

Empower:Me

**Exchanging Good Practices and Extending
Method Pools in European Special Schools to Strengthen
Self-Confidence of Students with Learning Disabilities**

Project Erasmus+ (KA210-BE-22-12-83006)

Duration: 1. 11. 2022 – 1. 11. 2023



Erasmus+

Enriching lives, opening minds.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The booklet you are holding in your hands is just a brief presentation of the Empower:Me project, in which seven organisations participated. They are very diverse organisations—those that represent state policies, those that educate children as state schools, and non-governmental organisations that work with informal approaches. What they all have in common is that they care about the well-being of children and a better future for society through education.

The project combined knowledge from four countries, mostly in relation to special approaches and ways of working with children with special needs. It brought together various experts, from psychologists, special needs workers and teachers to activists who work with children every day.

Among all the practices that the participating organisations use in their regular work, this booklet presents the four that are most useful and popular, and it also presents the participating organisations.

We still believe that useful knowledge should be shared—that is exactly why the booklet is here. But we also know that we live in a world full of information, so here we provide only the most essential, briefly.

We hope that we give someone an idea they can use in their work and accelerate the possibility of connecting and cooperating for a better future of Europe.





Never discourage anyone who continually makes progress, no matter how slow.
(Plato)

Project Empower:Me

Our project was based in the social field, addressing people who work with special needs students. Throughout our time working with these students, we found that many of them lack self-esteem and do not trust in themselves to achieve certain goals. Thus, we believed it necessary to focus on this problem and solve it by finding ways to incorporate into everyday school life activities which are easily applicable for everybody.

With our different backgrounds and experience, we were able to share diverse activities and choose the ones most suitable for everybody's students. We facilitated, shared and tested good practices. From our multifaceted method pool, four activities turned out to be the most popular amongst ourselves: Strength Cards, Balloon Tower, Empowering Videos, and the Diary of a Happy Life.



Every partner applied their favourite activities in their schools and simultaneously adapted them to their students' needs and abilities. The students' responses were overwhelmingly positive, heightening our motivation even further. Tips and tricks were developed to adjust the activities to any kind of disability a student may have, and discussed in our meetings.

From all of these experiences, we gathered every little detail and assembled the present booklet, to be used by teachers, disseminators and social workers.

We hope you will find it useful and have fun trying out the following good practices yourselves.

*Tell me and I forget. Teach
me and I remember.
Involve me and I learn.*
(Benjamin Franklin)

The background is a solid teal color with several large, overlapping, semi-transparent white and light teal shapes that create a sense of depth and movement. The shapes are organic and flowing, resembling stylized waves or abstract forms.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES FOR STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS

You can draw well.



You are reliable.



You are responsible.



You are optimistic.



Strength Cards Balloon Tower Empowering Videos Diary of a Happy Life



Charity

"Between two people let this law apply for mutual good: One should forget what they give, and the other should never forget that they received something."

Serves the Elder

February 2023

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Do I like to help others?

Should I expect a reward for helping others?

When was the last time I helped someone and how?

Reaction to the weekly challenge:

Who was my secret angel? _____

What has s/he done for her/him? _____

To perform good – to be charitable means helping others. You can show charity to your friend or to someone on the street. Do you know any charity activities? Search for them on the Internet.

Weekly challenge: participate in a charitable activity, or help someone who needs it. Write about it in the box below.

Strength Cards

GENERAL INFORMATION

Number of students	Number of teachers	Material	Keywords	Duration period
For all class sizes	1+	Strength Cards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Giving/accepting appreciative feedback● Self-perception● Self-awareness● Positive thinking	20–40 minutes

DESCRIPTION

Goal:

The Strength Cards have been implemented into school workshops, to help the students to get to know themselves better and to practice appreciative thinking about their own abilities as well as those of their peers.

