



EMPOWERING INCLUSIVE TEACHERS
FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

EiTTT

Case Studies



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Case study:

Co-Teaching for Inclusive Classroom Practice

Lukkari Primary School, Nurmijärvi, Finland





Context

The second Learning Activity of the EiTTT project was held from the 6th– 10th of February 2017 at Lukkari Primary School in Nurmijärvi, Finland.

Lukkari Primary School

There are 278 students in Lukkari Primary School. Students are between 6-12 years old (grades 1-6). Our staff consists: 1 principal, 12 classroom teachers, 5 special class teachers, 1 special needs teacher, 8 assistants, 1 school secretary and 1 extra teacher.

The school year begins on 1st of August and ends the 31st of July. The students have 190 school days. There are holidays during the school year: autumn holiday, Christmas holiday, winter holiday, Easter holiday and summer holiday. The teachers have the same holidays as the pupils. The summer holiday is about 2 ½ months from June to August. Lessons are held between 8.00-14.55. Each lesson lasts 45 minutes. Pupils have 19 -25 lessons per week depending on the age of the child. There is usually a break (15-20 minutes) after every lesson. The students spend their breaks playing outside.

The second Learning Activity week of the EiTTT project was attended by a team of twenty people, comprising project partners and colleagues from their schools and institutions. The focus of the Learning Activity was to observe and contemplate Lukkari Primary School's way of Co-teaching as a method of inclusion. On their first day in the school the project team met the students and staff of Lukkari Primary School in a morning assembly. This was the beginning of discussions and exchange between the partners and the staff members/students of the school. These exchanges continued throughout lessons, breaks and lunch time. During the week there was also an opportunity to meet and mingle with the representatives of the Board of Directors and the Parents' Association.

The observation of co-teaching in practice played a central role in the Learning Activity. In the course of the week there were possibilities to observe co-teaching in different classrooms. During the first visits to the co-teaching classes the main aim was to observe the teaching and the communication (words and wordless) between the two teachers and the assistant in the classroom. Later the team was asked to focus their observation more towards the students. Do students benefit from learning in the co-teaching classes, and if so, how do they benefit? There was an opportunity to observe the way the two teachers share their teacherhood in the co-teaching classes and how the students with different learning possibilities were addressed.

We also attended a seminar on Inclusion at the municipal hall. Different aspects of inclusion were introduced. Dr. Risto Hotulainen from the University of Helsinki told us about teacher education in Finland. Mrs Niina Laitinen from Valteri Centre for Learning and Consulting told us about their systems for supporting special needs students. Mrs Marjaana Mäkinen explained about the intensified and special support in Nurmijärvi and Dr Anne Ryan provided a summary of the EiTTT project. As well as the seminar on Inclusion the principal and the teachers of Lukkari Primary School gave presentations on facts relating to the school, the school system in Finland, co-teaching and the 'Steps of Support' system. We visited a special education school, the Kivenpuisto School, which shares the Lukkari school campus, to get a different point of view on inclusion.

On Wednesday afternoon the team observed the 3rd, 4th and 5th graders having their elective subjects, which is one of the innovative aspects of the new curriculum in Lukkari school. These students are in mixed age groups and the groups include students with special needs. Students can choose from drama, music, art, cooking, an ipad-course, outdoor activities, science, games and mathematics. On our final day, Friday, we reviewed all of our learning during the week. There was a great deal of feedback from each of the team members. It was a very productive discussion about the benefits of co-teaching for students and teachers.

Education System in Finland

The project team learned about the Finnish education system and the 'Steps of Support' for all children.

There are two official languages in Finland: Finnish and Swedish. English is also widely spoken and a requirement of the national curriculum. At primary school, children take English lessons from Grade 3 at the latest (from grade 2 at Lukkari school). Primary school children are also offered the possibility of studying another language, for instance German or French.

Free

In Finland education is free at all levels from pre-primary and basic education. The books, school lunches, all materials and transportation for students are free.

Education is free at all levels in Finland. In pre-primary and basic education school books, a daily meal and transportation for students living furthest away from the school are free for the parents.

