Young people want to be part of the answer

Young Minds as an educational approach to involve schools and students in national environment and health action plans.

Bjarne Bruun Jensen
Venka Simovska
Niels Larsen
Leif Glud Holm
Young people want to be part of the answer

Young Minds as an educational approach to involve schools and students in national environment and health action plans

Bjarne Bruun Jensen
Venka Simovska
Niels Larsen
Leif Glud Holm
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword ......................................................................................... 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface ............................................................................................... 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Young Minds approach and its relevance for the Children’s Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE) .......... 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case stories: Young Minds in different contexts ................................ 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds in Slovenia ....................................................................... 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds in England ........................................................................ 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds in Finland ........................................................................ 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds in Spain .......................................................................... 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds in Denmark ...................................................................... 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds in the Czech Republic .................................................... 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds in Hungary ....................................................................... 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds in Ireland ........................................................................ 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ reflections and recommendations – potential, barriers and challenges .......................................................... 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students about Young Minds .................................................................. 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations and tips for teachers ............................................... 119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Minds participants ..................................................................... 129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Health-promoting schools programmes are targeting one of the major determinants of health: education. In 1986, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion described where people live, work and learn as powerful settings for developing, enhancing and sustaining health. Schools are therefore key institutions for creating and protecting the health of young people. Evidence has shown that school health education is most effective when introduced within a holistic framework in which each facet of the life and organization of the school is used to maximize the messages of health. It has also been shown that young people who are more satisfied with their educational experience are less likely to behave in ways that pose a risk to their health. The health-promoting school concentrates not only on the content of the health education curriculum but also on the teaching and learning methods used, the social and physical environment of the school, the school management structure and the links between the school, school health services, the home and the community.

Experience from the European Network of Health Promoting Schools programme indicates that genuinely involving young people in dealing with health issues can positively affect health.

Young Minds is an approach focusing on such genuine involvement of young people, as it is based on democratic and participatory methods and the use of interactive communication tools. It enables young people from all parts of the European Region to communicate and exchange experience in various areas related to health. By working together, young people develop a better understanding of differences in societies and cultures.

Evidence shows that young people are concerned with environmental issues, both at the global and local levels. Young people are not only inter-
ested in health, environment and other essential issues but also prepared to be actively involved in developing solutions and making a difference.

Young Minds has successfully offered a platform for young people that supports them in taking action at the global and local levels.

The European Network of Health Promoting Schools focuses on participation, active involvement and democracy. It has therefore been a pleasure once again to experience that these theoretical concepts also work in reality.

Vivian Barnekow Rasmussen
ENHPS Technical Secretariat

Preface

This publication builds on Young Minds, an educational approach developed and carried out by a team from the Research Programme for Environmental and Health Education at the Danish University of Education. The Young Minds approach was initiated in 2000 as a project linked to the ENHPS (a programme jointly supported by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and WHO Regional Office for Europe), and there have been several rounds or phases of the project since then focusing on various aspects related to health (they can all be viewed at http://www.youngminds.net).

The project phase documented in this publication is Young Minds exploring links between culture, health and the environment. It is an Internet-based project in which young people from eight countries in Europe (the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain) communicated and explored links between youth, culture, health and environment as a basis for concrete action to initiate positive change.

The Young Minds approach was used as a way of involving young Europeans genuinely in the process leading up to WHO’s Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health: The Future for Our Children, which took place in Budapest on 23–25 June 2004 (http://www.euro.who.int/budapest2004). In the final phase of the project, Young Minders – including representatives from students at the eight schools – participated at the Conference with the aim of presenting the voices of young people at the Conference.

At the Conference in Budapest, the European ministers made political commitments to ensure safer environments for children. This happened through the adoption of a Conference declaration and of the Children’s
Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE). CEHAPE emphasizes children’s involvement and underlines the need to ensure implementation through the development of “child participation models” (paragraph 19f) in European countries.

This publication documents and illustrates that young people can be involved in taking genuine action concerning issues and problems related to health and the environment. Young people possess immense potential for developing new, creative ideas for a better world and should consequently not be overlooked when countries initiate national action plans for improving health and environmental conditions.

This publication has four main sections. First, the overall educational approach and its main concepts are briefly described. The second section includes case stories portraying the Young Minds process in each of the eight participating schools. The third section evaluates and reflects on the project by outlining and discussing the perspectives of the teachers involved as well as the young people. Finally, several recommendations and tips for teachers and others involved in future participatory, cross-cultural and action-oriented projects are summarized.

As always, it is a stimulating and thought-provoking experience to collaborate with committed students and teachers, and their invaluable contributions during the whole process are gratefully acknowledged.

Bjarne Bruun Jensen, Venka Simovska, Niels Larsen and Leif Glud Holm
Research Programme for Environmental and Health Education
The Danish University of Education

The Young Minds approach and its relevance for the Children’s Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE)

Young Minds exploring links between culture, health and the environment was an Internet-based project in which young people from eight countries in Europe (the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain) communicated and explored links between youth, culture, health and environment.

Young Minds was initiated in 2000, and there have been several phases of the project since then focusing on various aspects related to health. In the project carried out in 2004, Young Minds consisted of eight schools working within the framework of environment and health. The action component this time was linked to WHO’s Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health: The Future for Our Children, which took place in Budapest on 23–25 June 2004. Young Minds was invited to actively participate in this Conference.

Main principles of the approach

The main approach builds on the following key elements:

- student participation: students are genuinely involved in dialogue and decision-making about specific aspects of the topics with which they are working;
- action and change orientation: the student project work is directed towards action and change, and students’ ideas and visions have a crucial role in deciding about actions to be taken to improve the environment and health in their schools and communities;
- cross-cultural collaboration: students cooperate across national borders in order to explore differences and similarities with regard to the environmental and health concerns, with an emphasis on global interconnectedness and social responsibility; and
Young people want to be part of the answer

The Young Minds approach

• using information and communication technology: students use the Internet and other modern technologies to investigate the topics, exchange and discuss ideas, present their findings and reflections and initiate a broader debate.

These key elements reflect the Conference Resolution from the first conference of the European Network of Health Promoting Schools in 1997.

✔ … The health promoting school is founded on democratic principles … The health promoting school improves young people’s abilities to take action and generate change … Young people’s empowerment, linked to their visions and ideas, enables them to influence their lives and living conditions.

Since then, several projects within the European Network of Health Promoting Schools have been based on these ideas and the Resolution as a whole and have attempted to demonstrate the benefits and potential of working with participatory approaches in school health education and promotion. Further, many national networks of health-promoting schools are integrating information and communication technology in teaching and learning about health. Moreover, a number of schools in the European Network of Health Promoting Schools have worked with international collaboration at many different levels (teachers, students etc.). Young Minds attempts to integrate and further explore these experiences.

Further, the concepts and ideas mentioned above have been put into operation through the investigation, visions, action and change (IVAC) approach. This approach implies that students and teachers in various countries should go through several phases in working with environmental and health problems. Teachers and the students should together choose and investigate a problem. In addition to investigating the problem, they should also develop their visions for the future and finally try to take action to initiate change and get closer to their visions.

Box 1 illustrates the questions that students might address in working with the IVAC approach. In investigating a theme (A), students have to be actively involved in choosing the subject and coming up with an answer as to why this subject is important to them. Among others, a social science perspective is important to clarify the social causes behind the problem.

Box 1. Using the IVAC approach

A. Investigation of a theme

• With what specific issue do we want to work and why is it important to us?
• How does it influence us – what are the effects?
• What are the main causes behind this?
• What is the situation in other Young Minds countries – do they have similar or different conditions?
• How can we collaborate with other Young Minders? Do we want them to conduct a survey about the same topic in their country so we can compare their results and conditions with ours?

B. Developing visions

• What are our dreams and visions – what kind of changes would we like to see happen?
• Why do we want these changes – what are our reasons and motivation?
• How can we present our ideas to others (drawings, text, photos etc.)?
• What are the visions and ideas of the other Young Minders?
• What are the reactions and comments to our vision of the other Young Minders?
• Can we develop a common vision in collaboration with other Young Minders?

Even if the problem manifests itself in a classroom or school, the underlying causes often turn out to be outside these parameters. Questions drawing on the sociological perspective, in which environmental and health problems are considered in close connection with the economic, cultural and social structures in which they develop, are important here.

Students then develop visions on how living conditions may look in the future (B). This phase deals with the development of students' ideas, perceptions and visions about their future life and the society in which they will be growing up. How would they like their social life in the classroom to be? How do they want the local community to be in the future?

Having room for imagination is also important to promote a wealth of possible actions in connection with fulfilling some of the visions that have been drawn up (C). Students independently develop some actions, whereas others require close collaboration with teachers, parents or key people in the local community. It is very important that all students' suggestions be taken up and discussed. The various opportunities for action should be discussed in relation to their potential outcomes and the barriers that might arise. Finally, a decision should be made to carry out one or more actions. Actions could target environmental policies in the local community, in which case the students need to approach politicians and take other measures.

Instead of viewing the questions in Box 1 as goals to be worked on in a set order, the process can be described as a cycle, or perhaps a spiral, in which certain points are reworked several times to elaborate them further. These perspectives do not imply that the teacher's tasks become easier or less exciting or that the teacher's role should become less important. The challenge is to find a balance in which students are involved as active partners and are taken seriously but teachers have an important role to play as partners in the educational dialogue with students.

The philosophy of the Young Minds project combines the educational approach described in Box 1 with intercultural collaboration and communication. If students communicate with students from other cultures about a specific environmental or health issue, they will be encouraged to look at their own routines, behaviour and conditions in another perspective. This is supposed to stimulate and promote their visionary and critical thinking, which again is a precondition for taking specific environmental or health-promoting action. Information and communication technology creates new and stimulating conditions for this kind of collaboration among young people.

The Children’s Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe

At the Conference in Budapest, the European ministers were expected to reach consensus and make political commitments to ensure safer environments for children. This happened through the ministers’ adoption of a Conference declaration and of CEHAPE, which emphasizes children’s involvement and stresses the need to ensure implementation through the development of “child participation models” (paragraph 19f) in European countries.

One aim of the Young Minds project was to demonstrate how schools and students can be genuinely and actively involved in these processes. Consequently, the IVAC approach was introduced to help teachers and students to focus on real-life action on health and environmental issues. The hypotheses are that this educational approach 1) stimulates and encourages students’ empowerment and action competence (their ability to initiate and bring about positive change) and 2) will be a valuable contribution to the development of national (and international) action plans in health and the environment that integrate the concerns young people have themselves.

Participants and process
The project group consisted of primary and secondary school students from eight classes representing the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain as well as their respective teachers. In addition to this, a coordinating team of four researchers from the Research Programme for Environmental and Health Education at the Danish University of Education was responsible for overall project management and facilitation.

The process consisted of a planning phase, a phase with classwork and cross-cultural collaboration via the Internet and finally participation at the Conference in Budapest.

The planning phase – developing a shared understanding
The coordinating team approached the coordinators of national networks of health promoting schools in eight countries. A letter describing the aim, the content and the approach of the project was circulated to the national coordinators, and they were all asked to identify one school in their country that could participate in the project.

On 14 February 2004, the teachers met with the coordinators of the project for a two-day planning meeting in Copenhagen. The aim of this meeting was to discuss the basic concepts, aims, content and criteria for the success of the project. It was considered essential at the very beginning of the project that its actors develop a common understanding of the main aspects of the educational approach and establish shared aims and criteria for success. At the meeting, the distinctions between moralistic and democratic health education and promotion were discussed as well as the concepts of genuine student participation, action and the development of action competence. The IVAC approach to structuring the project work was agreed upon as a common framework for all eight classes.

To concretize the overall topic of health and environment, two topics were identified (mental well-being and the school and the environment), and the eight schools were divided between the two topics. In addition, a common timeline for the project work in each of the classes was developed and a framework for the collaboration between the classes was agreed upon. This process took into account crucial elements such as different school holidays, examination dates etc.

Classwork and cross-cultural collaboration via the Internet
The next project phase took place from March to June 2004. It consisted of the students’ work at their school and the cross-cultural communication and collaboration using information and communication technology. The project implementation took different shapes in each of the classes depending on each school’s priorities, conditions, resources as well as systems of meanings with regard to both the project topic and the overall approach to teaching and learning. In some countries (such as Denmark and Spain) the project was integrated within regular classes, whereas in others (such as Hungary and Ireland) students and teachers worked both within and outside classes. During this phase, teachers and students continually published their work on the web site and also engaged in discussion in the forum section on the web. In some countries the students published their materials and findings on the web. In other countries the teacher took responsibility for publishing. Nevertheless, all content was negotiated with the students before it was published, so the web content authentically represented students’ own findings, ideas and reflections.

During the end of this phase, students engaged in genuine collaboration. Some classes asked students in other countries to carry out surveys and to feed back their findings. The students then collected all the dif-
Young people want to be part of the answer

The Young Minds approach

Different responses and published the total survey on the web site. Other students developed common ideas across countries for how to take action etc. During the whole process students expressed their opinions in the forum section. A crucial task at the end of this phase was to select the two students who were going to the Budapest Conference to represent the class. In some countries this was decided through a competition; in others the teacher made the decision; and in some countries the students and the teacher made the decision jointly.

The Conference in Budapest

The last project phase was devoted to presenting the contents on the web site, presenting the process in each of the classes on posters and preparing for participating in the Budapest Conference. The participation of the Young Minders was construed as a real-life action aiming at voicing young people’s opinions about culture, health and the environment at the Conference and influencing the Conference process. Two students and one teacher from each school attended the Conference, where they formed an editorial team with the task of representing the project and running an online electronic discussion open for interested students at schools within the European Network of Health Promoting Schools. In addition to the online forum, the students brought posters, leaflets and other material to present the work done at their own schools. The coordinating team of the project attended the Conference and facilitated, supervised and coordinated as well.

A Young Minds stand was established at the Conference venue, in the central area, with eight computers, eight poster displays and other materials to present the project. Each class prepared its own presentation, representing the story of Young Minds in each of the schools. Several additional displays grew and changed during the Conference days, as teams of students and teachers edited the forum topics in real time, printed out and presented highlights from it on the displays. In addition, the students interacted with the Conference participants, inviting them to visit the site, demonstrating the web site, interviewing, taking photos and giving interviews themselves. Highlights from the Conference were published on the web site, which was updated daily.

During the Conference, several students succeeded in approaching ministers and other officials from their own countries. The ministers were interviewed and their responses were published on the web site. The ministers also got feedback on young people’s ideas and concerns related to the Conference topics for further work. For several countries, it was agreed to continue the dialogue between the “official” side and the young people after the Conference.

The Conference and the possibility to attend as a representative for the participating class comprised a highly motivating factor for students’ previous work at the schools. Further, the work done in the classes before the Conference was a crucial precondition for developing the ownership that the participating students successfully demonstrated at the Budapest Conference. This previous work, which was also encouraged by the international collaboration between students from the different countries, is probably crucial and necessary if young people are to play an active and genuine role in conferences like this.
Case stories:
Young Minds in different contexts

As mentioned above, Young Minds is based on shared underlying principles as well as a common educational approach. The various participating classes interpreted and implemented these in different ways depending on the needs, conditions, priorities and systems of meaning in each of the cultural and educational contexts involved.

This section presents the story of Young Minds in each of the classes with an aim of portraying the similarities and differences between them as well as the diverse ways in which the teachers, working in different conditions, coped with the barriers, challenges, successes and failures inevitable in any innovative educational development. The teachers describe and reflect on the process and present fragments of the content with which they worked.

The overall project’s topics included:
• school, the environment and the built environment surrounding the school; and
• mental, social, and emotional well-being and environmental issues.

As described in the stories, within these topics, students, following the IVAC approach, investigated several different issues and perspectives, created visions about better alternatives for the future and took action to bring about changes and come closer to these visions.

