



EMPOWERING INCLUSIVE TEACHERS  
FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

# EiTTT

## Case Studies



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## Case study:

### Co-Teaching in Teacher Education

University College Leuven-Limburg, Belgium



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## Context

From 7th to 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2016, our first learning activity took place at University College Leuven-Limburg (UCLL) in Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium.

## Education in Flanders

Belgium consists of three regions: Flanders (the Dutch language area), Wallonia (the French language area) and a small German speaking area which has no specific name. These regions are each federated states with a region-specific government. Within the Flemish government, the minister of education is responsible for almost every aspect of educational policy, from early childhood to university education. Yet some specific educational issues (e.g. the start and end of compulsory education in terms of age or the establishing of the minimum conditions for obtaining a degree) are still the responsibility of the federal authorities (i.e. the Belgian government focusing on national matters across regions).

## Structure of education system

Early childhood education is available for children from 2.5 to 6 years. Although early childhood education is not compulsory, almost all children attend it in Flanders. This type of education is multi-faceted in nature and aims to develop children's cognitive, motor and affective skills. Primary education targets children from 6 to 12, and consists of 6 consecutive years of study. A child usually starts primary education at the age of 6, the age at which education becomes compulsory by law. The minimum objectives considered necessary by the government, are described in so-called attainment targets.

Young people aged 12 to 18 have to enrol in secondary education. Secondary education is organised as a uniform system, comprising specific stages and types of education. Pupils only select specialisation subjects in the second stage of this type of education in order to allow them to be introduced first to as many subjects as possible. The second stage (and the third stage) of secondary education distinguishes four types of education forms: 'general secondary education', 'technical secondary education', 'secondary arts education' and 'vocational secondary education'. Each of these types of secondary education offers a common and an optional part.

Once someone obtains his or her secondary education degree certificate, he or she has unlimited access to higher education. Higher education in Flanders can be 'professional' or 'academic' in nature. Higher professional education consists of professionally oriented bachelor courses, which are only offered at colleges of higher education. Academic education comprises bachelor and master courses, which are provided by universities. In Flanders, the following types of higher education courses are offered:

- › Bachelor courses; these include professional bachelor courses and academic bachelor courses
- › Master courses
- › Further training programmes
- › Postgraduate courses, updating courses and in-service training courses
- › Doctoral programmes

## Teacher Education at UCLL



Vzw UC Leuven (formerly KHLeuven) is a university college in Flanders, collaborating under the name UC Leuven-Limburg (UCLL) with two other university colleges: vzw UC Limburg (formerly KHLim) and vzw UC Leuven Comenius Lerarenopleidingen (formerly Group T). UC Leuven-Limburg is renowned for the high quality of its teaching, research and regional development. More than thirty professional bachelor (EQF 6), and lifelong learning study programmes are offered in various discipline fields, with a focus on health care, social work, business and commerce, teacher education and science and technology. UC Leuven-Limburg's strong commitment to research ensures state-of-the-art training programmes for its 15,000 students. The EiTTT project team was based at UCLL's Hertogstraat campus in Heverlee, near the university town of Leuven, some 30 km from Brussels. The entire student body of approximately 2,000 students on this campus, is enrolled in various teacher education programmes, in the largest teacher education institution in Flanders.

Teacher education programmes at UCLL are professional bachelor degrees which lead to the certificates of 'early childhood education teacher', 'primary education teacher' or 'secondary education teacher group 1 teacher' (i.e. the first 3 years of secondary school). These are programmes of 180 credits that are aimed at developing both pedagogical competences and specific professional knowledge skills. Across Belgium, all such programmes are taught at colleges of higher education (not at universities). Those who wish to teach the secondary education group 2 (i.e. the last 3 years of secondary school) have to attend a teacher education course at the university or at a centre for adult education. All the different teacher education programmes are equivalent and are based on a similar set of basic teacher competences.

## Towards Inclusive Education

If students have special educational needs they receive extra attention in the Flemish education system. These needs may be the result of significant intellectual disabilities, psychological disorders, visual, hearing or other impairments or various physical disabilities. In Flanders, most of these children have traditionally attended special schools where they benefit from smaller class sizes and individual guidance from specially trained teachers and educational therapists.

