

Siegfried Zoels, Jörg Seifarth

Fördern durch Spielmittel – Spielzeug für behinderte Kinder e.V. –
Toys for Children's Rehabilitation

Berlin / Germany

“Learning to learn”

The method of “Inclusive Creativity” – The ALICE Project

- Participation in learning processes and ways to encourage it
- Motivating people to find solutions to their sometimes problematic situation
- The role and potential of toys and playing activities in the context of adult education

1. Introduction

What is lifelong learning and what do practical examples for efforts in this field look like?

How can alternative learning methods be used in the context of adult education? And how can important aspects like motivation, empowerment, inclusion and encouragement become part of workshops with people who have been distanced from learning processes?

An innovative approach can help to bring out the creative potential in adults as four exemplary workshops have shown. The common basis was a method developed over the years.

This project was preceded by two European cooperations (1999-2001; 2001-2003, INNOVATION-programme), the methodological output of which served as a basis for the work carried out under the ALICE project. These Projects were initiated and coordinated by Siegfried Zoels and Beate Punge and focussed on the principle of “Inclusive Creativity” as their starting point and fundamental philosophy throughout all project processes.

In the ALICE project (“Adult Learning and Inclusive Creativity-Methods encouraging the potential of people by using toys and play”, 2005-2008, GRUNDTVIG-programme) we have been testing this method of Inclusive Creativity in the field of non-formal adult education.

Our Method is based on the assumption:

Everybody is creative. The important thing is to create conditions in which an individual may find strategies for problem solutions.

People gain motivation and self-confidence in the process.

The tasks are ‘real’ problems, for which no good solutions have been found or where not enough experiences have been made, as for instance:

- Existing ideas for toys that are transferred to production,
- Games that are collectively redeveloped,
- Social processes given new content,
- Communication processes amongst different generations

Non-Formal Adult Education in Europe: Four Examples

A central aspect of our project was a series of workshops organized by four project partners and documented and evaluated by members of two academic partner institutions.

The main objective of the workshops was testing the method of Inclusive Creativity in the context of adult education where learning processes need to be encouraged more than in other areas: seniors, long-term unemployed, juvenile delinquents and people with disabilities. People from these groups were invited to participate in workshops and the aim was to see how they could best be motivated to actively engage in the course of the experience.

The preparations for the workshops were in part influenced by the results of the past workshops. Partner meetings took place at the time (mostly towards the end) of the workshops. This was an opportunity to witness a highlight activity and to meet the participants of the workshop. These meetings turned out to be an important element of the European dimension as for most of the participants this was the first time they met with a group of people from different countries, speaking different languages. Knowing of this meeting in advance, the participants were looking forward to it and quite ostensibly enjoyed this situation.

The evaluators were present at the workshop locations and gained a real inside perspective for their documentation of the workshop process and results.

The film-shooting days during the workshops were of special interest to the participants because they themselves had been encouraged to develop a script for the documentation. They decided what they wanted to show, the little story of the workshop they wanted to tell in the film

The four workshops had different target groups, used different ways of organising the meetings and were part of the institutional and cultural particularities of the countries where they were held. But the common guideline described in the project title was anchored in each of the situations. The experiences the participants made are comparable because of the way they were given a context to show their potential for creative solutions and successful learning.

The extensive workshop documentation done above all by the evaluators but also by the workshop partners and the participants themselves constitutes a remarkable amount of material that may be used in the future in similar circumstances.

All in all it became clear that our basic assumption proved to be correct: everybody can be creative if the necessary conditions are provided.

2. Overview of the workshops

The following presents notes and impressions from the four workshops, offering examples typical of the specific workshop organisation. Since this is only an overview of the workshops, we have only included extracts from the extensive reports that were made.

2.1. I nonni di Alice – Alice's grandparents Seniors in an intergenerational project (Ivrea / Italy)

- Grandparents meeting with children
- Singing, dancing and playing as a group
- Increased confidence in their educational role
- Building up a social network

The workshop was organized between April and May, 2006 and included a number of meetings in two crèches in the Ivrea area.

The most important **result** of the playgroups promoted by Alce Rosso, Ivrea, within the ALICE project was the **increased confidence** of the participants in exercising their educational role and the social networks that originated from the experience. A merit of the project was also that staff at the crèches and local policy makers have started to value the resources offered by the older segment of the population, a very valuable asset in a society such as the Italian one which is characterised by an ever aging population.

