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NECE talked to Anna Mauz and Felix Lorenzen, programme managers at [Stiftung Lernen durch Engagement](#), about their work and its importance to strengthen citizenship education:

NECE: What is the unique selling point of the new project “Education for a democratic Europe” within the landscape of European programmes for Education for Europe?

Felix Lorenzen: We do not know yet whether we’ll have a unique selling point. What is certain, though, is that we base our project on concepts of experience-based learning, especially the concept of service learning. It is our firm conviction that youngsters deserve the opportunity to experience Europe and democracy in a practical way – not only in non-formal education, but also in schools.

Anna Mauz: Service learning is one way of achieving this: It is a recognized and scientifically sound learning method which combines experience-based classroom training with community involvement. With service learning, students contribute to the common good by becoming involved in their neighbourhood or community. This, however, is not independent from classroom teaching. It is closely linked to the contents and expectations of the curriculum. The civic engagement, be it cultural, social, political, or environmental, is prepared in class and then carried out and continually reflected upon by the students.

In our project “Education for a democratic Europe” it is our aim that young people are brought into contact with civic participation in a European context by taking responsibility for themselves and others. In doing so, they develop their personality and gain social and civic competences which are crucial for a democratic Europe. Of course, service learning is not the only way of experience-based learning. This leads us to another feature of our project: Since the end of last year, we’ve been in quite an extensive strategy stage.

Felix Lorenzen: There are so many examples of students and teachers who use their projects to fight for a cause - like democracy, against racism or climate change – and thereby learn more than from textbooks. We get to know and select the best approaches and examples of experience-based learning which we will implement and promote together with others. There is so much out there! One could say, we’re currently searching for unique selling points of existing approaches.

NECE: How and with which educational projects do you advocate for a democratic Europe?

Anna Mauz: It’s our role to empower students, teachers and schools to implement their own projects. We inspire and support them – with innovative workshops, with hands-on material for the classroom and with connecting them to other teachers and students in Germany and Europe. Of course, this role is important, but students and teachers – often together with civil society organizations – have the key role. I can give you two examples of such service learning projects:

- **Social Studies and Art:** In social studies lessons students of a primary school learn about native animals and plants and organize an adventure day in the city forest with games and nature excursions for kindergarden children. A lot of the kids in the kindergarden and primary school have a migration background – especially from Turkey. With the help of the teacher and the parents, the students get in contact with a primary school in Ankara. They start a discussion about the native environment in the different countries and the value of nature. With the help of the native Turkish-speaking students, everybody can take part in the discussion. Together they decide that they want to create an exhibition with drawings of the local environment, to write small essays about the values of nature and to show the exhibition in the local library and local kindergarden.
- **Science Education:** In a project lasting several months in biology classes of a middle school, the students deal with complex scientific contexts, especially environmental pollution. In close cooperation with the local Nature Conservation Association, they start a campaign to reduce their own footprint in everyday life. The students start to ask how other countries deal with these problems and together with their Spanish language teacher they connect with a middle school in Catalonia. Via videocalls, the students from both schools start an exchange about the topic of environmental pollution as a worldwide problem.

Both examples highlight two things we are trying to focus on: Strengthening European democracy and civil society **and** changing education and our learning culture: students learn to use their knowledge and competences in a practical setting, develop a deeper understanding of subject-based content and recognize the relevance of classroom learning.

NECE: Why is it so important to lastingly anchor such models or projects in the educational landscape and how can this be successfully implemented?

Felix Lorenzen: There's a lot of empirical evidence about the impact of service learning and experience-based learning. We are happy that more and more actors, for example the Council of Europe with its Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, embrace these approaches.

At the core is a simple question: Where did you learn the most? At least for us, it was instances of just doing things. Especially if they were supplemented by a certain kind of how-to, coaching, joint reflection etc. We believe that in the area of non-formal education this is well understood and the emphasis on experience-based learning can be found in most activities. In the field of formal education and especially with regards to less privileged students, however, such methods are used less often.

Anna Mauz: In other projects, we have established lasting cooperation with departments of education and school authorities which foster experience-based learning methods. Given this experience, we are confident that we will also be able to achieve similar successful results with this endeavour to promote European experience-based learning.

About our work:

The foundation Stiftung Lernen durch Engagement develops and establishes service learning opportunities nationwide so that young people, regardless of their backgrounds, can experience high-quality education while reaching their full potential, becoming involved in the community, and being an active part of our democratic society. Established in 2017, the foundation comprises a network of over 200 participating schools and over 70 partners from civic society (e.g. community foundations, volunteer agencies). They also work with education specialists in politics and public administration. www.service-learning.de, or follow us twitter twitter.com/stiftunglde

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