However, on 12th March 2014 the Flemish Parliament approved a parliamentary act on measures for pupils with specific educational needs. The aim of this new legislation is to make education more inclusive. It consists of measures that enable more students with special educational needs to register and remain in regular (mainstream) education. This legislation is known as the 'M Decree'. 'M' refers to the concept 'Maatwerk' (custom-made / tailor-made – i.e. to the educational needs of the child). The M Decree requires that all primary and secondary school students, including those with learning difficulties and 'mild' disabilities, be enrolled in mainstream schools. While students should follow the mainstream curriculum, the right of students to reasonable adaptations by the school to their special educational needs will be guaranteed in accordance with the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The act outlines measures which would allow pupils with specific educational needs to participate fully, effectively and on equal terms in regular schools and classrooms. It also delineates more clearly the admission requirements to the different strands of special education. So, separate special schooling remains an option in Flanders, but the student's need for such provision must now be very well justified. The M Decree therefore, is designed to uphold the child's right to be enrolled in a mainstream school, and to prevent too rapid and potentially undue referral to special schooling. This focus on mainstreaming aims to accord with wider EU policy on inclusive education. Since the beginning of the school year 2015-2016, the provisions of this act are being gradually implemented.

Nonetheless, in Flanders, as in other jurisdictions represented in this project partnership, inclusion policy has proven to be controversial. Concerns have been expressed as to whether the mainstream school system there is ready to meet the needs of

all children. Teachers' groups have called for significant financial investment in mainstream schools to support the infrastructural adjustments and resourcing they believe are required if education is to be truly 'inclusive'. Similarly, questions have been raised as to whether teachers are being afforded adequate time and support to develop the competence necessary to incorporate this policy change in practice. These issues are of interest to the project team, as a premise of our project is that if mainstream teachers' needs are overlooked during such change, there is a risk that inclusive ideals may be conflated with integrationist practice. In Flanders, one promising response in this regard is a pilot re-deployment programme, which, since the 2015-16 school year, has seen 180 teachers from special schools assigned to mainstream schools to work alongside and support (co-teach with) teachers in the mainstream system. This programme has also served to offset teacher job losses in special schools.

## 'Teacher Education for Inclusion' at UCLL

Lijne Vloeberghs (project partner at UCLL) explains:

'The teacher education department at UCLL aims to prepare students to become innovative teachers who always take student diversity in their classrooms into consideration. For our early childhood, primary and secondary education student teachers, as for our student teachers in the advanced bachelor programme in special educational needs, we aim high and teach them about diversity, inclusion and in particular, co-teaching strategies. The educational field in Flanders is surely moving towards more inclusive education; the M-Decree is a first step in this process. We want to prepare our future teachers for this new reality. In our teacher education department we try to prepare our student teachers by using three strategies:

1. Encouraging co-teaching in internships / school placement. We seek opportunities in partner schools for our student teachers to co-teach with classroom teachers. We also model co-teaching during our courses.
2. Encouraging our students to use the Universal Design for Learning framework for developing lessons (we're at the start of this process, the first step is to support teacher educators in their introduction of this approach).
3. Making both teacher educators and future teachers aware of the special dynamics concerning living in poverty (both within our student group and within the pupils in the schools)'.

During the visit to UCLL the project team learned about each of these approaches. The team focused in particular on the strategy of introducing future teachers to co-teaching during teacher education, as a means of providing for their development as inclusive practitioners.

## What is Co-teaching?

A common definition:

Two teachers working together as equal partners with the shared responsibility of a class and developing a powerful learning environment for all students by:

1. Preparing the lessons or activities together (taking into account the specific educational needs of the pupils in their class)
2. Performing the lesson / activity together
3. Evaluating and adjusting the lesson / activity together

The sharing of responsibility between two teachers is an important factor in this definition. As Lynne Cook, a noted expert in the area states, 'co-teaching is not simply having two teachers in a classroom with one acting as a glorified paraprofessional or an in-class tutor for one or two students' (Cook in Spencer, 2005, p. 297). Rather, for true co-teaching to occur, both professionals must co-plan, co-instruct and co-assess a diverse group of students in the same classroom (Murawski, 2010; Naegele, Ralston, and Smith, 2016).