The grandparents have been active in promoting other educational activities in Ivrea and the neighbouring towns. There has been a significant **domino effect** on other educational services: many crèches and toy libraries in the area have started applying a more inclusive approach in their activities, opening up their doors to families and in particular to grandparents.

After the publication of an article on the experience in a journal ("Bambini" – January 2008) the cooperative has received many calls from other institutions and cooperatives asking to meet to talk about the ALICE project and ways of involving senior citizens in the development of educational services.

Finally, the **European dimension** of the project has given the participants increased credibility and visibility at local and national level as well as giving them a strong feeling of being part of an important project that not only overcomes age boundaries but also geographic ones.

2.2. Spielzeugwerkstatt – Toy-making Workshop A group of long-term unemployed people in a toy-making workshop (Berlin / Germany)

- Watching children play with toys that need improvement
- Drawing ideas and creating something new
- Finding a solution to a real problem
- Working in a group with others
- Everybody is a potential expert in toy-making

Plans, ideas, method: Outline

The workshop organized in Berlin was part of a structured program based on the aims of project ALICE: developing and testing alternative learning methods that will help various groups to enter learning processes. It is the second of four workshops in project ALICE and its specificity lay in the objective of motivating people to become active in toy making. The specific group was composed of 12 individuals who had experienced long-term unemployment. How could these people be motivated to participate actively in a workshop that included theoretical and practical learning? What were the necessary preparations, and how should the balance between motivation and guidance be kept? The learning method that project ALICE in general and the Berlin toy making workshop in particular planned to test and describe is based on the idea that toys, game and playing can be powerful tools of motivation and integration. They have a great potential to stimulate people's creativity and they do not require special knowledge and training because everybody is an expert.

Workshop meetings

Preparatory meetings and visiting kindergartens

The participants were able to express their opinions and expectations in small group meetings. On this day the participants visited the future workshop locations and had a chance to explore the toy library Ludothek with its big choice of therapeutic toys. At the end of this day it was more or less clear which of the potential participants wanted to take part in the activities on 6 workshop days over a period of 6 weeks.

Prior to the first meeting with the participants a number of results from past Creativity (Toy Design) Workshops was selected. These toys were created by toy designers and they all had some aspect that needed to be improved, many of them were unfinished or secondary working models. These toys were made of wood or textile (or both) and they were used to illustrate various approaches to toy design. The participants in the Berlin toy-making workshop presented these toys to the children in the kindergarten they visited.

One important aspect of the workshop preparation - and as a matter of fact the first situation where learning took place - were visits in two different integrational kindergartens. A group of 6 participants and two facilitators went to one kindergarten and another group on the following day to another kindergarten.

As they were watching the children play they noticed details, forms of interaction, potentials and problems in the playing value. The discussions afterwards showed that the participants had been very attentive and some already developed ideas for their toys. In the group discussions various elements from these visits to kindergartens were a recurrent theme that influenced the work of the participants in a positive and stimulating way.

The meetings

The actual meetings took place on six Mondays, starting on October 30, 2006.

At this time the participants were already familiar with the workshop locations, they had visited kindergartens and some had an idea with whom they wanted to form groups for the workshop duration.

Workshop day 1

On this day, the participants met all facilitators and workshop personnel. After an ice-breaking round where everybody had a chance to say who they were and what they expected from the workshop two experienced co-workers introduced the participants to the world of toy-making. A toy designer talked about different practical aspects of a good toy making use of the numerous examples in the shelves of the toy-library where the meeting took place. The participants learned about some of the basic aspects of good toy design and also about regulations concerning products that are made for children (glues, minimum sizes, surfaces etc.).

After that another introductory session, held by a co-worker experienced with the therapeutic uses of toy and play, focused on the social and interactional aspects of toys.

The remaining hours were spent with rounds where people could express their ideas on the toys they would like to use as an inspiration for their own designs and on the members of the group of participants they would like to work with. The forming of groups was encouraged and at the end of the day there were five groups of two to three participants with one specific object they wanted to work on.