Step-by-step implementation:

1. A deck of cards displaying good character traits is given to the first student.
2. They have to distribute one or two cards to another student, to whom said character trait fits best in their opinion.
3. They have to read aloud what the cards say, so everyone in class hears.
4. The card deck is then given to the next student.
5. This is repeated until everybody has distributed cards at least once and all the cards have found an owner.
6. At the end, the results of the exercise are discussed. The students voice their thoughts on their own character traits and evaluate them and become aware that they might show a certain trait in some situations and not in others.



EXTENDED INFORMATION

The method is suitable for children with learning disabilities, autism and mental disorders. Children with serious mental disorders or severe autism might have difficulties in matching the cards with the strengths of their classmates.

Before using the Strength Cards, make sure that your students know what strengths are. Also, pay attention to the cognitive capability of the students and, if necessary, remove from the deck those cards that name strengths that are too abstract. It is also important that the group using the strength cards know each other well enough; otherwise, they may not be able to talk about their strengths.

Hence, there are not only pictures, but also sentences on the cards; the target group should be able to read. Alternatively, the teacher reads the sentences aloud. It might help if you create strength cards yourself that have different kinds of pictures on one card, i.e. a photo and a comic-strip version. The children could even illustrate their own card deck. It might also be necessary that the children flick through the cards and familiarise themselves with their appearance.

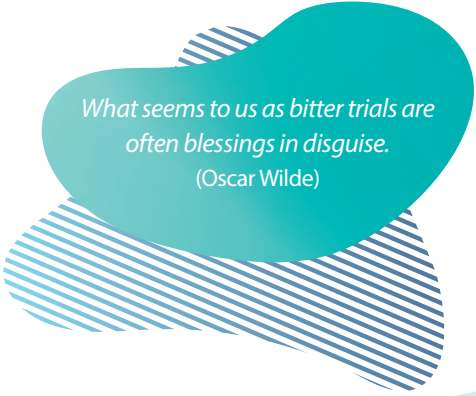
Before starting the activity, decide whether the card deck should be placed in the middle of a table or sitting circle, or if the students will pass around the whole deck. Keep in mind that it might be a little noisier during the activity. Younger children might also have problems holding the big cards with their small hands. For younger or very shy children

it might be helpful to let the teacher start this exercise, so the students have them as an example and can follow up more easily.

To prevent certain students from ending up without cards, it is a good idea to interrupt the process once, for example, 2/3 of the class have got cards. The cardless students could then raise their hands and the focus can be on them for the rest of the process. After everybody has received a card, students can then get multiple cards again.

Remember, if you want to see broad smiles on your pupils' faces, the Strength Cards are a great option. The cards can be used as a fresh activity between usual lessons. The exercise can also be used once a week as a fixed ritual.

It is not a method for filling up five minutes at the end of a lesson. The students need enough time to think about the qualities of their classmates, and then it's worth it.



*What seems to us as bitter trials are
often blessings in disguise.*
(Oscar Wilde)

Balloon Tower

GENERAL INFORMATION

Number of students	Number of teachers	Material	Keywords	Duration period
5–7	2	10–12 balloons, tape, glue, paper, rope, scissors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Problem solving● Conflict resolution● Active participation	30 minutes, 3–4 times a year

DESCRIPTION

Goal:

The balloon tower is a teamwork technique for problem solving.

Step-by-step implementation:

1. Students are told to build a tower by joining balloons together.
2. They are told they can use the materials as they wish.
3. During construction, sharing ideas, task distribution and cooperation are encouraged by saying “How do you plan to do it? What are you going to do now? If that didn’t work, try something else,” etc.
4. When the tower is completed, explain, the students explain what stages they went through and state what problem-solving steps they took. (As an example of explanation: How did we do it? 1. We observed, 2. We reviewed, 3. We thought, 4. We tried, 5. If it did not work, we tried something else, 5. We got help, 6. We were patient.)
5. The teacher explains that they can solve the problems they encounter in their daily lives by following the same steps.
6. The students discuss this idea by putting pictures of sample problem situations into the right order. Solution suggestions are made.
7. They are advised to remember what was said in this activity when they encounter a similar situation in the future. and the activity ends.
8. By referring to the balloon tower, the students are reminded from time to time of the steps in problem solving.



