



Tools4Inclusion

Focus Groups

About inclusion

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Partnership

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Contributors

All partners contributed with local/national consultation and implementation of focus groups.

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Introduction

1. Overview

The objective of the current task under WP4 is to investigate the knowledge and attitudes of professionals regarding inclusion and inclusive educational practices in the three partner countries. We will summarize and interpret the qualitative data gathered through focus groups conducted by the three partner organizations, with a particular emphasis on identifying and highlighting best practices. Additionally, we aim to contribute to the refinement of training materials and toolkits by incorporating the perspectives of practitioners. Our long-term goal is to develop training and intervention resources that are practical and can be easily integrated into everyday practice.

1.1 Research questions

- ◆ **How can inclusiveness be defined when training youth from diverse socioeconomical backgrounds?**
- ◆ **What best practices can be gathered and implemented in training material?**

1.2 Method

Three focus group interviews have been conducted in three different countries: Portugal, Malta and Hungary. Each discussion was led by a skilled member from one of the partner organizations (Bagazs, Aproximar, Global) using predefined open-ended questions. The moderators were instructed to remain neutral, ensure balanced participation, encourage discussion, and keep the conversation focused. In each group, the discussions were held in the participants' native languages. The interviews were conducted online with both camera and audio connections among the participants. Records and transcriptions of the sessions were also made for further analysis.

1.3 Participants

A total of 21 people participated in the focus groups. The age range of the participants was between 30 and 65 years, with a mean age of 43.5 years. The participants were primarily female. For detailed information, please refer to Table 1. The professions of the participants were also diverse; however, they were primarily teachers and psychologists. 10 of the participants work at a public school, 4 at a private school, and 8 at a nonprofit organization.

Table 1

Partner	Female	Male
Bagazs	5	0
Aproximar	8	2
Global	2	4



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Results

2. Results

2.1. Definition of inclusiveness

1. **Appreciating Differences:** It is essential not only to accept the differences among participants but also to genuinely appreciate and celebrate these differences. Understanding that diverse perspectives enrich discussions and enhance learning experiences can foster a more inclusive environment. By valuing the unique backgrounds and viewpoints of each individual, we can create a culture of respect and collaboration.
2. **Involvement of Experienced Trainers:** The engagement of trainers with relevant experience is critical to the success of any program or initiative. These trainers bring valuable insights and expertise that are vital for effective facilitation. Their ability to navigate complex dynamics and address the specific needs of participants can significantly enhance the learning experience, ensuring that the training is both impactful and meaningful.
3. **Importance of Community Representation:** Representation of the community within focus groups or training sessions is of paramount importance. It ensures that the voices of diverse community members are heard and considered in the decision-making process. By including representatives from various demographic backgrounds, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the community's needs and challenges, ultimately leading to more effective solutions.
4. **Understanding Integration vs. Inclusion:** It is crucial to recognize that integration does not equate to inclusion. While integrating individuals into a group is important, true inclusion requires deliberate efforts to ensure that all participants have equal access to resources, opportunities, and support. This can be achieved by adapting techniques and approaches to meet the diverse needs of a heterogeneous group. By making these adjustments, we can create an environment where everyone feels valued, supported, and empowered to contribute.

2.2. Limiting factors

1. **Lack of Legal Frameworks, Regulations, and Clear Guidelines:** A significant challenge in many educational and social contexts is the absence of comprehensive legal frameworks, regulations, and clear guidelines to govern practices. Without these foundational structures, it becomes difficult to ensure accountability and consistency in implementation. This lack of guidance may lead to confusion among educators and organizations regarding their roles and responsibilities, ultimately hindering the effectiveness of programs designed to support diverse populations.
2. **Insufficient Effort in the Educational System:** There is often a noticeable lack of effort within the educational system to address the needs of all students, particularly those from marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds. This can manifest in inadequate curriculum design, insufficient training for educators on diversity and inclusion, and a general failure to adapt teaching methods to engage all learners effectively. By failing to prioritize these crucial aspects, the educational system risks perpetuating inequities and limiting the potential of all students to thrive academically.
3. **Lack of Financial and Human Resources:** The scarcity of both financial and human resources poses a substantial barrier to the effective implementation of programs aimed at fostering diversity and inclusion. Insufficient funding can restrict access to necessary materials, training, and support services, while a lack of qualified personnel can hinder the delivery of quality education and programming. Addressing these resource gaps is essential for creating an equitable environment that supports the diverse needs of all participants.
4. **Self-Exclusion and Closeness on Both Sides:** Self-exclusion is a critical issue that can arise in situations where individuals or groups feel disconnected from the opportunities available to them. This can occur due to perceived barriers or negative past experiences, leading to a reluctance to engage. Additionally, the closeness or insularity of both the marginalized community and the dominant group can exacerbate this issue, creating a cycle of misunderstanding and lack of collaboration. Breaking down these barriers requires concerted efforts to foster open dialogue, build trust, and promote genuine engagement between all parties involved.

2.3. Good Practices

1. **Focusing on Similarities to Build Trust:** Emphasizing the commonalities among participants rather than their differences can be a powerful strategy for building trust and fostering a sense of community. By recognizing shared experiences, values, and goals, facilitators can create an inclusive environment that encourages collaboration and open dialogue. This focus on similarity helps to establish rapport and reduces barriers, making it easier for individuals to connect with one another and engage in meaningful interactions.
2. **“Put the Person at the Center”:** A participant-centered approach is essential for effective engagement and support. This means actively getting to know our participants at a personal level, understanding their unique backgrounds, challenges, and aspirations. By meeting their individual needs and providing tailored support, we can empower participants to thrive and contribute fully to the group. This personalized approach demonstrates respect and commitment, which can further enhance trust and collaboration.
3. **Utilizing Existing Resources:** Leveraging existing resources is crucial for maximizing impact and sustainability. Instead of reinventing the wheel, organizations should identify and make use of current assets, whether they are materials, expertise, or community connections. By harnessing these resources, programs can reduce costs, increase efficiency, and enhance their overall effectiveness. Collaboration with local organizations and stakeholders can also lead to enriched learning experiences for participants.
4. **Making Programs Feasible and Adaptable:** It is vital to design programs that are both feasible and adaptable to changing needs. Flexibility allows for adjustments to be made in response to participant feedback and emerging trends, ensuring that the program remains relevant and effective. By providing a framework that can be tailored to different contexts and individual preferences, facilitators can enhance engagement and facilitate better outcomes for all involved.
5. **Implementing Evaluation Processes:** Establishing robust evaluation processes is essential for assessing the effectiveness of programs and initiatives. Regular evaluation allows for the identification of strengths and areas for improvement, facilitating continuous growth and development. By using both qualitative and quantitative methods, stakeholders can gain

valuable insights into participant experiences and outcomes, leading to informed decision-making and enhanced program quality.

6. **Raising Awareness Among Decision-Makers:** Effectively raising awareness among decision-makers is crucial for driving change and securing necessary support for diversity and inclusion initiatives. Engaging with key stakeholders through advocacy, presentations, and discussions can highlight the importance of these efforts and their benefits to the community. By presenting compelling data and real-life stories that illustrate the impact of inclusive practices, we can foster a greater understanding and commitment among decision-makers.



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