



EMPOWERING INCLUSIVE TEACHERS
FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

EiTTT

Learning Activity Summaries

EiTTT (Empowering Inclusive Teachers for Today and Tomorrow) was a European strategic partnership project funded under the Erasmus+ KA2 Education Programme of the European Union. EiTTT focused on the development of mainstream schools as inclusive learning environments for all learners, including those with special needs and disabilities; those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds; and persons with a migrant background.

The project carried out six transnational learning activities on the following themes:



These resources are designed to outline how the EiTTT partners implemented the learning from the project's activities. They aim to inform teacher educators, practising teachers, student teachers, school administrators and policy makers at national and European levels.

EiTTT was coordinated by Marino Institute of Education, Ireland, with partner organisations in Belgium (University Colleges Leuven-Limburg & Karel de Grote University College), Cyprus (Dimotiko Sxoleio Anthoupolis KA), Latvia (Rigas 45. vidusskola) and Finland (Lukkarin koulu). The project partners, who represent three teacher education institutions and three schools, shared a commitment to inclusive education and an understanding of priorities to be addressed if inclusion is to become intrinsic to school practice. The project ran from October 2016 to March 2019.

With a view to facilitating learning for all in the diverse population of contemporary classrooms, EiTTT identified that schools themselves must also be enabled to provide support structures that can facilitate teachers' inclusive practice. As a cross-sectoral group of educators, the EiTTT partners exchanged learning about what they believe are exemplary inclusive education practices in their respective teacher education institutions and schools.

Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union





Learning Activity 1: Co-Teaching in Teacher Education



The EiTTT project team together with colleagues from each of our institutions and schools travelled to the university town of Leuven, located 25 kilometres east of Brussels, in the province of Flemish Brabant. We were welcomed to UCLL by host partner Lijne Vloeberghs and her colleagues. Our base was the Hertogstraat campus in Heverlee, where the entire student body, of approximately 2,000 students, is enrolled in various teacher education programmes, in the largest teacher education institution in Flanders.

M Decree

Belgium is a federal state, within which education is largely regulated and financed independently in each of three distinct communities/regions, overseen by the federal government. In Flanders, the Dutch speaking northern region of the country where we were located, **'Inclusive Education'** is currently at the forefront of educational discourse. This follows the institution in September 2015 by the Flemish parliament, of legislation known as the 'M Decree'. 'M', which refers to the concept **'Maatwerk'** ('custom-made' / 'tailor-made' – i.e. to the educational needs of the child), requires that all primary and secondary school students, including those with learning difficulties and 'mild' disabilities, be enrolled in the first instance, in mainstream schools. All students there should follow the mainstream curriculum, with 'reasonable accommodations' if required, for students with additional needs. While special schooling remains an option, the student's need for such provision must now be very well justified. This focus on 'mainstreaming', aims to accord with wider EU policy on inclusive education. It has also emerged in the context of concerns about comparative data on the education of children with special needs in Europe, which have suggested that the percentage of pupils in 'segregated' special education in the Flemish community, is the highest in Europe (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, Country Data 2010). The 'M Decree' therefore, is designed to uphold the child's right to be enrolled in mainstream school, and to prevent too rapid and potentially undue referral to special schooling.

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 the 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 very promising response in this regard is a pilot redeployment programme in which some 180 teachers from special schools have been assigned to mainstream schools to work alongside and support (**co-teach with**) teachers in that system. The programme also serves to offset teacher job losses in special schools.

Co-teaching at UCLL

In light of these developments, the purpose of our visit to UCLL was to explore the potential of co-teaching, particularly as a preparation strategy for inclusive educational practice.

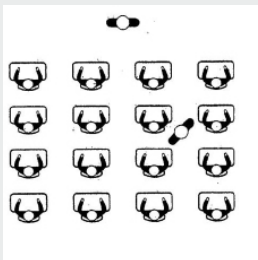
Co-teaching refers to two classroom practitioners (teachers; host teacher and student teacher; student teachers) sharing planning, teaching and evaluation activities. Therefore, the strategy may be employed for several purposes; to enhance teacher preparation; to serve more experienced teachers' continuing professional development needs; and ultimately, to provide all pupils in the class with better learning opportunities. For student teachers working with host teachers, or in pairs, it also holds potential to advance their learning for inclusive practice. At UCLL, the promotion of co-teaching is designed to serve each of these purposes, and features particularly in a three-strand approach to the preparation of future teachers for inclusive practice.

Learning Activity 1: Co-Teaching in Teacher Education

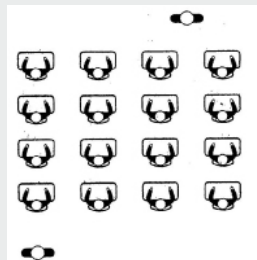


The project team considered various concepts of, and approaches to co-teaching, including:

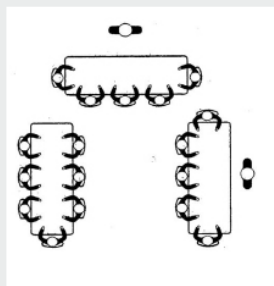
One Teach, One Assist



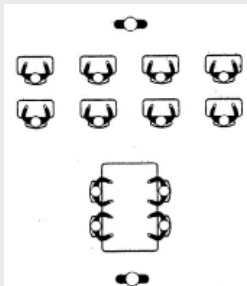
One Teach, One Observe



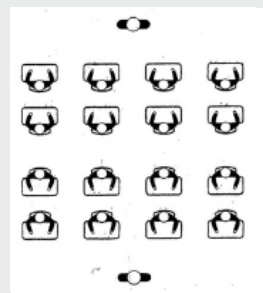
Station Teaching



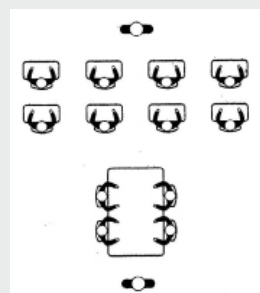
Alternative Teaching



Parallel Teaching



Team Work



We concluded that each approach has its merits. Decisions about strategies employed will depend on the characteristics and needs of pupils, the curriculum, the subject matter, practical classroom considerations and teacher preference.