In particular, the issues addressed include:
• air quality and indoor and outdoor pollution;
• the school (physical and psychosocial) environment and various ways to improve it;
• recycling and separating waste at the source: what can schools do?;
• school democracy (student councils) and opportunities for students to have a voice in influencing local environmental and health policies;
• biodiversity, organic farming and similar initiatives;
• mass-media influence on young peoples’ health and well-being: information and attitudes concerning the environment and young people’s voices in the mass media; and
• mental well-being and the environment: the ecology of mental well-being and the hierarchy of human needs.

We hope that these stories will provide creative inspiration and practical advice to other teachers and schools interested in participatory, action-oriented and cross-cultural work with environmental and health issues.

Young Minds in Slovenia
Martina Dernovscek

Context and participants
School Centre Nova Gorica – Vocational and Technical Secondary School of Agriculture and Food Preparation (http://www.s-gng.ng.edus.si/kmetijска/index.html) is situated in western Slovenia next to the border with Italy. The school follows the national curriculum and provides education for about 300 students aged 14–19 years who take part in several extracurricular activities, such as sports, flower arranging and baking. The school owns a large property (14 hectares of fields, vineyards, orchards and greenhouses) where students gain practical knowledge. The residential home for students is located next to the school building.

The school has been a member of the Slovenian Network of Health Promoting Schools since 1998. It has been very active, including running various one-day workshops for children, running interesting information booths for browsing, organizing regular meetings and instructing students in such topics as a balanced diet, the dangers of smoking, teenage alcoholism and drug addiction, young people and the rules of the road. The Institute of Public Health of the Republic of Slovenia therefore invited the school to take part in the Young Minds project in October 2003.

The Young Minds project was presented to all classes in general terms, and all students of our school were invited to participate. On 1 March 2004, the aims and objectives of the project were explained to the student council and to the students who showed interest in actively participating in the project. In the end, six students from three different classes volunteered to participate.
Choosing the two representatives for Budapest was extremely difficult, as all six students were interested in attending the Conference. The following criteria were discussed with the students:

- good command of written and spoken English;
- active participation in the project and familiarity with the Young Minds process and the web site;
- skills in information and communication technology: Internet, e-mail and web site administration;
- communication and social skills; and
- motivation to take part in such an event.

We had a democratic vote, and all the students agreed that Ales should attend the Conference. Borut (a student) commented: “He is a treasure chest of knowledge; he must go to Budapest.” The other candidate, David, was also chosen based on the criteria mentioned above.

**The process**

The decision to deal with the topic of the physical school environment together with the Young Minders from the Czech Republic, Ireland and Spain was made at the planning meeting in Copenhagen on 14 February 2004.

At the first project meeting, the students were informed about the Young Minds project timeline and the vision, followed by a discussion on how they would like to improve the built environment surrounding the school (brainstorming). The students also brainstormed how they imagined their ideal school (Fig. 1). They wrote some of their ideas in the web forum.

![Fig. 1. Ideas about an ideal school](image)

The first task for the students was to work on their presentations on the web site, which they found quite interesting and amusing. As shown in Fig. 2, they took photographs of themselves. David created drawings (portraits) of the Young Minders to be published on the Slovenian web site.

Then the students discussed the topics on which they would like to focus. They came up with the topics of (a) the relationships between teachers and students; (b) the location of our school; and (c) smoking. We finally decided to focus on smoking. In a dialogue with the coordinating team, we decided to broaden the topic of smoking so that it would be relevant to the Conference themes. Thus, we explored the issue of smoking in relation to air pollution and air quality.

The students were asked to think of some questions they would like to investigate cross-culturally: that is, to ask students from the other countries in our group (the Czech Republic, Ireland and Spain). They then started to create a questionnaire. Two other Young Minds classes (from Denmark and Ireland) were going to work with the topic of air pollution, and we made plans to coordinate and complement each other’s work. Again, the project coordinating team facilitated and supported this collaboration.

Students made a questionnaire about air pollution and smoking, which was given to some students at our school to fill in and sent to other Young Minds classes. The teachers at our school created and completed a similar questionnaire. The results were presented in charts on the Young Minds web site (Fig. 3 and 4).

As a part of the investigation activities, the students visited the Department of Environment of the Municipality of Nova Gorica, which presented interesting information on various types of air pollution and some facts and figures about noise pollution. This information was also presented on the web site along with students’ reflections.
The students had an opportunity to participate in the Young Minds project according to their interests, experience and ability. Some expressed their opinion on a specific topic by writing material for the web site, and others made drawings and posters; some students analysed questionnaires, and others worked with digital photos or created charts to present the project findings.

**Action and change**

We carried out a number of actions as part of the Young Minds process. The following text briefly outlines some of them.

- The Young Minds project was presented to the local mayor, who seemed really enthusiastic about the project and ensured that our school would get money to improve the school environment (no money has been received yet).
- An application was sent to the local sports club to get a hoop for establishing a small basketball court.
- The Young Minds project was presented in the mass media (on local radio and local television). The students were interviewed and were very proud of appearing on television.
- Some of our students took part in the cleaning activity organized by the local tourist association and the local community. They picked up litter around the school.
- We successfully carried out an Activity Day. The students were divided into several groups to take part in various activities, such as planting, cleaning classrooms, picking up litter, drawing graffiti, painting beehives, baking and making sandwiches, writing articles for the school paper and making posters on the topic of the environment. They did a great job. The Young Minds project was presented on the national television and in the local newspaper.
- The measurement of a poisonous gas (carbon monoxide (CO)) in the air exhaled by smokers was organized during the mid-morning break at our school to raise the awareness about the dangers of smoking. The activity was carried out with help from a person from the Institute of...
Public Health of Nova Gorica, who provided a device for measuring the amount of CO in the air exhaled. Some of our students set up a booth in the centre of Sempeter, where they asked passers-by whether they would like to have the amount of CO in their exhaled air measured. A couple of medical students were also asked to measure blood pressure.

- The students interviewed the Mayor of Sempeter-Vrtojba about the plans for future developments in the municipality in relation to environmental issues. They gave some specific suggestions for improvements: placing noise barriers along the bypass near the school, introducing more informative programmes about the environment on television and acting to encourage people to use public transport more regularly. However, their attempts to make a difference were all rejected in a diplomatic manner. According to the Mayor, not much can be changed regarding public transport or reducing noise pollution.

In my opinion, the major change the Young Minds project has brought to our school is the improvement in the physical environment. Many trees, shrubs and flowers have been planted; some graffiti have been painted; and a small basketball court has been established (Fig. 5). The teachers and the students have been trying to find a mutual solution to the problem of smoking in front of the main entrance.

Collaboration with the other Young Minds classes

The most challenging aspect of the project was to introduce the international perspective into the classroom. I think the students really enjoyed getting to know other Young Minders and communicating with the other Young Minds classes, exchanging views on various topics and searching for common ground with other participants. They were extremely interested in reading the presentations of the other participants on their schools and countries. They had great fun presenting themselves on the web site.

Barriers and challenges

One of the main barriers was lack of time to work on the project within the curriculum. The Young Minds project did not have special time allocated for the project activities, which meant the students had to miss certain lessons in order to work on the project. Some teachers complained about this. The students could not stay extra hours after school, as they commute to school daily and have to stick to the train and bus timetable. Due to the lack of time, we often discussed the students’ ideas, suggestions and considerations together in the class, and then they entered them in their computer at home and I did most of the web publishing. This was a strategy we used to overcome the lack of time and yet ensure student participation and the authenticity of the web content.

Some of the teachers, especially the headmaster and the school psychologist, have been extremely supportive and cooperative, but most did not show much interest in (as they called it) “my” project. This is something that should be considered in the future projects.

Moreover, some of the classes from other countries were not really active in the discussion forum at the beginning of the project. The Slovenian students eagerly waiting for replies found this a bit frustrating, as there was none. One of the reasons for this problem was school holidays, which differ in European countries.

The huge drawback was that some students do not have access to the Internet at home, so the only time to work on the project was at school, which was not much since we usually met twice a week for 45 minutes.
Fortunately, the computer room in our school is well equipped, so computers were always available when needed.

Communicating in English was a great challenge. Even though the students did not have much difficulty communicating at the beginning, their self-confidence has grown and now they say their English has improved immensely.

Students found this project very interesting and also exciting, as the project is completely different from the traditional learning about environmental problems.

Advice and recommendations
The planning meeting in Copenhagen in February 2004 was essential for all the teachers to grasp the idea of the project itself, to find out its aims and objectives as well as the project timeline and to learn about the IVAC approach. We received invaluable advice, and I got a clear picture of what I, as a teacher, was expected to do. Many issues that had seemed so abstract before the meeting were clarified and started to make sense. Further, meeting the coordinating team and other participating teachers was really important, resulting in learning interesting facts about the other participating schools. Carrying out the project by getting instructions by e-mail and not knowing other participants would make this project extremely difficult.

I find it very important that the students be given enough time at the beginning of the project to introduce themselves, their countries and schools to the other Young Minders. If we had been given more time for this project, we would have had a chance to collaborate more fully with the other Young Minds classes provided that all the Young Minds classes were equally active.

The action-oriented and participatory approach along with the use of information and communication technology and cross-cultural collaboration was quite demanding for me as a teacher. Luckily, the coordinating team gave me substantial invaluable guidance on how to proceed with the Young Minds project.

Concluding remarks
Students in Slovenia are taught about environmental issues in school but only to some extent. Young Minds provides a new, more effective strategy for learning about these issues. One of the students said: “We learned much more about the environment in this project than in the whole history of our education.”

The action-oriented and participatory approach brought a new perspective to my own teaching. Exploring the environmental issues with students from other countries was inspiring and stimulating for the Slovenian students. Using this approach in regular school teaching would be a good idea. You learn not what you are told but what you experience and do yourself.

Moreover, for the Slovenian students the project represented a perfect opportunity to communicate with other European students, which is not often the case in regular school teaching. Therefore, I can surely say that the international dimension and cross-cultural collaboration were the two most appealing aspects of the Young Minds project. Had the project been designed on the national level, it would not have been as motivating and exciting for the students as Young Minds.

Unfortunately, the Slovenian students have an impression they cannot have exert real influence on the local (or national) environmental plans. I hope the experience with Young Minds and the Budapest Conference will show them (but also adults) that young people have the power to and should influence our future and the future of the planet.

What do students say about the project?
✔ The Young Minds project is one of the most interesting projects at our school. It is also very useful, as we have been able to improve some things around the school. Being in this group means a lot to us because we are able to communicate with the students from other countries and at the same time we have a chance to improve our English. We have learned a lot about the pollution and protection of the environment while we have been communicating with the students from other countries. We like this type of learning a lot because it is not boring. (Ales)
✔ This project is great because it represents a different type of learning than in schools. I also like it because we could choose to take part in it or not. I had great fun drawing pictures ... . (David)

✔ It is very interesting because we got to know other Young Minders. We have found out a lot of interesting facts about other countries, schools, and above all about pollution and the problems concerning our environment. We have also improved our English. (Ana)

✔ This project has brought a lot of good things to our school (the Activity Day was organized at our school: we planted flowers, trees, bushes, picked up litter, painted some graffiti, etc.). We have been working together like a team and I think teamwork is very important. We have learned a lot about air pollution in our environment. (Borut)

---

Young Minds in England

Dilly Taylor

Background

Nailsea lies 13 km southwest of Bristol, in the Unitary Authority of North Somerset and has many features of a developing town: sports and leisure centres, a shopping precinct, supermarkets, a library and health centres. There is excellent access by motorway, other roads and rail services. Nailsea School (http://www.nailsea.n-somerset.sch.uk) was opened in 1959 with just over 90 students. In 1966 the school became a secondary comprehensive school, catering for students from 11 to 18 years.

The current school population is more than 1350, with a planned admission number of 240 students per year. It is a thriving school serving the community of Nailsea and its surrounding areas.

There are 240 students in year 10 (age 14–15 years) at Nailsea School, split into eight tutor groups (classes). The Young Minds project was presented to the whole year group in an assembly, and all students were invited to participate. Several students from each tutor group volunteered, creating a group of 22.

How we chose our two representatives for Budapest

All year 10 students were invited to enter a competition in school to decide who would attend the Conference in Budapest. There were 16 entries, many of them students working in pairs. The task was to design and then present to a live audience a presentation on any aspect of “the effects on young people of the environment”. They could use whichever medium they wished. Each of the entries was individual, and all of them put in an equally hard amount of work. The selection was made by all our eight tu-
tors, our Assistant Head of Year and other interested teachers. Originally
the judging was to be on one day, but the presentations were so detailed
and we only had lunch times (50 minutes) in which to do them, so it took
two weeks. It was an extremely difficult choice for the teachers, and it took
them 2 days to make their decision.

Starting the process
The teacher participating in the planning meeting held in Copenhagen on
14 February 2004 decided to focus on mental well-being and the environ-
ment. The Young Minds group in Nailsea School decided how to take this
subject further at their first project meeting. We devised a plan of what
we wanted to achieve and when, and tasks were allocated. The first task
was to submit an entry about themselves on the web site. This proved
problematic with so few opportunities to meet, and the information tech-
nology assistance within our own establishment never materialized. To
make a difficult situation even worse, the school was in the process of
major refurbishment, which involved whole sections of the building be-
ing unusable and classes and offices being moved into temporary accom-
modation. A core group of the class conversed online with each other and
their teacher very regularly, which went some way towards progress but
was not ideal.

After only two weeks and meetings to brainstorm ideas and consider
our investigation, the process was then seriously interrupted by the year
10 exams. All 240 students went on study leave for 2 weeks, which meant
they did not attend school except to sit examinations. This was then fol-
lowed by the two-week Easter holidays.

Overcoming discontinuity
Nevertheless, the core group continued to converse and discuss at length
online. The students compiled and implemented a survey of their peers
to collect comparative evidence regarding their growing interest in how
the mass media influence the mental well-being of young people. Their
results and the discussion forums online clearly showed that this area
could be taken much further.

Guidance from the Young Minds project coordinator at this point was
fortuitous, cementing our focus and creating a greater sense of unity be-
tween the participants.

Investigation
The final version of the England Young Minders’ questionnaire for use
with other Young Minds schools was drafted in a pizza café away from all
the exams and building work: much more pleasant!

In our discussion groups, most 15-year-old students felt that the mass
media in England do very little to deliver national and world news and is-
sues in a format to which young people can relate. A television programme
called Newsround is broadcast Monday to Friday at 17:25, and its target au-
dience is 8- to 15-year-olds.

Young people are now very aware that only selected news items are
broadcast. Students who read the news on the Internet notice that very
big stories or issues are often not even mentioned on the main television
and radio news, let alone a ten-minute slot for young people. Finally, we
agreed to pursue the following questions.
• Do the mass media give young people in other countries more bal-
anced exposure to global and environmental issues?
• How could mass media oriented towards adults be made more inter-
esting or accessible for young people?
• How much attention or time do young people in other countries spend
watching or reading about the news or associated issues compared
with following teenage interests?
• How do young people in other countries learn about environmental
issues?
• Does the content of the mass media ever affect the mental well-being
of students from other countries?
• Could young people do more to “help themselves”?

The following section gives a few examples of the results. The full ques-
tionnaire and its results can be viewed at the Young Minds web site (http://
www.young-minds.net).
The findings implied that, although 75% of the Young Minders in England do not feel adequately informed about current affairs or environmental issues, the Young Minders in Hungary feel considerably better educated in this area (Fig. 6).

![Fig. 6. Survey of Young Minders: adequately informed?](image-url)

So do young people think they should be given more information about national and international environmental issues? Fig. 7 gives a very clear answer – yes!

Further, we asked who should take responsibility for educating them about current affairs and environmental issues (Fig. 8), and the results provided some surprises! Apart from Denmark, very few Young Minders consider this to be the responsibility of teachers. They consider the mass media bear the greatest responsibility, with parents and government following behind.

By reading national and international news on the Internet, many students in England are aware that many important stories are not told on or in our mass media and that news items are often selected for political reasons or sanitized. The young people feel that this creates a sense of mistrust in certain aspects of news coverage in England. Our results show
that young people in many other countries have similar experiences; it is interesting to see that Young Minders in Finland are the least concerned (Fig. 9).