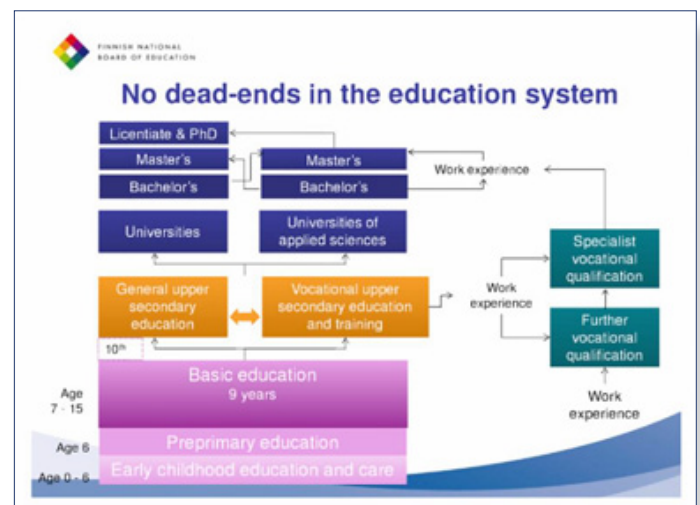
One of the basic principles of Finnish education is that all people must have equal access to high-quality education and training. The same opportunities to education should be available to all citizens irrespective of their ethnic origin, age, wealth or where they live.

Equality

The basic principle of Finnish education is that all people must have equal access to high-quality education. The same opportunities to education should be available to all citizens regardless of family background or place of residence.

The Public Comprehensive School

The majority of Finnish children are educated in the public comprehensive school system. It was developed in the 1970s.



Curriculum

A revised core curriculum was introduced in 2016. Teaching targets are outlined in this national curriculum. The Finnish National Agency for Education draws up the national core curricula for pre-primary education, basic education, general upper secondary education and basic education in the arts, as well as the curricula for preparatory education for immigrants and morning and afternoon activities for school children. The curricula set out the key objectives, content and policies of education. The national core curricula create a progressive continuum in a coherent way and provide a strong basis for lifelong learning. Education providers and schools draw up their own local curricula based on the national curricula.

The new curriculum introduces certain phenomena that have not been in general use in Finnish schools. From now on children will learn how to code and use new technology. Teachers are encouraged to create new kinds of learning environments both in and outside schools. One of the key words in the new curriculum is phenomenon-based learning. In this approach, a class observes a real-life phenomenon and analyses it through an interdisciplinary approach.



Freedom of Teaching

Within the framework of the national curriculum, teaching is highly independent. There are no inspection boards visiting schools to monitor their performance or results. While teachers have a great deal of independence, they are all trained at universities and have access to professional development. Most teachers hold a master's degree. The status of the teacher in Finland is exceptionally high. Entry to initial teacher education is very competitive with just 7%-10% of applicants accepted onto teacher education programmes.

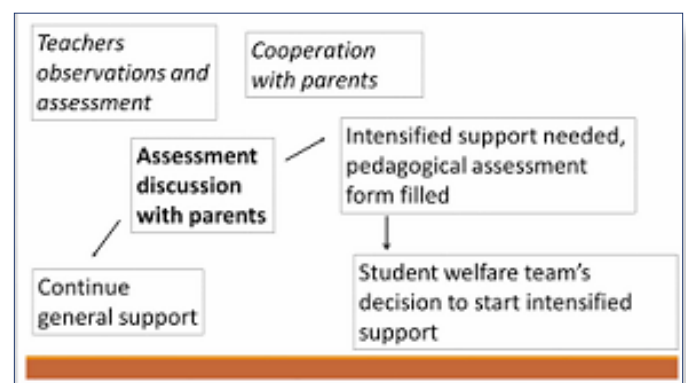
The Steps of Support

The current thinking in Finland is that the potential of each pupil should be maximised. Therefore educational guidance is seen as essential. Also teachers are required to treat the children as individuals and to help them proceed according to their own capabilities.

General Support

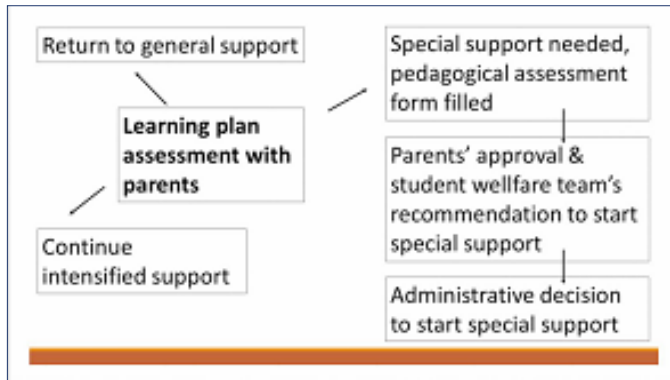
In Finland about 84% of students manage on general support, in other words they are on the lowest step of support. Even when studying on the lowest step the students have the right to get individual support when needed. Pedagogical