Workshop day 2

This day was called "Ideas and projects". The participants made a number of technical drawings and

listed materials they needed for their model toys. For all participants this was a real challenge because they had never done anything like this. At the same time it was indeed a learning situation where they wanted to produce quality drawings that would be a good preparation for the upcoming workshop sessions. Some of the participants managed to finish their drawings while others sad they would use the time to the next workshop day (one week later) to come up with a specific idea.

On the workshops days 3, 4, 5 and 6 the participants developed ideas, made drawings and worked on their toy objects in a wood work and a textile work location.

Follow-up visit and observation by participants

There was one element of evaluation that had not been planned. Before the final meeting a group of workshop participants expressed their interest in a second visit of the kindergarten they had been to before the workshop started. This time they wanted to take the toy models they built and watch the same group of children play with them. For them this was a kind of test for the quality of their products but it was obvious that they were convinced of the fact that the playing value of the toys had indeed been improved. This visit was organized in the same location of the first visit. The group of children was excited when the group arrived and the photos clearly show how much they enjoyed playing with the new toys. Very specific problems had been addressed and it was obvious now that good solutions had been found.

The participants were given evaluation/observation sheets that they filled out at the end of the visit and they visibly enjoyed acting themselves as evaluators.

The meeting with the EU project partners

The day the participants met with the EU project partners they expressed a sense of pride when a small “marketplace” was organized where they explained and discussed their work like toy-making experts. They did not show the slightest sign of intimidation in the expert discussion and enjoyed the international atmosphere.

2.3. Next door to Alice – A Prison Tale

A stage performance by youth prisoners (Youth Prison, Hameln / Germany)

- Finding an appropriate way to motivate young men behind prison walls
- First steps in learning choreography, learning to rely on others, learning to be part of a group with one aim
- Movement, dance and being on stage: a group performance
- Strengthening of the prisoners' self-confidence by discernment of their own strength
- Development of a new level of relations

Our project partners in Hameln had the difficult task of testing a method of creativity with juvenile offenders in a youth prison. The problems were rather clear: little motivation to engage in learning processes, lack in physical exercise and group dynamics that render learning rather difficult. The organisers decided to involve two groups of young adults in a dance performance that would result in success if they worked together as a group. They rehearsed dancing, reading poems and decided to perform to a large audience of visitors.

Movement behind the door with “ALICE” - Contents of the project:

A wide range of different activities including but not limited to dance, Hip-hop, street, eye toy kinetic, coordination exercises, dancing theatre, tai chi ...

It's our goal to develop exercising elements in cooperation with the prisoners by playing experience.

These methods are supposed to be integrated in lessons (learning by exercising)

Goals of the project:

The prisoners are expected to

- have fun and show interest in exercising in order to develop more self-confidence and body control
- be motivated to develop the different kinds of physical activities on their own with the purpose to discover their feeling for fantasy and creativity
- include elements of physical activities in school lessons. It's aimed to create an atmosphere of learning and working, also improving a willingness to learn
- develop team spirit by playing experience

Target groups: group of juvenile prisoners in Hamlin

- teenage prisoners (aged 14 - 15 years)
- repression victims – showing a tendency of mental disability – often suffering from a long-term state of neglect – suffering from symptoms of addiction – showing a high degree of passivity
- prisoners not being able to handle their leisure time
- prisoners suffering from a lack of physical exercise
- prisoners with a wide deficit of learning problems

Conclusions

- Movement and dance are appropriate methods to motivate participants of low educational levels to become aware of their physical abilities in a different way.
- Moving helps the participants to a better physical feeling.
- They can get more self-confidence by conquering their stage fright.
- In disguise and with masks they can act out their situation.
- Acting is a good method to come to terms with conflicts and to find solutions.
- The participants learn to put themselves into other persons' places.
- A part of the methods can be used in their lessons to avoid aggression and to make learning more eventful.
- Special exercises help the participants to concentrate.

During the workshop our participants expressed this by saying: "I've never concentrated for such a long time before" and "I've never been able to listen for so long before."

An important result is the integration of movement elements in the lessons. These integrated offers have been tried and tested especially for those with an educational handicap. As a companion of such learning groups there might be the possibility of another kind of approach to the participants by shared sports activities.

Students who have experienced difficulties in learning often have the chance to recognize and show their talents and strong points in the sporting sphere.