Themes addressed in roundtable discussion with teacher educators at UCLL:

- Why co-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

In that discussion and in engagements with teachers during a school visit, we noted that at UCLL:

- 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 to co-teach, i.e. to plan, teach and evaluate together during school placement for classroom practice.
- In the Bachelor programmes for early childhood, 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 mainstream classrooms, and thus to facilitate fuller participation in learning by all children.
- At a later stage in that degree programme [Special Educational Needs], students who chose to undertake 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.
- 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 shared with us their experience of developing ‘professional learning communities’ in schools in which experienced teachers had chosen to co-teach.

Universal Design for Learning

The theory of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has recently been introduced to teacher education programmes at UCLL. It is based on the principle that: **Diversity in classrooms is the norm. Therefore, teachers should think and plan accordingly.** Student teachers at UCLL are encouraged to plan lessons for classroom practice in accordance with the UDL framework, i.e., to provide **Multiple Means of:**

- **Representation of knowledge** (options for perception, language, mathematical expression, symbols, comprehension)
- **Action and expression** (options for physical action, expression and communication)
- **Engagement** (options for recruiting interest, sustaining effort and persistence, self-regulation)

The theory of UDL is indisputable. However, the project team members concurred that the important matter of **how** beginning teachers might learn to employ it remains an issue. Without adequate support, efforts to incorporate the framework in planning and subsequent practice may simply exacerbate the challenges involved in learning to teach. As student teachers invariably report: *‘You need to know your children first’; ‘You need good class management skills’; ‘You need experience. . .’*

Conclusion

There is much merit in exploring the value of co-teaching in teacher education as a means of preparing student teachers for inclusive practice in schools. Student teachers may learn to employ valuable UDL principles in practice by co-teaching with host teachers during school experience.





Learning Activity 2: Co-Teaching for Inclusive Classroom Practice



EiTTT partners and colleagues from across Europe gathered in Finland in February 2017 for the second Learning Activity of our project. While we were based in Helsinki in southern Finland, our daily destination was Lukkari Primary School in Nurmijärvi, a rural municipality with a population of 41,000 people, located approximately 37 km north of the capital city. For most of us therefore, it was a very different type of journey to work every day - through a pristine winter wonderland of deep snow and sub-zero temperatures (-14 -18)! Our week-long learning journey about Finland, its people and its education system, was enhanced by the wonderfully warm welcome extended to the team by teacher and project partner Kirsi Lemponen, her colleague Satu Kastikainen, school principal Tiina Nordgren and all the pupils and staff of Lukkari school.

Lukkarin Koulu (Lukkari Primary School)

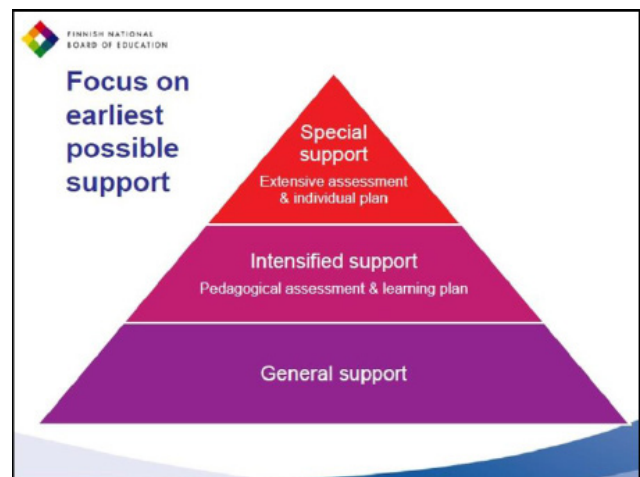


At Lukkari school, as in Finland generally, children commence their primary schooling at age 7 (or sometimes 6) and proceed through grades 1 - 6 before transferring to second-level school. Like most primary schools in Finland, this is, by European standards, a relatively small- to medium-sized school with a current enrolment of 278 pupils aged between 6 and 13 years. Nineteen teachers and eight classroom assistants together with the principal teacher are employed there.

Schooling in Finland

- **Free Education:** In Finland education is free at all levels. School books, lunches, all materials and transportation are provided at no charge.
- **New Curriculum:** A revised primary school curriculum was introduced in 2016.
- **Equality:** The basic principle of Finnish education is one of equal access to high quality education for all citizens. Hence, most children are educated in public schools, a school system developed in the 1970s.
- **Steps of Support:** With a view to educational and social equality, the following steps of support are provided in the Finnish school system to enable each child to maximise his or her potential.

Focus on earliest possible support pyramid



Learning Activity 2: Co-Teaching for Inclusive Classroom Practice



Co-teaching for Inclusion

The focus of our study in Finland was Lukkari School's successful model of 'co-teaching for inclusion', whereby a mainstream teacher and an experienced special education teacher, supported by a classroom assistant, work on a full-time basis in mainstream classes. In each of these classes there are approximately twenty-four children, 7 – 10 of whom have special educational needs. We were privileged with much opportunity to observe teacher / pupil interaction in a variety of classrooms and to be afforded time to discuss our daily observations with teachers and the school principal. Our learning was extended during teacher presentations and an Inclusion seminar and during our engagement with the students, teachers and the principal teacher of the special school, 'Kivenpuisto', which shares the Lukkari school campus.

