Hungarian Report on focus group meeting 3

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Focus group meeting: 8-9 February 2012, Budapest
III. Group

Background information:

As the primary school we negotiated originally decided in the last minute not to take part in the program we approached a school run by a Foundation, called Alternative Secondary Grammar School in Economics. There are children from age 12 up to 19 (7-12 grade), a well-known, prestigious school, more open and liberal, democratic than most mainstream schools. They also run vocational courses for young people after their final examination and for other young adults.

The children participating in the group were very open and active, there were much more applicants than places in the group. Teachers selected children based on their other school obligations (e.g. preparation for tests). The selection was taking into consideration: the required age, sex and children from different backgrounds, not only from „good families”. Due to a flu epidemic, there were fewer boys than girls at the meeting.

Venue:

The meeting was held at the library of the school, children sitting at tables and forming smaller rounds during the discussions in groups.

Alternativ Közgazdasági Gimnázium

Budapest, 1031, Raktár utca 1.

Dates of the consultation:

8-9 February 2012

Basic data on the group:

- Participating children: 10 persons
- Age: 5-5 - 13 – 14 years old
- 7 girls and 3 boys
- 6 persons are living in Budapest, 6 in the suburbs around Budapest or neighbouring towns
- No vulnerable child in any means
Preparation of children:

- The participants in the group were asked by the teachers in the school, many children wanted to participate but as they are working in „epocha” system, writing tests following an intensive period of studying a given part of the materials, only those were allowed to attend who had no obligations or had been after it.
- They were told about the aim and format of the meeting, the facilitators did not meet them prior the program.
- In the school they have got human rights education but so far child rights have not been part of it interestingly.

I. Program/Methodology

Program:

1. day

8.15-9.00 Welcome, Introduction : learning each others’ names, introductory games by using the Discover Europe (EU materials), Make a step forward!. Demonstrating differences, enaqualities and discussing it

9.00-9.45 Background information, rules and framework, child friendly information on the UN CRC

9.45 -10.15 Break
10.15-10.45 Discussion on child rights
10.45-12.00 Playing with the child rights cards
12.00-13.00 Lunch
13.00-13.30 Choosing two rights for further exploration
13.30-15.00 Discussion on the first two rights (Focus)
15.00-15.20 Break
15.00-16.30 Evaluation of the day

2. day

8.15-8.45 Welcome back, looking back to the first day
8.45-10.00 Choosing two rights for further discussion
10.10.20 Break
10.20-12.00 Discussion on the two rights (Focus)
12.00-13.00 Lunch
13.00-14.30   Evaluation of the two days, closing

Only facilitators needed to learn children’s names as they knew each other well.

Main conclusion:

- Participating children were very motivated, open and they were not only interested in the topic, but also wanted to learn about each other, and listening to the others’ points. This was very different from the two other groups, where children wanted more „private time” and could not concentrate on each other.
- In this group there were many positive feedbacks provided to each other, again very different from the other two groups.
- Here not only rights but the dualism of rights and responsibilities were also mentioned. When looking at the negative effects of the meeting, they were mentioning the missed obligations to be prepared for the tests.
- They had high expectations and at the end of the day, these were fulfilled, the group members were satisfied.
- Following the introductory, preparatory games and exercises have become very relaxed and committed, shared their vision, had a good vocabulary to express themselves.
- „There are no differences between two children“. „I think it does not make any difference what nationality a child has got, whether it is boy or girl”, „I mean children are equal”. „One does not worth more than the other” (It is not quite true though that they are not facing difficulties concerning this issue as there is a boy, who’s parents are from Russia, working in Hungary, who speaks perfect Hungarian but feels ashamed not be native and often asked, what kind of name has he got. He changed his name to sound Hungarian)
- „When it comes to children and the problems related to them, it would be essential to sit down with them and ask them, why is this problem, where from is it originating, why do they feel the way they feel. It should happen together with the parents, as in this case parents could also learn from the discussion”
- „As far as I see childrens’ rights are hard to be implemented as they are „only” child rights”
- „Adults are not interested in the opinion of children as they have got the same experiences in their childhood.” „Often their opinion is also refused, it is not surprising”, „Many adults do not understand why would it be relevant, asking children about their opinion”
• “It is not important to many parents to raise them independent, having their own opinion as they themsevles have not experienced it as an added value in their own carrier”

• They could clearly describe the need for implementing the chosen child rights, and their content, just like the consequences if they are not implemented.

