

## Round table: Learning from past experiences on professional development

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KINDERWELTEN is a 3 1/2 years dissemination project for Anti-Bias pedagogy, operating in three federal states in Germany (Niedersachsen, Baden-Wuerttemberg and Thuringen) with a total of 15 provider organisations and 31 day-care centres.

The strategy of dissemination consists in the training of key persons in the process of changing educational practices. In-service trainers, managers of the day-care centres, dedicated teachers, representatives of the provider organisations (NGOs, churches, municipalities) take part in workshops and ongoing reflection meetings with our project team. Detailed manuals serve as support for the transfer process that these key persons undertake within their day-care centres, with their staff, with children and parents. Public presentations at the end of each phase - alternately on a regional and on the federal level - serve as an opportunity to stimulate professional exchange and to deepen the understanding of Anti Bias issues.

What have we learnt so far on professional development?

1. One lesson is that in Germany we must emphasize the importance of Anti-Bias work in respect to equal opportunities in the educational sector. Children's well-being is a precondition for their learning abilities. If children don't feel safe and are not respected and encouraged in what they think, feel and know they will not engage actively in learning processes and will not reach their real potentials. Anti-Bias Education as a pedagogy that looks at strengthening children in their identities, at giving opportunities to experience diversity actively and at raising children's critical thinking about bias and discrimination creates places where all children can really learn. Intercultural pedagogy in Germany has far too long been an approach for social learning in a very narrow sense: be nice together and tolerant, celebrate the differences. We have to make clear that our work on inclusion goes far beyond that.
2. A second lesson is that educational quality needs more than reflective and critical individuals. Within the centres we must aim at an organizational quality that is characterized by respect for diversity and inclusion. This has consequences for our training settings: Meanwhile we are working with the whole staff of centres over a period of at least two years because only then you will see changes of organizational learning processes. Commitment of the whole team is necessary, a concentration on the content of Anti-Bias education. What if only some of the teachers want a change? What if it's just not affordable? We also learnt that we must involve the organisations that provide childcare services in a continuing reflection process. E started to do this with our ongoing project, it's interesting to deal with the very different organisations that are providing day-care centres like churches, NGOs, municipalities, organisations with a strong background in the workers' movement. But it's new for us to involve them and we do not yet know how exactly Anti-Bias principles will shape the decisions of providers.
3. In our efforts to mainstreaming Anti-Bias Education we are trying to strengthen and to influence the existing support systems for teachers rather than establishing parallel ways of support by projects. Projects will come to an end and the support will end, too. But our strategy in training professionals who are key persons in the dissemination process reveals severe weaknesses of the existing support system itself. These are also confirmed by the OECD report on early childhood education in Germany. In our project we have to deal with regional disparities and huge differences between providers concerning in-service training, consultancy and psychological support. This contributes to inequalities in the child care centres themselves: Less chances for teachers to get trained and to develop professional competencies results in less reflective ways of supporting young children. If we rely on existing structures we can only scandalize them of being insufficient. But in how far can projects at all become stimuli for innovations in educational



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structures? How can we challenge existing inequalities? In our project we are trying to initiate Anti Bias networks and first steps have been done. We will see in how far they will become networks for change.

4. A fourth lesson is that we must be aware of our own biases: In our team for example the experiences of migration are well represented, as part of our personal and professional lives. But there is no single male colleague in our team and nobody who grew up in Eastern Germany or who is familiar with the history and daily culture(s) in the former GDR. It means that some perspectives are always missing in our reflections, presentations and in our trainings. And usually we do not like it when somebody criticizes us for having limited perspectives – after all we are working for diversity! Sometimes we even think that thanks to the homogeneity among us we can be productive because we agree easily in some points... We have to do both: Try to include more perspectives and voices. And accept that we will never include **all** possible perspectives. The open question for us is how we can make our raising awareness of own biases fruitful for the training of teachers.



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