How to Introduce Citizenship in a Special World?
Visualising Approaches to Promote Identity and Citizenship in a Special Setting

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Abstract

For many years Flemish students in the Departments of Social Sciences and Education (KATHO) have received intensive training before they practice with communities of children and adults with special needs. Trainers increasingly focus on how trainees can support children and young adults to grow in awareness of their citizenship in communities or work settings. This paper presents the vision, theoretical framework and methods of some multidisciplinary initiatives in West- Flanders. We describe a mediation model for persons with mental dysfunction that has been successfully applied in a not-for-profit organisation; and proposals for educators and teachers to take a positive and stimulating approach to persons with dyslexia empowering their growth towards Identity and Citizenship.

Introduction

For many years Flemish students from the Departments of Social Sciences and Education (KATHO) have received intensive training prior to practice in the community with children and adults with special needs. Increasingly trainers focus on how trainees can support children and young adults to grow in awareness of their citizenship in communities or work settings. In this paper we present a vision, theoretical framework and methods of some multidisciplinary initiatives in West- Flanders.

We start with the presentation of a mediation model for persons with mental dysfunction successfully applied in the non-for-profit organisation called DEN ACHTKANTER (THE OCTOGONAL CENTRE) followed by a proposal how educators and teachers can realise a positive and stimulating approach to persons with dyslexia empowering their growth towards Identity and Citizenship.

To introduce the students, especially teacher training and social sciences students, to this matter, a visual approach (with exercises) is an option. Visual data play an important role to promote pathways toward Professional Identity and Valuable Citizenship.

Finally we present some recommendations on mediation, to the educators and teachers in the field as well as those involved in training the trainees.

How to introduce citizenship in the World of Adults with <u>a mental dysfunction</u>

Presentation of a setting of good practice "vzw Den Achtkanter" (translation: the octogonal centre)

We visited this Centre, located in Kortrijk, Flanders, Belgium several times and we spent many hours discussing and exchanging ideas with the staff. We are convinced that this non-for-profit organisation is an example of good practice in coaching the clients towards valuable citizenship and professional identity.

Vision, theoretical framework, professional relationship, professional methods and visible results are innovative in their application and this since ten years. Reason enough to present this organisation and expose to a larger audience in education and in the professional field, within our country and abroad.

The Centre is recognised and subsidised by the Flemish Government through The Flemish Fund for Social Integration of Persons with Special Needs.

Den Achtkanter wants to offer opportunities to adults with mental or cognitive deficiencies and possibly concomitant psychological troubles in order for them to shape and lead their lives on their own. Drawing on the unconditional belief in the capacities of these adults, we create an atmosphere that is most stimulating for self-fulfilment and full-size citizenship in an ambiance of equal dignity.

Den Achtkanter aims at quality of life: that is why it supports its clients – starting from a tailor-made care – with regard to working, living, leisure and interpersonal contacts. Here, it places at the centre of all activities, the promotion of independence, along with the clients' wishes, desires and dreams. The Centre stimulates the clients to actively participating in society and supports them at acquiring the skills needed to adapt themselves to an increasingly exacting society.

Vzw Den Achtkanter offers support to:

Adults with mental dysfunction
These adults are not in the possibility to work in a sheltered workingplace, due to the level of dysfunction. But they are able to learn a whole range of skills necessary for the integration in society. Support is offered in relation to their needs, wishes and possibilities.

Adults with mental dysfunction and accompanying psychopathogical problems
Persons with a stabilised psychiatric or psychological problem and not dependent on a specialised setting can receive support for all aspects of life: living, working, enjoying leisure time and relations.

Adults with an after-birth brain Injury
The injury is the result of an accident or illness. The adults in this organisation can no longer work regularly and need very often support in leading their lives. The consequences of brain injury result mainly in cognitive problems like problems with

memory, concentration, orientation and learning. The target for this group is to help the clients to find a new balance in life. Available services are cognitive training, training of practical skills, psychosocial support, communication skills training, physical and movement training, support in leisure time in the house or in society, tailor made working activity, residential or non-residential support in leading their lives.