In an alternative to separate special class provision, four of the five special education teachers at Lukkari school teach on a full-time basis alongside class teachers in mainstream classes. A decision to introduce this **co-teaching model** in grades 1 – 4 in the school was taken some years ago as a consequence of dissatisfaction on the part of special education teachers with the performance and behaviour of children in special classes. Following parental consultation, four 'new' mainstream classes were formed, each of which includes up to ten children who would previously have been placed in special classes on a full-time basis. In each of these co-taught classes there are three adults, i.e. two teachers and a classroom assistant available to all children. **Co-teaching is a methodology which is highly recommended in Finland's revised national curriculum.** The project team spent much of the week observing in these classes and considering the merits and challenges of this approach in the context of 'inclusive education'.

We observed:

- A variety of co-teaching approaches employed by each team of teachers (e.g. One teach – one assist; Team teaching; Flexible grouping; Station teaching).
- Seamless interaction and wordless communication between co-teachers and between these teachers and assistants, which allowed co-taught lessons to flow without interruption.
- The high quality of the relationship between co-teaching adults, and also the exemplary adult-child relationships in this context.
- The possibilities for heterogeneous group work. A small break-out room adjoins each mainstream classroom, with doors left ajar between the two rooms.
- Genuine inclusion: Team members reported being several hours in each classroom before any 'special' needs of children became evident, as all children were receiving more individualised support.

- That differentiated textbooks are used for Mathematics, Finnish and English. These textbooks greatly facilitate effective co-teaching and practical inclusion.



Conclusion

- Co-teaching as practised at Lukkari School is highly beneficial for pupils.
- Co-teaching is also beneficial for teachers.
- Co-teaching requires certain teacher competences and commitments.

While the placement of children with varied learning needs in mainstream primary 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 children in these classes. The shared expertise and commitment of two different teachers and a classroom assistant in a context of considerable pupil diversity can 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 in their schools.





Learning Activity 3: Video Interaction Guidance in Teacher Education



For this Learning Activity week project partner Leen Stoffels and colleagues at Karel de Grote University College (KdG) facilitated an invaluable range of learning experiences for our cross-sectoral team of teachers and teacher educators. With a view to providing appropriately for the education of all students, including those experiencing difficulties arising from social / emotional factors, the team focused on the concept of **pedagogical sensitivity** as fundamental to learning in school. The teacher education strategy of **Video Interaction Guidance (VIG)** and the manner in which it is employed at KdG to provide for and enhance the development of sensitive, caring, empathetic teachers, was central to our study there. During the course of the week we engaged in a variety of workshops facilitated by a range of expert practitioners. Our learning from these activities was complemented by observation of a range of inclusive and special education practices during study visits to primary, secondary and special schools in Antwerp.

KdG is a higher education institution located in Belgium's second city, Antwerp. As the largest university college in the region, it comprises nine campuses, with a combined enrolment of more than 12,000 students. Named after Charles the Great, the college was founded in 1995 by the merger of 13 Catholic colleges. It offers courses and programmes leading to bachelor and master degrees in six fields of study:

- Education
- Social Work
- Healthcare
- Commercial Sciences and Commercial Studies
- Industrial Sciences and Technology
- Visual Arts

In view of societal developments internationally, the fields of **Education, Social Work and Healthcare**, all located on KdG's south campus, are closely aligned, with ongoing development of linked programmes to support families and communities holistically.



Teacher Education at KdG

The faculty of Education at Karel de Grote University College has a long history and extensive experience in the provision of Teacher Education programmes. More than 2,500 students are currently enrolled in various teacher education bachelor and master degree programmes there.

Focusing on Home Background:

In line with the interrelationship between Education, Social Work and Healthcare courses at KdG, the field of Education incorporates in its programmes for prospective and practising teachers, **a focus on contextual / home background factors** with respect to the children with whom they [will] work.

Bert Murawski, a former teacher who is currently employed as a teacher educator at KdG, facilitated an in-depth exploration by the team, of the key qualities of effective teachers. With reference to his own career spent in school classrooms and administration,

Learning Activity 3: Video Interaction Guidance in Teacher Education



where he engaged with children exhibiting a variety of behavioural challenges, Bert described how he had developed an interest in the social / emotional factors underlying these behaviours. **He shared his observations on how and why children respond differently to different teachers:**

- ‘Children come to school from very diverse home backgrounds and with quite varied experiences of parent / child relationships. This reality may be easily overlooked in our quest for more effective pedagogical strategies’.
- ‘Just as strong emotional ‘bonding’ between parent and child is crucial in child development, so sensitivity, care, empathy and responsiveness on the part of the teacher can provide for similar bonding with the pupil and hence can more effectively enable the pupil to fulfil his or her educational potential’.
- ‘Good social / emotional development facilitates intellectual development’.
- ‘The quality of the teacher / pupil relationship is fundamental to effective pedagogical endeavours in school’.
- ‘Attachment theory’ as first outlined by researchers such as Bowlby and Ainsworth in the 1906s and 1970s, may be employed to explain the centrality of the teacher/pupil relationship in education’.



Video Interaction Guidance in Practice

In two subsequent workshops facilitated by teacher educators An Leroy (KdG) and Luc Degrand (University College, Leuven-Limburg) we considered the matter of how teacher educators might practically support the development of appropriate personal dispositions in prospective and practising teachers. The use of technology and specifically **Video**, was considered to offer a valuable means of enabling [student] teachers to reflect on their classroom practices and on their engagements with their students. In this regard, a **key teacher education strategy employed is Video Interaction Guidance (VIG)**.



