Marie Friese & Petra Wagner[1]

Implementing inclusion in early childhood education - but how?

Anti-bias education as an inclusive, practice-oriented approach

Vorurteilsbewusste Bildung und Erziehung (VBuE©[2]) is an inclusive, practice-oriented approach for educational settings in Germany. It is based on the Anti-Bias approach developed in the 1980s by Louise Derman-Sparks and colleagues in California. Kinderwelten, a NGO located in Berlin/Germany, has adapted and introduced the Anti-Bias approach to Germany.

The approach advocates for educational justice by promoting diversity while resisting discrimination and injustice. Particularly in early childhood education, VBuE© has established itself as an approach nationwide in many day care teams and is described, for example, in Berlin's Educational Programme for Early Childhood Day Care Facilities as a component of inclusive education. VBuE© provides suggestions for educational practices in which children, with all their identity markers, affiliations and diverse living conditions, are empowered and protected from discrimination. The approach, therefore, can also be seen as an educational response to legal regulations such as Volume VIII of the German Social Security Code, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Federal Participation Act.

Based on four fields of action (teamwork, interaction with children, shaping the learning environment and collaboration with parents / caregivers), teams can set out to make their own day care center a discrimination-aware place of learning. Four goals of the approach are pursued, which build on each other:

- Goal 1: Strengthening self-identity and reference group identity
- Goal 2: Developing respect for diversity
- Goal 3: Encouraging critical thinking about prejudice and discrimination
- Goal 4: Taking action against discrimination and prejudice

Prejudice awareness from early on ... but children don't have prejudices, do they?

Children learn from very early on that belonging to certain groups elicits different societal reactions, and that these evaluations are pervasive or block their access to social participation. Young children feel quite acutely whether there is a place for them and their family culture in institutions, whether they - with everything that defines them - are visible and, therefore, important. They experience that gender identity, dis_ability, age, forced

[1] This article was published in 2020 in a brochure about trainings for diversity and democracy for early childhood practitioners in Germany https://diversity-jugendhilfe.de/wp-content/uploads/Kita_Broschuere_online.pdf Translation: P.A. Scott/Kinderwelten

[2] Vorurteilsbewusste Bildung und Erziehung means literally "prejudice-aware education". It is the copyright title of the anti-bias education approach adapted for the German context by the NGO Kinderwelten.

migration history, language, religion, residence status, family type, etc. are referred to in different ways in their environment. These messages from the outside world, which are often unconsciously associated with value judgements and images of normality, play an essential role for children in the development of their self-esteem. Children, therefore, need adults who perceive and value differences, and who intervene in the event of discrimination, and support children in defending themselves against injustice. In order to convey to children that it is possible to defend oneself, and that injustice does not have to be accepted, adults need the conviction that social inequalities are not "normal" but human-made and have many negative effects. "What messages do children receive about social coexistence within our society? What significance do these messages have for their image of themselves and of others? What does this mean for their motivation to learn? And what information and values do we as educators want to pass on to the children?" These questions are the focus of anti-bias education.

What do prejudices have to do with me as a professional?

In VBuE © the following principle applies: we all have prejudices - there is no such thing as being free of prejudice. That is because we are all socialized in systems that are based on inequalities and power relations. Just as the children we work with draw on prejudices at a very early age, so have we also as children internalized various images of groups and how they are socially evaluated. As an education professional, I am never detached from my own social position, regardless of whether I am aware of it or not. We all experience discrimination and/ or have privileges that influence us in our work. A day care facility always reflects social inequalities and is by no means a neutral space. This is why it is so important when educators engage in self-reflection to understand where certain ideas of normality and stereotypes come from. Discrimination-aware education is about exploring this so that internalized images, beliefs, and prejudices can gradually be recognized and an openness to new perspectives develops. This is a lifelong process that is never completed.

VBuE © in training courses as quality development for early childhood educational practice

Professionals' learning processes need support, an exchange of ideas in the team, and spaces that give time and attention to the issues mentioned above. Training courses significantly support these processes: they provide new specialist input or update knowledge, promote collegial exchanges with professionals (from other institutions) and enable reflection on one's own work and role. In addition, an individual's practice-related questions can be brought up in training courses, joint solutions can be sought, and new perspectives can be gained.

Diversity-oriented organizational development and anti-bias education both have the goal of implementing inclusion on an individual, cultural, and institutional level and by so doing, increasing awareness of discrimination. As a didactic, practice-oriented concept, anti-bias education can support and guide teams on their way to creating an inclusive and discrimination-aware organization.

References and Related Links:

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Brochures for Anti-Bias practice: KiDs aktuell https://kids.kinderwelten.net/de/Publikationen/

Publications for download at: www.kinderwelten.net