



“Kókay Lányi Marietta – Principal of Gyermekek Háza – in Budapest, Hungary. This interview and the photos are based on a visit there in November 2008. It was a great school. It was an inclusive school. We are excited to share this example of leadership and excellence with you as we start a new year – 2009. Thanks to Marietta, her colleagues and the children at the school for their fine example of inclusion in action.”

See Below for Interview.

Name: **Ms Kókay Lányi Marietta**

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Short Bio: **Kókay Lányi Marietta**



She is the founder of the School since 1991-92. From 1994 to present she is the pedagogical director. The school is located in Budapest, Hungary and has developed 'best practices' for inclusive education in the country. She is co-author of a book on good inclusive teaching which is widely used in Hungary.

She studied at the Primary Teacher Training College in Budapest (1983) and at the University of ELTE (1988)

Marietta and a team from her school took part in an Inclusion Europe seminar on inclusive education held in Graz, Austria in April 2008.

The Questions: 1. What makes your school inclusive”?

In our school the students are in the centre of the education instead of the curriculum. That makes our school inclusive. So, the different kinds of students and their abilities determine the working of our school not the standard curriculum. We try to get acquainted with our students, their social milieu and to work up personal relationships. Every day we start with a conversation sitting in a ring when students can tell about themselves.

• Tell us more

We've made a differential learning environment. Our teaching methods are not standardized so they ensure diverse learning ways. Our students can go on slowly or rapidly in the acquirement of knowledge and key skills.

We also differ the curriculum into three levels of complexity. We work with cards and workbooks that contain the knowledge in three levels. Our evaluation in school is a personal system containing the different

kinds of levels. Also a number of teachers trained to work with handicapped children work in our school.

2. What do you do as the principal to make inclusion work in your school?

When we decided that the "inclusion" would take place in our school (it was in 1993), my colleagues and I made a pedagogical program wherein we drafted what we should have to do so that the inclusion would work well in our school. All of us keep in view these establishment of principles that bind over every teacher.

- We learn a lot from each other, for example we can take part in each other's lessons and that helps us. • We teach and also study the differential learning methods in continuing professional educations.
- The beginners (teachers) can choose a colleague who helps them in the preparation for the lessons. • We regularly hold teacher's meetings where we talk about educational situations. These things are very important.
- The responsibility of the Principal is that she can guide the teaching staff in a way that decisions can be made taking regard to the opinion of teachers and colleagues. • We also take the parents into the life of our school by organising programs and open lessons.

3. What helped prepare you to be an effective principal of an "inclusive school"?

Everyday practise helped me to be an effective principal. I had to learn through co- operation with my colleagues. I had to experience that only those decisions could be effective which were made by the whole teaching staff together. However I also have to know when I need to stand for the main aims of the school and not letting them to be damaged.

Beside the leading post I also teach. So, I am not removed from the world of the classroom and I can help my colleagues in practice if they need it. **"Together, for one another!"** – This is our shibboleth.

4. Is inclusion good for your students?

Inclusion is good for every student. Especially for the handicapped children who are not teared away from their everyday environment. They can attend school near by their homes. The medium of healthy (typical) students is natural for them as well as in the adult world.

Healthy children can experience that handicapped classmates are the same like them, only they have other possibilities in some aspects. But then again isn't this true for every single one of us? Everybody has stronger and weaker areas of abilities and that may be more salient for the handicapped children. That's all. This is natural for children. We only have to help them to keep it like this.

5. What do parents think about inclusion?

At first parents were probably afraid of inclusion. The reason for this is that the handicapped children were separated in special schools in Hungary until 1993. So, inclusion was unknown for the parents. We invited them to the school and show them how the healthy (typical) and the handicapped children can learn together and how the teachers of handicapped children help the work.

We organise a lot of activities that parents can attend. In this way they have a share in our everyday life. We often have talks about educational situations and the advantages of inclusion with parents. A number of parents bring their children to the **Gyermekek Háza** especially for the inclusion because they can see the positive side of that.

6. How do teachers manage the challenges of inclusion?

Teachers had to change a lot of things in their practice. They apply the differential teaching methods and cooperative learning instead of "frontal teaching". In this manner they can go by the diversity of their students and by the idiosyncrasy (*specific individual needs*) of handicapped children.

They had to acquire skill to cooperate with each other and with the teachers of handicapped children who came into the school. A complete paradigm shift in their minds was needed.

7. How do you use Cooperative Learning in your school? Does it help inclusion work?

We often apply Cooperative Learning in the Gyermekek Háza. In situations of cooperative learning the emphasis is on cooperation, not competition. Children experience that they can

easier do the exercises together, they can count on each other and everybody is a valuable member of the group. Teachers have to supervise the process of getting every group member a fitting role, however the group itself does the casting. There are many different

roles e.g: "time-monitor", "chief of silence", "spokesman", "writer". It is important for the students to experience that they can depend on each other and they have mutual responsibility. During the cooperative learning students work in mixed groups. In this way handicapped or talented children can study together. Cooperative Learning is a good component of the differential learning.

8. What is the toughest thing about leading an inclusive school?

Leading an inclusive school is not so tough.

The principal has to pay particular attention that every colleague (teacher) should have similar thinking about children, learning and inclusion. That's why it is important to carefully select the right people into the staff and provide them appropriate training before they start teaching. Whenever students, parents or teachers had difficulty in doing something we have to make opportunity to discuss these problems. Anyway, inclusion is a pleasant thing: we can see children's happiness, their smiles and that they feel themselves free to advance by any means. I am and my colleagues are also delighted for any bit of development we can reach to create a motivating environment for children to learn and extend their abilities in any ways they want.

9. What would you say to parents/teachers who aren't certain if it will work?

I would say to come to the ***Gyermekek Háza*** and see it. It works. Or try it! For fifteen years healthy (typical) and handicapped children have learned together in our school. We have a lot of experience about inclusion and we can offer success and happiness in learning for any student coming to us.

10. Do you have a final comment?

I think that an inclusive school is the "good" school. Paying attention to the diversity of children and providing suitable environment for everyone is beneficial for students and teachers also. Using this method teaching becomes a kind of an art. It also provides safety for highly caring parents. It is great to lead a school like this!