The team explored the variety of VIG strategies that have been employed with KdG student teachers during their placements in schools over the past four years. In that time, almost all of the schools involved in hosting KdG student teachers for school practice have granted permission for video recording by student teachers in classrooms.

At KdG, the VIG strategy is considered to be “really working”, making student teachers much more aware of their competences and dispositions and thereby enhancing the nature of their engagements with their students in the classroom. We concluded that the strategy obviously offers student and practising teachers much potential to explore the quality of these engagements in terms of the **Pedagogical Sensitivity** required to **support the learning needs of all their school students and not least those experiencing difficulties arising from social / emotional factors.**

Learning Activity 3: Video Interaction Guidance in Teacher Education



Basisschool Melgesdreef

The project team was privileged to visit Melgesdreef primary school and the adjoining secondary school (Atheneum MXM) located in the Antwerp suburb of Merksem. These mainstream schools have a combined enrolment of more than 1,000 students. In the course of presentations and discussions with the school principal and staff and during visits to classrooms, we explored the policy and practice of inclusive education at the heart of this impressive campus.

Personalising the Curriculum

In accordance with the four levels of the care system in all Belgian mainstream schools (Basic; More Intensive; Extension of Care / External Support; Highest Level), Melgesdreef school provides a structure of support for children to facilitate their inclusion in mainstream education. Nonetheless, it was emphasised that while the learning objectives designed for the children respect this structure, they are **also personalised to take account of individual needs**.



Alongside educational provision in mainstream classes, additional educational and care support for pupils is provided if required, by 'fly teams' of support teachers. As far as possible these teams provide this support within the classroom setting. Working in consultation with the school's care coordinator and the principal, they also support class teachers by meeting every teacher four times yearly to discuss class progress and the particular progress of every child within the class. As in Melgesdreef primary school, the backgrounds of students in Atheneum MXM school are very diverse. The school's learning programmes are based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

UDL Universal Design of Learning



Tongelsbos Special School

For the final school visit of this learning week, the project team spent a day at Tongelsbos Special School. Tongelsbos is located 30km from Antwerp. 160 students are currently enrolled in the primary section of the school, and 220 students in the secondary section. The staff comprises 35 primary teachers, 65 second-level teachers and 25 other staff (paramedical and support personnel). Students at Tongelsbos are assigned to classes and particular programmes that accord in the first instance, with their **Care Needs**. The school's care team comprises a psychologist, a psychologist / pedagogue, a social worker, a speech therapist, a physiotherapist and a 'time out' worker (to support students' needs for time out of class / school arising from behavioural difficulties). **Universal Design for Learning** underpins all activities at the school.

Learning Activity 3: Video Interaction Guidance in Teacher Education



Conclusion

- The team focused on the concept of **Pedagogical Sensitivity** as fundamental to learning in school.
- We recognised that the need for appropriate personal dispositions in teachers is now more critical than ever, given the diverse population of students in contemporary mainstream classrooms.
- We concluded that the ability and willingness to review and reflect deeply on the quality of their engagements with their students and the possible factors, including home background factors, impacting on these, is key to the development of appropriate sensitivity and responsiveness in teachers.
- The challenges student teachers often experience with the requirement to ‘reflect’ on their professional engagements with a view to learning from such reflections are well documented. The team considered how technological advances that have provided ease of access to, and facility with the use of video might facilitate these reflective and learning processes.
- We concluded that the strategy of **Video Interaction Guidance (VIG)** offers student and practising teachers much potential to explore the quality of these engagements in terms of the **Pedagogical Sensitivity** required to **support the learning needs of all their school students and not least those experiencing difficulties arising from social / emotional factors.**
- We recognised the need to carefully support [student] teachers’ introduction to such a teacher education strategy.
- Our learning during the week was complemented by **observation of a range of exemplary inclusive and special education practices in primary, secondary and special schools in Antwerp.**



Marino Institute of Education,
Dublin, November
27th - December 1st, 2017



Learning Activity 4: Student-teacher Placement in a Special Education School Context – Developing Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes for Inclusive Practice



EMPOWERING INCLUSIVE TEACHERS
FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

INSTITIÚID OIDEACHAIS
★
MARINO
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
An Associated College of
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

Marino Institute of Education (MIE) was privileged to host the EITTT project team in Dublin for one week from 27th November – 1st December, 2017. Despite the time of year, delighted project partners from Finland, Cyprus, Latvia and Belgium, quickly dispatched with recommended umbrellas, and in the company of MIE colleagues, spent a week in sparkling sunshine exploring all that the lovely Marino campus and city of Dublin have to offer. As participants remarked, it was a “wonderful week” of very varied and insightful learning activities that included workshops and presentations facilitated by MIE staff and student teachers, as well as visits to a wide range of mainstream and special schools around Dublin during the school placement period for MIE’s student teachers.