EXTENDED INFORMATION

Through this skill, students can understand how to act in conflict situations. It is also an activity that contributes to the development of social skills since problem-solving steps are a skill that can be learned and improved.

Building a balloon tower represents a problem that needs to be solved in this activity.

Building the highest tower is only the obvious goal for the students. However, it is all about appropriate communication.

It is about arranging, clarifying opinion and at the same time tolerating others while finding a solution.

Obstacles / solutions:

This activity can be executed as a contest between students and teachers as a team-building method

It could even be between the classes of a whole school. This could increase the tension or could possibly lead to arguing.

To communicate either verbally or even non-verbally, in a respectful way.

Observe how the students coordinated or argued.

This activity is considered part of the resilience programme. Problem-solving ability is considered an important element of resilience and self-confidence.



Advice:

If the activity is carried out in the form of a competition, students should be reminded that the goal is not to win but to work together.

It is an activity that contributes to the development of social skills.

It is expected that conflict resolution skills will develop.

it teaches students through a fun game.

The students should gain awareness about problem situations; they discuss and develop solutions at the end of the activity.

It is a fun activity that is a welcome change from “normal” lessons.

Adaptation possibilities:

Plastic ball cups, boxes, balls, etc. can be used in cases where balloons are not suitable.

Combination possibilities:

A contest could be organised as a team-building activity between students and teachers, even between the classes of a whole school.

With charity, the following rule applies between two people: the first should immediately forget that he gave, the second never forget that he received.
(Seneca the Elder)

Empowering Videos

GENERAL INFORMATION

Number of students	Number of teachers	Material	Keywords	Duration period
For all class sizes	At least 2	Smartphones or tablets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Presenting self-best qualities● Self-perception● Self-awareness● Self-expressing	depending on number of students 4–8 hours

DESCRIPTION

Goal: For this activity, students film a video about themselves, presenting their best qualities. The goal of the activity is to help the students reflect on themselves and give them the opportunity to make a creative self-presentation that they could even use for job applications. Through this practical approach, the students can think about their abilities, conceptualise a video and work independently.

The empowerment videos provide a creative outlet for students, through which they can express themselves. They reflect on their strengths and present themselves in front of a camera, as well as creating their own videos from beginning to end. At the same time, their media competency is promoted.

Step-by-step implementation:

1. Firstly, they need to be prepared for filming. They need to work out what they want to say and show of themselves, as well as planning what they want to film and where.
2. One possibility is for them to fill out a questionnaire, answering questions such as: Who are you? Which school do you go to and what class are you in? What do you love? What do you hate? What are your hobbies? What are you good at?
3. The students can then go filming on their own smartphones or on school tablets, whichever is accessible.
4. The last step is editing the video with the help of the teachers. Free software such as iMovie (Apple) or CapCut (Android) can be used for this.

EXTENDED INFORMATION

Advice: To get started, the students should get some basic advice on how to film. This means that they should be made aware of holding their filming device horizontally the entire time, never filming against the sunlight and whenever they record audio, to be in a place without background sound.

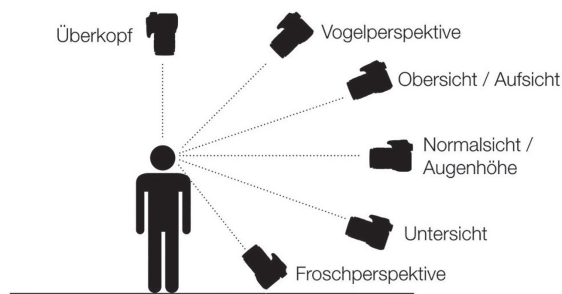
To get a visually pleasing video, a small introduction to filming is necessary. For this, the students could be made aware of different filming locations (the school building, the schoolyard, the classroom) and different camera angles and perspectives. For instance, when they film themselves, they could talk as if they were in an interview (only showing head to chest) and if they visualise a strength, they could be filmed from further away, showing a little of their surroundings as well. The video could be designed as follows: It could start with a view of the school building or a classroom, for instance, then intertwine clips of the students talking about themselves with clips of them displaying their strengths and end with a funny pose.

