

European Conference

Closing the empowerment gap through citizenship education How to address educationally disadvantaged groups

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Report

Workshop 6 Learning Environment – Non-formal Citizenship Education II

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Input:

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Project Presentations:

"Child Trafficking Response Programme" (CTRP) presented by Lora Lalova, Partners Bulgaria Foundation (Bulgaria)

"Standing on the threshold of Europe" presented by Niccolo Milanese, European Alternatives (France)

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This year's NECE conference focused on the complex changes regarding civic participation and its effects on socially disadvantaged groups. All over Europe, citizens tend to refrain from traditional political participation, which is reflected by decreasing turnout rates in elections and a growing disenchantment with politics. Informal citizenship education, which entails drawing individuals from all backgrounds back into education and sometimes into community involvement for the first time, has been marginalised very often. Therefore we were pleased to be part of this workshop and discuss the good practices. The primary goal of the workshop was to stimulate knowledge transfer and good practices in Europe about informal citizenship education. Further aim was to discuss how citizenship education can become a suitable tool for closing the empowerment gap.

Dr Christian Spatscheck from the Bremen University of Applied Sciences started the sessions with the general thesis that citizenship, participation and education for democracy cannot be thought of as abstract ends but rather should be based on concrete settings that need to be connected to the everyday life-worlds of young people. Therefore, citizenship education should be based on the interests, needs and life situations of young people and then develop programmes that enable young people to develop their potentials in fields that are relevant for their own life course.

Citizenship education needs to use special methodologies to get a deeper understanding of their target group's life situations and can then begin to develop supporting environments for peer group and neighbourhood based learning arrangements. This approach made clear that Life Worlds makes sense. Professionals need to understand the different lifestyles of their target groups. Life world is about understanding people and not by explaining who or what they are. We have to meet them where they are to take them serious. For understanding and supporting people in leading their daily life. Teaching citizenship should shift to learning democracy, if we want to put the life world theory in practice. When teaching people, we have to do this it in everyday situations. What are your needs? Topics? After investigating this we can use more common strategies like changing their mind set and make them more connected to other people. Learning democracy with young people is most effective in everyday groups or in their neighbourhoods instead of an individual approach. There should be a shift from „having citizenship“ to „doing citizenship“. In the discussion after the presentation it was pointed out that we have to dare to be risky. Issues of common concern can differ extremely. People may have different ideas and attitudes about for example discrimination and homophobia. Professionals have to be ready for these kinds of opinions.

Two very different examples of how to deal with life-worlds in informal citizenship education were shown in the presentations of the project "Child Trafficking Response Programme (CTRP)" by Lora Lalova, Partners Bulgaria Foundation (Bulgaria) and the project "Standing on the threshold of Europe" presented by Niccolo Milanese, European Alternatives (France).

The overall goal of the CTRP project is to establish effective models of support and protection to at risk and trafficked children in order to prevent violence, exploitation and abuse and minimise unsafe child migration. The programme provides direct support to children at risk or trafficked children and ensures child participation through different means, such as peer-to-peer education and consultations with children regarding their rights, needs and the proper design of prevention activities. Another fundamental activity is capacity building of local professionals to understand the root causes of trafficking and the issues related to violation of human rights. At country and regional level, advocacy efforts are invested in exchanging lessons learned and good practices, thus promoting the adoption of good child protection models in South East Europe.

The activities are designed to inform and educate children at risk about child rights, unsafe migration and other adolescent-related dangers. All activities adhere to the principles of life skills-based education. Additionally, children at risk are encouraged to seek personal consultation with trained professionals and receive guidance and counselling on a wide range of matters. Within the programme several training and seminar modules are included in which peer-education methods proved to be effective. Peer leaders had a very important role. Adolescents were empowered to act as role models and advocates. Many peer-to-peer sessions are organised. The challenge is to retain volunteering within the peer education life cycle. Moreover the overall project should involve and support the wider community (parents, relatives, teachers, care givers, officials, etc.) in project activities. Another interesting result is that efforts to improve adults' capacity in work regarding child participation often increases children's opportunities to express their opinions/views and have their voice heard in child policy-making.