Student Teachers’ Learning on Placement

In addition to course work, MIE student teachers’ Inclusive Education module incorporates a ten-day placement in a special education setting. Students may choose to undertake this placement in a **special school** or in a **special unit/class** in a mainstream school. During the placement students observe and work alongside the class teacher and special needs assistants. The students are required to engage in as much work with pupils (in small groups and on a one-to-one basis) as permitted by

their host teacher. While they are not formally assessed on their teaching abilities during this placement, the students are required to document their ongoing learning in a reflective journal. Each student on placement is visited by a member of the academic staff who reports in a formative manner on the student’s development and learning during the period of placement. This placement experience is invariably described by most students as one of the most valuable learning opportunities of their teacher education course. They generally find it ‘highly informative’, ‘professionally challenging’ and often ‘transformative’. Significantly, students report that it also affords them a heightened appreciation of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to work more inclusively with all children in mainstream school settings, and following this placement they appear to be far more committed to, and confident about, doing so. In summary, students’ feedback suggests that the experience of this placement in a special education setting can enhance their overall understandings about education and children’s learning, and serve to prepare them more comprehensively for future practice in both mainstream classrooms and special education settings. **Student teachers’ development and learning arising from this placement experience was the focus of the Learning Activity week in Ireland for project partners.**

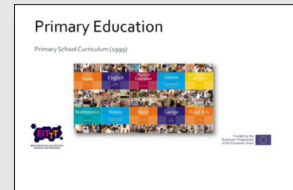
Learning Activity 4: Student-teacher Placement in a Special Education School Context – Developing Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes for Inclusive Practice



The week opened with a range of presentations and workshops facilitated by MIE academic staff members:

'Ireland and the Irish Education System'

Ms Jennifer O'Sullivan



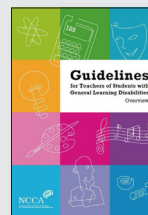
'Third Level and Teacher Education'

Dr Rory McDaid



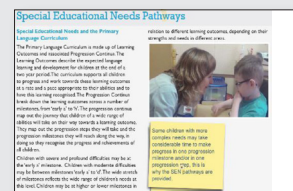
'Inclusive and Special Education in Ireland: Developments to Date'

Dr Anne Ryan



'Current Special Educational Needs Policy and Practice in Ireland' – Ms Deirdre Murphy

Ms Deirdre Murphy



'Digital Tools for Inclusion in Schools: Practical Insights into Student Teachers' Inclusive Education Course Work'

Dr Anne McMorrough



The EiTTT Team Visits Student Teachers on Placement in Schools

Over the course of two days, partners visited students in special and mainstream (special classes / units) schools.



Student Teachers and EiTTT Project Partners in Conversation

Thirty-five student teachers randomly selected from the B.Ed. 2 year group were invited to return to college from school placement for one day during the learning week, to meet and share their views about this placement with the project team.



Learning Activity 4: Student-teacher Placement in a Special Education School Context – Developing Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes for Inclusive Practice



Conclusion

On the final day of the learning week the team worked in country groups to reflect on all aspects of their learning during the week. Facilitated by MIE lecturers Dr Sandra Austin and Dr Anne McMorrough, they used the padlet tool (<https://padlet.com>) which enabled large screen presentation of concurrent feedback from each of the country groups.

They addressed the following questions and offered recommendations:

1. Is this placement necessary? Is it valuable in initial teacher education (Why / not?)
2. Is this placement necessary / valuable in preparation for mainstream teaching?
3. What (if any) learning opportunities does it afford student teachers which might not happen otherwise (i.e. via course work alone?)

- There was a unanimously positive response from the EITTT team members about the potential of this placement experience for enhancing student teachers' professional development.
- It was seen to be a vital element in the preparation of inclusive practitioners.
- Partners recommended that student teachers be offered further opportunities to practise in 'diverse' settings during their teacher education course and that they be gradually assessed on this practice.
- The importance of informed, supported reflection by the student teachers on this experience (i.e. in conjunction with teacher educators) was underlined.

In conclusion, informal feedback from student teachers and academic staff in MIE over many years has indicated that placement experience in a special education setting serves as a valuable learning experience for future teachers, with much potential to advance their learning for inclusive practice. As student teachers have reported, the experience of this placement can demystify their thinking about 'disability' and 'special educational needs'. It can afford them greater opportunity than in mainstream classes to 'notice' variations in children's learning capacities and styles and to consider more carefully how to apply 'ordinary' methodologies to effectively respond to these. Research findings indicate that students' focus as future teachers may consequently shift from a preoccupation with children's 'learning difficulties' to a recognition of potentially 'problematic pedagogies'. Hence student teachers are better able to regard human 'difference' as a given and a starting point for all lesson planning. The observations of the EITTT partners during their week in Dublin concur with these views. The team highly recommends that teacher educators incorporate such placement experience in the preparation of beginning teachers for effective practice in our diverse world.



Anthoupolis (K.A.) Primary School, Nicosia, Cyprus, 23rd - 27th April, 2018



Learning Activity 5: Inclusion through Education - Students from Refugee / Migrant / Socio-economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds



The EiTTT project team was based in Nicosia, Cyprus for the week of 23rd - 27th April, 2018. Courtesy of the exceptionally generous hospitality of our host partners – principal teacher Venetia Agroti and class teachers Evridiki

Papageorgiou, Christiana Gavrielidou and Ortansia Frangiskou - together with all of the staff, students and parents of Anthoupolis (K.A.) Primary School, we were privileged to spend time in this beautiful location. It was a week of immersive learning about Cyprus, its people, history, geography, politics and education system, with particular focus on this school's exemplary educational provision for the students and families of the Anthoupolis community. **As Europe presently experiences an unprecedented level of inward migration and movement of refugees, our school systems are challenged as never before to put in place supports and strategies that will meet the needs and ultimately maximise through education the potential of all socio-cultural groups. With a long and successful experience in the provision of such supports, the staff of Anthoupolis School shared their learning with the project team.**

Anthoupolis (K.A.) Primary School, Nicosia



The community of Anthoupolis some 10 km from the centre of the capital city Nicosia was developed to house displaced people ('refugees') from elsewhere on the island following a coup d'état and subsequent Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974. In 1977 Anthoupolis School opened with the enrolment of children from 83 occupied communities. Now re-organised into two separate primary schools (junior and senior) which share one campus, there are 138 children aged 6 - 9 years currently enrolled in the junior (K.A.) school which caters for grades 1 - 3. Most of the children in the Anthoupolis schools today represent the third generation of people displaced 44 years ago. They are drawn from a community experiencing high levels of socio-economic disadvantage.