Here we start to investigate what effects mass media coverage of national and international (including environmental) issues have on the mental well-being of young people (Fig. 10). Many young people think about these issues at least every few days. Again, it is interesting to see that the Young Minders in Finland tend to be less concerned. We wonder whether this reflects the mass-media coverage in Finland.

Do the issues about which you learn affect the way you behave (Fig. 11)? For example, avoiding certain foods if the mass media say there is a health concern, or being put off smoking by mass-media health warnings? There is currently a government antismoking advertisement campaign on television in England, which the young people think is disseminating an especially powerful message.

Young people are very aware of the role mass media play in representing what is considered “beautiful” or “acceptable”, and it has a noticeable affect on the way they behave (Fig. 12). Nevertheless, the various countries differed strongly, with England as the most positive and Hungary and Denmark as the most negative.
As the results illustrate, the countries involved in the Young Minds project have similarities and differences. The differences caused considerable debate about different cultures, routines and living conditions in the countries. The international comparisons were valuable in our work, as they stimulated students’ own critical thinking and reflection about their own traditions and behaviour. They also supported the view that we need to be critical about the mass media and especially how they target young people in our societies.

Vision
The English Young Minders believe that both the government and the mass media have a responsibility towards future generations to inform them of all environmental, health and current affairs issues in a balanced and truthful way, without bias or political spin. Our vision therefore includes:

- the government and the mass media working together to ensure that all environmental, health and current affairs issues are delivered to young people in a format in which they can relate;
- young people being consulted and listened to regarding their information needs and preferences of delivery and broadcasting;
- finding a way to ensure that all environment, health and current affairs issues are reported in a truthful and unbiased manner; and
- government and the mass media encouraging and enabling collaboration between young people across the world, to create an understanding and trust and therefore to ensure a safer and healthier future for all.

All the ideas take into account that this is the age of technology – and we therefore need to use it. We also want the mass media as well as governments to take young people seriously. As Julia in our class said: “I want to be part of the answer!”.

Action and change
Our class discussion considered how the project might progress. Planning action entailed another investigation to discover who the most appropriate mass media and political people to contact would be. At this point we asked for advice from the local authority (North Somerset), which supplied us with a contact list and guided our introductions and press release to local and national mass media and politicians. It was decided that the young people needed to make their voice heard by talking to:

- local and national mass media (written media, television and radio);
- local government;
- local politicians; and
- national politicians.

One way would be to ask the local mass media to highlight the Young Minds project and highlight our concerns regarding the education of our young people. Another question is whether we should interview the mass media about what account they take of young people’s opinions? Do they really ever consider how many items affect young people?
Another would be to access our local politicians and ensure that they understand that young people do have thoughts and ideas regarding the future of our planet and will act on them if given the chance. We developed a questionnaire for the politicians with two purposes: to gain information about political priorities and to influence politicians’ thinking through the questions. The questionnaire contained 12 questions; here are 5.

- Do you think that young people’s ideas should be taken into account when issues affecting them are being decided at governmental level?
- At this level of government, has it been considered that young people might be included in the planning/decision-making?
- How would you consider changing practice so that young people can be consulted?
- In our own survey of young people from across Europe we have shown clearly that young people are very affected by issues in the media. Do you think that young people should be taken into account when you are involved in publishing consultation/planning documents to make sure they are accessible/available to them?
- What would you personally suggest we as young people do to have a real influence on the local (or national) environmental action plans?

We also interviewed the mass media. The following questions were among the 13 questions included in the interview.

- In our survey of young people from across Europe we have shown clearly that young people are very affected by issues in the media. Have you ever considered how young people might be affected by the reporting of certain environmental issues?
- Would you agree that the media in Britain do very little to ensure that current affairs and environmental issues are presented in a way that is understood by young people, i.e. 15- to 16-year-olds?
- How would you back a plan that encourages those that do draw up such programmes to take into consideration the needs of young people in accessing such material?
- How would you consider changing practice so that young people can be consulted or at least their needs be taken into consideration?

The Young Minds group approached the following people and organizations for interviews:

- national newspapers;
- local government;
- national government;
- local environment groups;
- national environment groups;
- national educational publication (TES – The Times Education Supplement); and
- the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation).

Some of the interviews are still in progress. Nevertheless, the responses so far have been encouraging, especially from the mass media. The politicians, however, have been noticeably slower to respond. For example, after the students’ interview with the BBC health correspondent, a group was invited to observe the BBC television news for a week and then meet the programme producers to pass on their observations and ideas on how this format could become more accessible or friendly to young people.

Budapest and beyond
Integral to the presentations all the students made during the Conference week in Budapest was the invaluable contacts the young people made with both national and international politicians and mass media. Not only were the students able to extend their investigations to a qualified level but the future continuity of the project was ensured.

The class was invited to attend a meeting with the national Health Protection Agency in London where they presented their ideas as to how this large government agency could incorporate young people in their consultative planning. Following this success, we then gave a presentation about the Young Minds project and the young people’s thoughts to the top health personnel at the Health Protection Agency Annual Conference at Warwick University.

As well as being invited to give presentations for the governing bodies of our local schools (in the near future), members of the English Young
Young people want to be part of the answer

Minds class are also being invited to attend consultative meetings with the North Somerset Council Environmental Working Party and the area wildlife conservation organization.

Further, the concept of a collaborative Internet-based project has now been cloned to pilot a similar approach to support peer drug education in southwestern England and has the potential to achieve tangible success.

Students evaluated the project and its main approach very positively, as the following quotations illustrate.

✔ Wow! They’re taking notice of us.
✔ I think I’ve learned the most important thing in my life.
✔ Standing up there I felt really important.

Final comments

The whole concept of international collaboration via the World Wide Web is a stimulating and exciting concept. The project very quickly made the students in England look beyond their rather insular perspective and start to consider how life is for young people beyond their own shores, let alone world environmental issues. They have also learned that they can be part of the answer: they can make a difference and that the future of the planet is in their hands.

Most schools in England teach young people about environmental issues in a comprehensive and cross-curricular manner. Nevertheless, having been involved in the Young Minds project in 2004, I wonder if there is far more power in approaching the subject in a less directed way. This means away from the normal curriculum and through projects such as this, whereby the students take ownership of the issues and discover that they do have power to change things (action), especially if they work in a collaborative and international environment.

Young Minds in Finland

Pirjo Henttonen

Context and participants


I had worked in my school for six months when the invitation to participate in Young Minds came to our school. I therefore asked my colleagues to help me in selecting students to take part in the project. I wanted them to be oldest ones (age 15 years) in the upper comprehensive school. I also made a decision that students should be in same class because of the schedule. I asked class 9B if they wanted to be in this project. Ten of seventeen students were interested: five boys and five girls (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13. Young Minders in Finland
The process
I informed the parents, and the students made a commitment to the project. At the beginning we discussed who should do what: boys preferred the work with computers and girls with writing stories. We discussed the IVAC approach. Students mostly worked in pairs or in two larger groups. I saw them usually after school or asked another teacher’s permission to take them from the regular classes (biology or English) to work on this project.

We started by discussing environmental problems in and around our school: we have water nearby, there are two lakes in the vicinity, the indoor air is sometimes quite thick in our classes and young people do not feel well. It was decided that Finland would explore the topic of mental well-being and environmental issues together with Denmark, England and Hungary.

After the planning meeting on 14 February 2004 with the other Young Minds teachers in Copenhagen, we made a mind map (Fig. 14) outlining what influences the mental well-being of young people. The map included a variety of issues such as hobbies, friends, family, school, idols, mass media and the environment.

![MINDMAP](image)

Fig. 14. Mind map – what affects the mental well-being of young people

We decided to concentrate on the issue of the mass media and their influence on health and well-being. The investigation focused on exploring issues such as the following. To what extent do the mass media control our life and well-being? To what extent do the mass media determine what we talk about? In what ways do the mass media affect our opinions? How could we in the Young Minds project use the mass media to reach other students?

In this starting phase of the project, students made posters about Young Minds to inform the whole school community about this project. Moreover, we organized activity days in the whole school to deal with some of the environmental issues. Examples of the activities include the following.

- **Cleaning day.** The whole school took part in activities to improve the physical environment of the school. Each class was assigned their own place to tidy up. Smokers cleaned their own corner.
- **Recycling old clothing and other things day.** The idea of this activity was to exchange old clothing, books and other things. However, the turnout was quite low. Students prepared a questionnaire to find out why this action was not successful. The results showed that the idea was very good in general but in the future it should be organized better, with more specific information provided at the whole school level. Further, students suggested that instead of clothing we could recycle sports equipment (such as skates and skis), as this is more meaningful to most of the students.
- **A day without a mobile phone.** The idea of this activity was to initiate a discussion about the ways students use mobile phones and how this affects mutual communication, schoolwork and well-being.

In addition, as part of the cross-class collaboration and joint investigations, the Finnish Young Minders created a questionnaire for other Young Minders, dealing with the mass media. Examples of questions include the following.

- How much do young people in other countries watch television, and in what kind of information and programmes are they interested?
Young people want to be part of the answer

Do the mass media influence young people’s appearance, image and self-esteem? Is this similar or different in different countries?

Are young people in other countries worried about war, pollution and how information from the mass media affects these worries?

What can young people all over the world do to take better care of the environment?

The findings are published on the web site along with students’ reflections about the results.

In the vision phase of the work, we tried to combine mental well-being, the mass media and the environmental issues, but this turned out to be rather abstract and difficult. We could see on the web site that the Danish Young Minders succeeded in doing this very well by using Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, and we were inspired to read their reflections on the web site.

Action

In order to initiate changes and improve some of the environmental problems that we had identified, we took the following actions.

1. We held a meeting with the local environmental secretary to discuss the environmental projects in the Municipality of Asikkala. Students had several suggestions aimed at improving the environment in the local community and the school.
   - Waste bins should be cleaned more often.
   - The local environmental issues should be communicated better with young people.
   - Teachers’ cars should be parked safely, away from the school, so that there will be no danger of motor vehicle accidents at all.
   - There should be more places to park bicycles at the school.

2. We made suggestions to the school board on how to improve the psychosocial environment of the school.
   - It is important to have newspapers in the lobby; it will help students to get more information about the environment and news about the world.
   - Trash should be separated at source in the whole school and not just in the kitchen.
   - The physical environment of the school should be improved: for example, the lobby in front of the history and math classrooms could have more benches and places for socializing.
   - The school cafeteria should have a greater variety of healthy products.

3. We disseminated the project experiences by publishing an article about Young Minds in the local newspaper.

All these actions are underway, and their outcomes were to become visible when the new school year started.

International collaboration

The planning meeting in Copenhagen was excellent: when the names are linked with faces, it is easier to make contact later and use the web-based discussion forum.

During the project, students looked carefully at the web introductions of each group and some gave feedback on this work. It was not easy for all of them to write messages to unknown peers, and some had to be pushed a little once in a while.

As part of the cross-cultural work, the Finnish students designed a questionnaire and sent it to the other Young Minds classes to investigate their opinions about the mass media and well-being. The findings were published on the web site, representing similarities and differences between different classes. In addition, students replied to the questions concerning other topics they got from the other classes.

At the Conference in Budapest, students collaborated with the other Young Minders presenting the project, the posters and the web content to the Conference participants. Further, they performed the interviews in cross-class teams and updated the web site together on a daily basis.
Main barriers and challenges in the process
I found using the IVAC approach difficult but challenging. Working with the students so that they can investigate and find information themselves instead of getting ready-made answers has been a challenge. Further, working in English has been a challenge. The success of the approach depends heavily on the motivation of the students, and this is sometimes hard to achieve. However, when motivated, students were very enthusiastic about the project and even spent time in their summer holidays to work on it independently.

The web publishing took a lot of time and depended on the skills some students had prior to the project, as there was not much time to study the web platform. In addition to the Young Minds web site, I used the school’s intranet to share information and discuss tasks, but this was not so efficient as talking with the students face to face.

Our topic (the relationship of the mass media to mental well-being and environmental issues) was complicated, and we had difficulty relating it to environmental issues. This was especially challenging when we wanted to discuss the issues related to mental well-being with the local politicians responsible for environmental issues. They do not seem to think that these issues are related.

Generally, we had little time for the project. Most of the time I was pretty much alone with “my” project. In some periods I was quite stressed. I would highly recommend that the schools establish two teams of teachers for such a major project. One could concentrate on the content and conceptual issues and the other could deal with the practical issues and the information and communication technology. The time is also crucial for the cross-cultural collaboration. There should be sufficient time for students to get to know one another and to work on their classroom-based projects, so that they would have something concrete on which to collaborate. If all the energy is devoted to their own classroom-based work, there is not much left for mutual collaboration.

Main benefits of the project
For the Finnish Young Minders, the project has been beneficial in many ways. Among other things they learned:
- to work with web publishing;
- to communicate in English;
- to collaborate internationally;
- to make interviews, charts and graphs;
- to compare the same environmental and health issues in several European countries;
- to work in action-oriented ways; and
- to organize their own project.

Experience from the Budapest Conference
My students loved the action at the Conference, even though at the beginning they were a little scared. As one of the students stated: “It was worth all the work.” They had a once-in-a-lifetime experience and gained many new friends. The participation at the Conference provided a good opportunity to practise expressing themselves, making new contacts and conducting interviews. Students were impressed by the attention Conference participants gave them. We also got invited to participate at a conference in Finland next year.

Further, we got some ideas to bring back home from Budapest for our future work in the school.
- We could make a brochure about our school in English.
- We could make an English version of our web site.
- We could make a printed (and/or web) school magazine a couple times a year. Students in each grade would be responsible for the publishing the things that are important to them.
- We should tell others about the Conference and share what we have experienced.
- We should organize a theme day or week for mental well-being in the autumn, also at the national level together with other schools in the Finnish Network of Health Promoting Schools.
The students about the project

✔ We think that this has been an interesting experience (demanding, frustrating, worth the work it demanded) which has made our solidarity stronger in the class, because we have spent so much time together.

✔ We have really started to think about these issues, what we have investigated, and we have become interested about them.

✔ Creating the web pages was fun; we saw pictures and introductions about the other groups. We communicated with students from other countries in the discussion forum, which was inspiring in many ways.

✔ Our English improved by all of the translations and so on. Even more importantly, now we know something about youngsters’ mental well-being and school environments in Europe. This is a good base for us to think about these issues also after this project.

✔ The Conference was the best part of the project.

✔ After the Conference I see the whole project more clearly.

Young Minds in Spain

Santiago Villora Moreno

Context and participants

Tavernes Blanques is a small village with 9000 people. The school is surrounded by a market garden, which is a typical feature of the surroundings of Valencia city. Tavernes Blanques School is a secondary school built in 2001 (Fig. 15). It is located less than 3 km north-east of Valencia city. There are around 800 students and 70 teachers working together. Students attend classes according their age (12–18 years old) in the first and second level of secondary education (1 to 4 ESO in Spain) and Bachillerato (upper secondary 1 and 2).

In 2002, our school started participating in the Spanish Network of Health Promoting Schools. In this framework we were proposed to collaborate in the Young Minds project, and Tavernes Blanques School was finally selected.

I am a tutor in grade 3 of secondary education, so I selected a resource group of students 15–16 years old. Students were not selected because of
their ability in English (extremely low in schools in Spain) or because of their qualifications. They were selected because of their attitudes towards classwork, responsibility, maturity, and so on. Another important criterion for me was that we would spend a week together in Budapest, so I, as a teacher, needed to trust them while we were both working and travelling.

**Description of the process at the school**

We started trying to identify the main environmental problems in our school. We worked for 2.5 weeks in collaboration with other students (grades 3 and 4 of secondary education: 14–16 years old). The results of this initial phase were classified into eight different themes.

**Architectural problems.** Although the school is very new, it has many design problems: leaks, poor air circulation and high temperature in summer, thin walls separating classrooms, windows with blinds obstructing sunlight (we are using electric light even at noon in the summer!). We have hundreds of lockers that cannot be closed and are therefore useless for students.

**Rubbish and recycling.** All areas frequented by students are dirty, mainly the playground, cafeteria, corridors and toilets (Fig. 16). Students discard sandwiches, aluminium foil and other rubbish. More than 50% of the students mix batteries with common rubbish. The school does not recycle waste.