Other good additions for the video are music or sounds. To ensure no copyright is violated, Creative Commons (CC) music can be used, as well as anything in the music library in, for example, iMovie. Thus, the videos could be presented at, for example, school events open to the public as well.

Combination possibilities:

It is helpful to use methods highlighting their strengths prior to starting the activity, for example the Strength Cards.

Perspektiven



© Stephan Spohr

At bottom every man knows well enough that he is a unique being, only once on this earth; and by no extraordinary chance will such a marvellously picturesque piece of diversity in unity as he is, ever be put together a second time.

(Friedrich Nietzsche)

Diary of a Happy Life

GENERAL INFORMATION

Number of students	Number of teachers	Material	Keywords	Duration period
For all class sizes	At least 2	Diary documents (copies) and pencils	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Self-awareness,● Communication,● Self-valuation,● Sensibility,● Self-reflection	Max. 15 minutes

DESCRIPTION

Goal: Encouraging awareness and sensibility in children in relation to themselves and their surroundings

Step-by-step implementation:

1. Preparation of diary documents / copies
2. Motivating the students? (Acknowledging the method and description of how to use the documents)
3. Listing kind-hearted behaviour to oneself, a family member, someone from school
4. Involving students in a conversation about good behaviours such as being charitable, etc.
5. Writing their individual reflections
6. Discussing answers through questions with the mentorship of a teacher who will remind them why it is good to be kind-hearted to people around oneself as well as to ourselves.
 - *Do I like to help others?
 - *Should I expect a reward for helping others?
 - *When was the last time I helped someone and how?
7. Getting students involved in a collaborative puzzle activity
8. As a weekly goal, supporting students to determine one of their classmates for whom each of them will be a secret angel
9. Discovering and guessing the name of their secret angel experience in their diary
10. Discussing the following questions:
 - *Who was my secret angel?
 - *What has s/he done for her/him?

EXTENDED INFORMATION

Advice: In order to avoid misunderstandings, it should be explained beforehand that the favours expected from students should not be of material nature.

If there are more than number of students , the time should be extended and additional time should be set aside to allow each student to share their outputs with one another for at least five minutes.

Sending information about the method application in the classroom and asking them to participate is highly advisable in order to get them involved in school activities and school projects.

Adaptation possibilities: The activity can be used for students with special educational needs as well as for all others who are interested in improving their confidence skills.

Combination possibilities: It is not a single application, but an activity can be extended and spread amongst others and one that keeps motivation alive. It also gives students the opportunity to reflect upon important issues related to life and priorities in life.

Charity
"Between two people let this law apply for mutual good: One should forget what they gave, and the other should never forget that they received something."
Seneca the Elder

February 2023

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When was the last time I helped someone and how?

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You can show charity to your friend or to someone on the street.
Do you know any charity activities?
Search for them on the Internet.

Weekly challenge: participate in a charitable activity, or help someone who needs it. Write about it in the box below.

*The little things
matter!*
(Unknown)

CONCLUSION



*Keep your face always
toward the sunshine – and
shadows will fall behind you.
(Walt Whitman)*

PROJECT PARTNERS

BÜRO BLAU gGmbH, Berlin, Germany (Non-profit non-governmental organisation)



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BÜRO BLAU is a non-profit organisation based in Berlin, Germany. It constitutes projects in city and regional management, social work and media education. The interdisciplinary staff team consists of engineers, media educators and social workers. In every area, enabling dialogue between different parties is crucial. The emphasis is always on allowing participants to see the different points of view and thus, broadening their minds to learn from each other. The educational projects In particular, the educational projects focus on eye-level exchange between teachers and students, through conveying and reflecting on experiences.