The junior school, in which the project team was located, is staffed by ten mainstream class teachers including the principal teacher, two special needs teachers, a visiting teacher, two speech therapists and a special needs assistant. The project team observed how the work of these professionals has been underpinned and enhanced from the outset by the activities of an **exceptionally well organised and committed Parents' Association**. Throughout the week we observed in classes and in the All-Day School Programme, engaged with teachers, the school inspector, and representatives of the Parents' Association, and received input from personnel involved in Teacher Education and in the International Organisation for Migration (UN).

Learning Activity 5: Inclusion through Education - Students from Refugee / Migrant / Socio-economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds



School Support for Inclusion: Well-being First

Primary schooling in Cyprus is mandatory and free for children aged 6–11 years. One year of free pre-primary schooling is also compulsory. The secondary school system caters for students aged 12–18 years, and subsequently, very high numbers of young people proceed to university. However, given a dearth of suitable employment for these highly qualified graduates, the emigration rate for this cohort remains high.

In Anthoupolis the **well-being of every child** is prioritised in school. With a view to children's holistic development and in line with the concept of the 'Sensitive Teacher' (see EiTTT Learning Activity at KdG University College, Antwerp, Belgium) school staff in cooperation with the broader community attend as necessary to the basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, emotional care) of the children in the first instance. The school day begins at 7.30am and ends at 1.00pm. **However, in this school as in others located in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, a government-funded initiative provides for an optional 'All Day School' programme.** Children in this programme may remain on the school premises until 4.00pm. They are offered lunch and recreation, homework support and supportive teaching, and they can also avail of a range of optional subjects and activities. A **government-funded programme of Summer Schools** is also offered, with places in this programme prioritised for children from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds and children with special educational needs.

As became apparent to the project team, the concept of Inclusive Education in Cyprus aims to be all encompassing in practice. It addresses students with special needs and disabilities, while concomitantly taking account of the persistent effect of socio-economic challenges on the school experience of many families.

Remembering 1974

We observed that the empowerment of a community to adapt to new situations and deal with ensuing personal concerns has been, and remains a central element of the Anthoupolis agenda. The ongoing impact on the social and educational systems of the political upheaval in Cyprus following the events of 1974 and the occupation of large areas of the island, was very evident throughout our time at Anthoupolis school. As we discovered, education in Cyprus is highly valued as a means to a better life. With 'protection' and 'empowerment' traditional features of national policy, the education system aims to produce a highly educated workforce, while providing for social inclusion. In essence, the school is called upon to fulfil an important social role.

'Action Day'



A key date in the school's calendar is 'Action Day' to commemorate 1974. This year that day of activities was held during our project visit. We had opportunity therefore to join with the pupils of the school in these activities. This included listening to personal accounts from some of those who had lost family members, homes and livelihoods, observing film footage relevant to the events, and briefly experiencing what 'home' might feel like in a hot, dusty UN tent with all one's worldly possessions contained in a small suitcase. It was a most informative and deeply emotional day as we reflected on the intensity of the sadness still felt some 44 years after the commencement of this unresolved conflict. As the activities were designed to enable the school's children to empathise with, and acquire an appreciation for, the life experience of displaced people arriving in present day Cyprus, the parallels with today's world events were very much brought home to us. The day drew to a close as we joined with children, parents and teachers in an uplifting cultural celebration of folk music and dance, which culminated in the children's release of hundreds of white balloons with a wish for a better future for all.



Learning Activity 5: Inclusion through Education - Students from Refugee / Migrant / Socio-economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds



The Teacher in Cyprus

Unlike the situation in many other Western countries, the career of teacher is still held in high esteem in Cyprus. We learnt that entrants to teacher education are drawn from high-achieving second-level graduates and undertake a four-year Bachelor's degree. Teachers preparing to teach in the pre-primary school system enrol in a separate teacher education degree programme, and teachers of children in special classes and schools are required to hold additional 'special education' qualifications.

Teacher Autonomy: Co-teaching

While a national curriculum is outlined, and recommendations about teaching approaches are offered by the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education, teachers in Cyprus have considerable autonomy over lesson planning and the nature of the methodologies they employ in the classroom. Hence, following learning from a visit of EITTT project partners (including Cypriot teacher partners) to a primary school in Finland in which **co-teaching** is practised, **the strategy was recently introduced at Anthoupolis School. Furthermore, the approach has received the full support of the school's inspector and is now being recommended in primary schools across Cyprus.** The project team observed a series of co-taught lessons. We were impressed at the seamless incorporation of various co-teaching strategies that provided for the total engagement of all children in the classroom through several lessons over a period of 80 minutes. Subsequent discussions with teaching staff underlined our learning (from Finland) about the challenges involved in the successful introduction of such a potentially effective classroom methodology. As was emphasised, it is a learning process for everyone involved; one that requires commitment in particular to comprehensive preparation, and a willingness to 'reveal' to colleagues all aspects of yourself as a teacher.



Special Education

Reform of Special Education is presently under way in Cyprus, with policy favouring the 'inclusion' of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools and classes. There are nine special schools in Cyprus, and some mainstream schools also provide special classes ('units'). We were privileged to observe teaching and learning in special units in one such school.