In the research literature (Cook, 2004; Fluijt, 2014) at least six types of co-teaching are distinguished:

### One Teach, One Observe

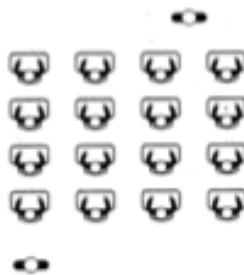
In this approach to co-teaching one of the advantages is that detailed observation of students engaged in the learning process can occur. When one teaches and one observes during co-teaching, the teachers should decide in advance what types of information are to be gathered during the observation and

should agree on a system for gathering the data.

Afterwards, the teachers should analyse the information together. That is, observation should have a deliberate focus, rather than serving merely as an incidental check of student activity.

**When to use:**

- › In new co-teaching situations
- › When questions / concerns arise about students
- › To check student progress
- › To compare target students to others in class

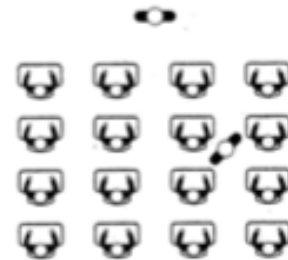


**One Teach, One Assist**

In this approach one person has primary responsibility for teaching while the other circulates in the room providing unobtrusive assistance to students as needed. Although this approach to co-teaching has many merits, it is also often over-used, possibly because it makes few demands for change on the part of the teachers.

**When to use:**

- › When the lesson lends itself to presentation by one teacher
- › When one teacher has particular expertise for the lesson
- › In new co-teaching situations – allows teachers to get to know each other
- › In a lesson process in which student work needs close monitoring

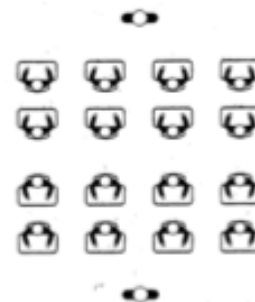


**Parallel Teaching**

In parallel teaching co-teachers are both teaching the same lesson, but they divide the class between them and teach the lesson simultaneously. This approach facilitates closer observation of students and may afford them more opportunity to actively engage and respond in the lesson.

**When to use:**

- › When a lower teacher-student ratio is needed to improve instruction
- › To foster student participation in discussions
- › For activities such as practice, re-teaching, and test review

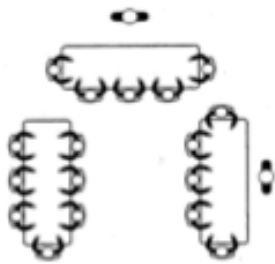


**Station Teaching**

In station teaching, students work independently at stations. Teachers divide the lesson content and students. Students move around from one teacher to another and also to different stations so that each teacher repeats instruction several times and each student engages with both teachers and works at each station. If appropriate, a further station could be set up to require students to work in pairs instead of independently.

**When to use:**

- › When content is complex but not hierarchical
- › In lessons in which review is intrinsic to instruction
- › When several topics are being addressed in a lesson

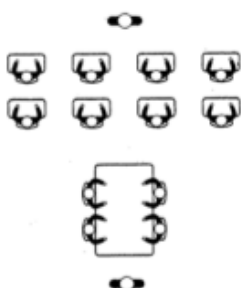


**Alternative Teaching**

In most classrooms there is a need at times for small group work that needs close supervision by a teacher. In alternative teaching, the majority of students in the class undertake the planned lesson with one teacher while a small group either completes an alternative lesson or the same lesson taught at a different level or for a different purpose. This approach might be employed for the full duration of a lesson or at times during the lesson.

**When to use:**

- › In situations where students' mastery of concepts taught or about to be taught varies significantly
- › When high levels of achievement are expected for all students
- › When enrichment is desired
- › When some students are working on a parallel curriculum



**Team Teaching**

In team teaching both teachers are teaching the same lesson simultaneously. Each teacher is very familiar with each stage of the lesson and knows when to take the lead and when to act in a more supportive role. The approach is conversational rather than one of turn-taking as each teacher contributes equally to the lesson.

**When to use:**

- › When 'two heads are better than one' or experience is comparable
- › During a lesson in which instructional conversation is appropriate
- › In co-teaching situations in which the teachers have considerable experience and a high sense of comfort about working together
- › When a goal of instruction is to model some interaction to students

**As indicated in these strategies, through co-teaching during their preparation for practice, student teachers could be facilitated in developing many skills required for inclusive practice:**

- › Co-teaching lowers the pupil/teacher ratio, allowing student teachers more opportunity to work with pupils on an individual basis.
- › It may enable student teachers to become aware at an early stage of their professional development of pupils' diverse learning needs and how best to respond to these needs.
- › As co-teaching can facilitate the provision of unobtrusive assistance to pupils, class management challenges may be reduced and so student teachers' learning about lesson development and the development of pupils' learning may be more readily advanced. This can facilitate the inclusion in education of all pupils in the classroom.

