

Inclusion as a chance to think the school new

SOIL-conference in Berlin on 29. September 2017

SOIL moved forward and carried out the second conference in Berlin. The title “Inclusion as a chance to think the school new” was also an impulse towards the audience. The SOIL organizer, the German partner SCHENCK, cooperated with the Initiative School on the Move, the secondary school “Heinz-Brandt-Schule”, which offered a venue. The conference was supported by the lead partner atempo.

SOIL-Conference in Berlin gathered 110 participants from all the sectors of the school education in Berlin and within generated a high stakeholder value - policy makers and decision makers from the the Senate Administration of Berlin for Education, school supervisors (Schulaufsicht), consulting points for inclusive pedagogy (SIBUZ), school headmasters, NGOs working on the field of education, parents boards (for Berlin and national), teachers board and many others. In Germany, school education is in autonomic charge of the federal states, education is not a national wide agenda. So there are 16 different education systems alongside the country. The foundation Friedrich Ebert Stiftung introduced those main similarities and differences at the conference and pointed out, where the segregation in education has got the most influence on the societal life in the region. Miriam Pech, the headmaster of the Heinz-Brandt-Schule, hosted the conference in her school – the winner of the German School Prize in 2011 and certified as a School against Racism. Eveline Wiesenhofer (atempo) introduced the SOIL-project, welcomed the SOIL-partners from Maastricht, Bratislava and Bucharest. Stana Schenck (SCHENCK) and Hannah Furian were moderating the conference as an inclusive tandem.

The Patroness Sybille Volkholz

The patroness of the conference, Sybille Volkholz, the former Senator for Education, since 2012 the chief of the expert board “Inclusion for Berlin” opened the conference and said –“ Inclusion is not a new idea. There are many experienced schools in Berlin living inclusion for almost 40 years. Now the challenge is, to inspire other schools, to let them learn from each other.” She appreciated the offer of the project SOIL for the school education in Berlin as a platform to network and encouraged the participants to walk the SOIL path, to get to know and to use the SOIL-methods.

The Key Note “How to develop schools through the spirit of diversity”, Margret Rasfeld

Margret Rasfeld, the founder of the Initiative Schools on the Move, embedded the purpose of education into the phenomenon of the fast changing society and the role of the young generation within. Once the young people leave the schools, are they prepared to deal with the challenges? Will they take an active role to contribute and to form the better world, or will they just observe? This all has got to do with inclusion, with readiness to act, to teamwork, to respect otherness, to help each other, to be empathetic, to view people through what they can do and not through their deficits. To learn to care about people and nature, to turn the ego-system into an eco-system is a crucial paradigm of Schools on the Move. Pupils of the Evangelische Schule Berlin Zentrum supported the key note of Rasfeld and talked about their subjects as are “Responsibility” and “Challenge”, about the supporting and the positive feedback culture at their school.

10 Pupils of the Heinz-Brandt-Schule (HBO) made a report on their commonly organized and financed challenge - walking 350 km the Jakob Path by foot. Subjects like this, strengthen young people, enable diverse groups to accomplish difficult tasks. Another group of pupils of HBO runs a school firm "Just Eat" and made a catering for the whole SOIL-conference.

The Dialog-Groups

The audience of SOIL represented the concentrated competence in school education in Berlin. SOIL has asked all the participants in advance to formulate their issues, what they would like to discuss about at the conference with others. Eight topics were detected, gathered in the online-tool www.answergarten.ch, and put back to the dialog-groups, eight chair-circles of 8-10 persons.

1. How to finance inclusion?
2. Barrier free material now– how to organize it?
3. Easy Language – how to use it in heterogeneous classes?
4. How to be fair to ever learner?
5. Inclusion in secondary schools
6. Development of individual talents
7. Usage of digital tools
8. Fostering the inclusion spirit

The groups worked on two approaches and determined the key words:

- What is the vision, where do we want to get?
- How do we get there, what are the instruments?

All the key words were stucked on the tree posters and exposed afterwards around the auditorium. The ideas will be evaluated and be part of the recommendations presented at the Round Table in Berlin in 2018.

The Key Note – “ Read and Write – the Key to the World” , Klaus Candussi

20 Million People in Germany are not in charge to read and understand information, so they can use it to improve their lives. Many texts are so complicated, that even persons with higher education must read them twice to get the essence out of it. How then people with learning difficulties deal with information? Klaus Candussi, the CEO of atempo, exposed, why several levels of written information are needed, according to the abilities of the readers, letting space free to improve. He introduce the capito-method, which allows to start at a basic level, compared to the European Frame of Languages A1. The same information can be offered then in 6 different levels A1 to C2. Each reader chooses his own level of comprehension. User friendly easy-to-read-language has been recently developed by atempo. The capito-App is the youngest kid of capito and allows to transfer complex information to any of the six levels via the capito-App on the smartphone. Capito-App of atempo has recently won the World Summit Award as the best product in the sector Empowerment and Inclusion in Austria.

The Workshops

The SOIL-conferences are also a vehicle to promote the SOIL-methods and to recruit schools to participate on the SOIL-seminars. The participants of the SOIL-conference in Berlin had the opportunity to choose one of the three workshops:

1. Easy-to Read, the capito-method
2. Individualized learning in the Learning Office
3. Individualized learning with tablets

Walburga Fröhlich, the Co-CEO of atempo has introduced Easy-to-Read more in detail. She designed the workshop interactively, asking many questions how to generate easy to understand information and how to adjust the capito-method to the target group – persons with learning difficulties, persons with migrant background or persons who are just starting to learn German. Many participants were meeting this method for the first time, learning the system behind it.

Margret Rasfeld explained the participants the idea of the learning office. The pupils from the Evangelische Schule Berlin Zentrum were supporting her, reporting their own experience in individualized learning. The workshop was an open discussion on how to break the traditional way of teaching a (seeming) homogenous group to a learning environment based on diversity of talents, age, learning approach, progress and tempi.

Karl Bäck installed several tablets and fixtures in the auditorium. Six pupils from the HBO took part in a crash course in digital tool day before the conference by Karl Bäck and guided the participants during the workshop by explaining the learning apps.

The panel discussion

Margit Glasow, the free journalist and expert on Inclusion, Diversity and Equal Rights was the host of the panel and moderated the discussion. Mario Dobe from the Senate Administration for Education and Burkhard Jungkamp, member of the Board for Education by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, agreed on many points, e. g. how the labelling of vulnerable groups strengthens segregation and why the support and assistance in schools should not be personalized. Karin Martens, the senior advisor of the City of Maastricht, conceded, that Netherlands is not that progressive country in inclusive education, as the people in Germany would like to believe. Arthur Hackenthal freshened up the round and pointed out, that it is hard to decide to visit a regular school, as long as there is the pressure to deliver. Also he criticized, that tests are not made for people with learning difficulties as him. That is why, he cannot reach out for professions as e.g. journalist.

The SOIL-conference in Berlin was a good day to inspire, inform, to experience and to network. SOIL will move on to the conferences in Bratislava (13.10.17) and Bucharest (20.10.17). The SOIL-Seminars in Berlin take place on 16.-18. November 2017. See you there, stay with SOIL!

Stana Schenck, 4.10.2017