Learning Activity 5: Inclusion through Education - Students from Refugee / Migrant / Socio-economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds



'Schooling' in Anthoupolis: Conclusions

The primary objective of our learning week was to identify some potentially effective approaches to enabling the social inclusion through education of students from refugee / migrant and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The 44 year history of Anthoupolis and the still evident inter-generational implications of displacement and ensuing 'disadvantage' brought home to partners the long-standing commitment imperative in such approaches. Partners concluded that where necessary, investment will be advocated in relevant education projects in their own jurisdictions:

Social-emotional Development: The manner in which socio-economic and emotional factors have shaped the work of teachers and parents in the Anthoupolis community cannot be underestimated. Since its foundation the school's mission has centred on building competences to support those whose life chances have been compromised by external circumstances. The teachers took pride in their commitment to maintaining a warm, caring atmosphere and a safe, respectful learning environment in the school with a view to the **well-being of the children** above all else. They spoke of 'giving children time to think' and 'opportunity to work together'. As partners observed, the rounded development of every child was paramount, with a **social skills** element incorporated in every lesson. Parents and Teachers Together: Teachers had the full support of the school's Parents' Association, a body that had developed with the school from its inception. In a presentation to the project team, the current president of that association emphasised the value of strong home-school liaison and outlined the extensive scope of the association's work for the betterment of the school's children and teachers. The community ('village') involvement in the development of its children and its future was key, and the relationship between this school and community was mutually empowering. Partners reflected on the commitment entailed in developing such a beneficial situation.

Teacher Expectations: All team members remarked on the advanced level of the curriculum presented to very young children in both Mathematics and Language, and on the children's consistent focus individually and during group work, throughout these lessons. We considered if pupils' evident abilities to rise to these challenges might be explained by high-level teacher expectations in conjunction with a commitment to children's holistic development, and in part also by the compulsory requirement to undertake a pre-school year at the age of five prior to enrolling in primary school. The relatively small number of pupils in each class was also noted. It was confirmed that the maximum class size in Cyprus primary schools is 25 pupils.

Person-centred Methodologies: Team members observed that the effective person-centred focus in this school stood in sharp relief with the web-based approaches that are permeating schools elsewhere.

The Teacher: Who is selected for teaching? What do we emphasise in teacher preparation? We noted that rather than feeling challenged by the broad scope of their agenda, teachers in the school felt that they were beneficiaries of it. As the school principal commented, 'the challenges of the school make you a more complete person'. As a project team we found ourselves reflecting again on the significance of **the person** in the professional role of 'teacher', recognising



Riga Secondary School No. 45, Riga, Latvia, 26th – 30th November, 2018



Learning Activity 6: Cross-Disciplinary Support for Inclusive Education



EMPOWERING INCLUSIVE TEACHERS
FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW



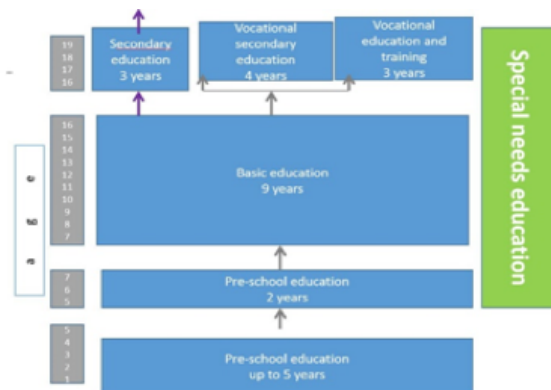
RĪGAS 45. VIDUSSKOLA

The EITTT Project team was based in Riga, Latvia for the week of the 26th to 30th November, 2018. Our host school was Riga Secondary School No. 45 (Rīgas 45. Vidusskola). Upon arrival we were greeted by the school principal, Baiba Neimane, teachers and project partners Natasa Dilba, Laura Zavacka and Iveta Liepina, and we were entertained with a delightful performance of traditional music and dance by the school's students. It was a week of immersive learning about Latvia; its traditions and culture, and an opportunity to gain a comprehensive insight into Latvia's education system. Riga Secondary School No. 45 has extensive experience in facilitating Inclusive Education with Support Teams and Outreach Programmes. It was this collaborative, integrated support model which was the focus of our study during the week.

The Education System and Teacher Education in Latvia

Schooling in Latvia is mandatory and free for children aged 5-18 years. Preschool is offered from age 1 – 6 years and attendance is compulsory from the age of 5. Preschool provision is available in both mainstream and kindergarten settings. General Basic Education offers an integrated primary and lower secondary programme for children aged 7-16. Following this stage of schooling students have an option to enrol in a three- or four-year programme of general secondary education, vocational education, or vocational education and training. Successful completion of one of these programmes allows the student to progress to either higher education, or interest-/vocational-oriented education. In Latvia, there is also a considerable emphasis placed on holistic development through education. Hence, school students have much opportunity to engage in Arts, Crafts, Music and Sporting Activity.

General teacher education in Latvia is completed over four years at Bachelor level. Two further years of professional training are required in order to qualify as a Special Education Teacher at this level.



Riga Secondary School No. 45 (Rīgas 45. Vidusskola)



Riga Secondary School No. 45 was founded in 1911. Located approximately 7.5km from the central district of Latvia's capital city

Learning Activity 6: Cross-Disciplinary Support for Inclusive Education



Riga, this large school has a present enrolment of 714 students ranging in age from 7 – 18 years. The students are accommodated in 32 classes across grades 1-12. Together with the school principal there are eight deputy directors and 100 teachers employed in the school. In accordance with general educational practice in Latvia, schooling at Rigas 45. Vidusskola is structured into three levels; Primary, Basic and Secondary. Grades 1-4 comprise the Primary level, grades 5 - 9 are the Basic level and Secondary schooling takes place in grades 10 - 12.