- › If one classroom practitioner is largely observing while the other is both teaching and observing, it is likely that overall observation of pupils will be improved. This practice with a host teacher may enhance student teacher self-assessment and hence their pupils' learning.

## Rationale for Co-teaching in Teacher Education

In 2005 Cochran-Smith and Zeichner highlighted a lack of data linking success in a student teaching experience with pupil learning outcomes. This remains the situation with regard to the impact of co-teaching in student teaching as both the practice and study of this approach are at a relatively early stage. However, the research findings that are available are positive, and underline the potential value of such a methodology for the preparation of inclusive teachers.

While the application of co-teaching in student teaching is a relatively new approach, Bacharach, Heck and Dahlberg (2010) maintain that this emerging practice holds great promise for transforming the world of teacher preparation. As they point out, 'given the increasing diversity of today's schools and the prevalence of teacher accountability issues, the model of learning to teach in isolation should no longer be an unquestioned practice' (Bacharach, Heck and Dahlberg, 2010, p.3). Co-teaching during preparation for teaching has been found to enhance the learning of student teachers, to be beneficial for the teachers with whom they cooperate, and significantly, has also been found to positively impact the learning of the pupils in co-taught classes.

Co-teaching with a cooperating teacher is quite different to the traditional approach of 'dropping' a student into a classroom to observe for a short period of time before s/he assumes full responsibility for the class. In that 'sink or swim' model, student teachers largely survive or fail on their own (Bacharach, Heck and Dahlberg, 2010). However, by teaching alongside a cooperating teacher and also consulting with a college supervisor, student teachers may more rapidly improve their learning about **appropriate preparation and planning** for the complexity of classroom practice. In more gradually assuming solo

responsibility for a class they may do so from a stronger starting point. The status of the student teacher in the eyes of pupils may also be improved as the student teacher is **introduced and perceived as a teacher** from the outset. This approach may also address any **power differential** between cooperating teacher and student teacher as teacher candidates are provided with strategies to 'find their voice', while cooperating teachers should be open to learning from students who bring emerging theories and ideas. Co-teaching can provide student teachers with opportunity to receive direct guidance on the importance of effective **communication and collaboration** skills; skills which are more vital than ever in today's diverse classroom environments. Cooperating co-teachers not only model and coach, they can also **explicitly share their rationales for practice** (Bacharach, Heck and Dahlberg, 2010). In an editorial in the Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education (2015) this point is highlighted: 'It is the sharing of expertise that is critical. . . . a pre-service teacher might share some of the latest ideas from educational research they bring from the university, which when combined with the pedagogical expertise of the cooperating teacher positions them to interrogate the theory and co-reflect critically on the relative impact of putting the theory into practice. Indeed, they could develop new, local theory from doing so.' As the researchers emphasise, these factors should be given due consideration in implementing a co-teaching strategy in student teacher school placement. Schools and teachers involved should be offered appropriate support and training for their cooperative role.

A study by Murphy, McCullagh and Doherty (2014) presents a strong case in favour of including co-teaching within initial teacher education programmes. These researchers focused on the development of ten student teachers' confidence and ability to teach primary-level science as they planned, taught and evaluated lessons in cooperation with their host teachers during school placement experience. In line with findings from previous co-teaching research (Murphy and Scantelbury, 2010) the researchers found a significant overall increase in preservice teachers' confidence in their developing teaching skills and improvements in various aspects of teacher competence. They suggest that co-teaching can provide for the development of classroom practitioners who are more reflective about their work and its impact. The student teachers involved were very positively disposed to this form of preparation. As one stated,

'all pre-service teachers should have a co-teaching experience'. It was further suggested that this model of teacher preparation could also benefit the cooperating teachers involved, as it potentially increased their awareness of, and attention to issues in teaching and learning arising from developments outside of the classroom.

