

Baltic Sea for Young People

From classroom lessons to scalable impact



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SDG 4 Quality Education · SDG 13 Climate Action · SDG 14 Life Below Water

Introduction

Students at Państwowe Liceum Sztuk Plastycznych, a public fine arts high school in Gdynia Orłowo, can walk to the Baltic in a few minutes, yet the sea rarely comes up in their lessons. Over six weeks I designed and delivered Baltic Sea sessions at the school and worked on turning them into materials it could keep using after I left.

My coordinator was Natalia Filipowicz, my former history teacher, who now teaches there. The school shaped the project from the start. The administration asked for the lessons to be in English, so they also served as practice for the Matura, the Polish school-leaving exam. Later, students' own questions led to a session on studying abroad that I had never planned.

This report evaluates my three SMART goals and reflects on what the placement taught me about leadership and about the system I was working in.



With Natalia Filipowicz, my project coordinator

Six weeks in brief

Week	What happened
1. Arriving	Met Natalia, toured the school, met students and walked to the coast. Focused on listening and building trust.
2. Designing	Agreed with the school to teach in English. Asked English teachers at local schools what works for their students, then built two lessons with worksheets and teacher keys.
3. First lessons	Came in after an all-nighter, far too prepared, and never reached the second handout. Learned how quickly teenagers' attention moves and adjusted daily.
4. Going outside	Made sessions more interactive, led a walk to the Orłowo pier and ran a Baltic hackathon where students designed their own initiatives.
5. New directions	Ran a session on studying abroad at the school's request. Reviewed my materials with a Polish foundation working on Baltic protection, which pointed me to a Swedish ocean literacy programme looking for a Polish partner.
6. Consolidating	Reviewed what had worked, revised the materials and left them with the school.

SMART goals overview

The three goals I set in my project scorecard before the placement began:

	Goal 1: Design the education package	Goal 2: Deliver the sessions	Goal 3: Build a reusable resource pack
Specific	Design a Baltic Sea package for the host school: at least one slide deck, one lesson plan and one worksheet, suited to the students.	Deliver interactive Baltic Sea sessions at the host school and, where feasible, at nearby schools.	Refine the materials, using teacher and student feedback, into a pack the school can keep using and share.
Measurable	Materials complete, with teacher notes so someone else could run them.	Number of students reached.	Pack handed to the school; interest or use beyond it.
Achievable	Realistic given my work with See the Sea. The main challenge was adapting content for students learning in English.	Depended on timetables and teachers giving up class time; other schools depended on their capacity.	Low cost. Limited by time after delivery and by getting structured feedback.
Relevant	Serves the school's wish for Baltic content and Matura-linked English practice.	Brings a local environmental issue into the classroom in a coastal city.	Makes the work last beyond six weeks: the "scalable impact" in the project title.
Time-bound	End of Week 2.	Weeks 3 and 4.	Weeks 5 and 6.

Outcomes at a glance

Goal	Success meant	Outcome
1. Education package	Complete, usable materials by the end of Week 2	Achieved
2. Delivery	Interactive sessions at the host school, students counted; nearby schools if feasible	Achieved at the host school (over 100 students); not extended to other schools
3. Resource pack	Materials refined and left in a reusable form	Partially achieved

What happened

Goal 1: Design the education package

Outcome: Achieved.

Evidence: By the end of Week 2 I had:

- **A Baltic Sea mind map worksheet** for group work across eight categories, from nature and the economy to feelings, with a teacher key.
- **A video and vocabulary lesson** with pre-, while- and post-watching tasks, B1 and B2 vocabulary relevant to the Matura, and discussion on what students, schools, cities and governments can do, also with a teacher key.
- **Slides** to accompany both lessons.

During delivery I added a plan for a coastal walk lesson, a Polish hackathon worksheet that takes groups from idea to measurable result, and a presentation with a printed agenda for the study abroad session.

Worksheet 1: Baltic Sea Mind Map

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Task: Work in groups. Write as many words or short phrases connected with the Baltic Sea as you can. Think about nature, animals, places, activities, problems, weather, people, and feelings.

