



Getting to know each other

The two artists and two gallery employees meet the principal and two involved teachers for the first time. They meet in the school building at the start of the school semester in the principal's office. Talking about expectations they create a program outline together. The program is based on the subject matter the pupils struggle with so that they get additional time and hands on approach. All parts involved agree on dates of four full day meetings for each class. The outcome of this session becomes a program outline that the artists compile and send to everyone via email. Overall, everyone seems eager to start the project, the teachers communicate their wishes, and the principal supports them fully.



We come to you

The artists first meet the pupils in their respective classrooms to get to know them in the surroundings they are used to. They introduce a group work method in the circle and present the outline to the pupils to give them possibility to change aspects of it. During this step one of the locations changes to accommodate to the wish of spending more time outside. The pupils are little unsure and distrustful in the beginning, however when artists introduce the first creative activity (binding a small notebook and creating a collaged front page for it) pupils lit up and had a lot of fun. Artists encouraged them to get as creative as they wish, as well as let them communicate freely and move around the classroom. Afterwards the whole group goes for a walk in a close-by park, where the artists introduce pupils to principles of nonhierarchical decision making by short discussion and consequential group agreement. After intense focus in the class they deserve a break for physical activity at the playground. Afterwards pupils harvest different local plants for a herbarium and learn the names for their morphological parts and the possible uses and ecological meaning of said herbs.

Adventuring in the forest

The second meeting happens in a nearby forest. The location is chosen together with the teachers as they know there is a new aquatic environment built for educational purposes. This session has a lot of success. The pupils are excited to be outside and the weather is pleasant. Pupils divide to three groups and receive instructions on how to create a closed ecosystem in a jar, that they can keep for later and observe in their classroom. These groups collect all the materials needed part after part, helping those who are slower with collecting dirt, moss, and other ingredients. It combines a lot of play elements with fill in sheets where they can repeat what they learned and put it in words. The topics are the water cycle, photosynthesis, and a review of plant parts.



Let's explore together!

The concept starts to form around an exhibition titled "Escaped, Found a Hideout, Still on the Run" in the Plato Gallery that deals with more than human actors and their encounters with humans. The artists incorporate the topics raised by the exhibition with the current topics that the pupils were dealing with at school (i.e. water cycles, ecosystems, and plant classification.) Their main motivation become to allow both the pupils and their teachers to spend as much time outdoors as possible while the weather is still nice as both the teachers and the pupils raise the topic of spending too much time indoors as one of their concerns. The artists choose to combine hands on activities outdoors with arts and crafts sessions inside and generous breaks to create a plan well suited the attention span of the pupils, hoping to show both the pupils and their teachers alternative ways of learning.



You come to us

The third and fourth sessions happen in the gallery buildings. They combine interacting with the surrounding exhibitions and deepening the knowledge from previous encounters. The atmosphere at this point is very lively and focused. The activities are creating animal masks, exploring the exhibition, making plastered paw prints and learning how to recognize animals by their paws. In the end there is an emotional debriefing and conclusion of the program. The pupils are encouraged to take notes and pictures in their personal notebooks. After concluding the program, the artists compile a zine for each of the classes documenting everything they did together.



All's well that ends well

Overall, the structure of the meetings worked out well, the artists managed to coherently connect the topics and create a feeling of completion. One of the teachers managed to get involved into the whole process quite naturally, the other one however didn't show comparable amount of dedication or interest in the whole project. The duration of the project was fine, however even longer collaboration with the classes would enhance the experience and its longevity. The fact that the artists were invited by the teachers and the school for further collaboration can be considered hopeful and constructive.



STORIES OF INVOLVEMENT – EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

MORE THAN HUMAN ENCOUNTERS

Location: Ostrava, Czech Republic (PLATO Gallery, Bělský Forest, Primary School Šalounova)

Time: September – October 2023

People involved:

- 50 primary school children (5th and 6th grade) and their teachers with assistants
- 2 multidisciplinary artists with expertise in audiovision, design, games, herbs, facilitation, education
- Education team and employees of the PLATO Gallery