ALLiES eGuide

Challenges and Good Practices in Creating Safe and Equal Structures

In the following you can find good practices and most challenging development areas that easily hamper the realization of non-violence and equality on the structural level. To create structures that support this, it is important to consider the following aspects:

Time and personnel resources

- It should be ensured that the time and personnel resources are in balance with the increased challenges for collaboration.
- Sufficient resources ensure individual support for children with special needs.

Organisation

The challenge of the big organisation is the power of effective decision making on management level and sharing of responsibilities. It is important that:

- The job descriptions and responsibilities, especially those of team leaders, are clear.
- Decision making is transparent and fast.
- There is an open atmosphere in which each individual is respected.
- One possibility for developing classroom collaboration is multi-professional cooperation: a cluster of two teachers and a special education teacher when needed, and/or an assistant teacher who work together with a group of children.
- It would be ideal to create a harmonious day for the children so that the boundary between school and afternoon care/youth work is not strict, but smooth. This is possible when the same adults from different administrative sectors work with the same children during the day and in cooperation with the staff of other sectors.

Challenges of this idea have been:

- Different needs of school work and afternoon care: how to use the same spaces and rooms for different kinds of purposes without confusing the children about rules. In afternoon care, the activities are more unstructured and freer than at school, because it is children's free time and should offer opportunities for relaxation, playing and having fun.
- The staff of different administrative sectors need to communicate with each other (for example, learn the concepts and aims of different professionals) and find time for joint planning of work.

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Management

It is important that:

- Management is supportive, inspiring and listens to the employees.
- The whole staff is committed to the same goals.
- Team leaders are from different occupational backgrounds.
- The work is resourced sufficiently: fees and time resources. Hours/week should be defined.
- Team leaders are able to mentor, support, encourage and give feedback. They need training in management.

Values and goals

- Continuous and regular discussion of mutual values and goals.
- Commitment to the agreed values and goals, and their implementation.
- Shared courses of action and commitment.
- Meeting practices and planning are effective.
- Mentoring is resourced.
- Systematic introduction and orientation for the newcomers.
- Regular and organized practices.

Equality

- Equality issues among the staff should be taken seriously, especially concerning different educational backgrounds in different sectors. Everyone should value one another's professionalism and also her/his own in order to make a good team.
- Participatory methods and practices needed.
- It is important to made good use of the knowhow resources of the staff.
- Equal sharing of the workload.

Organising the activities

- Seamless cooperation between educational staff, youth services, nurses, parents, and other multi-professional adults involved.
- Attention to timetabling, sharing, participation.
- All the activities in the house should be described and compared in relation to one another: job descriptions, work processes. Increased understanding of how the work is done at the other end of the house.
- Coordination and timetabling of projects and development work.
- Awareness of violence in educational environments, possibilities for intervention and prevention, as well as awareness of gender sensitivity and power and status struggles that produce inequality, should be increased by training among parents, staff and teacher students.
- The staff should be committed to the principles of equity, communality, safety, non-violence as well as jointly shared rules. These principles should be put into practice in mutual interaction and in practices and interaction with children.
- If parents also support these principles, holistic prevention of violence can succeed.