Kerin and Murphy (2015) examined how co-teaching affected the professional development of undergraduate music education preservice teachers during an eight-week school placement. They found that in comparison with student teachers' experience during the traditional school placement, 'there was a radical improvement in the development of professional agency amongst the co-teaching cohort' (Kerin and Murphy, 2015, p.309). In summary, student teachers markedly improved their subject or content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. The researchers also recommend co-teaching as a means of facilitating the sharing of content knowledge supplied by student teachers with experienced teachers' pedagogical knowledge 'so that each expands their teacher repertoire' (p.310).

Bacharach, Heck and Dahlberg (2010) examined the impact of a co-teaching model of student teaching on the mathematics and reading achievement of primary school pupils. The study found that all pupils had increased opportunity for appropriate support when required, and indicated that the teacher candidates improved the academic achievement of their pupils. It is noteworthy that benefits accrued in particular to children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and to children with special educational needs.

Some researchers have raised questions about the efficacy of introducing student teachers to the practice of teaching by means of a co-teaching approach. Their concerns relate to whether these future teachers will be able to teach independently at a satisfactory level when required, whether they might be incorporated through co-teaching into poor rather than effective teacher practice, and whether poor relationships between the co-teaching student and teacher might cause difficulties in the classroom (Wassell and La Van, 2009). In their response to these criticisms, Murphy, Carlisle and Beggs (2009) point out that co-teaching can be applied alongside rather than as an alternative to independent teaching during student

teaching experience. They also refer to the wide variety of co-teaching models that can be applied in various settings. As these findings suggest, student teachers who learn to teach by co-teaching with experienced cooperating teachers have potential to become more effective and inclusive practitioners.

## Learning Activity week at UCLL

The range of learning activities undertaken by the EiTTT project team at UCLL is outlined below.

### Project Activity: November 7th (AM)

Team members shared information on our different school systems:



**Belgium (Flanders):** Outlined in previous sections above.

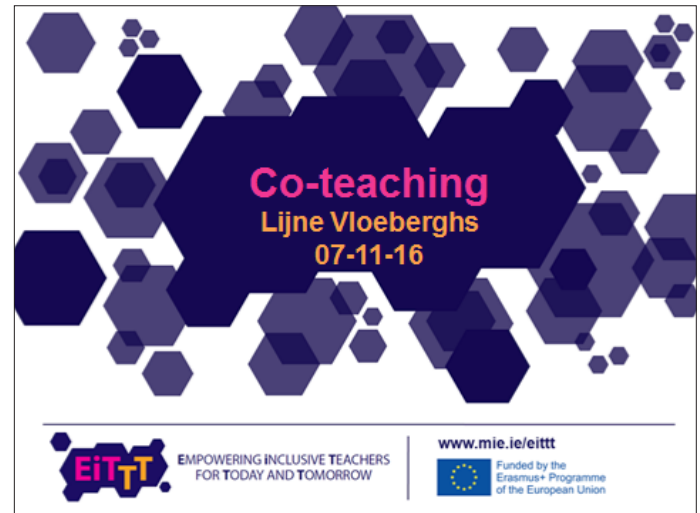
**Finland:** Compulsory education between 7-16 years. At age 6 years there's preschool. Between 16-18 years students have the choice between general or vocational education. For students with special needs there are special needs schools, special classes in mainstream schools and inclusion through co-teaching in mainstream classes.

**Ireland:** Compulsory education between 6-16 years. Most 5 year olds and half of all 4 year olds also attend primary school. At secondary school level, students can choose either general secondary education with an academic focus, or more vocational and practical courses. For students with special needs, various schooling approaches are possible, e.g. special schools, special classes in mainstream schools or inclusion in mainstream classes. In accordance with government policy, inclusion in mainstream schooling is increasingly popular and has resulted in much student diversity in these classes.



**Cyprus:** Compulsory education between 5-15 years. Pre-school 5-6 years. Primary education 6-12 years. Secondary education 12-15 years. Students can choose between general or technical education. Our project partner school in Nicosia provides education for children between 6-9 years. If children have severe disabilities there's special education, otherwise there are special classes in mainstream school.

**Latvia:** Compulsory education between 5-16 years. Pre-school between 5-6 years. Primary education 7-11 years. Secondary (elementary strand) education 12-16 years. Secondary education 17-19 years. Our project partner school in Riga offers primary, elementary and secondary education. Children with special needs can attend special classes in schools. The local authority provides a multi-disciplinary special team which is responsible for these students' individual lesson plans.