For over 20 years, BÜRO BLAU has worked with special needs schools and conducted and executed workshops to foster key competences, offer job orientation and support dealing with the media. There are multifaceted workshops that, for example, accompany students when placed on an internship. These workshops give the students the opportunity to get to know themselves better,

to receive feedback from their peers and to reflect on their wishes for their professional future. Furthermore, the students gain access to the use of tablets and can train their media skills.

*Most people see what is,
and never see what can be.*
(Albert Einstein)

Mamak Directorate of Education, Ankara, Turkey (Public Education Authority)



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The Mamak Directorate of Education is a local public education authority, founded in 1984, and is responsible for the administration, coordination and organisation of educational activities conducted by 198 schools (preschool, primary, secondary and high schools, a guidance and re-

search centre, and two adult education centres in Mamak, which is one of the biggest and most populous districts in the capital city Ankara. In addition to meeting the physical and financial needs of the schools, assignment of teachers, and planning and implementing the educational activities, our institution is engaged in other activities to widen the scopes and quality of learning and teaching contexts. This engagement requires collaboration on the local, national and international level. Therefore, we operate in cooperation with the Municipality of Mamak, NGOs, healthcare centres or hospitals, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education on the national level and with NGOs and educational authorities on the international level. Our staff consists of 6028 teachers, 201 managers, and 150 officers. Our directorate also has departments such as Adult Education, Primary and Secondary Education, High School Education, Vocational Education, Projects and Strategic Planning, Statistics, Data Processing and Educational Technologies, Adult Education, Special Needs Education and Culture and Sport. One of the tasks of our directorate is to organise and to plan the special needs education in our region. There are two work schools and 13 rehabilitation centres for special needs students in our district. We are responsible for the social integration of these pupils by involving them in special needs education to gain basic life and vocational competencies.

*There should be no individual
whose education is neglected.*
(Mustafa Kemal Atatürk)

Društvo Jasa, Maribor, Slovenia (Non-profit non-governmental organisation, private, NGO with the status of working in the public interest)



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NGO Jasa was founded in 1996 by supporters of humanistic orientation (philosophy professors, writers, journalists, etc.). The aim was to actively “co-shape” a society, to intervene in areas relevant for a quality society: human rights, ecology, animal protection, ethics, European education, consumerism, etc. (In short: Sustainable Education and Active Citizenship). Jasa is a member of various European networks of non-governmental organisations and cooperates in various European projects.

Jasa educates and raise awareness among the public, with an informal way of teaching. To that end purpose a special educational book edition “Let’s Make a Gentler World!” was published.

In the past 25 years Jasa has published 24 educational books, totalling 75,000 copies, most of which were donated through various educational activities to the people, with support of donors and sponsors.



The message of the book is reinforced with educational activities: discussion tables, competitions, exhibitions, entertainment and educational events, dramatisations ... and with the preparation of didactic materials for educators and teachers, and workshops for school-teaching collectives or leadership collectives of enterprises and municipalities, and so on.

*I cannot teach anybody anything;
I can only make them think.*
(Socrates)

Kadikoy Research and Guidance Centre (Kadikoy RAM), Istanbul, Turkey (Non-profit, public, educational institute)



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Kadikoy RAM is a governmental institution affiliated to the Ministry of National Education and has been in operation since 1987. It is located in Kadıköy, one of the most central and beautiful areas of Istanbul. The staff team consists of 13 school psychological counsellors and 11 special education teachers. The Centre provides counselling and special education services for schools and individuals in the region. Target groups are all school staff, students, parents and adults living in the region. The centre works for children with behavioural and learning problems referred from schools.



Services are also available for adults with disabilities and who need psychological support. The centre provides group and individual therapy sessions and play therapy for young children. Licensed practitioners implement various ability and intelligence

tests to identify people with special needs. The applicants' medical information is also collected and after the evaluation is completed, the centre prepares official reports for them and places them in the most appropriate school or where they can benefit from additional training opportunities. The centre also organises training for psychological counsellors, conducts research in the field and develops programmes for students and teachers. Some of the main study topics are: addiction prevention, school violence, discrimination, peer bullying, cyber bullying, child development, adolescence, sexual development, behavioural problems, child neglect and abuse, positive parenting, coping with exam anxiety, stress and anger management, resilience, career guidance, inclusive education, and effective communication.