**Vandalism.** Many doors and windows are broken. Some students peel off class labels and other elements that can easily be dismantled (Fig. 16).

**Smoking.** Students generally smoke inside, outside and around the school. The toilets are one of their preferred smoking places, and other students cannot use the toilets because of smoke.

**Foul smell.** The school is located near sources of foul odours such as factories and wastewater conduits. Some days the windows must be closed, even during summer (Fig. 16).

**Surrounding environment.** The environment surrounding the school looks very good because of the market garden (fields), but there are many other suburban areas near the school where people do not take care (Fig. 16).

![Fig. 16. Inappropriate use of a class notice board; the playground area after recess; the environment around the school; sources of foul odours close to the school](image)

**Internet inaccessibility.** First we worked at a very low speed, but now we cannot access the Internet at all. We cannot access the Young Minds site from any student's computer.

**Social behaviour factors.** Some students are worried about their social behaviour during breaks. They are grouped according to age from 12 to 18–19 years old but other factors as bullying, smokers, social position, immigrants and so on are also displayed. They are interested in doing something “different” during break time to improve this.

Despite all these environmental problems, students like their school, they feel well in it and it is the main reason for changing the problems described. Students then selected topics according to the expected changes: rubbish and recycling, smoking and music during breaks.

**Students’ participation and Internet access**

During the presentation of the Young Minds project, students were attracted for the novelty but they quickly considered the project too extensive and difficult to interpret because it seems they did not believe in the project. When I showed them the web site, they started to become interested, but unfortunately a week later the Internet was inaccessible for six weeks. Then the Internet connection worked during May, but at the
beginning of June it was definitively offline. It was very difficult working with students without any “visible” information. Just three students with Internet access at home started to work on the project.

**Investigations**

The IVAC approach is a scientific approach and method for finding problems, identifying them and making suggestions for change. Using this approach, we started to identify the main environmental problems. Investigation was necessary as a starting-point. Students were interested about what is happening in and around the school: recycling, smokers, student groups during breaks, foul odours, dirt in the school and rubbish accumulating around the school. Each problem was studied during class time, discussed among the students and the environmental impact underlined. Students agreed that they would feel better if they would improve things and initiate change. Nevertheless, many problems were too difficult to act on, so students selected the more realistic environmental problems (the ones for which they could expect change following their action).

**Action and change**

### Rubbish and recycling

- We sent a letter to the village council informing about the Young Minds project (4 May 2004). In the letter we explained our objectives related to recycling and asked for financial support. Also we sent a second letter (early June) to the municipality to obtain funds from private enterprises and from the regional council. On this occasion we also asked for a plastic container to be installed close to the school. We previously contacted private companies to determine whether they are interested in financing our project if the council acts as an intermediary. We do not know the results, but the school never received any funds.
- We had a meeting (25 May 2004) with the person responsible for environmental issues in Tavernes Blanques, explaining our problems and offering the school as an environmental health education centre in collaboration with the council initiatives. As a result of this meeting, they provided the school with a container to collect batteries.

### Music

- A campaign was held in the school (poster and advertisements) to encourage students to use battery containers (Environmental Education in grade 4). The initial results were very impressive: batteries collected during six weeks (Fig. 17) may contaminate 45 million litres of water, which is nearly the water consumed during two months in Tavernes Blanques (9000 people).

### Smoking

- In order to improve the school atmosphere, each day several songs selected by the students were played during recess. The organization would need to be improved to give this responsibility fully to the students (it was always the same teacher – me – involved in this task!). The initial results were very good.

### International collaboration

The problems with the Internet access in the school prevented us from participating more substantially in the international collaboration. We only participated by collecting data from students and sending back test...
information to the other schools in Young Minds. The discussion forum at the Young Minds web site is a good way to collaborate if you have Internet access.

**Advice and recommendations**

- More details should be available about the process of selecting schools for Young Minds in each country.
- There should be at least two teachers responsible for Young Minds in each school. Doing this work alone is difficult.
- Selecting more enthusiastic students from different classes would be better.
- The planning meeting is strongly recommended and very useful.
- The project should be a whole-school project involving more teachers working in teams.
- Teachers should know the objectives and details of new projects in advance. Further, teachers should read case stories like these before they commit themselves to such a project.
- Distributing a summary of the project within each country might be helpful. This document can be used to contact local councils and mass media.
- Teachers should contact local and regional authorities and mass media. This would make the project known not only in the school but also within the local community, which could help in fundraising.
- The project coordinators should support teachers in their daily work. Sometimes this may mean that more work needs to be done. Other times their advice is very helpful. In any case, it is important for teachers to know that the support team is ready to help them.
- Make a realistic budget for all partners included (teachers, coordinators and students).
- Information and communication technology facilities (especially the Internet) should be checked in advance. If unexpected problems with the information and communication technology occur, it should be possible to go to the nearest cybercafé, paid by the school, to work on the project.

**Comments and concluding remarks**

Experience from Spain implies that much hard work is needed in the future. The environmental and health problems identified in this project reflect cultural behaviour in many regions of Spain. Students’ behaviour at school often reflects parents’ behaviour in the village.

The Young Minds project has been very helpful in making the students aware about environmental problems. Several actions have already started and should be followed in the future by other action. But the main work must be done with the support and cooperation of other projects. We need the collaboration of the responsible authorities (local, region or country) to start a national action plan for health and environment.

The Budapest Conference was successful. Despite their limited English skills, the students in Spain worked hard interviewing representatives from many countries, presenting our local environmental and health problems and asking for ways to make changes.

**What do students say about the project?**

✔ It’s a good opportunity to improve the environment, but it should not stop at the end of the project.

✔ It has been a short time to work on the project, so changes are not evident.

✔ Environmental education should start with very young people.

✔ Our local representatives are closer than expected. We can meet them!
Young Minds in Denmark

Kamma Rasmussen

Context and participants
Katrinebjergskolen is situated in Denmark’s second largest city. The Municipality of Aarhus has one of Denmark’s largest public-sector primary and lower secondary education systems, with more than 27,000 students at 53 schools.

Katrinebjergskolen has 600 students (from kindergarten to grade 9) and 70 teachers. The school is located in northern Aarhus. Most of the children come from middle-class and lower-middle-class families living in flats and small houses. Students are typically urban children without much contact and experience with nature.

Twenty-three students 13–14 years old are participating in the Young Minds project: 8 boys and 15 girls. Four students have either one or two parents who were born outside Denmark. About one fourth of the students have learning difficulty, but they are doing well in practical subjects.

Almost all the parents are working or studying. Parents are interested in their children’s schooling. When they heard about the Young Minds project, they backed it up. Parents think it is a great opportunity for their children to go to Budapest and take part in the Conference.

The school, which is under the Aarhus Municipal Education Authority, is environmentally certified. Energy conservation measures, energy management and environmental management are already in force. To develop the educational aspect, the local school authority has developed the Green Touch Project in collaboration with the Danish University of Education. This project supports schools in their work with environmental policy. The approach is to develop children’s action competence in relation to the environment. Since Katrinebjergskolen is an active school in the Green
Touch Project and I have been working with the project, we were selected for the Young Minds project.

I find it important that the process in the Young Minds project be part of the daily education in the class. The national curriculum states that students should work with methods very similar to the IVAC approach (problem and project oriented); this is why I attach great importance to the project for all students in the class.

**The process**

Before the planning workshop on 14 February 2004 in Copenhagen for the coordinating team and the teachers, we discussed possible topics in the class. Students had several proposals. We discussed that it should be a topic relevant to the children and of such importance that they were able to present it at the Conference in Budapest.

During the workshop, the teachers and coordinators agreed on two topics: school and the environment and mental well-being. I think our decision-making process was not adequate, especially for the topic of mental well-being, because it was not discussed and evaluated in relation to students and their practice. I regretted that I did not react when the students did not quite understand the meaning behind the words and had problems finding content for their own investigation.

After the workshop in Copenhagen, students conducting brainstorming with inspiration from some topics in the mass media. Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs (Fig. 18) was shown and discussed in the class, and I asked students to find topics that they thought would be important to human needs. I also wanted the topic to give us possibilities to conduct some science education and investigation because we were going to work with the project in science lessons.

Our focus was the body and security (physical needs). These must be fulfilled to provide mental well-being. Health and environmental issues are related to the fulfillment of these needs.

The students found various issues related to the pyramid and wrote their contributions in the discussion forum at the web site on the following issues:

- love and friends;
- fatness;
- breakfast;
- bullying;
- alcohol; and
- asthma.

Students were active in the decision-making process; they proposed suggestions and argued for them. They also listened to the teacher’s arguments because I have a more extensive and more general view.

The brainstorming and the class debate gave us many ideas to continue the process. Then the class followed and joined the dialogue in the discussion forum (the web site), collected new ideas and conducting new brainstorming: What are the most interesting issues from the discussion forum? Students and teachers ended up with this list of priority topics:
• smoking and cigarettes;
• air pollution (transport, cancer and asthma);
• depression and suicide;
• anorexia;
• fatness; and
• alcohol.

We decided to go on with air pollution and made an overview of our overall theme (Fig. 19).

Students developed questions to guide their further investigations on these issues. The investigations took different forms and modes including:
• finding information in books, in newspapers and on the Internet.
• posing questions (by e-mail) to the public transport company owned by the Municipality of Aarhus and of Aarhus County and to a large private bus company;
• interviewing a scientist who is investigating how air pollution influences children’s health; and
• conducting experiments to illustrate the greenhouse effect and to indicate the particulate matter in the exhaust from cars (Fig. 20).

Investigation
The focus in the investigation phase was now: air pollution. In the news we heard and read a lot about:
• the salmon from the Baltic Sea being contaminated with dioxins;
• particulate matter from diesel polluting the air in the cities; and
• global warming caused by carbon dioxide emission from electricity generation, from transport and from incinerating waste.

Visions
In the vision phase, the students worked in smaller groups so all of them were able to be active, responsible and committed. They presented the results to their classmates and summed up the visions. I think that the final visions should be simple, clear and understandable to all the students. The visions articulated by the students included the following.
• We would like to walk around in Aarhus – and in the world – without worrying about getting bad particles into our lungs and the rest of our body.
• We would like to eat eggs, meat and fish and drink milk without any worries about dioxin in it.
• We should reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Everyone in the world should have the right to live a good life (also people in the future). We must share the riches of the world and keep the world and nature intact.

Action and change
In the next stage of the project, in order to come closer to their visions, the students carried out the following actions:
• making suggestions for the new transport plan for Aarhus;
• making suggestions to the municipal councillor who is the leading local responsible person for environmental issues; and
• creating a questionnaire for three different bus companies.

The first action is described here in greater detail.

The Municipality of Aarhus has made a plan for the future transport in the city centre. Citizens were invited to send their ideas about the transport plan. The Young Minds class from Katrinebjergskolen made a suggestion and sent it to the Municipality (Fig. 21).

All the contributions for the future transport plan were exhibited in the town hall (Fig. 22).

As a different kind of action, the results from the experiments and the other investigations were used in a debate play made by a group of students (Fig. 23). The debate play was shown at a reception in Copenhagen and at the Healthy Planet Forum (the parallel forum for nongovernmental organizations linked to the Conference in Budapest; http://www.healthy-planet-forum.org); later it will be shown to other students and their parents in our school.

In addition, as part of the action phase, we informed the following people about the project:
• the person responsible for transport in Aarhus;
• the Mayor of Aarhus;
• Denmark’s Minister for the Environment;

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE TRANSPORT PLAN FOR AARHUS

• We suggest that only a few cars must drive into the city centre.
• There will be less particle pollution and noise pollution, and it is safer for children and old people.
• There should be huge parking places outside the city centre where people can park their cars.
• We think that there should be carry though streetcars, because they don’t pollute as much as buses and cars do. They use electricity and not diesel or fuel. Then there will not be emitted any dangerous particles through exhaust. And less CO2 will end up in the atmosphere.
• We think there should be bikes which people can borrow for only 3 dollars (you get it back when you have finished) and there should be bike taxis for hire.
• It will be safer to bike if there are not any cars on the road.
• Parents should also have the chance to borrow a bike trailer or a bike for the kids if they can’t be placed on the parents’ bike.

Fig. 21. Students’ suggestions on the transport plan for Aarhus
Fig. 22. Exhibition in the town hall presenting suggestions for city transport in the future, including the Young Minds proposal
Young people want to be part of the answer

Young Minds in Spain

• Denmark’s Minister for Health; and
• the European Union Commissioner responsible for the Environment.

The Budapest Conference
The whole class went to Budapest because, in addition to the Ministerial Conference, students took part at the Healthy Planet Forum too (Fig. 24). The students paid the travel themselves (saved money, sponsorship and money paid by the parents). At the Healthy Planet Forum, the students showed the debate play picturing some of the problems and conflicts of interest regarding health and environmental issues and collaborated with the students from Ireland and Spain. They presented the Young Minds process in our school and the findings from their investigations.

Working with the IVAC approach in the class
One might not directly see any changes related to the Young Minds work in our class or community. The changes are in our heads and hearts and, in the community, changes are like constant dripping that wears away the stone. The students have been part of a democratic process: they made suggestions for the transport plan for Aarhus and they found it very important to influence the ministers in Budapest. They have taken a stand on current health and environmental problems. They know how to take action and how to solve problems. That is important experience to have for a future citizen in a democratic society.

Working the IVAC way has given students some qualifications for the future, such as:
• asking questions and ranking them in priority;
• finding answers;
• preparing and carrying out interviews;
• finding information in books and on the Internet;
• expressing themselves;
• expressing their attitudes;
• coming up with proposals;
• making plans for a project;
• organizing a project;
• collaborating; and
• communicating.

Collaboration
Presentation and information on the web site was an important and motivating process in the collaboration, but personal contact is always best. The teachers and the coordinating team met in Copenhagen on 14 February 2004 in the beginning of the project and were introduced to each other, which was very important for cooperation.

The dialogue on the web site and the discussion forum were slow in the beginning because classes were busy with their own topic. They did not respond to the content of the various web pages. When the other Young Minders sent the first questionnaires, my students found them interesting to answer but soon found that the questions were rather similar. However, they also found interesting ideas and questions: for example, the questionnaire from England asked whether there are any television programmes aimed at children and young people. The Danish students found exploring this question very interesting.

The international collaboration stimulated and inspired the students in their work because they knew that there were recipients for their messages. Further, collaborating with students from other countries at the
Conference was important for the students. Nevertheless, this was challenging because they were young people like themselves and they did not know one another very well.

**Barriers and challenges**
- Having to write in English was a barrier and challenge to the Danish students. It took longer, and they were hampered by a limited vocabulary. They expressed themselves in a more limited way than they would have in Danish.
- Conducting good interviews is difficult for the students. They prepare questions and stick to them when they interview, rarely posing new exploratory questions based on the replies. It is a major demand for all the students but an important challenge to give to some of them.
- The time from February to June is split up into many short periods because of holidays, and working parallel in the countries and working in unbroken modules are therefore difficult.
- Using the web was a slow process because of technical difficulty and lack of skills. I would have established a web group to do most of the web work if I had known that in advance. The support from the coordinating team was excellent.
- Young Minds is a vast and enormous process, especially for the students who need guidance and structure. They lose the broad view. Helping them to find reasonable tasks they can handle can be very difficult. The process is fine for the students who have good language skills but hard for those who learn through practical tasks.
- When we conducted brainstorming and made decisions, the “strong” and most confident students were the most active. I would like to help the other students in achieving more influence, because they need it the most.
- Guiding the students in a process in which the teacher can have difficulty in maintaining an overview is difficult. It was nice to be supported by e-mails from the coordinating team. The support also included three visits to the class by a member of the coordinating team.