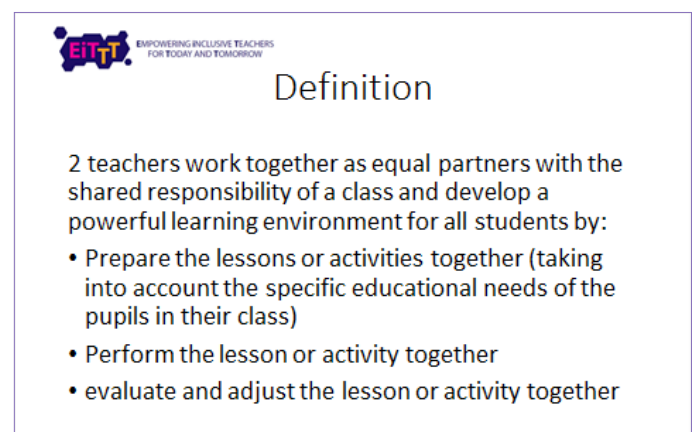
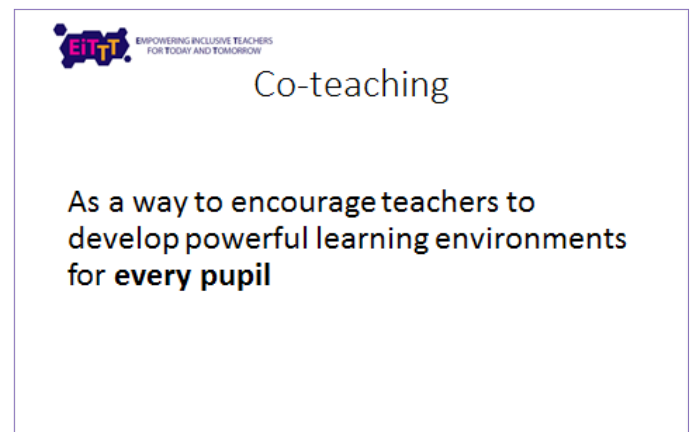


### Key Learning:

- › Inclusion is a new emphasis in the Flemish school system. The focus is not on 'problems' but on how the school can provide for the child's needs.
- › There are many similarities between our education systems.
- › In all partner countries of the project there are similar challenges in mainstream education regarding appropriate support for children with special needs.
- › There are differences between our countries in terms of the range of children with special needs and how these children are supported in the school system.
- › In Flanders (Belgium) as in some other countries of the project, parents have the freedom to choose a school type for their child.

### Project Activity: November 7th (PM)

An overview (with video) was provided on how co-teaching is addressed in teacher education at UCLL. Selected slides are presented below.





## Definition

2 teachers work together as equal partners with the shared responsibility of a class and develop a powerful learning environment for all students by:

- Prepare the lessons or activities together (taking into account the specific educational needs of the pupils in their class)
- Perform the lesson or activity together
- evaluate and adjust the lesson or activity together

## Key Learning:

- › There are various forms of co-teaching. Students at UCLL have been introduced to some of these approaches.
- › One form of co-teaching isn't better than another. The approach chosen will depend on the needs in the classroom, on learning and teaching styles, on the curriculum and on the subject and lesson concerned.
- › It is fine to switch between styles in one lesson.
- › The aim of co-teaching in teacher education is to help student teachers to focus more on the children in the class.

## Project Activity: November 8th (AM)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a means of developing inclusive learning environments. Another strategy to which student teachers at UCLL are introduced. Origins of UDL: Universal Design (UD) movement of the 1990s. Architect and designer Ron Mace defined UD as 'the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design'

## Universal Design for Learning

08/11/16 – Lijne Vloeberghs

### Empowering future teachers towards more inclusive education = coping with the diversity in the classroom

Within our teacher training programmes :

- Strategy 1 : encouraging co-teaching in internships and by 'walk the talk'
- Strategy 2 : encouraging to use the Universal Design for Learning-framework by developing lessons (we're at the start of this proces, first step is to inform teacher educators)
- Strategy 3 : making both teacher educators and future teachers aware of the special dynamics concerning living in poverty (both within our student group as within the pupils in the schools)

## Principles of UDL

Students are diverse

Everybody has a different brain

Teaching = the art of making new brain connections

### Key Learning:

- › Start with the reality that every classroom is diverse instead of preparing a lesson for the 'mainstream' child and then trying to make adaptations. There are multiple ways to approach teaching.
- › UDL's Key Question: What do I want my students to learn, and what barriers might be hindering that learning? You have to know your students first! That's difficult for student teachers. One way of enabling student teachers to focus on children is to provide for co-teaching with the host-teacher.
- › One challenge: As a teacher you're dependent on information provided by parents. Sometimes parents may be reluctant to share all information with you.