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

(Nelson Mandela)

Spojená škola, Special Needs School, Košice, Slovakia (Special elementary school)



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Spojená Škola Košice provides education to students with special educational needs, especially those with autism spectrum disorder. The school is divided into the following organisational components: Kindergarten for children with autism spectrum disorder; Special elementary school; Practical school; Primary school for students with autism spectrum disorder accompanied by mental disorders; and two designated workplaces: Institution for the enforcement of custody and imprisonment, and the state orphanage.



The main goal of our institution is the education of students with special educational needs. The teaching process is adapted to the needs and abilities of students. Educational activities in all organisational units are based on the school's annual plan and take into account the specifics of individual groups of children and students. The main role of the teachers

is to properly motivate students to learn and take into account their specific individual needs. Education takes place in a playful way with the use of innovative methods. The school is focused on the development of folk traditions. The subject of work teaching has a dominant position. Pupils acquire skills in working with wire, weaving or making various ceramic products. We try to create a pleasant environment for students, each class has its own relaxation corner and is equipped with an interactive whiteboard. Pupils also have at their disposal a school kitchen, a ceramics workshop, a carpentry workshop, a computer room, an exercise room or a gym. The relaxation needs of children are also served by the unspoiled room, the relaxation room and the multisensory "white" room SNOEZELEN, which helps them stimulate more senses.

School motto: A school with tradition. A school for life.

My world is not like yours, your world is not like mine. There's only me and you in the world, so let's try to get along.

(Lyrics from the school song of Spojená škola, Košice, Slovakia)

Yasar Ozel Egitim Okulu, Special Needs School, Izmir, Turkey (State School for Special Needs Education)



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Yasar Special Needs Education School is a state school providing education for children with moderate autism. It was founded in 2013 in Guzelbahce/Izmir. Our school was established by the Yaşar Education and Culture Foundation and the Ministry of Education in 2013. It started its educational activities in the 2013–2014 academic year within the body of the Ministry of National Education. Our school has 20 classrooms, two business workshops, one music workshop, one painting workshop, one gym, one cafeteria, a



practice garden, animal shelters and a large garden. Our institution carries out educational activities in accordance with the curriculum of the Ministry of National Education for the acquisition of academic, social, sporting and life skills. The classrooms provide education services in the form of two teachers and four students. Lunch and a shuttle service are provided free of charge

to students. Our school provides educational services to students from six different districts of Izmir Province. A total of 58 teachers work in our school, forty-three of whom work as special education teachers. Others are music, painting, crafts, physical education teachers. There is a management team of four staff.

*Nature never breaks
her own laws.*
(Leonardo Da Vinci)

Schule im Nibelungenviertel, Special Needs School (Public institution)



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The state school "Schule im Nibelungenviertel" is located in the county of Brandenburg and belongs to the Barnim school district. The school's focus is on the education of children with diagnosed learning disabilities. Regarding that, the concept of the school is practical learning. The school's curriculum prescribes that theoretical content must be transferred into practice through working in projects, internships, school companies and different workshops (kitchen, wood, metal). A further goal of the school is enabling children to become independent members of the society. Therefore, the children participate in different projects (class council, cleaning project, sport competition, reading competition). Besides the work with the families, the school is responsible for the coordination of different

players who are working together with the school as therapists (occupational therapy, speech therapy, learning therapy), artists, drivers, afternoon care, social worker, etc.