Nature	Animals	Places
Activities	THE BALTIC SEA	Problems
Weather & Seasons	Economy	Feelings

Challenge: Select 5 words that your group thinks are the most important.

Worksheet 1: the Baltic Sea mind map

PART B. While-watching task

Task 2. Watch the video and complete the table. First, listen for the general idea. Then watch again and add more detail.

Task 2A. Choose the main message of the video:

- ☐ A. The Baltic Sea is healthy now.
☐ B. The Baltic Sea has serious problems, but recovery is possible.
☐ C. Nothing can be done to improve the situation.

Task 2B. Complete the table with information from the video.

Problem	What happens?	Example from the video	Solution

Task 3. After watching, discuss in pairs or groups:

- Which problem is the most serious?
- Which solution seems the most realistic?
- What can students, schools, cities, or governments do?

Worksheet 2: the while-watching task

Impact: Building the materials around students' English level meant language did not block engagement with the content. The teacher keys mean the lessons do not depend on me. Because they double as English resources, they have a reason to stay in use at a school with no fixed slot for environmental education.

What changed: The decision to teach in English came after I had started drafting, so I had to rework level, pacing and vocabulary. The outdoor and hackathon materials were not in the plan; I added them after seeing how the first lessons went.

Key learning: Designing for someone else's classroom starts from their priorities. The best decision in these two weeks came from the school, and the most useful input came from teachers who had no obligation to help me.

Goal 2: Deliver the sessions

Outcome: Achieved at the host school. Not extended to nearby schools.

Evidence: Over Weeks 3 to 5 I worked with over 100 students in four formats:

- **Classroom lessons in English** built on the two worksheets.
- **A walk to the Orłowo pier**, with one stop for my story and a discussion about the Baltic and a second for group work.
- **A Baltic hackathon** where groups designed their own initiatives for the sea.
- **A session for all fourth-year students** on studying abroad, which also told the story of See the Sea, the foundation I started at 17 in Gdynia.

Students' ideas were the clearest sign of engagement. One group pitched an environmental fashion show. Another proposed a travelling exhibition, shown in art schools across Poland, about how the Baltic has changed over decades.



Group work during a lesson



With one of the classes



Walking to the Orłowo pier



A stop by the sea

Impact: The walk and the hackathon turned students into designers, and the art students connected the sea to fashion, exhibitions and visual storytelling in ways I could not have planned. The study abroad session was unplanned and drew the largest audience of the project. For many students the messenger mattered as much as the message: someone a few years older from their own city, explaining how he got to London.

What changed: My first lesson had far too much content, so I moved to shorter activities, more discussion and more time outside. I underestimated how hard it is to get into another school's timetable within a few weeks. Other schools still shaped the project through the English teachers who advised me.

Key learning: Leading a room is a feedback loop that runs in real time. I learned to plan less content and leave more space for students to talk. My best moments came when I stopped teaching and listened.



Goal 3: Build a reusable resource pack

Outcome: Partially achieved.

Evidence: The lessons, teacher keys, outdoor lesson plan, hackathon worksheet and study abroad presentation were left with the school. A Polish foundation working on Baltic protection reviewed my materials and referred me to a Swedish organisation that runs a very similar ocean literacy programme for schools and wants a Polish partner.

Impact: The school has a ready set of lessons in English and Polish with guidance for teachers. The referral is the most promising route to reaching more schools.

What changed: I had pictured scaling as sending the pack to nearby schools myself. Finding an established programme with the same aim suggested that joining it may reach more schools than building something parallel. I gathered feedback informally, from lessons and from conversations with Natalia and teachers, and the pack is not yet polished enough for schools that have never met me.

Key learning: Scale depends on partnerships. Six weeks is enough to build good materials, but schools adopt something when someone they trust recommends it or when it comes through a programme they know. The foundations are in place, and the scaling work continues after the LiA.

Systemic change reflection

1. Understanding the system

I worked inside Polish secondary education, in a public art school with a timetable built around the Matura and intensive artistic training. Environmental topics appear in biology and geography but rarely with a local focus. The biggest barrier was time: every hour I used was taken from something else, and my lessons had a place largely because they also served English. What surprised me was how much depends on individuals. The project worked because Natalia vouched for me and teachers elsewhere gave advice for free. The request for a study abroad session revealed another gap: these students have little access to information about studying abroad, though many want it.

