

Mystery Boxes NAVE2

Introduction

The NAVE 2 project aims to develop quality instruments and procedures to support and to promote international exchanges of vulnerable students. The Mystery Boxes project has been designed to prepare students for an international exchange in a direct, fun and engaging manner. The set up described below can be adapted to particular circumstances depending on the level of the student and the amount of time available. However the general rule is the better the students are prepared the more worthwhile the exchange becomes for all those involved.

Objectives

- To prepare students for the exchange abroad by gaining practical knowledge of the visiting country.
- To create first contact between students taking part in the exchange and lowering the threshold for communication.

Description

The project consists of five lessons or meetings in which students first prepare a Mystery Box to send to the partner's exchange students. The topic to discuss is: What does a foreign student need to know to "survive" a stay in the host country. Then after sending it off the students will themselves receive a Mystery Box and discuss its contents. Students formulate questions around the content and send them to the exchange students. After receiving the answers the students discuss the contents again and make a plan for their stay.

Step by Step

Preparation: teachers from the exchange partners come together online and discuss planning, the best means of communication, potentialities and abilities of the students, etc. It is important to agree on the content of the box, date of sending the box, dates of questions and answers. This project should take within a short and limited period of time to keep the attention of the students and to prevent frustration. Discuss and decide if the box should only contain objects or also assignments, like making a typical foodstuff or language lessons.

Lesson 1: Preparing the content of the box. The students discuss and decide what goes in the box keeping in mind how the other students can use the materials as a source for innovation and learning. The idea is first to discuss what it is important for the other students to know about their country's culture in a practical day to day sense. Students can have a discussion, search the internet, make drawings, cut out pictures, discuss with friends and family or with newcomers. It is not about the number of items but more the story behind the items. This story should be clear beforehand. The conclusion of the lessons is a shopping list. Students can either buy/collect the items themselves or have this done by the teacher.

The box can contain almost any kind of material from your culture and field of education. Recycled materials are always a good option too. For example, the box might contain photos-pictures, clothes, fabric, newspapers, wood. Be creative! But do not send money, silver, gold, gemstones, food or anything that is dangerous.

Lesson 2: Getting the box ready for shipment. The items gathered should now be put in a box ready for shipment. The students could make a video of packing the box that includes a brief introduction of themselves. This can be added to the box or shared through a social media channel (as long as the content is not really revealed, it has to remain a mystery). They can also share some small, more personalised items, depending on the level of the students.

The contents of the box should not cost more than 25 euros. So max. 25 euros/ box. The students should make the box themselves to a size of approximately 33 x 33 x 17 cm - Max 5 kg.

Lesson 3: Unpacking of box and formulating questions. Students should receive the boxes at approximately the same time. They unpack the box under supervision and discuss each item with the focus on what it says about the host country and about their stay there. They formulate questions together about the purpose of the object or the reason why it was selected. These are then collated and included in a video, an email or some other means of communication. It is vital that the relationship between the question and object remains so if any other means of communication than video is selected, a photo of the object should always be linked to the question.

Lesson 5: Answering questions. Students receive the video or something else with the questions concerning the items they have selected. They discuss if the questions are related to the story or reason for selecting the item. It is possible that the questions are very surprising, as the objects are likely to be interpreted differently. Why is that and what is then a proper answer. The answers can be in writing, with a video or some other means.

Lesson 4: Discussing answers received. Students are about to travel to this particular country. So discuss whether the answers are helpful. Do they provide support to “surviving in”? What will this mean for their stay and how will they have to prepare?

Options:

- Extra lessons after unpacking of box to discuss questions further or to have more rounds of questions and answers.

Conclusion:

At the end of the project the students should have a better idea of the country they are going to, know a little bit of the students they are going to meet and hopefully be very excited about the trip.

Challenges:

Limited knowledge of English in partner communications

Very different participants in partner schools

The whole class or one group?