*If a child can't learn the way we
teach, maybe we should teach
the way they learn.*
(Ignacio Estrada)

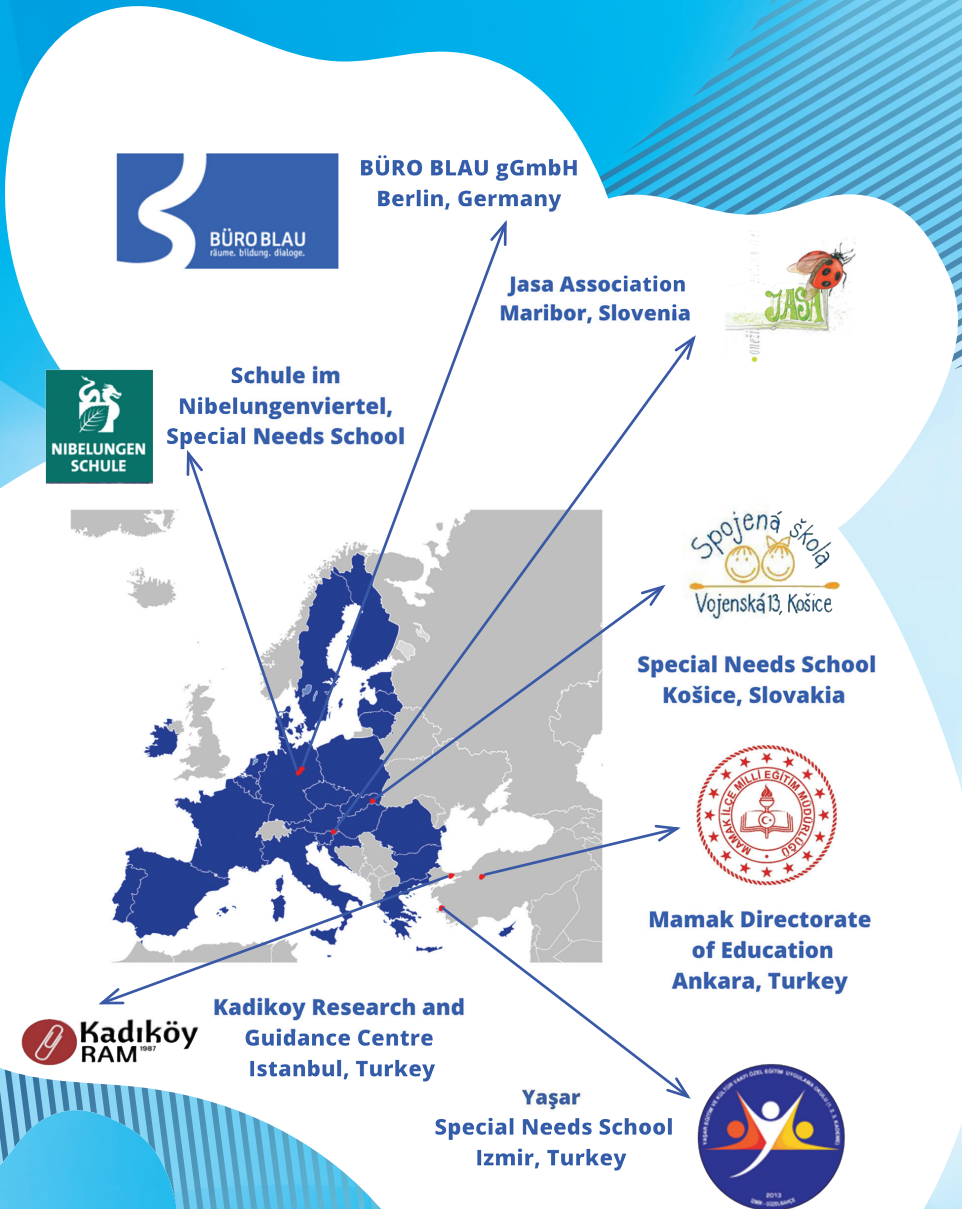
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August 2023

Empower:Me – connected



BÜRO BLAU gGmbH
Berlin, Germany



Schule im Nibelungenviertel, Special Needs School

Jasa Association
Maribor, Slovenia



Special Needs School
Košice, Slovakia



Mamak Directorate of Education
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Kadıköy Research and Guidance Centre
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Yaşar Special Needs School
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