### Key Learning:

- › Insight on school system and mainstream classrooms in Flanders
- › Feedback on co-teaching (in teacher education) from host teacher: 'Student teachers and their pupils do better in a co-teaching situation'.
- › Students are not obliged to co-teach with their host teacher, but they are encouraged to do so and it is common for final year students to co-teach.
- › First year student teachers at UCLL do not co-teach. They are mentored by the host teacher and college supervisor but practise alone'.

### Project Activity: November 8th (PM)



Visit to a mainstream primary school, and to a pre-school class and a grade 3 class there. Discussion with a mainstream class teacher who has worked as a host co-teacher with student teachers.

### Project Activity, November 9th

Round table discussion with teacher educators at UCLL.



### Questions addressed:

- › Why co-teaching in student teaching?
- › Co-teaching in the teacher education curriculum at UCLL. Theory underlying this approach?
- › The preparation of host teachers for co-teaching
- › Student teachers' views on co-teaching
- › If co-teaching can enable student teachers to become more inclusive teachers

## Key Learning:

- › Student teachers are introduced to co-teaching concepts and practices from the beginning of their courses.
  - › In various bachelor degree programmes, particularly after their first year in the programme, student teachers are encouraged (though not obliged) to co-teach, i.e. to plan, teach and evaluate together during school placement for classroom practice.
  - › In the bachelor programmes for early childhood and primary education, final year student teachers are required to co-teach in pairs throughout a four-week placement in schools located in communities designated as socio-economically disadvantaged. This strategy is designed to enable future teachers to become more attuned and responsive to the wide diversity of learners in these mainstream classrooms, and thus to facilitate fuller participation in learning by all children. The student teachers are assessed individually on their practice and their final mark is a combination of feedback contributions from the teacher educator / supervisor, the host teacher and the student teacher.
  - › At a later stage in the Special Educational Needs post-bachelor degree programme, students who have chosen an inclusive education placement bring their advanced special education knowledge to the mainstream classroom and are encouraged to co-teach with the mainstream teacher, thereby sharing respective expertise.
  - › Mainstream class teachers who frequently host UCLL student teachers for school practice, report that co-teaching with the host teacher provides for significantly better learning for student teachers and their pupils.
- › Teacher educators at UCLL frequently model co-teaching.
  - › Student teachers must feel professionally 'safe' in order to start working with a co-teacher, i.e. the relationship must be one of trust.
  - › It is best not to obligate students to work with a co-teacher. There should be choice about engaging in this strategy.
  - › Co-teaching with a host teacher calls for very careful planning.
  - › Student teachers are more receptive to the approach if it is presented to them as a means of becoming a more inclusive teacher.
  - › Co-teaching can be a particularly suitable approach when students are learning to teach in challenging contexts.
  - › It is a learning process for everyone; for host teachers, student teachers and pupils. It has to be part of an innovation process with the main aim to help the children; they are at the centre of this learning.
  - › For student teachers the focus can be on children as there is a second pair of eyes in the classroom. When there are two 'teachers' you have opportunity for valuable critical reflection and discussion arising from mutual observation and feedback.

## Co-teaching and Continuing Professional Development

In Flanders, continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers is encouraged but not mandated. At UCLL, co-teaching is promoted as an effective means of CPD. Teacher educators at UCLL shared their experience of developing 'professional learning communities' in schools in which experienced teachers had chosen to co-teach. They highlighted:

- › The value of engaging in co-teaching from the outset of one's teaching career, as a means of CPD.
- › The importance of 'choice' in decisions about employing such an approach. As trust between partners is paramount, teachers should be given freedom in terms of opting for co-teaching and choosing teacher partners. Factors such as teacher personality, as well as working and teaching styles matter.
- › That school climate also matters. It is helpful if school principals support and encourage the strategy, rather than seeking to impose it.
- › That co-teaching is most likely to be employed by experienced teachers when it is promoted as a means of developing more inclusive classroom practice.