discussion and evaluation are done together with the parents. If needed, differentiation, remedial teaching or part time special education/learning support is used. During lessons the help and support of an assistant is possible. These arrangements agreed together with the parents may be written to a learning plan. Guidance counselling and the expertise of the student welfare team are available if needed. During assessment discussions with parents, the teacher can come to the conclusion that general support is not sufficient enough to support the student's learning. If intensified support (next step) is thought to be needed, a pedagogical assessment form is completed and delivered to the student welfare team. The team makes the decision whether intensified support is needed or not.



Intensified Support

In Finland about 8.4% (Nurmijärvi 11.7%) of students study with intensified support. Their teaching is organised in mainstream classes. On the step of intensified support it is compulsory to link the forms of support to a learning plan. The learning plan is made together with the parents and it documents the test results, ways of differentiation, remedial teaching, part time special education/learning support, support of the assistant and the cooperation with the student welfare team. Assessment discussions of the learning plan together with the parents and the teacher are done at least once a year. If intensified support is not needed any more it is possible to step down to general support or step up to special support if more support is needed. If special support is needed, a pedagogical assessment form is filled and delivered to the student welfare team for their recommendation. Afterwards an administrative decision is needed to start special support.



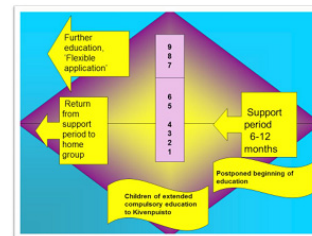
Special Support

In Finland about 7.3% (Nurmijärvi 8.2%) of students study with special support. An individual education plan is compulsory in special support. This is more precise than a learning plan to document all the test results and used/tried/needed aids to support learning. Multi- professional pedagogical discussion and observation are required on the step of full-time special education. The special needs assistant and the student welfare team work intensively with the student.

Each autumn the municipality is required to report the number of students studying on the different steps of support to the national government.

In Nurmijärvi it is possible to study with special support in special education classes or as an integrated student in a mainstream class. In the primary and the secondary schools there are 17 neurological special education classes, 4 special education classes for students with challenging behaviour and 2 flexible basic education classes. The municipality also has one special needs school, The Kivenpuisto School.

The following slides are from the presentation to the project team by Lasse Latomäki, the principal of Kivenpuisto School.



What the special education offers?

- Recognising individual strengths and difficulties in learning
- Strong and individual support for pupils
- Small class sizes
- Individualised education plans for the entire duration of education

Teaching and everyday life at our school

- Class-based special education: 1st to 9th grade
- Individualised/partly individualised/partly general syllabi
- Curricula based on operational areas
- HOJKS (Individual Education Plan)

Kivenpuisto School as a resource centre

- Areas of expertise amongst Kivenpuisto personnel
 - Earlier school start → extended compulsory education
 - Autism teaching
 - Teaching based on individualised syllabi
 - Creating Individual Education Plans (HOJKS – legal document)
 - Attention deficit and behavioural problems
 - Special needs children in daycare and school
 - Physical disability

Our focus

- Good manners and paying attention to others
- Increasing cooperation between home and school
- Working according to Individual Education Plans on a daily basis
- Teaching according to pupils' individual circumstances
- Strengthening the sense of community
- Preventing social exclusion

EITTT is focusing on the development of mainstream schools as inclusive learning environments for all learners, including those with special needs and disabilities and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. For much of the week at Lukkari school, the project team observed co-teaching in mainstream classes, and considered its possibilities as an inclusive learning method.

Rationale for Co-Teaching in Mainstream Schooling

Co-teaching is about learning and creating new practices and new thinking. Through the changes in teacher thinking and classroom practices that co-teaching appears to bring, it may generate new ways of thinking about teaching. Such a new kind of teacherhood where sharing goes as deep as a teacher's professional identity clearly has implications for teacher education (Rytivaara, 2012).