The organisation offers a wide range of services from daily activities, working, enjoying leisure time to even relations. 'Den Achtkanter' presents itself to the clients with these words:

'Your wish! What do you want for yourself? Your wishes, your dreams for leading your life, for working and for your leisure time: That's what we are at!'

- *The Day activities/Work activities have different aspects:*

The workshop programme focuses on 'developing a professional identity;

integration projects focus on working within the society and developing social contacts in the shop 'Het andere geschenk' (in translation: the other gift) and 'De hond in 't kegelspel'(in translation: the dog in the game of skittles);

Constant self-development can be reached by training;

'A la carte': full-time or part-time, always tailor-made;

for everybody: geared at supporting the individual needs

- *Non-residential sheltered living and coaching*

This programme focus   on independency*;* non-residential living-coaching by appointment; individual support offered by the *c*oach on household budget, leisure time, social contacts; support in own house, living in green surroundings close to the day-centre or living downtown

- *Residential living and coaching*

This programme offers continuous support and feeling 'at home' in a home, situated in a community, a village or a city, where everybody can remain him/herself with respect to one's own privacy. Feeling at home means for the client: Shaping your own home, sharing life with others, hominess, the room to yourself. Support is also given where assistance is necessary, permanently when needed with as much freedom as the client can cope with.

- *Club 3*

This programme offers activities for elderly and less active dwellers offering the possibility to reach elderly age with human respect, rest at your own rhythm and tailor-made participation in the society, all of which guarantees   a nice and meaningful 'old day'.

- *Short residential living*

Temporary support in case of illness, holidays, crisis,..; or as bridge to (independent) living.

- *Outreach project: Folk-Play Academy 'De Hond in het Kegelspel'*

This Academy, open for the public, is a joined cooperation between two organisations: 'Den Achtkanter' for persons with mental dysfunction and the non-for-profit organisation 'De Bolster' (translation: a shell, a husk) for persons with psychosocial problems.

In a cafeteria with a unique collection of 30 old traditional Flemish games, the clients of both organisations have a unique opportunity to work as valuable professional workers. They offer a good service and explanations about the games and guarantee also a unique experience, for example for a child's birthday party, a visit of a social-cultural group , or an individual visit.

- *Outreach Project: Shop: Het Andere Geschenk'*

This is a real shop where a wide range of artisanal, high quality products, produced by persons with mental dysfunction, are sold to the public. Through this project a positive self-image and a professional identity can be stimulated, especially as to the motivation towards independency. This project is a real challenge for all stakeholders in creating and realising new products and in investing the income created by the sales, in new qualitative forms of guidance and support. Interrelations' skills can very well be trained under supervision of volunteers.

The model of valuable citizenship

The model of valuable citizenship is now the most important paradigm within the settings for persons with mental dysfunction. The objectives are their fully participation in the society and optimalisation of their contentment and well-being. This model is based on four pillars: quality of life, emancipation, support and coaching and empowerment. (Van Gennep, 1997).

'Quality of life' refers to the possibility of the person to organise and guide his life on all areas. The focus is oriented on the implementation of 'normality' and complementary specific support. The quality of life determines the physical, psychological and functional well-being and life-enjoying of the client.

'Emancipation' focus on optimalisation of the client's development and his equal position within the society.

'Support' focus on the implementation of methods and strategies stimulating the development, functioning, wellbeing and the rights of the client. These objectives can be reached by offering support in different ways by the social network and additionally by the professionals and services. The individual and flexible support of the client is a real need, requiring a demand-based approach.

In 'Empowerment' the aspects of quality of life, emancipation and support are integrated. 'Empowerment' strengthens the real possibilities of the client, the belief in his/her capabilities and offers power and energy to become conscious of his/her own situation and equal rights, to be assertive, to communicate and debate, to participate, to live, to work and to spend free time together with others, to move within the broad society.

This model of valuable citizenship influences the objective of support, the applying methods and the images of persons with dysfunctions as equal citizens in their own essence, feeling and behaviour.

