

Letter From the Editor

By Lothar Thiel, Deutsche Schule Bilbao/Spain.

**Dear students, parents & teachers,
dear contributors, readers & friends of *trait d'union*,**



You are reading here the last article, posted on traitdunion-online.eu, which will be transformed into an archive ("Our Common Work 2009-2013"). The **future** website URL is traitdunion-online.org, at this point (19-08-2013) however still a construction area. For technical reasons this change is inevitable.

2000-2013: This is a very long time, especially for an international school magazine project. The history of *trait d'union* was always full of surprising changes and of course of ups and downs: phases of felicity, and of disappointment as well.

The "International Multimedia School Magazine *trait d'union*" was founded in 2000 by students and teachers of the German School of Toulouse/France in cooperation with their colleagues of the Lycée International "Victor Hugo" de Colomiers/France within the framework of a **Comenius Project**, an

international school project with students' exchange, financially supported by the European Commission. We were also backed by the "Central Office for the German Schools Abroad" ("Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen"), which was so kind to host our presentation website for free from the beginning until 2009 on its DASAN Server.

From 2004 until 2007 the Michaeli-Gymnasium München was the coordinating school of *trait d'union*. In this period the first well-working IntraNet has been constructed – by a student from the Munich school. It allowed not only to show the results of our common work, but gave us – to the students and the teachers – a publicly readable platform for the direct cooperation (including discussions, mutual comments etc.). The IntraNet existed until 2009, then it became an archive ("Our Common Work 2004-2009") <http://intranet.traitdunion-online.eu/>

Since 2007 (until today) the German School of Bilbao is the coordinating school of *trait d'union*. In 2009 *one* new website replaced both the former presentation website and the IntraNet. It was initially built by another student from the Michaeli-Gymnasium München, then relaunched by a professional information scientist and was called "***trait d'union* Editorial Office**". Between 2009 and 2013 *trait d'union* was the platform for two other Comenius Projects.

I mentioned the **ups and downs**. The ups: During these 13 years hundreds of students from many different countries came together, but not only for traditional school exchanges, but for **international editors' meetings** where they – besides the **online teamwork** – really *worked together*: on the *trait d'union* issues, videos and audios. During this time and not only in the Comenius framework students and teachers of 25 schools from 13 countries and 4 continents (Austria, Ecuador, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Netherland, Poland, Russia, Senegal, Spain, Turkey and the United States of America) contributed texts, photos, pictures, audios and videos, using 29 languages: <http://traitdunion-online.eu/school-coordinators/>. That is why many teachers in different countries integrated *trait d'union* in their lessons and used it as a platform for intercultural education, being aware that **intercultural competence** is one of the key qualifications of our time, both on the vocational and the social level. And therefore in 2012 "BEGEGNUNG" ("Encounter"), the magazine about the work of the German Schools Abroad, edited by the above mentioned Central Office and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, carried out a big article about *trait d'union*: <http://traitdunion-online.eu/lotharthiel01/2012/02/12/artikel-uber-trait-dunion-in-der-begegnung/>.

Intercultural interaction (communication and cooperation) has *typically not only one reference frame*. **The only constants** in this area are the **diversity** on almost each regard, the **encounter with the unexpected** and the **changes**. There is no doubt: On the one hand the meeting with the unknown and with foreign cultures is often fascinating and an important source of creativity. But on the other hand it would be at least rather naive to deny the enormous challenges and difficulties to which you have to face up within intercultural contexts. Having as main aim preparing young people for the exciting, but also difficult field of intercultural interaction, the responsible persons however should not be too astonished to meet such a kind of difficulties also in the **field of organization** of intercultural school projects: There may be divergent education styles in different countries; some teachers want to integrate the intercultural teamwork at a high rate in their lessons, others want to avoid this. Some colleagues prefer multilingualism, others the exclusive use of the foreign language *they* teach, in the project. Sometimes you meet a big support by the administration of the school, the town and even local cultural institutions; sometimes you have to face disinterest and even resistance. In all relevant groups – students, teachers, parents – you can find enthusiastic support because of the possible cultural enrichment of young people; but also reluctance because of extensive curricula that demand or seem to demand the undivided concentration of the students – and teachers as well – on the school’s “core area”. These differences can lead to problems for the international teamwork.

However not all the downs result from intercultural problems. There may be a lack of funds. Maybe the teachers of a school feel already overcharged, that adding other work within an intercultural project would seem to them a kind of self-exploitation. Sometimes the persons who formerly lead the project were entrusted with other important tasks that prevent them to continue their work for the project, at least in the way they did before. But maybe they cannot find a successor or at least a cooperator. Participating constantly and bearing responsibility on a local and/or a global level in a big project like *trait d’union* (for free, by the way) is interesting, even exciting, but also energy-sapping. All the more, if the concerned persons do not only do their job as organizers of the project and by integrating the project work in their classes, but if they try furthermore to handle and to compensate upcoming obstacles.

Our former partner schools from Austria, Germany, Italy and Poland applied successfully for a new Comenius Project called “Miteinander statt gegeneinander” (“Together instead of against one another”). We wish them good luck!

Since last year the German School of Bilbao and the University of Deusto (Bilbao) participate in a **Leonardo da Vinci Project** called “Intercultural Driving Licence | Vocational (Icudriving)”: www.icudriving.org. One of the principal aims of this project is the definition of the elements of intercultural competence as a vocational qualification, its evaluation and certification. In the framework of this project *trait d’union* could be transformed into an “Intercultural Youth Magazine” without leaving its embedding in the school sector, but by widening the possible group of participants: See the article about *trait d’union* here: <http://www.icudriving.org/partners.html>

So the project year 2013/14 will be a period of important changes for *trait d’union*. We are in conversation with possible future partners. Schools, organizations and persons, being interested to contact or to cooperate with us, are invited to write us an e-mail (see below!). The **topic** for the next issue of *trait d’union* will be: **“The Work World – Yesterday, Now and in the Future”**.

Will we have one day other European Projects, Leonardo, Comenius...? We will see. Or like the Germans say: “Abwarten und Tee trinken!” Let’s wait and drink tea! (Coffee is also allowed.)

Sincerely



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