There are many models and ways to implement co-teaching. Murphy (2011) outlines six models: 'team-teaching', 'supportive

teaching', 'station teaching', 'parallel instruction', 'alternative teaching' and 'one teach/one assist'. The dominant model in the research literature is 'one teach/one assist'. This can be partly explained by the traditional form of engagement between mainstream teacher and special education teacher. The researcher recommends that as a successfully implemented and sustained practice, co-teaching / team-teaching requires that context-sensitive features need to be laid bare in order to explain what inhibits and enables team-teaching to take root in schools and classrooms as normal practice. It also requires wisdom about the management of change and how school improvements can be achieved.

Trends in research include the dominance of the USA-led research model and the tendency to focus more on how to team-teach and less on how team-teaching impacts upon teachers and students. What prevents teachers from engaging in team-teaching is rarely addressed, but the competences needed in order for team-teaching to succeed are at our disposal and very useful. The reported benefits by teachers and students include socio-emotional development as well as cognitive and learning gains (Murphy, 2011).

Experienced co-teachers provide several reasons why co-teaching should be used. Co-teaching is one way to deliver services to students with disabilities or special needs as part of inclusive practices. In co-taught classrooms all students can receive improved instruction. In co-teaching, the instructional fragmentation that often occurs in other service delivery options is minimised. Students benefit by not having to leave the classroom to receive supports. Furthermore, co-teachers often report that one of the most noticeable advantages of sharing a classroom is the sense of support it fosters (Cook, 2004).

Kerins and Tiernan present co-teaching, with a focus on station teaching, as a model of in-class support for a pupil with special educational needs. Station teaching is suitable as a means of in-class support for developing early literacy skills in the infant classes, as it allows for variation in activities and for pupil movement in the classroom after relatively short intervals (Kerins and Tiernan, 2014).

Co-teaching is reported as beneficial for pupils as well teachers. The ability to collaborate effectively can have a very positive

impact on the implementation of an inclusive programme, and co-teaching in an 'inclusive' classroom is often considered the best practice for students with moderate and sometimes severe disabilities. In the studies on collaborative schools, where colleagues come together and feel the shared ownership of the school, the students in the whole school generally have better achievement results (Cook and Downing, 2005).

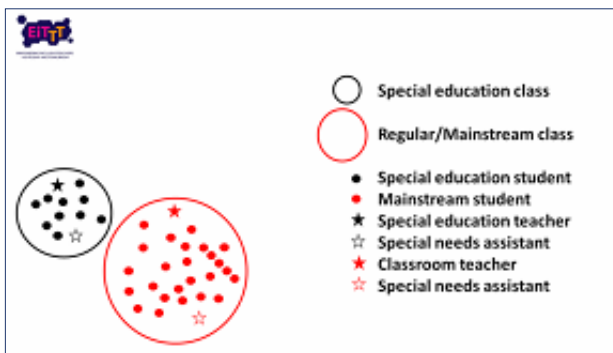
Several researchers have demonstrated the benefits of co-teaching for students. In a study conducted by Almon and Feng (2012) in an urban elementary school, co-teaching in the 4th grade classroom had a more positive effect than solo teaching, as measured by student mathematics achievement. The research done by Walsh (2012) shows that co-teaching can be considered a high-leverage strategy capable of accelerating achievement to close the achievement gaps in reading and mathematics. There are also many benefits to using a co-teaching model with English Language Learners (ELL). Co-taught lessons are inclusive and offer more support for diverse ELL students. Students are able to stay in the content classroom and not "pulled out" for remedial ELL programming. ELL students are also able to interact more with their English-speaking peers (Naegele, Ralston and Smith, 2016).

In his study, O'Leary highlights the potential of co-teaching to create opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively towards providing evidence-based, proactive, effective and inclusive learning environments for all students. Teachers identified co-teaching as valuable for themselves and for their students. Outcomes for students with special educational needs included improved behaviour, fewer discipline referrals, improved attendance and improved academic achievement (O'Leary, 2015).