• Often their examples originated from books, films showing that children from this group have a safe life, with much more resources to gather information available but also being capable paying attention to outside, to others, gathering information and syntatising it.

• It was exceptional how strong the group dynamic was, they could pay attention to each other without interruting the others, patient enough to wait, being calm.

• Their capacities to give a more abstract, general explanation or forming their opinion for the policy and decision makers was lower than expected.

3. The four chosen child rights?
   a. All children are equal
   b. Children have right to their identity, name, ethnic background and family
   c. Children have rights to be listened to and express their views
   d. Children should not be abused

It seemed to be obvious and not questioned in any way that all children – all people, human beings – are equal at least in principle and should be treated accordingly. It was chosen as a basis for all other discussion.

The right to identity, name, ethnic background and family was important as in this school children are coming mostly from families where politics and freedom of speech, tolerance is an issue, they are taking quite active part in forming their own opinion and even the teachers are very outspoken in these areas. As a consequence of the structure and methodology of teaching, children learn easily the interrelation between history and the current social, political, economic situation. Due to the very harsh political situation and the divided society in Hungary for the time being children have characteristic standpoint on issues concerning human rights and the ways people can exercise their rights in different areas of life. They learn about inequality, special vulnerable groups who are facing discrimination and do not agree with it, however do not think that is an easy task to be tackled and resolved.

The right to be listened to and expressing their views is a natural but very important right for the group members. Both in the family and at school they experience controversy. On the one hand they are often asked, but not always listened to carefully, sometimes feel that it is more formal than substantial. Some experience that the adults (e.g. parents) have got bad experiences or got into trouble by telling their views and express feelings.
Children found it quite natural that some parents have not got open ears, and it is hard to be asked and taken seriously in some instances.

Child abuse and the prevention of it was an important issue for all children, who are aware of the different forms of abuse, and experience mostly verbal abuse, some are hit at home but not happy to talk about it. Most of the parents are using verbal aggression, and some children are afraid of telling certain stories, happenings to their parents. Despite of the openness and good communication some children mentioned that teachers are teasing them often, that can be humiliated but according to others it is rather a joke than a serious matter.

Children’s needs concerning the four chosen rights

- Members of the group were confident and self assured about their own rights and the proper implementation of it.
- Parents had a much bigger and more articulated role as in the other two groups. In the other two groups parents/carers, teachers were mostly seen as adults restricting rights and blocking or prohibiting certain type of activities, parents were hardly mentioned here in this context. The partnership seemed to be natural and the everyday experience among the group members.
- Child abuse however was also mentioned in this group, both child abuse and partner abuse cases, but not from their own family. They had information on neighbours, friends' families but not at home.

5. Suggestions concerning policies or interventions in relation to child rights

They mentioned the media – primarily television – where much more should be talked about child rights, and special programs, like ours, when they could discuss these issues.

6. Evaluation results

Children enjoyed the meeting and have very good memories of it. They have thought of the topics discussed and there were some ongoing debates on rights and partnership with parents or their authority. As they are teenagers there are many debated and arguments at home on free time activities, pocket money, evening programs etc. That are raising special issues on rights. It is also questioned whether they are „children“ or not, some feel that it is not a fair category used, despite of their age and their willingness to enjoy more independence and freedom. Their age group is on the edge of parents’ close supervision and growing number of decisions made by themselves, the activities and hours spent together and away from home are growing just like the discussions and tension around the rules and restrictions. It is an optimal time to talk much more about rights, opportunities but also limits and need to understand the importance of sharing information with parents, adults not only with peers.