**Suggestions**
- A front page on the web site telling what is new every time there is a change would be useful.
- The collaboration is more manageable if only two countries are involved at the beginning. Later on two collaborating groups could be joined together.
- The Irish Young Minders had made posters about each country. This was a good idea. If two collaborators make presentations of each other, they get more involved in each other, and you get involved in adding important information about your own country.
- Students’ ideas and visions should have a more crucial role in the action part.
- Motivation to collaborate could be increased if the students had known each other better.
- The coordinating team should communicate with the students about the process, the programme at the Conference etc.
- I think meta-reflections are important to understand one’s role and opportunities in a process.
- Students could be involved more directly in the project from the very beginning by writing a letter to the students and their parents to introduce the project and the timetable.
- Personal contacts will lead to better collaboration. This could include a videoconference for the students at the start of the project and a workshop for students similar to the one held for teachers.
- It could help the work in the classes if we had more examples from the beginning describing:
  - various ways of collaborating, such as questionnaires, an online growing story or making a sketch jointly;
  - the IVAC approach illustrated and explained to students;
  - how to make interesting posters (graphics); and
  - a more detailed project timeline.
Concluding remarks
Working in an action-oriented way is very good for committed students but difficult for students who are not interested in reading news or attending to what is going on concerning environmental problems. Remembering and supporting these students is important.

Students should be given a voice and encouraged to participate in the process as well. Participating in a project such as Young Minds opens the students’ minds towards the world outside their own. The Danish Young Minders saw the advantages of their own school when they heard about the school in Spain. I think that it is important that young people see how privileged they are in Europe and that they take responsibility for the future.

The students about the project
✔️ We know much more about the topics than our friends in the other classes.
✔️ We know a lot about air pollution and we think about what we are doing in everyday life.
✔️ Our work has been purposeful.
✔️ Good to know that others in other countries are working with the same things, but not until we physically are working together do we know it fully.

Young Minds in the Czech Republic

Marketa Uhlírova

School and the local setting
School attendance in the Czech Republic is compulsory from age 6–15 years. Most children attend state (public) schools, but there are newly established private and church schools. Education at state schools up to 18 years of age is free of charge. Private and church schools charge school fees.

Základní School in Sumperk is an elementary school with 723 students aged 6–15 years and 51 teachers and other staff (Fig. 25).

The school profile in brief
- Broad language education from grade 3 (English, German, Spanish and French)
- Intensive language courses for students in grades 5 and 6 combined with stays in nature and sport activities
- Educational and cognitive trips to Great Britain for grade 8 students
- Exchange visit with students of an elementary school in Goss Weenstein, Germany
- Participation in international projects
• Project day – health day
• Since 1992 part of the Czech Network of Health Promoting Schools
• Since 2000, involved in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (15-year-old students)
• Active support of education in ecology (teaching ecological biology and Project TEREZA – separating waste at the source)
• The school library publishes a school magazine Alfonz four times a year

The city
Sumperk is a town in the valley of the Jeseníky Mountains, situated at 50°N and 17°E and with an average elevation of about 350 metres above sea level. The town has many sunny slopes and extensive forests. The area of Sumperk is 2790 ha.

Selection of students and organizing the project
After the planning meeting in Denmark on 14 February 2004, we chose the students who were going to be directly involved in the project work. The teachers responsible decided to choose the oldest students in grade 9. After we informed students about the project, they got two days to think about it. Twenty students were interested, and they were asked to make a small project on the topic of the school environment. On this basis, 10 students were selected to be directly involved in Young Minds.

At the first meeting with the students, the IVAC approach was explained and discussed. We decided that every Thursday afternoon would be the Young Minds day.

The class started with a brainstorm on environmental issues related to their school and town as a point of departure in selecting the specific topic for the whole Young Minds project. Students started to speak their minds and the teacher listened to them, writing down notes and merely coordinating the discussion and supporting their ideas. The students felt that the students from lower grades should have the opportunity to express their opinions about an ideal school. Thus, the students had homework of collecting information and making a poster of an ideal school (Fig. 26).

This was a perfect start, because within a week the whole school was informed about the Young Minds project. After this the Young Minds team established a display board in the hallway where all posters, information and steps related to Young Minds were published on a regular basis.

The posters about the ideal school and the ways to improve the school environment showed that many students were interested in separating rubbish, recycling and hygiene. So the Young Minders decided that the specific topic to be explored in the project should be recycling and hygiene.

As a part of the investigation activities, the Young Minds group visited the local council for the environment and asked questions about recycling in our town. Students found out that the town council already does a lot to support cleanliness and waste separation in the town. But they complained about groups of irresponsible people who do not care and ruin the work of everybody by throwing 10 kg of dust into a full rubbish bin of plastic bottles. The Council thought that the Young Minds project could help in influencing these people to think differently and to take better care of the environment. Further, the town council was introduced to new, fresh perspectives, suggested by Young Minds, to make the town nicer and cleaner.

Students enjoyed preparing this visit and conducting interviews with the
people in the council. It helped them see the things from different viewpoints.

**Actions**
To improve the hygiene in the classrooms, each classroom needed two rubbish bins: one for rubbish and one for plastic. The students seem to be aware of this and are separating rubbish.

Then the Young Minders arranged paper collection, which will take place regularly — a couple of times during the school year. Further, aluminium is collected at the school club every Tuesday before lessons.

Students carried out direct action and painted the rubbish bins in the schoolyard a sunny yellow colour (Fig. 27). The class enjoyed painting the rubbish bins, and the effect was great because there is not much litter around the school.

In the Czech Republic, 1 June is Children’s Day. On this occasion Young Minders organized games for younger students, including:

- collecting plastic bottles for recycling: this was great fun, and the students explained to the younger children why recycling is important; and
- separating various items, such as mineral-water bottles, glass and soda cans, depending on the materials of which they are made.

As a part of the investigation process, students explored the importance of waste separation worldwide. Students were acting locally but they started to think globally, realizing that the world is interconnected and that people need to collaborate across borders if the world of the future is to be a nice place in which to live.

**New investigation and action**
As part of the investigation activities, the students created a questionnaire to explore how much people in the local community know about recycling and other environmental issues. They decided to publish the findings as well as additional information in a newsletter that they put together independently, with a little support from me as their teacher.

During the work with the newsletter, students influenced some local people as they were going around in the local community, asking questions and trying to find more information, which helped them see that local action is very important.

The newsletter’s information section included facts about recycling of glass, paper, plastic and aluminium. Students drew pictures to illustrate the text (Fig. 28), trying to picture the humorous but also the serious dimensions of the environmental problems.

[Fig. 28. Illustration in the student newsletter]

Fig. 27. Students with rubbish bins
According to the students’ wishes, the newsletter is supposed to be distributed among as many people in the town as possible and eventually also in other countries.

**Students’ comments**
The following comment by one of the students captures the opinions regarding Young Minds of most of them.

✔ I am very pleased that we got a possibility to be involved in the Young Minds project. Because of that, we learned a lot about our planet and especially about separating rubbish and recycling. It is great that teenagers like us can do something to help create a clean and healthy world for the next generations.

I especially enjoyed the direct actions we took. Also the part when we were collecting information for our newsletter was very interesting.

**Concluding comments**
Young Minds has been a very interesting, enjoyable and learning project for me as a teacher, even though I actually only coordinated the students’ work, supporting their ideas and helping them out when they needed it. I tried to enhance their motivation, to help them to take different perspectives and to further develop their ideas. I was very pleased that I had 100% support from the headmaster at our school, which made the work on the project much easier.
municating with young people from other countries via the Internet; the older ones found this to be a good opportunity to practise English.

Description of the process at the school
Soon after the project was introduced to the students, they realized that this project will enable them to express their thoughts and share their ideas with young people from other countries and to gain insight into environmental and mental well-being issues in an international context.

After the first phase of chatting, we had to concentrate on the serious part of the work. By the help of a guided discussion about mental health, we tried to grasp the concept and factors that affect people's mental health.

Investigation and vision
During the discussion about mental health, students worked out a list of questions they were seeking to answer.

- Are you at peace with yourself?
- What can cause stress for you?
- What situations and events make you stressful?
- What do you do to reduce the stress?
- Do you prefer going to school? (being under the pressure of expectations)
- Have you got true friends?
- Who can influence your thoughts?
- With whom can you talk about your problems?
- Are you concerned about your future?
- Can the mass media help?
- What is the role of the mass media in your life? (advantages and disadvantages)
- What would you like to change?

After familiarizing themselves with each other's opinions, students had a look at a previous survey of the lifestyles of fifth- and sixth-graders. The results were alarming: children's lives are becoming more and more troubled, they watch everything on television with or without parental guidance, and less time is spent on “pouring their hearts out”.

According to the Young Minds group:
- reality shows (watched most often by Hungarians) should be broadcast late in the evening without advertising them;
- the number of advertisements should be reduced; and
- violent and aggressive cartoons should be banned.

After the Young Minders examined these concerns more closely, the following questions arose:

- Are we going to become well-balanced adults?
- How can we prepare for this?
- Can we take care of ourselves and others?
- Can we live in peace with each other?
- Are we going to be surrounded by a healthy environment?
- How do we imagine our future?

The online and in-class discussions resulted in the decision to investigate the topic of the mass media. The title of our project became The Effects of News on Children's Mental Health, World View and Vision.

Methods of investigation
The Young Minders wished to involve every age group at the school and decided to use the following methods:

- grades 1–3: discussion and drawing (How do you imagine your future in 20–30 years?);
- grades 4–6: interview in groups of 4–5 students; and
- grades 7–8: questionnaires.

Students formulated 29 questions for the questionnaire. The members of the Young Minds team collected the answers with great enthusiasm and were full of experience and excitement after meeting the younger students. Nevertheless, they realized that the topic had to be narrowed down,
and 16 questions were consequently selected. We summarized and analysed our results and then wanted to make an international comparison with the other classes in the project. When we received the replies from the Young Minders from Denmark, England, Finland, Ireland and Slovenia, we were surprised by the similarity of the responses. Perhaps the country in which we live is not as important as our age and the world around us. But there were also differences, which we illustrate below.

Simultaneously with the questionnaires, some of the Young Minders observed the news for one week (morning and evening) on five television channels and two radio stations. They took notes on the news stories and categorized them. At the end of the week they summarized the results.

Here is the rank list starting with the hottest topics:
- politics – 169 times during the week;
- stars and gossip;
- the economy;
- terrorism;
- war;
- catastrophes;
- sport;
- crime;
- visit of a politician; and
- environment (natural and built) – 29 times during the week.

Students were astonished by the fact that most of the news was about wars, acts of terrorism, accidents and crime. We wondered why the environment is at the bottom of the list. Where can we encounter health issues and people’s collaboration to save and protect the environment? The Young Minds group asked children about the news they remembered and heard most often. The answers were:
- sport;
- the European Union;
- gossip (such as on David Beckham and Victoria Adams Beckham); and
- war.

Results and international comparisons

We asked our partner schools in the other countries several questions about their views on the mass media. We asked them whether they watch news on television (Fig. 29). Apart from the students in Ireland, 75–80% of the respondents in the other countries watch news on television.

![Fig. 29. Survey of Young Minders: news on television](image)

![Fig. 30. Survey of Young Minders: sources of information](image)
From where do children get their knowledge and information (Fig. 30)? The respondents in England and Slovenia are informed mostly by radio. The students in Hungary use the Internet the least to get information. About 60–70% of the respondents in Slovenia, Finland and Hungary read newspapers. The Young Minders in England think that getting information from friends is the least important.

We also asked questions about war (Fig. 31) and terrorism (Fig. 32). The results showed that the students in Ireland were less concerned about war, whereas the respondents in England and Slovenia were on the other end of the spectrum.

The Irish Young Minders were least worried about terrorism, and those in England, Denmark and Finland are most worried.

Finally, questions dealt with young people’s hope and vision about their future. The respondents in Finland, Slovenia, Denmark and Ireland were the most optimistic about the economic situation in which they would grow up, and those in Hungary and England were the most pessimistic (Fig. 33).

It is promising that almost everybody would like to have children, although most of the Irish Young Minders do not “plan to have a family” (Fig. 34 and 35). In some countries, such as Denmark, most students wanted to have two children, whereas the picture was much more mixed in other countries (such as in Ireland, where 20% want more than three children).

We also asked how often young people talk to their parents about their concerns and ideas about the future (Fig. 36). The Hungarian Young Minders indicated that pouring their hearts out in the family was crucial, and they wanted more time together with their parents. The international survey showed very large differences between the countries. In fact, the
Young people want to be part of the answer

Hungarians were among the ones spending most time with their parents, whereas many Young Minders in Ireland, Slovenia and Denmark say that they rarely talk to their parents.
Young people want to be part of the answer

All students expressed concern about the state of the environment when they grow up (Fig. 37). Again, there were great differences; those in England and Slovenia indicated the most serious concern.

Finally, we asked the young people in the other classes about action to improve the environment (Fig. 38). It was very positive that almost all young people in this survey indicated an interest in taking such action. Nevertheless, there were again differences, and the respondents in Ireland were least interested in doing something for the environment. In many countries, rubbish was considered the most important topic for action.

The findings from the questionnaires helped us to draw comparisons between the different countries and to discuss the reasons for these differences. During these discussions, we also started to look at our own situation and routines from new and refreshing perspectives. This was a good start for the next phases: developing visions and concrete actions.

Developing visions and actions

After the investigation phase, we tried to develop positive visions for the following problems to promote both mental and physical health.

Mass media
- Young people need their own television channel or programme for 11- to 18-year-olds: news, translated into their own language, events, lifestyle, environmental problems and results that attract their attention. They also should be involved in the process of production.
- Talking about the effects of drugs and alcohol consumption is necessary.
- There should be a forum on current local events and problems accessible via the Internet in schools.
- Television should have less advertising.

School
- A students’ club (opportunities to talk)
- Editing a school newspaper
- Regular discussions with students (in extra classes)
- Learning by doing as a new approach

Built environment
- Safer playgrounds
- Leisure centres
- Opportunity for sports

The first step in taking action was contacting local politicians: decision-makers who have the power to induce structural change. The first person to be asked was Antonio de Blasio, Project Manager, Healthy City Foundation of Pécs.

The Young Minders asked for his help in the following topics:
- safer playgrounds;
- more leisure centres and access to sports; and
- a television programme for young people.
Antonio de Blasio drew children’s attention to the fact that they should not only contact the decision-makers with their ideas but they should also make specific suggestions for how to solve the problems. Then their ideas will be more difficult to put aside. In his opinion, building a leisure centre requires serious financial support that he was not in a position to provide. But the building of a skateboard field could be arranged, and he even liked this idea very much.

In connection with the idea of safer playgrounds, he suggested that children conduct further surveys about this problem, missing things etc. Then he could also help with this. The same thing must be done with the television programme as well: make a detailed description addressing the following questions: To whom? About what? How often? And who will be the editors? If the plans are well prepared, the Foundation would be able to raise financial support to realize it. He agreed that programmes like the one mentioned were missing.

Hungary’s Minister for Environment and Water visited the town, which was a good opportunity for the Young Minders as well to take part in the discussion he led about environmental issues with children. Unfortunately, during that visit the Young Minders did not have a chance to talk about the project with the Minister, but they were not deterred for that reason. Instead they sent him an e-mail. The e-mail asked the following questions.

✔ As a result of our investigations, we found out that children watch too much television, and unfortunately they often see bad things, as if good things never happen in our country, in Europe or the world.
✔ What can we do about that? Where should we start? How do we forward our ideas to the appropriate institutions? Would you be willing to help us?

We also asked him about the environment:
✔ We are concerned about the environment. And we have discussed whether you accept children’s ideas and concerns in the national environmental protection planning.
✔ Could we have an influence in this? Is there a possibility? Could you help us?

The e-mail was sent, and we are still waiting for an answer.

Several specific changes have already happened. We succeeded in contacting mass-media experts from regional and national television – this is still in progress.

The Student Board Club has been completed using the money obtained from paper collection. It is now being furnished.

We won first prize in the competition for collecting bottle caps among all schools in Pécs; the prize was three benches made from recycled caps.

We are going to contact the headmaster and Student Board leaders of our school to inform them about our plans. In addition, we will suggest initiating the following activities:
• possibilities for informal discussions; and
• a group of students trained for solving conflicts.