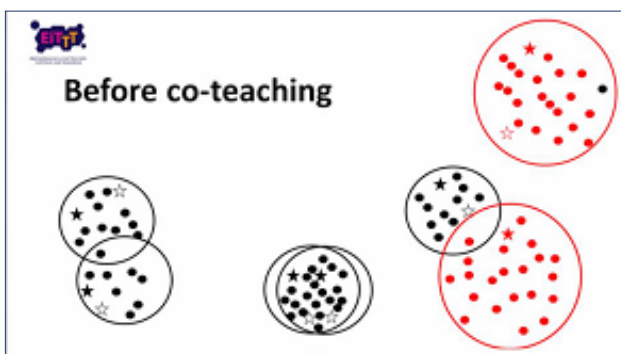
In order to foster ongoing co-operation, co-teachers need time to plan as a team for their shared students, providing opportunities to examine their responsibilities and to share tasks. The support of school management is an essential component in developing co-teaching programmes. Prizeman's study attributed much of the success to the voluntary nature of the co-teachers partnering. The commitment to co-teaching should be tied to a school-wide philosophy that is consistently communicated to teachers, students and parents and invites these to actively support the programme (Prizeman, 2015).

History of Special Education in Lukkari School

The project team learned about the introduction and development of co-teaching in the school:



Lukkari school is one of the three schools in Nurmijärvi that have regional special education classes in mainstream schools for students with learning difficulties and disabilities.



In Lukkari school, students with special needs have learning difficulties and particular needs relating to their concentration and linguistic development. Even though all the classes worked previously as separate units, the teachers planned and conducted some lessons or activities irregularly together. Sometimes a challenging situation with a special needs student could be solved by temporarily relocating him / her in a different classroom. This possibility was often used when the special education classes were situated near each other and all of the teachers were familiar with all the students. Because the special

education classes are small (max. ten students) it was possible to combine two classes without the number of students rising too high. For instance, PE lessons or field trips could be practically implemented with two classes together.

Cooperation between the special education classes and the mainstream classes was implemented by randomly combining two classes or by temporarily relocating students. The special education students could be integrated in mainstream classes for some lessons in order to try out learning in that environment. If learning and behaviour during these lessons succeeded, then full-time inclusion could be implemented. Relocating students also took place the other way. Mainstream students could be offered more support by randomly enabling them to study in the special education classes. If studying with more support proved to be necessary, then steps were taken to enable this on a permanent basis (moving from general/intensified support to special support).

The idea of combining a special class with a mainstream class and co-teaching emerged during the years of cooperation between these two different types of classes in Lukkari school. Could the “positive peer pressure” in a co-teaching situation help with the behaviour difficulties that occur even with many adults present in the classroom? Could the example of their peers motivate the learning of the special needs students? Could the extra support of the co-teaching class be sufficient to prevent a student struggling with learning not to need to be transferred to a special education class? **Could this form of teaching benefit both the special needs students and the mainstream students?**


A positive attitude towards this new way of teaching as well as approval from the principal made it possible for two of the special class teachers to pilot the first co-teaching class in Nurmijärvi in August 2010. Co-teaching was used as a teaching method in other cities and municipalities, but not in Nurmijärvi. The first co-taught class in Lukkari school had 28 students (22 mainstream and 6 special needs). Two special education teachers taught this class with the help of 1 – 2 assistants.

The pilot year of co-teaching in Lukkari Primary School was a success. Although there were doubts about the co-teaching strategy, the learning results were good and the class worked

well with the two teachers and the assistant. The social benefits of this form of teaching were quickly perceived. All the parents, excluding one, hoped that the class would continue as a co-taught class with two teachers. Because the first graders started their school co-taught, that form of teaching was natural for them. It was easy for these students to work with two teachers and the assistant. The mainstream students worked effectively with the special needs students because all were treated as equal members of the class. Only the team of adults knew which of the students had the formal designation for special education. One of the huge benefits of co-teaching was that the special needs students were not labelled, they were “just students”. With the approval of the principal it was decided to continue co-teaching in Lukkari Primary School.

cooperating with parents. Co-teaching requires weekly time for pedagogical planning and evaluating. It is important that the teachers are flexible and motivated to work together. Every class has a slightly different approach to co-teaching depending on the students and the team of adults. The two teachers plan the teaching of the class to meet the needs of the students. Many of the lessons are held in one classroom so that the teachers teach together. Using this form of teaching the students benefit from the personalities and strengths of both teachers. The assistant (or for some lessons two assistants) moves around the classroom to give individual help if needed. Because there are two teachers present all the time it is easy to make flexible teaching arrangements when needed. Sometimes the special education teacher can teach a smaller group of students with learning difficulties, enabling the classroom teacher to proceed at a faster pace with the other students. It is possible to easily do different kinds of grouping to meet the needs of the students and the subject being taught because of the team of adults (two teachers and 1-2 assistants) working in the class. Working in a co-teaching class requires constant discussions and reflection by the team of two teachers and assistant. It is important to reflect on your own teacherhood and to be aware of the personal strengths and weaknesses of yourself and your team members.