This encourages a more personal relationship level between educationalist and participant.

2.4. Smiles, BG

People with disabilities puzzling over an exciting surprise (Sofia / Bulgaria)

- Real empowerment of a mixed group of people with disabilities
- Learning to develop toys and giving them to the children in an orphanage
- Extra motivation and lasting results

Results

A number of interesting, tangible results were achieved in the workshop. Their general description is given by the relation between toys used and their effects:

- Toys as means for social communication and emotional contacts in a form of play
- Semi-manufactured toy articles as means for working and creative activities
- Knowledge transfer about toys and plays - provoking of new learning abilities
- Toy design and prototyping as a means for: Wish for learning; self-confidence; high spirits;
- Giving the toys as presents – a form of integration and re-integration into society.

Who could profit from these experiences?

First of all, the participants. They demonstrated their abilities to solve creative problems and these abilities could eventually help them to find qualified jobs.

The project activities in Sofia led to a number of positive effects for the participants:

- The interest in the workshop increased during the workshop;
- A positive emotional adjustment to the learning and creative process was established; the participants were generating new ideas all the time.
- The participants enjoyed giving the results of their work to a group of children in an orphanage;
- Relations of friendship were established, some people became more communicative.

The TV channel *TV Zdrave* demonstrated great interest in the workshop as a tool to show to

entrepreneurs that people with disabilities do have a potential to work for some companies. Organizers of the workshop and one of the disabled people were invited to a studio of this TV for several interviews. In fact, this TV show was one important dissemination activity.

The workshop in Sofia proved in practice the idea that the toys are suitable means of socialization, integration and re-integration. Giving some information with emotional impact (provoked by the toys), leads to a reaction - the possibility to see a problem and a desire to solve it.

3. Media work: Films and participatory evaluation

- Tell the story of this workshop from your perspective
- Filming the workshops on the basis of scripts developed by the participants

Johan Leidi is an anthropologist and media specialist who lives in Sweden. He was a subcontracted specialist: the man behind the camera on the film-shooting days during the final workshop phases. The participants were encouraged to develop an idea for a little film that tells the story of their workshop. This script was then sent to Johan Leidi and he visited the workshop location to capture it on film.

"I have documented creativity workshops and collected ethnographic data for evaluation purpose through a method I call participatory scriptwriting. The main purpose with the method has been to reach an understanding of how the participants perceive their reality through synthesizing their impressions of the workshops in a short manuscript. When the workshop ended they acted according to the script while I filmed them. The workshops aimed at empowering the participants by reaching their creative potential. I will demonstrate how the ethnographic work has been carried out and the reason for choosing participatory scriptwriting as method for documentation and evaluation. Visual methods are effective since they both relate to our senses and include an imaginary audience in the social process. Participation is collaborative and reciprocal. Scriptwriting stimulates action. I argue that participatory visual methods are particularly applicable when used in settings where empowerment through emancipation is an important aspect.

The theoretical presumptions for using participatory scriptwriting as a tool for documentation and evaluation in this project is based on three notions about how to reach a closer understanding of the participants' perception of their situation.

- The first is that social interaction can best be understood by participation;
- the second is that visual methods can be used to manipulate a social situation, and
- the third is that scriptwriting is a way to synthesize participation and the use of visual methods by letting the participants produce their own ethnographic text.

Participatory scriptwriting, in other words, is a way to use the visual ethnographic process to reach knowledge of how social groups understand a situation by letting them produce their own ethnographic material.

Although the methods chosen for documentation and visual evaluation of this project came up from a situation with too limited resources to be able to do extensive ethnographic work, the methods chosen turned out to be an effective method of contributing to the overall theme of the project. In applied ethnographic research settings time and money available is often inadequate to do extensive fieldwork. By using or inventing methods that fit the short time span and the inadequate economic frames, ethnographers doing applied ethnographic research can develop methods that used in an ordinary research setting could provide the ethnographer with material sufficient to carry out a more extensive analysis of the social situation.

4. Evaluation

Halmstad

The team from Halmstad were responsible for the overall evaluation of project Alice. Their input helped the positioning of our project activities in a larger societal and academic context. The practical objectives and tools of this project have been described in a more theoretical perspective which will make it easier to apply our method and results to various other situations.