Students’ voices
We asked the students to evaluate the project. As the following quotations illustrate, they mentioned several different issues and perspectives. In total they considered the project to be fun, valuable and a great learning experience.
✔ I believe it’s great examining problems from the children’s perspective and making contact with young people from other countries. (Botond Dani, 6b)
✔ I have had great fun because we could exchange our ideas on interesting and important issues in English. (Jozsef Werling, 8a)
✔ The project provided opportunity for familiarizing ourselves with the environment and opinions of others. (Laura Kocsis, 5b)
✔ I like this programme very much because I can meet and talk with young people from other countries and use English in reality. I remember the starting-point; now we have many results and we can use them. There were times when I got bored when we made the diagrams and asked a question for the hundredth time, but now I see how little things become bigger and bigger. (Erna Jakab, 8a)
✔ In my opinion, working in groups was effective, mainly because we knew the evaluation of the results were on the way and we can have a word, too. I hope the work will have a positive effect on our vision. (Zsuzsanna Almos, 7b)
It was great fun. I liked going there, working for an important goal – this is a great thing to me. I’m proud that I was working on a task of this calibre. At last, work full of responsibility and a useful idea – because this is quite rare in schools. ... I must say, we had a lot of time to do it, but it was worth the effort. I missed the space where I could work or do something useful. I had only met a few kids who had important and useful ideas and had the courage to tell them. But here! I knew that they exist, but I never imagined that there were so many! To be honest, I felt great. I wonder what will come out of this ... (Daniel Ruckert, 8b)

Young Minds in Ireland

Stephen Doherty

Introduction

Mulroy College is a vocational school with 440 students (http://homepage.eircom.net/~mulroyc). The school is located in Milford, a village nestled at the base of two peninsulas: Rosguill and Fanad. It is about 16 km north of County Donegal’s largest town: Letterkenny, Ireland. Our school was selected because it has a proven track record in both health and environment promotion. The Project Officer for Ireland’s National Environmental Health Action Plan is based in the North Western Health Board. The Department of Health and Children asked the Project Officer to designate a school for the Young Minds project, and we were chosen via the health promotion unit in our region.

My own selection as coordinator and Ursula O’Connor’s selection as assistant were based on our involvement in the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme and my involvement in two major environmental projects within my school. The SPHE programme is a mandatory environmental and health course available to all students in all second-level schools. The North Western Health Board has been one of the pioneers of this programme. The project partners were the North Western Health Board, the regional education authority (the Donegal VEC) and Mulroy College (Fig. 39).
The selection process
Young Minds began in October 2003 when the letter of invitation arrived at my school. After several meetings with school management and the environmental club committee, the principal and deputy principal decided to accept and support the project. As the chair of the environmental committee, I was appointed coordinator of the project, and my job was to communicate with the Danish University of Education coordinating team and to facilitate the project within Mulroy College. I was also head teacher for Rang Micheal (a third-year class) and had them for one class period a week for SPHE.

The Young Minds group evolved from this group when I invited the first, second and transition years to a meeting in my room at lunch times. The students were selected based on their interest alone. The age span of this group was 12–16 years. A core group of 19 students emerged (Fig. 40).

The project then became an energizing force within the school, and the new building in which we attended school started to develop character through student empowerment and motivation. All the partners were now working to improve the common issues. The partners were all now very helpful, and a vision for the school as a microcosm of society was developing. The students and teachers recognized the debates and activities that were happening within the school. Students and teachers were both addressing issues such as transport conditions and agreeing on ways to improve the problems. The ideas that teachers were striving to introduce into the school were being discussed by students and vice versa, and this created a student–teacher dynamic on which the Young Minders intended to build. One of the main reasons for the buzz was the mix of interested students, teachers, management and outside bodies.

The process adapted by the Young Minds group was cross-collaboration using the joint IVAC approach. Our topic was to investigate the physical built environment along with the classes in the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Spain and to see how this affects people’s health. And then to take action according to local needs.

Investigation
Brainstorming on the physical built environment was carried out with 120 students in our school. The age range was 12–19 years, and we felt that the variety of ideas would increase with the amount of time the students had spent in our school. Some drew maps, some made lists and some drew cartoons. They all took the task very seriously, but some ideas were a bit outrageous. For example, some more mature students suggested a severe reduction in the number of teachers and more or less total anarchy. The ideas were given to the Young Minds group and collated.

We then referred to the web site and involved ourselves in some collaboration. We converted our initial investigation results into posters and placed these around the school. One of the common denominators emerging between the students, teachers and partners was the idea of sustainability and continuity. We felt that it was very easy to carry out actions on a one-off basis, but would this improve everyone’s environment and health? The eventual structure would have to create a solid platform for the future. The idea of planning was thus addressed, and the students sought the involvement of the Donegal Youth Council representative within the school. Sean Bryceland, one of the school’s youth councillors, gave a talk on the structure of the Donegal Youth Council and its umbrella, the Youth Parliament, and he offered to help in setting up a student council.

Vision
The vision we created was finally drawn up by Barry Green, one of the core activity coordinators, and placed on the web site (Fig. 41). This map was finalized by Barry and a group of first-year students (12 years old).
This vision led the Young Minders to a more specialized debate to decide on a specific investigation. An investigation would have to be followed by action. The original brainstorming ideas were ranked, and these ideas were presented to our partners in the project. The Young Minds committee was now meeting every day at lunchtime and in our common free classes, and we eventually agreed in mid-May. It was decided to investigate the idea of setting up a student council to ensure that a structure would exist after this project that could continue the work of students. The idea of sustainable ideas appealed to everyone involved.

It was then decided to carry out smaller investigations into air pollution, waste management and the national environment and health action plan. A national environment and health action plan is a national plan to deal with how environment affects health. It is about bringing together the sectors whose activities and policies influence health and ensuring that they take health into account even when it is not normally considered part of their work. It is then about working together to manage the environmental factors that affect health. The Department of Health and Department of Environment are key to this at the national level in Ireland and the health service and local authorities at the local level. A school is a place where health and environment can be dealt with in a local and a global way. This form of education can form a foundation for the leaders of the future.

The support for the project at this stage had been boosted yet again with funding for proposed actions and funding for two extra students and one extra teacher to travel to the Healthy Planet Forum in Budapest. Our regional education authority, the Donegal VEC, gave this support in recognition of the work being done by the students and teachers in Mulroy College. As the sole representative for Ireland, Mulroy College presented a report on the IVAC approach to creating change by action within Mulroy College and its community, and the Donegal VEC was very supportive.

The four investigations included how to set up a student council, a local study into air quality with specific reference to the restrictions on public smoking instituted in Ireland in 2004, a general investigation into waste management, and an initial investigation of a national environment and health action plan. These have been reported on at the web site, and several posters were prepared for the Conference itself. We feel that all presentations reflect the central theme of environment and health: the future for our children. Our main presentation will be at the web site, and we feel the presence of investigations into air quality, national environment and health action plans and waste management are all vital in children's health.

Our Internet and physical posters reflect some of the outcomes of the Children's Environmental and Health Action Plan for Europe at the Conference. For example, paragraph 15(b) of the Children’s Environmental and Health Action Plan for Europe refers to environmental tobacco smoke, and this issue has been dealt with in both our school and our country. We reinforced the workplace ban with an antismoking campaign via posters. These posters highlighted the chemicals in tobacco and their implications. We feel the international collaboration referred to in paragraphs 17–20 has been well represented by our presentations, and we hope to continue and improve on successes and failures.
Actions
Eleven actions were eventually completed. The planning for these actions was very time-consuming, and the support of the school was a pivotal factor. The principal, deputy principal and all teachers who taught the Young Minders’ normally scheduled classes were extremely supportive and co-operative. We also feel our actions were similar or complemented the actions in our partner schools in the Czech Republic, Finland, Slovenia and Spain.

1. We felt the best way to create a good atmosphere in our school at break times was to create an area where students could gather and release their stress while at the same time create an area pleasing to the eye and also environmentally friendly. This was achieved with picnic tables (Fig. 42). This area has been very popular with the students taking examinations during examination time.

![Fig. 42. Picnic tables create a positive atmosphere](image)

2. The notice boards were part of the student council conditions, where three areas of the school were designated as student and community notice areas and nothing else. The main notice board is lockable for important issues.

3. Four oak trees were planted near the picnic tables as a mark of a new beginning for the school (Fig. 43). The health and environment aspects involve the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and the creation of an ecosystem that can support 200 species (biodiversity).

![Fig. 43. Oak trees planted](image)

4. The creation of a social international calendar broadened our general attitudes and enabled us to continue with the collaboration after the Conference in Budapest.

5. The school is an integral part of any community, and the image the school portrays to the community is vital. One aspect of Mulroy’s built environment is a large display stand at the school’s entrance. It was decided to adorn this stand with two large (2.5 m by 3.3 m) murals. The theme would be the Young Minds title along with the flags of the eight countries and a map of Europe with the countries highlighted. This has generated a positive community spirit, for which the students of Mulroy feel responsible.

6. We visited Portlean National School, a Green-School. This school of ten sends its students to Mulroy College to continue their education. Indeed, one of the students involved in starting the Green-Schools initiative in Portlean was the same student who manufactured the picnic seats and laid the concrete. This idea has renewed our intentions to pursue the Green Flag (Fig. 44) for our own school.

![Fig. 44. A Green Flag in front of a Green-School](image)
7. We visited ENFO, the information centre of the Department of the Environment and Local Government, in Suffolk Street, Dublin on our way to the airport on Monday, 21 June. We collected relevant information for the Conference and our projects next year.

8. The structures for a student council have been initiated, but this may have to wait. Lists of contacts have been gathered and this is ongoing.

9. I will include the following three actions together as they all involved interviews. This action has occurred in all participating countries. The interviews involved a local politician, an environmental health officer and a local recycling officer. We feel all interviews give our school insight into the way forward in health and environment. We feel we will have students who now know how our local and national government operates. These students can now enable change to be brought about along with all the other stakeholders.

10. The entire Young Minds project is based on every school’s technology status. Our school is a well-equipped modern school, but we still encountered some problems with Internet access. The actions of our partners in the North Western Health Board along with the actions of the students in embracing the new technology they provided were at the heart of the success of this virtual collaboration. The use of the digital camera, the scanner, the printers, the different types of computers, the data projector and all other devices was a vital learning experience for all Young Minders. It will bring a wealth of information technology skill into our school.

11. The final action is the use of our local mass media by the Young Minders. The highlight of this was a detailed interview on a local radio station, Highland Radio. We hope to renew the mass-media coverage of this project and reinforce the school’s position in the field of environment and health.

Sustainable change after Young Minds
These actions have undoubtedly revitalized Mulroy College and its community by creating a vibrant healthy environment and creating vital links within our community. We have also set in place a number of structures we intend to use to create a local environmental action plan that can be used as a template for other schools and organizations. Examples of such structures include the following.

1. A school-based recycling facility is to be established whereby students and teachers along with a private recycling company and the local Integrated Resource Development (IRD) office in Milford will endeavour to gather and package as many aluminium cans as possible for transport to a recycling area. We hope to raise funds via this venture. This national incentive is being organized by Repak, the National Recycling Company in Ireland.

2. We are currently seeking a Green Flag as recognition of being a Green-School from a nongovernmental organization, An Taisce (the National Trust of Ireland). This flag will recognize the ongoing projects in our school to improve the environment in a sustainable fashion.

3. We hope that the creation of a student council will reinforce the work being done by teachers and management. The students introduced the concept to the student body in Mulroy College in 2003/2004, and we hope this will further develop into an effective and purposeful force.

4. We hope to improve on our own environmental and health strategies using the increased number of contacts we gathered at the Budapest Conference.

Students’ comments
Students were interviewed about the project after the Conference in Budapest and were all very positive about the process and the various outcomes, which the following quotations help to illustrate.

✔ I’ve never used the Internet in such an organized way.

✔ What a difference something like this can make to our school.

✔ It’s great to get out of class and be praised for it.

✔ Does it really involve so much effort to order picnic tables?

✔ What’s everyone panicking about? (said regularly by Barry Green, a core activity coordinator)
Concluding remarks

The Young Minds project started off as many projects do. An idea to improve your school and to travel abroad and demonstrate the talent in your school must be grasped. Nevertheless, the project became a huge part of our school, and our school, our region and our country met the challenge. We hope to consolidate the project in the future.

Teachers’ reflections and recommendations – potential, barriers and challenges

This section builds primarily on the evaluation workshop held at the Conference in Budapest. All the teachers from the participating schools participated. The workshop, which was managed by two members of the coordinating team, was organized as a semistructured focus-group discussion that lasted two hours. The issues discussed at the workshop addressed both the practical aspects of the process (the preparation phase, the planning meeting in Copenhagen on 14 February 2004 and the role of the coordinating team) as well as conceptual aspects or the main features of the educational approach (the IVAC approach; participation and action orientation, international collaboration and the use of information and communication technology). This section summarizes the discussion around these overall themes, and a few quotations from the participants are added to illustrate and document the various opinions and attitudes. Finally, the main conclusions and recommendations for each theme are summarized. All participating teachers revised and approved the section as a whole, including the discussion and conclusions.

The educational approach (the IVAC approach)

An important part of the Young Minds educational approach is the IVAC approach. This approach implies that each group should go through a number of phases when working with environmental or health problems. Teachers and the students should together choose and investigate a problem. In addition to investigating the problem, they should also develop their visions for the future and finally try to take action to initiate changes and get closer to their visions. The main question at the workshop was whether the IVAC approach was useful.
The IVAC approach – and its basic educational values – was new to most of the teachers, and they all agreed that the approach had been very demanding – especially because limited time was available for the processes at the schools (March to June). However, the teachers found the approach valuable as it stimulated a fruitful learning process among students. The approach was experienced as a good way of managing student participation and action.

- IVAC is really something we can use, and the students like it. Especially the vision inspired the students to really work on it, and it meant something that there was a structure for the work. (Czech Republic)
- The IVAC approach works for my students. They did the posters for the Conference and the IVAC approach on their own. It supports the whole idea of the youngsters thinking by themselves. (Ireland)
- The way we investigate is similar. I never explain the IVAC; they just took it as a process like the time goes. Until this week, where we talked about the IVAC directly. We call it something else. (England)
- Students must be aware of the process. In our school we normally have a full week where students do their own problem-based projects, and they use more or less the same methods there as well. (Denmark)
- Students are normally just used to taking notes, but this IVAC is something new, and for those who participated is was really good. Even though they were tired in the end, I think they enjoyed it. (Slovenia)
- I presented the IVAC for a health forum, and they liked the approach, and this method can be used ever and ever; I think this is very useful for a student council also. There is only one way for change, and that is to get the politicians to agree. IVAC is a good way to learn to focus like recycling. And it will secure that everything is being done. (Ireland)

The issue of social inclusion and exclusion and the inclusiveness of the approach in this regard were also raised. Is the IVAC approach more suitable for students that are more confident (the “good” students)? Teachers agreed that the IVAC approach works better for some students. However, they also suggested that “vulnerable” or even marginalized students could benefit from this way of working if they receive adequate support from their teacher.

In one of the countries, some students used the approach as a way of solving their own personal problems, which was a valuable spin-off from the project. In another case the school project team presented and disseminated the IVAC approach to health promotion professionals working in the region.

It was also discussed what happens when students take action and then meet barriers – does this lead to a drop in their action competence and commitment? For example, during the action phase, students in some countries were let down by politicians who did not want to set aside time to meet and discuss with them. The teachers emphasized that, despite the barriers and obstacles, the learning experience gained in the action-taking part of the IVAC approach was valuable. Even if students were not taken seriously by the local politicians they approached, it created stimulating situations where they together with their teacher discussed various forms of democracy, different traditions of public participation and the various ways young people were viewed in society. Thus, as the quotations below illustrate, facing, overcoming and discussing barriers create fruitful learning situations in which fundamental issues such as democracy and society’s views on children can be raised and dealt with in the classroom.