Co-teaching in Lukkari School





History of co-teaching in Lukkari School

- Co-teaching started during 2010-2011.
- It started with two special education teachers, 22 "mainstream" & 6 "special needs" students, 1-2 assistants, 2 classrooms.
- Co-teaching did not result from a reduction in resources.
- Positive attitude and approval from the principal.
- 7 years' experience of co-teaching (5 special education teachers, 6 classroom teachers, 7 assistants, 200 students).
- Now: 5 regional special education classes for students with learning difficulties and disabilities (= 50 students with learning difficulties, linguistic or concentrational problems for example) in Lukkari School.
- Now: Co-teaching happens in classes from first to fourth grade. After that, students with special needs attend full time special class if necessary.


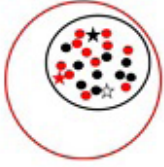
Lukkari school now has a seven year history of co-teaching in grades 1-4, i.e., teaching special needs students together with mainstream students in mainstream classes. Since August 2010 five special education teachers, six classroom teachers, seven classroom assistants and 200 students have worked in co-taught classes in Lukkari school. There are currently four co-taught classes in the school. The average class size in the co-taught classes is 25 children. In each of these classes there are three adults working together: a classroom teacher, a special education teacher and an assistant. A maximum of ten special needs students is integrated in these mainstream classes. The support needs of these students in these classes vary considerably. Together the teachers teach on a full-time basis and share responsibility for teaching, for students and for

Types of Co-Teaching in Lukkari School




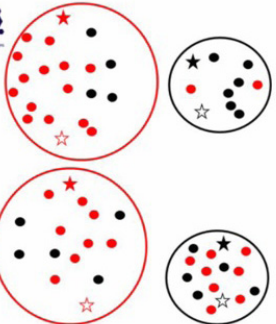
Team teaching

- 80% of lessons
- 1+1>2
- Shared responsibility for planning and teaching
- Requires trust and knowing each other, constant pedagogical discussions


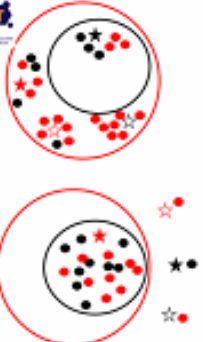
One teach – one assist

- Possible to concentrate on teaching one individual (one to one)
- Observation from a different point of view
- Possible to learn from the other teacher, new ideas

Alternative teaching


- Flexible grouping depending on the subject, method
- Different groups (big/small, basics/higher aims)
- Possibility to use different teaching methods and notice the diverse ways of learning

Station teaching


- Learning by doing
- Individual attention and teaching
- Functional maths, individual reading practises

The EiTTT team observed that co-teaching was very beneficial for both students and teachers in the school:




Co-teaching: Benefits for students

- Individual learning, support for learning difficulties (individual educational plan), support measures, many adults
- Possibility for differentiation, use of various teaching methods
- Learning in different groups (big/small, basics/higher aims)
- Evaluation by two teachers
- Peer support, more friends and social contacts
- Special education students are not "labelled"
- Learn to accept diversity



Co-teaching: Benefits for teachers

- Re-thinking teacherhood, personal strengths & weaknesses, prioritisation, reflection
- Willing to cooperate, share teacherhood
- Shared responsibility for students, teaching, parents
- Pedagogical planning and evaluation requires weekly time
- New possibilities/teaching methods, differentiation of teaching
- Support from each other
- Teamwork, flexibility, learning with each other and from each other, motivation