Results

The questionnaires were answered by the participants at every work-shop and the data compiled by

our partner in Chemnitz apart from the self-rating questions. These were compiled in Halmstad. The tendency we have seen is that the participants enjoyed the possibility to meet and exchange experiences. The participants seem to have a feeling of inclusion working together on a common task, which acted as a motivating force. The process of making a script about the group and its work supported a meta-reflection, which made them aware of the importance of what they were doing. This was still more accentuated by the knowledge that they were part of an EU-project, shown by the interest from the project partners. However, the workshops lasted only an intense but short period. By the end this seemed to cause a feeling of resignation as the participants realized that it was just a casual experience, which did not make any substantial change to their life situation.

The workshop evaluation by the Adult Education and Further Education department at Chemnitz University of Technology

- Presence at the workshop site - Observation and data gathering
- Analysis and reporting
- Evaluation that influences the project process

The evaluator's team from Chemnitz was present at all of the four workshops held in the ALICE project. They helped in the preparation, discussed details with the workshop organizers and handed out questionnaires to the participants. During the workshop sessions a number of observations were made that later became part of the workshop evaluation reports.

Unfortunately it will be impossible to show the impressive extent of evaluation material in this booklet. Each workshop was described in minute details and only a small portion of this documentation can be shown here. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you wish to receive more information on this subject.

A masters thesis dedicated to this work has been written at the department of Adult Education and Further Education where two students were part of the evaluators' team. In this thesis the two authors discuss the theoretical bases and practical forms of evaluation for social and socio-pedagogical projects in general and in particular the ALICE project as an example. Four pages of the evaluation report of the workshop series in Berlin will be shown here, after a description of the forms of evaluation that were employed.

5. Dissemination – a key for success

During our partner meeting in Sofia (September 2007), at the end of the workshop period organized for and with people with disabilities, we agreed to plan for a 3-day event in the summer of 2008. The idea for this event was developed in the months following the Sofia meeting and it was based on the following central elements:

Firstly, a major dissemination event was to take place in the form of a conference. We wanted to use the dissemination potential in the context of political decision-making and bring together all aspects for a best-practice example. People representing the European Commission and the National Agency for Grundtvig should be invited to present their perspective on European Cooperation projects like ours and all project partners should be given an opportunity to speak about their activities. On the occasion of the official presentation, an exhibit was prepared that portrayed our project in photos and texts and the DVD containing four documentation films were presented.

Secondly, a day of small-scale seminars and exercises for real multipliers was to be organized. This is an important aspect for the dissemination of project results to those who actually work in the field and who may profit from the results of European Cooperation and workshops that were held by the project partners.

Thirdly, a meeting of the project partners where, amongst other topics, upcoming dissemination efforts were discussed. One important aspect was the final preparation of this booklet, published with the aim of presenting a colourful and informative impression of our project work and the results we obtained.

6. Experiences we believe others can profit from - Cooperation and Sustainable Results

Non-formal adult education

Non-formal adult education is a powerful tool to motivate people to become active learners. This is especially true when people are not or have never been in a learning context they experienced as

positive. Four very different groups of people participated in the workshops organised by the ALICE project partners.

European Dimension

The partners in the ALICE project experienced the realities of European cooperation: meeting and discussing solutions with people from other European countries, working with people who live in a different culture, speak a different language and sometimes have different ways of organising their activities. For all partners this was a very positive experience. Rather unexpectedly, the European dimension also proved to be an important element in the workshop success itself. The participants in Italy, Germany and Bulgaria were not at all intimidated by the presence of foreign visitors when they presented their work. Instead, they were looking forward to meeting with the European partners. These meetings became part of the empowerment and learning processes.

Making a difference

In various instances, the partners in project ALICE have made efforts to present their activities to the political decision makers in their countries. This is not always easy as everybody knows who has tried to invite representatives of ministries and municipalities to project events.

Another important aspect of disseminating the results of our project work is the contact with multipliers, people working in similar or related fields and to whom the experience we made may be very useful.

The events organised by the project partners in June 2008 attempt to address those two aspects. Getting the message across to the media and thus reaching a larger audience has been another form of dissemination. Finally, our project booklet will help readers to have an impression of the work we have done so far.