Where Does Education for Social Justice Best Fit for Early Years Educators

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Embracing Inclusive Approaches for Children and Youth with Special Education Needs
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“We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”

Albert Einstein
Working with Inclusion

- Inclusion of children with special educational needs began to be addressed as Step by Step programs introduced in ISSA countries through teacher training – mid ‘90

- Inclusion of children with special needs a new concept for region
Working with social inclusion

Began addressing issues specifically in late ’90s and early 2000s in programs targeting children, parents and communities of Roma origin

– Kindergarten as a Family Center in Roma communities (1997 – 2006)
– EU MAP Monitoring projects
Working with social inclusion

• Different programs developed
  – Educating for Diversity: Education for Social Justice Activities for Children
  – Education for Social Justice: Program for Adults
  – Neither Black nor White Program
  – Effective Teaching and Learning for Minority Language Children

Main idea – Educators need to change both attitudes and pedagogical practice
Education for Social Justice Program for Adults

- Training for all ISSA NGO members
- Training of Trainers
- Work in Mongolia, Belarus to combine with work children with special educational needs
Starting Points – New understandings

• Inclusion is not about including people in the system/society, it is about transformation of the system/society so that everybody has his/her place in it…

• Inclusion represents the way to resist any kind of discrimination – it sets ground for different actions and projects promoting respect for diversity and equity and CRC is powerful framework for that

• Education is more than schooling…

• High quality education/programs are inclusive by default …
Study on results of last 10 years
Project “Education for Social Justice – Supporting Social Inclusion”

• Mapping existing potentials in ISSA network, good practices, adaptations
  – Interviews with all ISSA NGOs
  – Purpose to integrate existing expertise from the network

• Mapping of other programs addressing similar issues
  – To introduce new perspectives
Findings

- Education for Social Justice Program for Adults and Educating for Diversity Program: Education for Social Justice Activities for Children expanded beyond programs targeting Roma

- ESJ Adult most popular
  - Most comprehensive TOT
  - Strongest, challenging attitudes and values of educators

- ESJ values and elements of programs have been added in all other SbS based program (Getting Ready for School, Disabilities/Inclusion, Professional Development)
Findings

• Respectable body of trainers developed (ESJ Adult – 130+; Educating for Diversity: ESJ Activities for Classrooms - 100+; SLL – 50)

• Majority of NGOs have been very active in training

• Some NGOs using elements of all 3 programs in child centered trainings, making links between inclusion and quality of education practices

• Existing ESJ programs enriched with right based approaches, UNCRC, intercultural approaches
Findings

• ESJ core values and elements of programs became part of advocacy activities – promoting equal access to quality education

• Majority of NGOs are adapting ESJ programs to local context and needs of educators

• Majority of NGOs received accreditation for ESJ programs as recognized in-service training

• Few NGOs in EU countries of ISSA network managed to incorporate ESJ core values and elements of programs in pre-service teacher training
Findings

Programs mostly used for:

- Inclusion of children with different ethnic and socio-economic background (Roma in many cases)
- Inclusion of children with need for special support (special needs/disabilities)
- Promotion of the values of inclusion, child friendly and welcoming environments
- Mobilizing and connecting communities, especially parents
Challenges

• Situation in ISSA region concerning ESJ topics is changing for better, but still more on policy than on level of practice - BIG GAP

• How to establish cooperation with pre-service teacher training institutions and incorporate ESJ programs and core values – their practices are not inclusive?

• How to do more advocacy for importance of ESJ core values, how to make more understandable that inclusion is inherent to them?

• How to make programs more flexible?

• How to provide high quality facilitators to work with and support educators?

• How to make connections between inclusion and quality more visible?
Recommendations for moving forward

1. Using advantages of network
   - Exchange of experiences on Advocacy and lobbying – how to do it;
   - defining good practice;
   - constructing new understandings
   - (new) ideas

2. Developing and conducting well designed cross countries research – to be used for PR of the ESJ programs and core values

3. Establishing more visible connections between ESJ programs and ISSA Quality Principles (“Competent educators for 21st Century”)
Recommendations for moving forward

4. Joint fundraising

5. Continuous professional development and support for lead trainers – network of support

6. Strong mentoring system is needed, trainings are not sufficient (both for trainers and educators they are working with)

7. Improving “old” materials – making them more flexible and using them as back up system for all other initiatives in ISSA promoting equal opportunities and equal outcomes for all children
Recommendations for moving forward

8. Developing new materials – influencing structural level (e.g. whole school approach; democratization of educational institutions/system; Updates on new trends; Greater age span (3 to 18); Addition of specific topics such as multicultural education etc

9. New name for the programs – making them more attractive and easier to understand
“Educators and funders are initially resistant but once they receive training they become hungry for more”

Qendra Hap pas Hapi Albania

“We learned a lot and taught others a lot while implementing ESJ core values “

Center for Innovations in Education, Azerbaijan

“It’s applicable everywhere, it can be used in every project, every training. Participants like it a lot – for the first time we do not “tell” them how to work, but they have time and opportunity to work on themselves, their attitudes and understandings”

Kosova Education Center

“We have knowledge and opinion to influence governmental/policy level as experts on topic of education of Roma, professional development of educators and on social inclusion.”

Latvia, Center for Education Initiatives
Thank you...