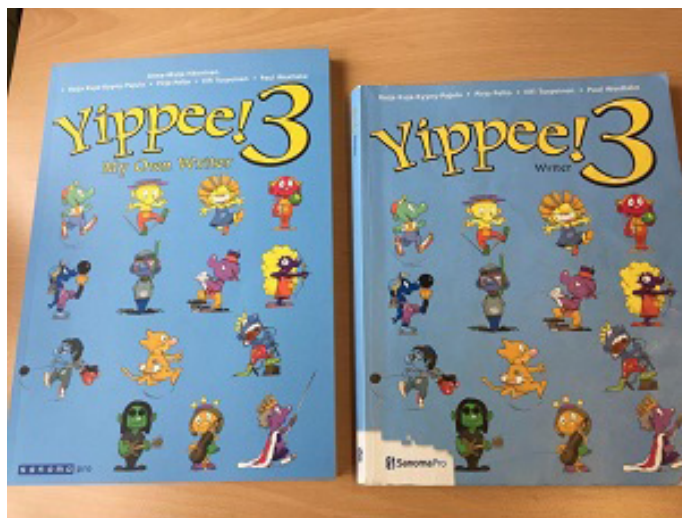
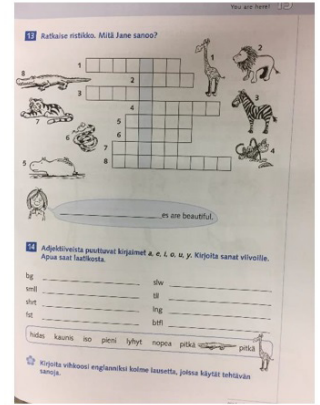
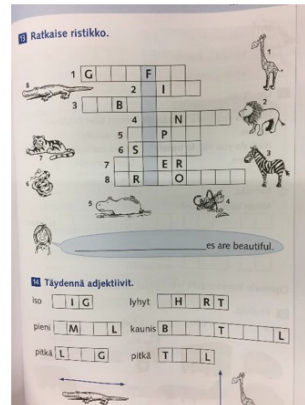


Co-teaching: Parents point of view

- Confusion - because of the tradition of one teacher in a class.
- Parents of special education students were worried initially about the size of the class (more than 10 students), but they found it helpful that their child was not "labelled".
- Parents of mainstream students were worried initially about the "negative" effect the special education students might have on their children.
- Very interested in what happens in the classroom between the teachers.
- Appreciate the possibility for individual learning and support.

Differentiated books – aids for inclusion

The project team found the differentiated textbooks used in the co-taught classes to be particularly helpful. We learned that in Finland many publishers offer teachers easy ways to differentiate teaching by publishing mainstream and differentiated workbooks. These books look similar and have the same numbering in the exercises so the use of different books is not confusing for the students. In Lukkari school differentiated books are used in Finnish, English and Maths. Students with dyslexia also have the possibility (if recommended by the psychologist) to use audio books in some subjects, history for instance.

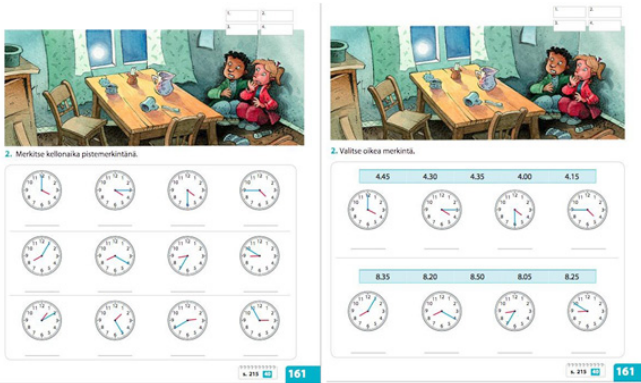


The pictures are from the third grade English workbooks. On the left Yippee!3 My Own Writer (differentiated) is slightly bigger than on the right Yippee!3 Writer (mainstream). All of the students have the same textbooks, but differentiated workbooks are also available. The covers of the books are alike. In 2011 the Best European Schoolbook Award was granted to Yippee! (Sanomapro) English books (third to sixth grade) for facing the new challenges of teaching, for instance by producing differentiated and web-based material for schools.

The differentiated workbooks (on the left) offer more primary and basic exercises while the mainstream workbooks also have more challenging exercises. Extra aids and pictures are placed in the pages to help the students to work independently. Because writing in foreign languages differs significantly from writing in Finnish, extra attention is paid to support spelling, for instance, boxes indicate how many letters are needed in the word.

The Maths books look like the same, but the content of the books is slightly different. The publisher is Sanomapro from Finland. These Maths books are for the third graders.





On the left there is a page from the Maths book for a mainstream student. On the right there is a page from the Maths book for a special needs student. It's easy to work with these books in a diverse classroom situation as all students can participate in the theme of the lesson.