The third presentation of the project “Standing on the threshold of Europe” was a very interesting example of how to educate migrant groups in citizenship. Furthermore it explained how to create a bridge between unheard migrant voices and people who work with them or enter into contact with them (teachers, social workers) while at the same time reinforcing the position of migrants who felt allowed to speak and express their views.

The project promoted and enabled more contacts between young isolated migrants and people outside of the educative structure they are accustomed to everyday. It was a transnational project to raise awareness on the situation migrants have to face when they settle in a country on one hand, and at the other hand to establish – together with migrants – pedagogical material on trajectories of migrants and new forms of attachment and belonging created in the ‘arrival country’.

In France the project was developed with young isolated migrants under 18 years old, arriving in France from outside Europe. The project aimed at giving them tools to express the feelings they had developed about their place of arrival. In Warsaw the project was realised in partnership with the migrants who came to the social centre. They were filmed by video professionals who had two aims; giving a voice to migrants who are not necessarily heard in Poland and producing educational videos which can be used in training sessions on schools, to inform about the situation of migrants in Poland. The Polish videos were presented to the young migrants in France at the beginning of their training.

Interesting results reveal that young migrants in Paris and Warsaw both learned tools of expression, collaboration, dialogue and compromise. In Paris participants from Afghanistan managed to really get in contact with local people from outside their ‘formal’ education at the centre. The empowerment of the participants also underscores/ emphasizes the success of the project. Instead of educating the participants, they were activated to express their opinions. The programme involved the participants to such a large extent, that these people still want to activate together, for example in the Occupy movement in La Defance.

Insights from discussion

The group agreed on the fact that citizenship education offerings will only achieve their aim when they meet the needs and interests of, and strike a chord with, the people they intend to reach. Accordingly, knowledge of values, attitudes, living environments and life circumstances of the different target groups is an indispensable requirement for devising and positioning educational offerings. Using life-worlds should be the start of informal civic education projects.

The two projects both succeed in reaching educationally disadvantaged target groups; migrant groups and children at risk of abuse. Although they both had a very different approach to non-formal citizenship education they both reached their goals. In many ways the participants build self-confidence and self-esteem, and developed the capacity to drive social change.

Both presentations showed that they are interesting ways in informal education of disadvantaged groups like migrants and abused children. Although the approach of the CTRP project has a very professional and structured setup and is well evaluated, it is also at risk to become too professional, especially when youngsters are becoming pros by using peer-education methods.

The project to approach migrants with a video project has used several life world approaches and was evaluated as a real non-formal method by the audience. The migrant had a very important role in shaping the goals and set up of the project. The coordinators focused on what the participants wanted to learn and how they wanted the concept. Real participation was the result.

Non-formal education can have an interesting international dimension. The projects showed that it can go beyond borders. Formal education has a more national outlook. The CTRP project had one setup for 7 countries, which all had the same kind of problems with child trafficking. Even the video project crossed borders and was shaped slightly different in Warsaw and Paris. In Paris the migrants took the camera themselves, the process was more important than the result. In Warsaw the migrants co-developed the videos but did not film.

The method of peer-education used in the CTRP project was considered as very useful and successful according to many people. Another inspiring example came from a social worker in the audience. She teaches anti-racist workshops in schools and has a youth cultural approach. She implements peer learning by giving the youngsters them information about the history of different youth subcultures like Hip Hop. After getting to know more about historical facts, they become more involved, and tell their peers what they have learned. For example about the emancipation of Afro-Americans in the Hip Hop culture, which gave them a tool to express their opinions and to object against the reality that surrounds them. This method enables people to empowering the ones who are interested. Non-formal education is not just about learning skills, but also about teaching tolerance and respect.

Further on it was stressed that these project examples first focus on solving social problems. A secondary target is teaching citizenship. The process is more important within these disadvantaged groups. Being part of these kind of projects is a democratic process. Members of disadvantaged groups see that participation is successful, which brings back their trust. Democracy starts at small level.

Non-formal civic education is also about how to meet each other and learning competences, but it starts with learning about the history of their lives.

All off the projects used social space methods, the risk zone method was used in the CTRP project, and also the migrants made videos of their neighbourhoods.

Resuming, the presentations and discussions indicate the vital role of using life-worlds in developing actions for new forms of non-formal citizenship education. Social workers as risk-takers uncover invisible control mechanisms, provide opportunities for disadvantaged groups to react and mobilize them for active participation.