Vision on support by mediation - a final objective

The belief in the possibilities of persons with a mental dysfunction is unconditional. They have the possibility to learn practical, functional, social and cognitive skills, to take initiative and responsibility; to be flexible, to solve problems on their own, to become independent and develop a positive self-image. Their level of functioning is mainly determined by the attitude of their environment. Too often a belief in their limits and incompetences result in a learned pattern of dependent behaviour, insufficient belief in their possibilities and waiting for the assistance of others and professional help.

'Mediation' is mainly a professional communication style, helping the individual to develop and acquire cognitive skills.(Feuerstein,1988;Haywood, 1992). Each professional interaction is characterized by necessary qualities like intentionality and reciprocity, transcendency (generalization and transfer) and meaningfulness (motivation). A basic characteristic is the 'process-orientation'. The individual receives questions about the way of working and problem-solving,…

Also, the continuous orientation on generalisation and transfer are typical.

It must be clear that the final target of support by mediation is 'a high level of independency' in as normal as possible daily life, work and free time environmental conditions. This can be translated in independent planning, action, evaluation and self-regulation of work and tasks without external guidance and counselling and the independent solving of accompanying problems. Participation in and respect of the society improves health, physical, psychological and functional well-being.

Method and practical implications

The Mediated Learning Experience Theory (MLE) (Feuerstein, 1988) defines two ways of learning by which the individual is adapting to and/or influencing the environment.

The first one is the direct learning experience: the individual is assimilating stimuli (S = stimuli) of the environment and adapting or accommodating (R = reaction) without any intentional direct help of a third person.

In the mediated learning experience a human mediator interferes and changes the stimuli intentionally, so that assimilation- and adaptation processes are facilitated and become more effective. There is a higher chance that the individual reacts and adapts more

conveniently. The experiences of the individual are modulated by the mediating intervention of a third person, the mentor or coach.

This method has some practical implications:

Working on the cognitive structure: the mediator explains the objectives, planning and content of each activity before it starts. It is proved that this is reducing impulsivity. At the end of the activity there is always an evaluation of the process. The person responds to questions related to the way of working, the problem-solving, transfer possibilities etc.

Process approach of failures: errors are inevitable. Errors are used to discover the reasons and to learn how to avoid them in future.

Fifteen levels of problem-solving (PS x15): the mentor can use a checklist to stimulate the problem-solving skills on developing in an oriented way:

solving the problem for the client (level 1),

solving a (partial) task together with the client (level 2),

modelling (level 3),

explaining how to do it (level 4),

indicating or mentioning a (single) correct solution (level 5),

indicating or mentioning several possible and correct alternative solutions (level 6),

mentioning solutions that need further examination (level 7),

inviting intentional thinking (level 8),

clarifying the problem by indicating the cause of the problem (level 9),

clearing up the problem by probing for the cause of the problem (level 10),

describing the problem (level 11),

stimulating to check after the execution (level 12),

stimulating to check during the execution-monitoring (level 13),

stimulating to check 'before' the execution (level 14),

reflection (level 15).

Cognitive modelling: It is important that mentors and educators are aware they play continuously an important role as model. Clients observe their own cognitive style, way of problem-solving of tasks and handling responsibilities.

Support and mentorship, a guarantee for demand-based care

Within the philosophy of valuable citizenship the needs, demands, questions and needs of the individual and his/her social network are the key to develop a life plan and roadmap for this person. The creation of an intentional , realistic and changeable Personal Life Developing Plan is the result of collaboration with and dialogue between the person him/herself, his/her network and the mentor, who is the support co-ordinator.

The mentor defends the rights, wishes and duties of the person. Mentor and client have a very close and respectful relationship, exploring the needs and looking for the answer. The mentor handles as a personal coach creating chances to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills by observing and training in order to realise his/her life plan. The mentor also tries to change in a parallel way the environmental conditions, and where possible, to reduce the negative consequences of the dysfunction.

The mentor controls and co-ordinates the evolution, the effectiveness of the chosen direction and the availability and effectiveness of human and technical support, within the limits of moral, legal, social acceptance and desirability.

There is a big variety in possible support. Mediation can be used in different situations like assistance to build up and maintain friendly relationships, assistance in case of health problems, assistance in case of problems of living and work, support in financial planning and budget, receiving access to social services and how to use them, assistance in case of behaviour problems.