- A case where the young people were let down by a politician created a situation where the teacher and the students talked more about politics, young people and the environment then ever before. (England)
- You must try to act according to politicians even if you don’t think you will get a positive response – it is an important lesson to learn for students. (Spain)

Finally, it was emphasized that the project as a whole and the IVAC approach were carried out in very different ways in the countries involved. In some countries, the project could not be integrated into the regular school lessons. In other countries, the philosophy behind the approach was already integrated into the national curriculum and the project was easily integrated in the regular schoolwork. The teachers who were not able (for various reasons) to integrate the project into the existing school timetable experienced that the project was extraordinarily demanding. The fol-
The following quotations reflect the different conditions and opportunities the teachers faced.

✔ I feel a project like this can be facilitated to fit into a school timetable in a more efficient manner. The amount of time that was spent outside of school by students and teachers was very demanding. (Ireland)

✔ For me it is big work to do. In my school I feel alone. We have to use the normal lessons to do the work. I think also it would be good if it were a longer period. At least start before Christmas. (Spain)

✔ I also think the students can start the network earlier, and also make them responsible. They made the phone call to the Mayor and they were responsible for that process from the start. This was done within their school time, because we feel that it is a part of their education. (Denmark)

✔ We did most of the work after school time for practical reasons: no one else will take my normal lessons, and it was easier to get students, too, than doing the Young Minds in school time. (Finland)

✔ I was supported by my school headmaster and had a two hours a week lesson donation for the project, and if I needed to, I could change lessons. It is very important and I think it is necessary for working on a project like this. (Slovenia)

✔ The school supported me, and that is very important; otherwise it would be stressful. (Czech Republic).

As these quotations illustrate, support from the school management is crucial. It is also clear that integrating the project into the regular teaching provides extra resources for the project.

In conclusion, participants emphasized that the project should be open for diverse ways of working in diverse educational and cultural contexts. The main challenge is to develop an overall project framework that enables the IVAC approach to be implemented under these different conditions.

Conclusions in relation to the IVAC approach

• It is important to have a common educational approach – otherwise cross-cultural collaboration is impossible.

• The IVAC approach is a good way of structuring student participation.

• The IVAC approach is successful in emphasizing action.

• The action perspective must be kept as an integrated part of the project and not only considered an end-product, as many actions require a follow-up phase.

• Confronting barriers should not be avoided, as it may be transformed into valuable learning situations.

• The Young Minds educational approach takes time, and a full school year is suggested as a suitable time frame.

• Students might use the IVAC approach as a general problem-solving strategy (transferability).

• The Young Minds approach should be open for different school conditions and educational traditions. The project should ideally be carried out as an integrated part of the school curriculum, but a combination of lessons and after-school activities should be recommended as a realistic work form.

International collaboration

The fundamental idea in the project is that students should collaborate across countries. This collaboration took various forms: some asked students in other countries to collect data for a shared survey, and others asked students from other countries to react to a common theme or a common suggestion. Much energy was put into facilitating the international dialogue and collaboration. Consequently, it was important to discuss what the international dimension brought into the project.

Although the idea of international collaboration and communication caused considerable frustration and problems among the teachers, as many of them spent most of their energy on the school-based project, they all emphasized the importance of the international dimension.

✔ The students really learn from each other in this project: when they, for example, saw the problems in Hungary or Denmark, they were surprised, and said – is that really true? (England)
The teachers gave several reasons for this.

- The international collaboration increased the commitment among students because they felt they were involved in an important and exciting project. In other words, it increased the status of the project from the perspective of the students.
- The international collaboration improved the students’ English skills. This benefit, which was emphasized by teachers outside England, was also a strong motivation for students’ parents to acknowledge the time students spent in the project.
- The international collaboration allowed for involving the global dimension in the work with environmental and health issues which, according to the teachers, is an invaluable aspect of teaching.

Conclusions related to international collaboration

- International collaboration increases the commitment among students and teachers.
- International collaboration encourages students to view their environmental and health problems and conditions in a broader perspective.
- The international collaboration improves students’ English skills.

The information and communication technology platform (http://www.young-minds.net)

“The web site is essential to the whole process.” This quotation very much covers the general attitude among the participating teachers. The basic idea behind the web site is to provide an interactive and dynamic platform supporting student participation, cross-cultural collaboration and instant publication of their findings and creations relating to the project themes. In previous phases of Young Minds, a moderator (technician or teacher) edited (and published) web pages that were ready for publication. In this phase, the idea has been that the students themselves should take responsibility and play a substantial role in the web-publishing process. Thus, students had direct access to the web administration.

The system is based on a content management system called SmartSite Publisher, in which the system designers have decided on many of the layout aspects so that the users (students and teachers) can focus on the content rather than on the layout. The system, however, still offers substantial freedom to skilled users to manage many of the various layout aspects of web design. The system has been undergoing error corrections, adjustments and minor changes during the whole process. This process was strongly guided by the feedback from the participating students and teachers.

The web site has five main menu points: introduction, content, participants, discussions and highlights. Each of these is subdivided. The general idea of the web site is to include (a) content sections, where students’ findings, reflections and project products were published; (b) discussion sections, with several discussion rooms organized by the topics for discussion; and (c) Conference highlights, where the students’ action at the Conference in Budapest was documented by a daily update of the web site (for detailed overview, visit http://www.young-minds.net). An online course in how to use some of the more vital facilities in the Young Minds system has been created as a central part of the web site. Additionally, all the participating teachers were introduced (hands on) to the system’s functions during the planning meeting in Copenhagen, before the project started.

Five of the eight teachers were interviewed about the function of the system during the Conference days in Budapest to gather information about user-friendliness. Very detailed and valuable information about each aspect of the system was obtained during these interviews, which will be used for the further development of the platform. For the purpose of this publication, however, we only summarize comments with more general relevance.

- The web site is essential to the whole process.
- A test period should be planned as a part of the project so that students and teachers can test the web system and have a chance to influence its design and functions.
- The discussion forum and the communication between students were crucial for developing ideas and concepts related to the overall project themes.
• A more general web layout for forums is preferable.
• Many of the problems encountered were caused by lack of teachers’ technical knowledge and lack of school-based technical support: this needs to be addressed in planning future projects.
• The day-to-day feedback and support for the teachers was invaluable in using the web platform.
• Special time in the project should be devoted to introducing students to the web system.
• Structures should be created within the project’s framework so that students responsible for web publishing could be in direct contact with the project support team for information and communication technology.
• The Young Minds web system is user-friendly and the online course is an excellent tool: however, sufficient time should be provided within the framework of the project for the teachers as well as students to become familiar with the system.

The planning phase, including the planning meeting in Copenhagen

One of the expensive aspects (in terms of time and money) of the project is the planning meeting, where all the (adult) participants gathered for a two-day workshop before beginning the school-based project work. The question was raised whether the project could operate without such a meeting.

During the discussion, all participants strongly emphasized that the meeting, which was held in Copenhagen (14 February 2004) at the very beginning of the project, was crucial in developing a shared understanding of the project, its goal and its educational approach.

✔ We have to have the Copenhagen meeting. (Ireland)

The project involves so many new challenges – such as working with a participatory and action-oriented approach, collaborating with students and teachers from other countries and using information and communication technology; it was crucial to share, compare and discuss these challenges, which were new to many of the participating teachers, with colleagues and partners in the project, in order to build ownership and clarify one’s ideas related to the approach:

✔ The meeting in Copenhagen gave us very good pictures of where we stood. (England)

In addition, the meeting provided an opportunity for the participants to discuss and select choose the overall project themes and to agree on a joint time plan for the project leading up to the Conference in Budapest.

Even though the information and communication technology dimension is an important factor in the project, the teachers emphasized that the human factor should not be neglected.

✔ The Copenhagen meeting was a vital step in the project and the project standard could only increase with this meeting. I feel that the project was a success and that the learning outcomes for me as a teacher were huge, but the Copenhagen meeting introduced a human factor to a virtual situation. The virtual dimension was new to me, and hence the need for the old-fashioned way of learning. (Ireland)

In relation to this, all the teachers emphasized that it is crucial for the virtual communication and collaboration to have a face behind the name.

✔ Even if we have the e-mail, it is not enough. (Czech Republic)

Further, all participants supported the idea that students should also have opportunities to get to know each other at the beginning of the project. All agreed that students – as well as teachers – are very eager to learn and to know each other.

✔ The students need to meet in the same way. We have to help the students to be more together, I think, and to get to know each other. (Denmark)

A face-to-face meeting with students at the beginning of the project is not realistic, but the information and communication technology platform needs to take these points into account, as does the time schedule of the project.
One of the schools that was not represented at the planning meeting for several reasons experienced severe problems at the beginning of the project. Because they were not present at the planning meeting, they felt lost in the first phase of the process, although they got considerable written materials and support. The school could finally begin with the “real work” on the project when a member of the coordinating team visited the school to discuss the project, the educational approach, the information and communication technology and other aspects with the participating teachers. The teacher emphasized that this visit contributed to raising the commitment among teachers, the school management and among students.

Most participating teachers seemed to have problems in motivating their colleagues from the school and getting support for the project from the school community. It was therefore suggested that, in future projects, a person from the coordinating team should visit each school. This would contribute to raising the ownership and interest among all local stakeholders.

✔️ I think it would be a good idea if someone from the coordinating team visits the classes and talks to the students about the project in the beginning of the project. (Denmark)

Despite the letter outlining the terms of participation sent to all the schools at the beginning of the project through the coordinators of national networks of health-promoting schools, several teachers were surprised about the scope of work required later in the process. They therefore recommended more clear descriptions of the project and the expected workload before they sign up as participants.

✔️ It is necessary to know in advance how much time you need for this kind of project. When I realized that, at the workshop in Copenhagen, it was too late to say no. (Spain)

It was also clear that some teachers did not receive adequate resources and time to carry out the project.

✔️ For us there was no budget for the work in Young Minds. So we used our generosity for each other. It is important that the establishment ‘higher’ up than the teachers feel a little bit more ownership. (England)

This indicates that the coordinating team has to ensure that the conditions for participation are understood and taken seriously at the national level (national networks of health-promoting schools) as well as at the school level.

Conclusions in relation to the planning phase

- A face-to-face planning meeting is crucial to get a shared understanding and to develop one common project instead of several independent, isolated projects. It should last at least two days.
- The coordinating team has to specify the commitment and adequate resources that the school has to set aside in terms of the number of hours for teachers, the information and communication technology equipment and other tasks, such as a letter of agreement that the school principal and the coordinator of the national network of health-promoting schools have to sign.
- Students should have the possibility to get to know each other personally as a prerequisite for their collaboration. The information and communication technology platform has to provide opportunities for this.
- The coordinating team should visit schools with specific needs or challenges.

The role of the coordinating team

The establishment of a coordinating team represents an investment in time and money. The role of the team was to develop and communicate the educational approach, to develop the information and communication technology platform, to support teachers during the process, to carry out the planning meeting and to facilitate the process at the Conference in Budapest. The teachers were asked whether the project could operate without facilitation and a coordinating team and – if not – how the coordinating team could improve its role and contribution.
The issues described in the previous section were echoed here. All participating teachers agreed that the coordinating team was crucial to keep the project together and to support and facilitate the process. The following more specific comments were made, and all participants agreed to them.

The continuous and almost daily feedback and communication from the coordinating team was highly appreciated. As the time for realizing the project was very short, people had to be contacted and stimulated to follow the agreed timeline. It was also important to encourage teachers (and their students) to go through the stages involved in the IVAC approach and to reach the action stage with their students. Further, the coordinating team had a central role in stimulating the international collaboration. The coordination was mainly carried out via e-mail and the project’s web site. When needed, more direct communication was initiated, such as phone calls. The teachers underlined that this direct form of contact is important, especially in sensitive moments in the development of the project, when they were overloaded with electronic information.

In addition, the technical support related to the information and communication technology platform was emphasized as being invaluable. The online manual created for this purpose was helpful but not sufficient. Again, direct communication and daily information and communication technology support, combined with visits to the schools, were suggested for future projects.

**Conclusions in relation to the role of the coordinating team**

- A facilitating and coordinating body is crucial for technical as well as educational aspects, as it helps to develop common approach and the project’s spirit.
- The coordinating team must be functioning continuously and be prepared to react on a day-to-day basis to ensure the continuity of the project.
- The participating teachers should know precisely whom to approach for specific problems and support.
- Visits and phone calls can make a difference at the right time.

---

**Students about Young Minds**

Students who participated in the Budapest Conference were asked to evaluate and comment on the Young Minds project. They received a questionnaire covering the following issues:

- the three most important things you have learned in Young Minds;
- the best and the most difficult things in Young Minds; and
- your advice for similar future projects.

This section briefly presents the answers from students.

**Students’ opinions about their own learning**

The answers in this subsection are mainly drawn from the question on the three most important things they have learned. This is therefore not an exhaustive list of competencies (skills, knowledge and attitudes) learned but instead represents the students’ top priorities. Their answers revealed several different categories of competencies.

**Personal, social and cultural understanding and learning**

Students mentioned personal as well as social aspects. The personal outcomes were dealing with the issue of getting more confidence and experience (“gaining more confidence”, “youngsters are our future”, “we must participate” and “gaining more experience”). The social and cultural aspects dealt with collaboration in an intercultural environment (“learned to work together”, “how to mix better”, “to work more as a team”, “I learned to work with people from other countries and speak to them” and “respecting other peoples culture/lives”).

The students say that they increased their self-esteem and that they strongly believe that young people have to be involved in solving the environmental problems of the future.
Learning about the environment

Students also stated that they have gained deeper insight into the environmental problems and issues. Several of the students mentioned the specific issues on which they focused ("I got much information about recycling", "about noise pollution", "smoking is unhealthy" and "effects of air pollution"). Some students addressed more general aspects ("more information about environment"), whereas many of the students emphasized the global intercultural perspectives ("there is a lot of pollution in the world", "I have learned really much about the environment and how it is in other countries", "more information about other countries' customs" and "a lot of things about the other countries"). It is striking to learn that students validate the intercultural aspect of the project as an important dimension of their learning.

Finally, several students especially mentioned the action part of environmental knowledge ("how to reduce pollution" and "I think I have learned to explain better a lot of new environment things I didn't know before").

Evidently, according to the students' views, the participatory approach in education is not in contradiction to learning and acquiring knowledge about environmental issues – rather the opposite is true.

Problem-solving skills

Many students mention the skills they have been using during the processes of analysing and exploring environmental problems. Interviewing key stakeholders has been a valuable learning experience ("making interviews", "how to interview people", "I have learned how to go up to people and approach them and have a nice conversation" and "how to interview delegates better").

Problem-solving skills were among the issues students mentioned ("how to reach a result" and "different opinions and suggestions for our problems"). I relation to this, they also consider the Internet and how to use it properly as useful learning experiences ("use the homepage of young-minds.net", "work with computers and use the Internet" and "I learned to work on the Internet").

Improving language skills

Finally, all the students outside the English-speaking countries include "language learning" as one of their top three learning outcomes:

✔ Improving my English.
✔ I learned to talk to other people in English.
✔ I speak English better now.
✔ I have learned a lot of new English words like pollution and I now know a lot about diesel cars.
✔ I learned a lot of English here because you have to talk it all the time.
✔ More English words and pronunciations.
✔ My English is a little bit better.
✔ A lot of English.
✔ English practice.
✔ English language – I learned a lot of things, new English words.

In conclusion, students view their own learning outcomes as multidimensional, including knowledge about environmental issues as well as more process-oriented skills. In addition to this, they are all very well aware of the spin-off in improving their English skills.

Advice for future projects

General advice

Students were asked to give advice for similar projects in the future. On a general level their advice confirm the teachers' opinions from the evaluation workshop. Among other issues students recommend:

• more time ("take more time for doing this project, not only five months");
• more countries ("take the project to more countries of Europe and the world"); and
• more variation ("find different and interesting ways of presenting our projects, something that will catch visitor's eyes and attention like art, music, videos?").
In addition to giving advice on improving the project, the general feedback illustrated satisfaction with the project as it was (“work just like now”, “you did a perfect job” and “keep up that good work”).

Advice to teachers
The students were specifically asked to give ideas for teachers and their roles in similar projects. The students’ vision about the ideal teacher is that she or he gives responsibility to and involves all the students and that she or he is also aware of the specific support different students need to live up to these responsibilities.

