

The IVAC Approach

CASE STORY

Pupils making a difference

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Initial stage: What makes me feel good?

In this project, children in grades 2 and 3 (8-9 years old) in a small town in Denmark worked for one full day on developing their ideas around the question "What makes me feel good?" At the end of the day, the classes presented their ideas in the form of posters. The children decided, with their teachers, to continue their work during the following week, working with the more focused question "What could make me feel better at school?" In this work, **the classes used the IVAC approach**, entailing a focus on the following perspectives:

- Investigation of what "feeling good" means to them;
- Development of their own visions about how they would like the school to change;
- Initiation of concrete actions in order to facilitate the necessary health-promoting changes.

The pupils discussed a number of ideas about improving their school and, after two days during which they presented and discussed their ideas, they finally reached an agreement. They would work for (1) more lessons on food and cooking, and (2) more lessons related to physical activity and movement. They then went through a "who-has-the-power" exercise in which they invited the school's head teacher to clarify how they could develop a strategy to reach their goals.

The teacher tried to convince the pupils to include cooking and working with food in their normal Danish language lessons. But the pupils did not accept this suggestion and decided to approach the director of education in the municipality with their proposals. They prepared an interview schedule, and one of their main questions was: "If we want extra lessons in home economics and physical activity, how would you advise us to proceed?" His response gave them a number of ideas about how they might achieve their vision.

After the interview, they worked in collaboration with their teacher to draw up a formal proposal to submit to the director of education. A few weeks later, they received a response from the municipality allocating resources for two extra lessons per week in home economics during the first semester and two lessons in physical education during the second semester.

Further work: What will make our community better?

The following year, the teachers decided to carry out a project using the same basic approach. This time the pupils, now 9 and 10 years old, worked with the question "What will make our community better?" Again, the IVAC approach was used as a guiding framework.

The pupils developed the vision that they wanted their community to be livelier and provide more leisure activities. During the investigation phase, for instance, they had discovered that, in the past, a circus visited the town at least once a year. The teachers introduced them to the ideas of networks and social capital (although in other terms), which the pupils discussed from many different angles and perspectives. Finally, they agreed to try to initiate actions with the aim of improving the community's wealth and liveliness. One idea was to get the circus to come back to town. Another was to establish a play area for children and young people. A third was to plan a charity run for all citizens in the area aiming, among other things, to raise money for their planned activities.

The pupils soon realised that they needed to address the local politicians if they wanted to make progress with their ideas. They then contacted other adults, including representatives from different sports associations, to present their ideas. Jointly,



the adults and children then initiated a public meeting, at which the pupils themselves introduced their ideas. Some of the politicians who attended the meeting tried to convince the pupils that the play area should be located at a remote site on the outskirts of the community, which was unsuitable for other uses. But the pupils argued their case convincingly, and were supported by their parents and other adults. In the end, the municipal council agreed to establish a 500-square metre playground in a central location and set aside funds so that a circus could perform in the local community on Constitution Day the following year.

Pupil's empowerment and action competence

This project can be analysed using two different sets of criteria: first, in terms of the changes the project facilitated; and second, and perhaps more importantly, in terms of the development of the pupils' empowerment and action competence. It was clear that the project did make a difference in the school as well as the local community. In the school setting, pupils succeeded in getting the lessons they had asked for. In the local community, pupils were actually able to bring about changes that improved the social capital of all citizens. As we evaluated the outcomes of the programme in terms of the pupils' empowerment and action competence, we saw them expressing a strong commitment to future actions in influencing and developing the community. One of the teachers involved with this project said:

"It surprised us, as teachers, that the pupils were so clear about what they wanted to get out of the projects... When we prepared the project, we discussed what to do if we ended up with 26 pupils who didn't say anything and didn't have any ideas. But we were impressed by the pupils' ideas and their commitment, and the fact that they were able to present such qualified arguments."

JENSEN, 2004: 421.

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