Four levels of mentorship and support can be distinguished: now and then; limited; extended and very extended and comprehensive. Support may never be ended. Even when a person leaves the professional care service he can always return.

Table 1. Levels of mentorship and support

Intensity	Regularity	Time	Environment
Now and then	No	Short	One
Limited	Yes	Short	One
Extended	Yes	Long	Some
Very extended/comprehensive	Yes	Long	All

Apart from the mentor and other professional coaches support is offered in first instance by the social network: parents, family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and not unimportant volunteers! Technical support in the life and work situation can be offered as well.

Professional identity

'I want a real profession,…I like to be productive…

The social position of somebody determines his/her respect and appreciation.

Offering work possibilities and day activities to a person with mental dysfunction has to be tailor-made, based on the wishes and motivation of the person on the one hand and his/her level of functioning. These work activities are very important for the person's feeling of competence and identification within a professional role. By executing social relevant and honourable tasks and by being given the opportunity to realise a respected professional position, the person can develop and acquire a professional identity. Respectful work can for example be offered in a mini-enterprise, a gallery, a bakery, a Folk Play Academy with cafeteria open for the public, a shop, working partially in the regular working market,…

Additionally the person's needs for self development by training, education, leisure or sport activities can be explored in order to offer an adapted program.

How to introduce citizenship in the World of persons with Dyslexia

Schalock (1989) identified the difference between the subjective social status (SSS) and the objective social status (OSS). The SSS is the way in which I think people see me (I think they perceive me as an endearing guy). The OSS is the way in which people really perceive me (some don't think me congenial). People act according their SSS. A big gap between the SSS and the OSS can cause a problem. If you think you are smart and you behave that way (although in reality you are absolutely not smart), people will think you are laughable.

This leads to tensions, unbalanced behavior and a dented self-image. The people in the case study thought initially they were stupid. They behaved also in that way. They used a trick to avoid being perceived as stupid. Later on some label themselves as competent. And they behave also in that way!

On hearing the diagnosis of "dyslexia" a child can face a crisis moment altering dramatically the building up of his identity. Also his relations towards his surroundings can be altered. Some people feel their world collapse and they are out of balance.

Marinus van den Berg (2006) distinguishes four domains which have to be in balance for evolving into a harmonious being.

A first domain is that of the **intimacy** in relation to my body, to the others (parents, family, friends). Intimacy is both the ability and the choice to be close, loving and vulnerable. Intimacy requires identity development. You have to know yourself and your inner self in order to share yourself with another. Knowing yourself makes it possible to stand for yourself. Learning disabilities disturb the pattern of friendships and can provoke pestering or harassment. Intimacy expresses itself in emotions that can or cannot be vented. When emotions are bottled up, extra psychic problems can surface.

When youngsters are growing up in intimacy and tenderness and are at the same time confronted with a learning disability, this can lead to instability. It happens that they get

so fixed on their learning disability that they put a lot of energy in trying to conceal it. This leads to locking up and loneliness. It is of paramount importance that these youngsters know that they can formulate a request for guidance.

It is also essential that the school environment provides "oases" and makes staff free of classes to be an anchor figure. The problem gets recognition when one tries to offer solutions in a planned manner and when there is no taboo or social prohibition about the problematic nature of certain behaviors.

A second domain is **labour /work.** Paid or unpaid work (as a volunteer) can give a purpose in life. Studying and learning can also be considered as a kind of work. School progress can be halted by learning disabilities. It is important to check if the children with dyslexia are able to understand the instructions to a given assignment. It is important to coach them (through staff or software) to fulfill the given tasks. This way the children develop enough strength to build resilience to path themselves into the labour market. It is indeed possible to have special exam classes with pc's and reading software and where remedial moments can be organized to optimalize the competences of the youngsters.

A third domain is that of **recreation/leisure** or relaxation. Here we notice also that dyslectic youngsters experience the need to feel unconstrained in one or the other free space.