✔ Consult the students more.
✔ Always listen to their students and give them a chance.
✔ Prepare the students very well because it’s not so funny when you feel that you don’t know anything.
✔ Let the students do more of the work with the posters; the students should tell about the project and what they have worked with, NOT the teachers.
✔ Be active.

Nevertheless, at a general level the students were very happy with their teachers and how they approached the project (“nothing – very good”, “not really – they are fine!”, “you are and you were very nice. Go on!” and “I can’t think of any advice; they were all brilliant”).

Finally, students were asked about their overall opinion about the project and their participation at the Budapest Conference.

✔ The change for a lifetime and I had the best time in my life. Thanks a million.
✔ It’s really funny. I don’t feel like I have to teach the ministers and the other people about the environment because most of them already know about it. It is more about letting them know that young people also have to learn about the environment.
✔ Very, very, very exciting. I’m very lucky that I have tried this. It’s also a big chance to talk with important people and show my opinion.
✔ Very interesting and exciting.
✔ Very nice opportunity to travel, meet people, learn English, do investigations of my topic mental well-being and interviewing ministers.

✔ A fantastic experience. I know now at least, we have made a bit of a difference. Thank you for organizing an event like this. I enjoyed it so much!
✔ The most important thing in my life!

In total, students’ comments strongly indicate that they developed strong ownership of the project and that they felt they were genuinely involved and taken seriously by the Conference delegates they approached.
Recommendations and tips for teachers

The following points represent a combination of conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned from the Young Minds project. We hope that these could inspire other teachers and schools to think of various ways of involving students meaningfully in learning about health and the environment.

Moreover, the Young Minds educational approach, involving genuine student participation, an action orientation, cross-cultural collaboration and use of information and communication technology, could be an effective strategy to involve schools and students in actualizing national environment and health action plans.

The recommendations outlined below are therefore related to the main principles of the project, which are crucial in involving students and schools as active agents of positive and sustainable environmental and health change.

Student participation
Student participation is one of the crucial constituents of the Young Minds educational approach. Student participation means the genuine involvement of students in processes relating to the content and processes of learning about health and the environment. Genuine involvement implies that students have real (as opposed to token) influence over these processes, despite the limitations arising from the nature of the school as an institution as well as the complexity of school teaching and learning processes.

Genuine student participation does not mean reducing the responsibilities of the teachers; they may even increase. The teacher should be both in a position to fulfil the consultant role and, based on her or his
own experience and talent, be able to perceive today’s environmental and health issues from an interdisciplinary and action-oriented viewpoint. Teachers have the main responsibility for facilitating and supporting the dialogue with their students – and also to feed adequate knowledge about environmental and health issues into these processes.

Genuine student participation should be the main principle for involving schools and students in realizing national environment and health action plans for several reasons: (a) it is in accordance with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child; (b) it is in accordance with the main principles of the European Network of Health Promoting Schools; (c) it is conducive to the empowerment of and development of action competence among children and young people; (d) it is conducive to effective learning; and (e) it contributes to developing people’s identities of citizens rather than passive consumers of various services, which contributes to the development of democracy and social justice. Some of the general conclusions regarding student participation from Young Minds include the following.

• Students should participate in meaningful and substantial ways in decisions regarding themes and issues related to the national environment and health action plans with which they would like to work as part of school learning. The issues should be of relevance to students’ lives and experience.

• The capacity and motivation of students to participate effectively is strongly related to efforts invested in strengthening their ownership related to the content, planning process, actions, suggestions for change and evaluation of the process.

• The power relations of the project’s organizational structure should be transparent and clear to the students and the areas of their potential influence discussed.

• There should be a wide range of participation opportunities for students with different interests, experience and capacity. Special attention should be paid to students who are less confident, marginalized or vulnerable (for any reason). Inclusive strategies should be used to encourage their participation and ensure mutual support among students.

• The IVAC educational approach is a valuable way of structuring and facilitating student participation in meaningful ways. It should be seen as a flexible structure that could be adapted to the local needs, priorities and conditions. Moreover, it should be viewed as a reiterative process and moving across all the phases and groups of questions rather than a set of steps to be taken in a certain order.

• Developing participatory and action-oriented teaching takes time. Appropriate conditions and resources should therefore be provided in schools and support for the teachers ensured. Participatory action projects involving partnerships between schools, universities and non-governmental organizations are invaluable in this regard.

Tips for teachers working with participatory strategies

• Start with brainstorming about issues, topics and themes related to the national environment and health action plans, to map out students’ interests, concerns, ideas and opinions.

• Involve students in deciding about priorities and issues to be explored in more detail.

• Participate actively in the dialogue and negotiation with students: be authentic. If there are external or strategic reasons to choose a certain issue over another, explain and discuss the reasons with the students.

• Discuss with students what other factors, besides their interests and priorities, are involved in the decision-making. Clearly map the areas of influence, delineate the area where the students are influential and discuss why. If you are participating in a cross-cultural project, make sure the structure of the project management is discussed with students.

• Use a variety of participatory teaching strategies and modes of working, such as working in small groups, working in pairs, discussion groups, drawing, modelling, writing, photographing and mapping. Different students have different learning styles and different competencies: use them effectively.

• Organize the tasks so that students can mutually support one another. Pay special attention to less confident, marginalized and vulnerable
students. Make sure they have a role to play in the peer group and that they get adequate support and encouragement to influence the agenda and build up their ownership.

- Make sure you have the support from the school management and your colleagues for the work you are doing. Present the project to the whole school and local community. Involve colleagues to be your critical friends.

**Action and change**

Children and young people often feel overwhelmed and powerless in relation to health and environmental problems. Taking action as part of learning about health and the environment is therefore a vital element if students are to be empowered rather than disempowered. Action-oriented teaching and learning contributes to student’s ownership and the development of their action competence: the ability to initiate and bring about positive change in health and environmental problems.

Action differs from activity and from habits or routine behaviour. To be characterized as action, an activity should be intentional, decided upon by the participants and address the root causes of the problem in question. Action-focused teaching therefore emphasizes the importance of close collaboration between the school and the local community as well as real-life action as part of the teaching and learning processes. Thus, the action component is essential if schools and students are to contribute to the national environment and health action plans. The lessons learned in the Young Minds project relating to taking action as part of learning about health and the environment include the following.

- School projects dealing with environmental and health issues should be focused on taking real actions and bringing about positive and sustainable changes in these domains – in school, the local community or in the broader society.
- The main purpose of taking action as a part of school teaching, including participating in the national environment and health action plans, is not to solve the problems of the society but to provide meaningful learning experience for students.

- Students’ ideas and visions about possible alternatives and solutions to the problems should have crucial roles in deciding which types of action to take.
- Action should be planned and carried out in close collaboration between the school and the local community, with students being actively engaged throughout the planning process.
- Action should be planned realistically, and adequate support should be provided so that students can experience success; however, the role of the barriers should not be underestimated – barriers should be used as challenges and transformed into stimulating learning experience about democracy, conflicts of interest in relation to health and environmental problems etc.
- All kinds of real-life actions, such as participating at conferences organized for adults, should be prepared very well. Students should create their own agenda, have a clear goal and get adequate support from the adults, in order to avoid tokenism.

**Tips for teachers working with action-focused strategies**

- Start with students’ investigation findings and their visions when discussing the action to be taken. The action should create a bridge between the reality and the ideal in relation to the health or environmental problem at hand.
- Help students make detailed action plans, defining roles and responsibilities, objectives, timeline etc. Support them in developing specific skills needed for taking action.
- Discuss the possible barriers with students and various ways to overcome them prior to taking action. Support students in creating realistic expectations and flexible problem-solving strategies.
- Reflect, together with students, on barriers and obstacles after the action taking and discuss what could be learned from them. Failure (as well as success) is a valuable learning experience.
- Involve members of the local community in planning action together with students. Help students to understand how to develop collaborative action strategies.
• Reflect on the IVAC approach and adapt it to your needs. Perhaps it is a good idea to start with students’ visions, and then make investigations or take action? Or to start with action first and reflect back on what needs to be investigated? Discuss with students the phase of their work at a certain moment and why it is in this phase.
• Children’s and young people’s health and environmental action often attracts substantial mass-media attention. Discuss with students about this and prepare students for the mass media, with a view to avoiding decorative or manipulative coverage of their action and supporting them in articulating their own message.

**International collaboration**
Health and environmental problems are both local and global, as the world is becoming increasingly interconnected. Integrating the international dimension in the schoolwork with health and the environment is therefore very important. Cross-cultural collaboration is conducive to students’ motivation and commitment. Further, it contributes to developing the sense of the “other”: a sense for cultural, sociohistorical, political, geographical differences and similarities regarding health and environmental issues and the ways to deal with them.

In cross-cultural collaboration, students are encouraged to think both globally and locally: the mutual feedback and reactions they receive from cross-cultural collaboration brings in new perspectives in students’ thinking and reflection about their own culture and the values, attitudes and practices they take for granted in their own settings, which is additionally inspiring for getting new (local) action ideas and suggestions.

The national environment and health action plans are part of more global principles and policies related to sustainable development and health promotion or to a better future for our children. The international collaboration should therefore be an integral part of the strategies to involve young people and schools in actualizing these plans. The Young Minds experience relating to the cross-cultural collaboration includes the following.
• Cross-cultural networks of schools and classrooms should be created based on a common educational approach and shared health and environmental issues to deal with. These should be decided on and developed in dialogue between all involved schools and teachers and should be sensitive to different educational and cultural traditions.
• The collaboration and communication tasks for students should allow for complementarity and mutuality. Students should use one another to explore health and environmental problems in a broader perspective, should create joint visions about a better world in the future and should – if possible – take joint action to come closer to these visions.
• Projects involving international collaboration should provide sufficient time and appropriate structures for the participating teachers and students to get to know one another, their contexts and cultures. Combining the use of technology and live meetings is optimal for this purpose.
• Joint planning of the school-based work as well as the collaboration aspects is preferable. Students should be actively involved in the planning. Preferably, cross-cultural student teams should be created to coordinate the collaboration. There should be different teams for different phases of the project and aspects of the project work.

**Tips for teachers working with international collaboration**
• Get to know more about the people with whom you are collaborating. Use e-mail and other information and communication technology options for introductions and getting to know one another.
• Learn some phrases in the languages of your partner schools and learn a little about the culture of your collaboration partners. Find out which religion(s) are prevailing in different countries in the project.
• Get to know a little about politics and current events in each other’s countries.
• Schedule the frequency of communication precisely; are you in the same time zone? When are your school holidays and your examination periods?
• Plan the type of communication software: take into consideration each other’s technical resources.
• Consider establishing peer editing and feedback processes in the classroom, for the students to reflect on the cross-cultural communication and be critical friends to one another.
• If you are working with the IVAC approach, agree on when you include the action part, the vision part and the other parts. Make sure to use each other’s ideas for whom to approach, questions to ask and other aspects.
• Consider establishing an international editorial board of students to jointly plan, edit and prepare contents to be published on the common web site.
• Celebrate the differences, similarities and interconnectedness between cultures.

Using information and communication technology
Information and communication technology is an inevitable element of participatory and cross-cultural schoolwork and of effective teaching and learning about health and environmental issues. It widens the possibilities for student participation, as it offers more opportunities for different learning styles and skills to be employed. The use of information and communication technology is motivating and engaging for students. It allows for fast and effective communication across geographical borders and helps in creating worldwide communities of learners. It could be used as a source of information, a communication platform, a medium for articulating and sharing ideas with large audience and a medium for discussion and collaboration. The experience from Young Minds shows the following.
• Information and communication technology should be used to create effective collaborative learning environments rather than to be used simply as a tool for getting information.
• Creating a joint web site, administered by students, as part of the learning process is a powerful means of creating virtual learning environments.
• Online learning environments have the potential to challenge the traditional power relations in the classroom, as information and communication technology provides structures that encourage students’ freedom to learn mutually and to create meaning in more democratic ways.
• The interplay between cross-cultural collaboration, taking action and participation in online learning environments contributes to students’ increased sense of self-determination and control over their activities.
• Various strategies should be developed to overcome the barriers of synchronous and asynchronous digital communication, such as: joint cross-cultural web-editorial student teams to administer the web site content; teams of students responsible for facilitating forum discussion; and specific timetable and information about time differences, school schedules and holidays.
• Adequate coordination, facilitation and support should be provided to both students and teachers for the use of information and communication technology. School-based information and communication technology support is important as well as moderation of forums by the project coordinating team.

Tips for teachers working with the use of information and communication technology
• Make sure the school has appropriate equipment and technical support.
• Spend some time in planning different ways to use the information and communication technology and to critically examine the credibility and quality of information available on the web in relation to the project topics.
• Help students to improve their critical sense in relation to the information available on the Internet. Identify and discuss different examples illustrating “poor” evidence and knowledge in relation to the topics involved.
• Start by familiarizing students with the web platform to be used in their schoolwork; in some cases, a few students would be faster in mastering the platform, so let them teach you and help their peers.
• Discuss the purpose of the common web platform with other classes, countries etc. with students; create teams of students responsible for following up on the web site content as it grows.
• Discuss Internet ethics with students and make sure they know the safety rules for using the Internet.
• Help students to present their ideas, visions, actions etc. on the web site in multiple ways: not only as text but also as drawings, photos, mind maps and videos.
• Discuss the communication rules and manners for using web-based forums. A wide range of web-based information could be used for this.
• Establish procedures and criteria for monitoring the content of the web site, including the discussion forum. If some of the content should be removed due to use of inappropriate language and messages (such as being racist, sexist or offensive to other people), discuss the reasons with students.
• Follow the school data-protection policy regarding publishing photos of students and other related issues.
• Discuss with students how to properly cite sources of information used for the web site content you plan to publish.
• Consider copyright issues with regard to using content (information, photographs and pictures) from other web sites. In most cases it is sufficient to ask for permission.

Young Minds participants

Schools and teachers

**Martina Dernovsek**
E-mail: Martina.Dernovsek@guest.arnes.si
School Centre Nova Gorica – Vocational and Technical Secondary School of Agriculture and Food Preparation
Sempeter pri Gorici
Slovenia

**Dilly Taylor**
E-mail: TAYLORDilly@aol.com
Nailsea School
Nailsea
Bristol
England

**Pirjo Henttonen**
E-mail: pirjo.henttonen@edu.asikkala.fi
Vääksy Secondary School and Upper Comprehensive
Vääksy
Finland

**Santiago Villora Moreno**
E-mail: Santiago.Villora@uv.es
Instituto de Enseñanza Secundaria
Tavernes Blanques
Tavernes Blanques, Valencia
Spain

**Kamma Rasmussen**
E-mail: kamma.rasmussen@skolekom.dk
Katrinebjergskolen
Aarhus
Denmark

**Marketa Uhlirova**
E-mail: pavelka@hluchak.cz or uhlirovamarketa@seznam.cz
Základní School
Sumperk
Czech Republic
Katalin Zalavári
Kinga Tamás
Tünde Pápa Gelencsérné
E-mail: mezoszel@axelero.hu
Mezoszel Primary School
Pécs
Hungary

Stephen Doherty
E-mail: sdmulroy@eircom.net or
sdohertyt@eircom.net
Mulroy College
Milford, County Donegal
Ireland

Coordinating team
Research Programme for Health
and Environmental Education
Danish University of Education
Copenhagen
Denmark
http://www.dpu.dk

Bjarne Bruun Jensen
Team leader
E-mail: bjbj@dpu.dk

Venka Simovska
Educational consultant
E-mail: vs@dpu.dk

Niels Larsen
Coordinator
E-mail: nila@dpu.dk

Leif Glud Holm
Information and communication
technology consultant
E-mail: lgh@dpu.dk

Resource people
Käthe Bruun Jensen
Teacher consultant
University College of Copenhagen
and Northern Sjælland
E-mail: Kathe.Bruun.
Jensen@skolekom.dk

Jeppe Bundsgaard
System manager
SmartSite Publisher
(http://www.smartsitepublisher.dk)
E-mail: jeppe@bundsgaard.net