

Intervention of the Dutch delegation, by Mr. DANKMEIJER, in workshop 4b (inclusive education: learners and teachers; the challenges at classroom level (evidence based practices), Thursday 27-11-2008 of the International Conference on Education, Geneva

This is a workshop to discuss what to do at the classroom level, and I would like to suggest a perspective and concrete working method for this.

One challenge to develop inclusive schools is the social climate in the school. This seems to be a major challenge because of our limited knowledge of classroom management concerning interpersonal and social issues and how to develop inclusive policy on the school level.

I would like to highlight some evidence based practices in these aspects of social inclusion in secondary schools in the Netherlands.

In 2004 the Dutch government enabled a coalition of NGOs to experiment with social inclusion and non discrimination in schools. The project started by doing a representative research among teachers. The analysis showed that there are significant differences between safer and not so safe school relation to the well being and efficiency of teachers. The successful school differed from unsafe schools on five aspects:

1. Teachers had a mutual social support for each other and did not work autonomously in their classes
2. Staff in these schools had an open and positive attitude toward diversity and combating discrimination
3. These school provided explicit education about diversity and discrimination, especially on gender and sexual orientation
4. These school had a functioning complaint commission and procedure
5. These schools had a counsellor who assist in making complaints and support the empowerment of minorities

In schools with such a diversity policy, staff suffered significantly less burnouts, felt healthier and their general sense of well-being was good.

As a follow-up of this research, the NGO coalition developed a so called Peer Interview Method to enhance inclusive school policy. This method entails a short training of 10 teachers in each school, in which they learn how to interview their colleagues about their professional pride, the challenges they face in inclusion, the way they would like to address inclusion challenges and what kind of support they need. Then these 10 teachers each interview 5 colleagues. These are not academic surveys, but personal conversations which touch the hearts of teachers and really motivate them to collaborate on real inclusion. This is especially important when school staff really wants to address sensitive issues like sexism, racism and homophobia. The results of these conversations are translated in concrete policy measures which directly relate to heart felt challenges and viable strategies by school staff themselves. A similar method can be implemented among students as well.

My conclusion from these good practices is that a more personalized and emphatic approach of diversity and inclusion may be a key strategy towards full inclusion.