Key Learning for the project team during this Activity Week:

- › Understanding the Finnish education system and how a primary school works in Finland: the weekly routine, relationship between students and teachers, lessons and breaks, funding
- › Teaching methods and materials, for instance, differentiated textbooks, team work among the teachers
- › The education system in Finland, equality, new curriculum, autonomy combined with structure, attention to the development of the whole person
- › Inclusive education is supported and funded by the government
- › CO-TEACHING IN PRACTICE
- › The training and expertise of the teachers, master's degree, how the student welfare teams work in the school, age profile of the teachers (more mature than in other European jurisdictions)
- › The function and availability of classroom assistants
- › Steps of Support – how to support students with learning disabilities, focus on getting support at earliest possible time, documentation, parental involvement, individual education plan
- › PISA: the lack of Finnish students on the lower layers, the result of the Steps of Support
- › Flexibility and different forms of special education
- › That inclusion should not be a priority for every student. Some students justifiably required more comprehensive support measures (for instance students with severe intellectual impairments or significant behavioural difficulties). In these cases inclusion may not benefit the learning or development of the student. Rather, school inclusion might not prevent social exclusion, and may instead contribute to it.

Conclusions of the Project Team

1. Co-teaching as practised in Lukkari School is an effective means of inclusive education:

- › It provides learning opportunities for all children in the classroom – i.e. genuine inclusion. During observation in these classrooms it was not possible for the project team members to distinguish between children with / without special educational needs. All children in these classrooms were offered equal learning opportunities.
- › Children with special needs are not only ‘socially’ included, they are practically included in class learning.
- › It facilitates children’s different learning styles.
- › It provides opportunity for supported group work.
- › It enables peer tutoring and learning from a variety of ‘role models’ including teachers in collaborative roles.
- › Diversity: Children can learn to accept ‘difference’ as the norm. This can facilitate the development of more heterogeneous friendship patterns and a sense of empathy at an early age.
- › It provides for a multiplicity of abilities, rather than defining any one child as ‘special’ in a universal sense. Therefore, it is likely to enhance self-esteem, as all children (and not least those with special needs) will gain confidence from having their particular strengths in different curriculum areas acknowledged in a mainstream context.
- › It is a valuable alternative approach to separate special class support in mainstream schools.

2. Co-teaching is also beneficial for teachers:

- › It enables shared assessment of, and planning for children’s needs – potential for more effective teaching, learning, differentiation, inclusive education.
- › It provides more opportunity to get to know individual children – can better address the needs of individuals – genuine inclusion.
- › At all times the focus can be on teaching and learning, as the classroom assistant provides support with administrative tasks.

- › It provides opportunity to manage the class / children’s behaviour more discreetly so that learning is not negatively impacted.
- › Teachers can learn in practice from one another – sharing curriculum knowledge, methodologies and interests.
- › It provides for flexibility of practice. Co-teaching approaches may be designed in accordance with varied teaching and learning styles.
- › Support: There is opportunity to share the pressures and challenges of classroom life – always someone to talk to.
- › It can facilitate better self-evaluation via ongoing critical reflection with a teaching colleague.

3. Co-teaching requires certain teacher competences and commitments:

- › Trust between teacher colleagues
- › Open-mindedness
- › Interest in working together
- › Shared values
- › Similar work ethic
- › Flexibility – acceptance of different approaches to teaching and interacting with children
- › Good communication skills
- › Daily pedagogical discussion
- › Confidence in one’s own abilities
- › Willingness to learn from others
- › Willingness to take risks, to be vulnerable
- › Willingness to commit to shared planning and critical reflection
- › Clear understanding of responsibilities and boundaries
- › Willingness to share full responsibility for students and for liaising with parents
- › Supportive leadership (school principal)

The few drawbacks we considered:

- › Might students become too dependent on immediate assistance and become discouraged from trying?
- › Might individual teachers feel they have lost independence rather than gained flexibility in teaching approaches?

Conclusion and Recommendations

While the placement of pupils with varied learning needs in mainstream school classes may prevent social exclusion, it does not necessarily facilitate educational inclusion. However, the practice of co-teaching in such classes can offer much potential for advancing the learning of all pupils in these classes. The shared expertise and commitment of two different teachers and a classroom assistant in a context of considerable pupil diversity can in make inclusive education a realisable goal. We recommend therefore that school leaders consider the strategy of co-teaching as a potential means of giving more practical effect to the policy of inclusive education their schools.

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