2. Leverage and constraint

Small actions mattered. Ninety minutes outside changed the energy more than any slide, a blank worksheet produced better ideas than anything I prepared, and a few hours writing teacher keys made the lessons usable without me. Progress stalled wherever I needed a formal channel: other schools required approvals and timetable space I could not secure in weeks. Exam priorities, a fixed curriculum, decisions held by school leadership and the six-week timeframe shaped what was possible. Over several years, deeper change could come from Baltic content built into English teaching, a network of coastal schools sharing resources, and an established ocean literacy programme that trains teachers instead of relying on guest lessons.

3. Contribution in context

My contribution was small and worked mainly at the individual level, for the students, and at the organisational level, for one school that now has new materials. It tested an idea, teaching a local environmental topic through English as part of exam preparation, and showed it can work. It also pointed to a gap: an established Swedish programme looking for a Polish partner suggests structured ocean literacy in Polish schools is still underdeveloped. For some students, the Baltic may now feel like something they can act on.

4. Continuity and sustainability

Continuing this needs teachers who own the materials and school leaders who give them time. Longer-term responsibility sits with school heads, with the bodies that run and supervise schools, and with the national curriculum, while ocean literacy organisations hold the expertise to scale. A future Scholar could take the pack to other Tricity schools and collect structured feedback, and if the Swedish partnership develops, See the Sea could be its Polish home.

5. My role going forward

I used to think of systemic change as a good idea delivered at scale. I now see it as slow, relational work, where my most useful role is connecting people already working on the same problem. I want to keep working in this space, by pursuing the Swedish partnership through See the Sea and keeping in touch with the school so the materials stay in use.

Cross-goal reflection

The goals were well judged for design and delivery but too ambitious for scaling, which six weeks could not cover. The goals I controlled were achieved; the one that depended on other institutions was only partly achieved. Almost every important change of direction came from someone else: the school asking for English, students asking about studying abroad, the foundation pointing me to Sweden. The project improved each time I let others change my plan.

Next time I would set some goals around relationships, such as securing one partner school by a set date, build feedback collection into the first lesson, and define “scalable” concretely at the start: who will use the materials and how they will find them.

Who am I becoming as a leader?

1. Leadership in practice

I used to see leadership as having a clear plan and executing it. In the school it meant listening, adjusting and knowing when to hand over control. I felt most stretched in my first lesson, after a sleepless night with far too much material, and in front of all the fourth-year students. Leading in complexity meant accepting that no one person owned the outcome, and my job was to keep the work moving between the people who did.

2. Character

Humility mattered most: Natalia knew the school, the English teachers knew the students’ level, and the students had better ideas than mine. Judgment came into smaller choices, such as how much science to keep when explaining eutrophication in a second language. Under pressure my instinct was to overprepare. That comes from accountability, but it also left little room for students, so I learned to cut material in the moment. I also found that I enjoy teaching far more than I expected, and I came away with real respect for teachers who do this every day.

3. Change Maker values

Curious, Good, Brave and Determined guided most decisions. In Week 2 I felt a tension between Fast and Good, as consulting teachers slowed me down but improved the materials, and I chose Good. In the classroom I felt a tension between Ambitious and Curious, between covering my plan and following students’ questions. I let the school’s priorities and the students’ interest decide, and the study abroad session came out of that.

4. Capacities

My people capacities grew most: speaking to teenagers, reading a room and building trust with a school and with organisations I had never met. Running several sets of materials at once tested my process skills. I still need to get better at measuring impact in a structured way and at handing ownership to others.

5. Developing a global mindset

Nine countries share the Baltic, and its problems, from nutrient run-off to warming water, begin far from any one coastline. Finding a Swedish organisation solving the same problem I was working on in Gdynia made that concrete. I expected to be the one bringing an international perspective to a local school. The students brought perspectives I lacked, and the most international outcome began with a local conversation. Global citizenship now means something practical to me: taking responsibility for your own place while staying aware of everyone who depends on the same sea.

Thank you

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