By means of IPod or mp3 dyslectic pupils download 'listening books' originally meant for people with visual disability. This new possibility gives them an entrance to the world of literacy. Remarkable even is that dyslectic pupils are involved in the world of theatre, musicals and choirs. Especially schools can avoid that their dyslectic students are not locked into one approach. Therefore, remedial teachers are able to stimulate and to bring in the picture programs that are best suited to the students' individual needs and the local school or community contexts (Ghesquière 2005).

The fourth domain is that of **values and norms.** At the level of ethical growth towards human 'meaningfulness', pupils and adults with disabilities have no need of normative models to copy or slavishly imitate, but of 'terrific' modes of experience that can give them the 'taste' for non-violent tenderness and respectful fellowship with each other's lives, for trust-inspiring and authentic speech. To live an ethical life is never done alone. Only a shared ethical life is a fruitful ethical life. Young people with disabilities should be able to develop their own views that can be a part of their identity. They are dialogical beings. The growth towards a personal and formed conscience can only happen in and through a content-wise confrontation with the views of others. Educators and teachers are expected to let their own approach and view be questioned and challenged by young people, for they also have to 'learn' from others. So that this reciprocal learning could be possible, it is important that what the participants witness should not be too emotional nor personal and too intimately loaded, but must have sufficient objectivity and content-wise resilience by means of which an open dialogue is possible and young people receive sufficient freedom and distance in order to formulate and form their own judgement and insights of conscience. (Burggraeve 2002).

The use of visual data in the promotion of pats to Professional Identity and Valuable Citizenship

Using visual data in constructing a greater community awareness, is one of the main aims to support valuable citizenship with people with disabilities at local community levels. Not only educators and teachers must express their approaches but also the pupils and the adults with disabilities receive these days   a forum to explain their problems, wishes and expertise.

Focus with the lens of the camera on the community encourages and empowers the community and gives self esteem to the individuals. The products are built on the knowledge of the members through a whole approach from the bottom-up. Indicators and issues of professional identity that contribute to special needs must become a household topic. We need to do more to awake the empathy and empowerment that help counter-act cultures of ignorance. The selected visual data are not only illustrations of the policy but will inform people within the wider community more about how the target groups think about the support and their own design of their world of work and study.

This participatory approach also generates contextualizing or storytelling. Both videos give a voice to the individual and collective experience. People themselves describe the meaning of the images during their own approach. To bring pupils in action in the picture was one of the targets. ' Schools and NGO's need to sketch on people's own knowledge, to build capacity through participation at local level, by supporting local data to find ways to solve problems, at ground levels, through better listening, empowering local participation.

The maker of the video essay wanted to build broader educational awareness around life-style issues, to increase wider capacity around coping with people/families caught up in cycles of misunderstanding. The reactions in the video are based on 3 questions: what is my problem? How is it dealt with at school or in a local community? How successful has been my own approach and involvement up till now? Pupils get aware that their individual problems are supported by the staff of teachers and the school vision.

Such an approach avoids the distortion of fitting data into a predetermined paradigm; through it we hear and understand how people with special needs give meaning themselves, or construct what matters to them.

The two productions are not simply the arranging of information around, but asks people to reflect on their own community portraits and voices. It is a method that enables people to define themselves and others, including policy makers.

All the participants in the video may codify issues when the concerns targeted for action are pragmatic, immediate, and concrete. This is the most direct application of the visual approach. The participants on the videos have also codified themes and patterns, or developed step by step views that were grounded on data.

Recommendations

- The Mediation Model is an important approach to realise professional identity and valuable citizenship focusing on these headlines:

    o Belief in Basic Trust as primary condition to quality of life in dialogue with the environment and the society

    o Clarification of the needs of the clients by empathy, listening, and if necessary specialised assessment

    o Comprehension or integrated understanding of the needs and translation in a demand based support,e.g. coaching and mediation

    o Motivational Coaching as a way to develop problem solving skills

    o Positive Rewarding and unconditional belief in the possibilities of each person

- Good practices in the field can be used to collect **visual** data (daily life, interviews of persons, professionals, local actors, visitors, regular and exchange students, own and exchange teaching staff members) and develop visual didactical methods to promote valuable citizenship.

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