### Project Activity, November 10th

Poverty and Education: Towards Co-teaching to Combat Educational Disadvantage:

"1 in 8 children (approx.) in Belgium living in poverty - i.e. potentially 2 – 3 children in every classroom".

There is valuable research underway at UCLL which seeks to target the education system's well-documented role as a potential instrument of social reproduction. The team of teacher educators / researchers undertaking these studies shared details of their dual approach, which involves targeting both teacher educators and student teachers at UCLL. In presenting the stark 1 in 8 statistic above, the research team explained

that the focus of their work is the 'hidden curriculum' in teacher education. As this may be communicated in the first instance, via potentially middle-class perspectives of teacher educators, their research has provided both teacher educators and future teachers with opportunity to engage in community-based activities (i.e. in local homes) in conjunction with 't Lampeke' - a Leuven-based non-profit, community outreach organisation that aims to combat poverty (please see Appendix II).

### Key Learning:

- › This initiative aims to raise awareness amongst student teachers and practising teachers of the often invisible signs of children living in poverty ->It has commenced by raising awareness amongst teacher educators at UCLL.
- › The initiative is based on the belief that it is best if education and well-being systems work together in this context.
- › In Flanders as elsewhere, we need more teachers from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds in teacher education – not just because of their background, but because of a genuine interest in pursuing a teaching career – a 'love' for teaching. We must address the barriers they experience in entering teacher education.

The project team acknowledged the value of this initiative. However, it was concluded that enlightened, committed teachers may be no less challenged by the prospect of engaging effectively in inclusive classroom practice. The team suggests therefore, that such teacher development opportunities might ideally be complemented by school-based responses, e.g. via provision for, and encouragement of co-teaching: Two teachers see more than one: Two teachers in a classroom can learn more via shared reflection on children's learning; Two teachers working in partnership will potentially include all children more effectively.

## Summary of Learning

- › 'M Decree' and Inclusive Education in Flanders
- › Aim of co-teaching in teacher education: To help student teachers focus on children's learning / develop inclusive education skills. It's important to make a connection with EVERY pupil!
- › Different models of co-teaching
- › One form of co-teaching isn't necessarily better than another. Various forms can be employed in one lesson
- › Co-teaching makes it easier to 'see' – two pairs of eyes are better
- › UDL and its implementation in classrooms. Student teachers need to start with the reality of the diversity in a classroom instead of adapting afterwards
- › There must be trust between student teacher and co-teacher. As a student teacher you have to feel 'safe'
- › For student teachers it's helpful to start with the 'One teach, One assist' approach in co-teaching
- › Advantages of co-teaching for student and practising teachers in challenging contexts
- › Co-teaching and CPD - benefits
- › Co-teaching - preparing student teachers to be critical friends
- › Poverty / Disadvantage and Teacher Preparation: 't Lampeke - understanding the importance of the community in schooling and teacher education

## Conclusion

During this Learning Activity week the project team gathered knowledge and shared thoughts on how co-teaching during teacher education can benefit future teachers. The teacher education institute at UCLL, in line with current developments in the education system in Flanders, has chosen to introduce co-teaching as a means of helping student teachers to learn to work more effectively with the ever growing student diversity of their classrooms. Other Inclusive Education strategies under way at UCLL are: (a) The encouragement of student teachers to use the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework for developing lessons and (b) Enabling both teacher educators and future teachers to become aware of the special dynamics and implications of living in poverty (both within the student group and amongst pupils in schools).

The project team focused on how co-teaching can be used to enhance future teachers' own learning and so to benefit pupils in classrooms. This teacher education institute is making the change from a more traditional approach to school placement whereby the mentor is the expert who gives feedback to the future teacher, towards a system of co-teaching in which there is a more balanced relationship between student teacher and classroom teacher. It is believed that if the power balance between student and mentor / host teacher is more equal, student teachers can experience more possibilities to learn. Given that similar dynamics are likely to be at work in teaching practice placement classrooms as in classes taught by two experienced co-teachers, there is potential to learn much more about the possibilities offered by co-teaching (e.g. during the forthcoming Learning Activity week in Finland) and so to further implement co-teaching in the curriculum at UCLL and other teacher education institutions.

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