Strongly influenced by historical links with the Soviet Union, Music holds pride of place to this day in the cultural life of Riga. In 1968/69, a course of Music was introduced at Rigas 45. Vidusskola. This aspect of the curriculum has flourished and is still at the core of the school's pedagogy. There are two Music programmes provided: Basic Music Education and Vocational-Oriented Music. While all students learn traditional Latvian music and dance, some students also receive tuition in a range of instruments, e.g. piano, clarinet and saxophone. This additional tuition is provided by the school at no cost to the many students involved.

Support Teams

In many schools in Latvia 'Support Teams' of inter-disciplinary professional personnel are based on site on a full-time basis. The composition of these teams varies from school to school, and in mainstream schools generally comprises the following:

- **Special Education Teacher:** Identifies and analyses needs. Provides in-class learning and special needs educational support. Provides advice and support to class teachers and to parents.
- **Psychologist:** Identifies student learning difficulties and particularly those arising from emotional / behavioural challenges and recommends interventions and strategies to teachers and parents.
- **Speech Therapist:** Works with pupils from 1st to 4th grade. Makes suggestions for diagnosis. Works with groups or individuals and prepares guidelines for students and their teachers. The therapist works alongside teachers in mainstream and special education settings.
- **Social Pedagogue:** The Social Pedagogue encourages dialogue and co-operation between families and educators and takes responsibility for educating and supporting young people with respect to a range of social and/or community-based issues. In special schools the Support Team is complemented by additional medical personnel such as Nurses, Doctors / Medical Officers, Paediatricians,

Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists /Physical Therapists and Psychiatrists.

The Support Team in Rigas 45. Vidusskola

With a view to facilitating Inclusive Education, the school has a full-time Support Team on site comprising one Speech Therapist, one Psychologist, two Social Pedagogues and four Special Teachers. This team supports students from grades 1 - 4 (approximately one third of the student population) who experience a wide range of difficulties. In addition the school has a Career Advisor, two Sports Activities Organisers and two Librarians. Throughout the week, the EITTT project team observed in classrooms and engaged with the teachers and members of the support team in the school.

Co-teaching between members of the support team (e.g. Social Pedagogue or Speech and Language Therapist) and the teaching staff is one strategy employed to support students within the classroom. Withdrawal from class is also available either for small group instruction or individual attention for some students. For students with identified special needs there is additional support provision such as extra time during assessments and the conduct of these in separate venues. Individual education plans and individual behaviour support plans are drawn up by the teachers in conjunction with the support team.

Mēs Esam Līdzās Rehabilitation Centre:



For students with special needs and physical impairments that preclude their full-time inclusion in mainstream schooling, support is available from rehabilitation and support centres. On the invitation of centre Director Dr Andra Greitāne, the team had the great privilege of visiting the Mēs Esam Līdzās Rehabilitation Centre which is affiliated with Rigas 45. Vidusskola, and engaging with students and staff there. **This centre is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation which developed as a response to the lack of such services in Latvia.** It provides for the development of children with a range of special needs. As we learnt, the emphasis in this centre is on supporting the child's quality of life in the broadest respect. Children are encouraged and supported

Learning Activity 6: Cross-Disciplinary Support for Inclusive Education



in their management of everyday responsibilities, in establishing and maintaining relationships, in participating in community life, and with their recreational needs and interests. Both medical and educational personnel work side by side in this setting. The valuable role of the Arts as a means of communication and in enhancing children's physical, intellectual and emotional development is also a central feature of this centre's 'curriculum'. If required, the Ministry of Education provides funding for child transport and transport assistance between these rehabilitation centres and their affiliated schools.

Samples of Students' Work: Embroidery / Book-binding



Riga No. 1 Special Boarding School



Another very informative morning was spent with students and staff at Riga No. 1 Special Boarding School. Founded in 1924, this was the first such school in Riga. With 200 students currently enrolled, the school employs a teaching staff of 75, as well as 35 assistants and a range of allied medical / therapeutic personnel. A broad range

of learning and extra-curricular activities is incorporated into the two special education programmes provided - one for students with intellectual impairments and another for students with severe or multiple disabilities. The school's success in identifying each student's vocational potential and supporting its development was evident. With a development centre on site which provides support to parents and offers continuous professional development courses for teachers, the school is considered a 'Centre of Excellence'.

Ropažu Vidusskola



A visit to Ropažu Vidusskola, a mainstream school located approximately 36 kilometres outside of Riga, offered another insightful perspective on inclusive educational provision in Latvia. Presentations from school staff and a student-led tour of the school referenced the school's exceptional commitment to the importance of environment in education. Located in pristine rural parkland, the interior of this long-established school building had been recently re-designed to reflect an understanding of the impact of environment on student and staff wellbeing and hence learning. Indeed, Environmental Education and Protection were central features of the school's learning programme. The prevailing atmosphere was of remarkable calm and respect and above all of much pride in, and enjoyment of, the educational endeavours underway. Input was provided by school staff on the clearly structured supports in place to meet the needs of all students.

Learning Activity 6: Cross-Disciplinary Support for Inclusive Education



Key Learning during this week:

- **Inter-disciplinary collaboration / Support Teams:** The value of an integrated response for inclusive education: Teachers' inclusive practice is enhanced through their liaison with, and support from a readily accessible (ideally on-site) team of other relevant professional personnel in health and social service disciplines – personnel who are also engaged with the students concerned and their families. Such Support Teams offer opportunity for the immediate sharing of information and for the employment of strategies such as co-teaching, all of which benefit the holistic development of the child.
- **Art / Music based Education:** The potential of the Arts as an alternative means of communication and in advancing the physical, intellectual and emotional development of all children.
- **Life-Skills / Vocational Education:** Exceptionally high student vocational skill levels were evident – indicating considerable attention to this aspect of curriculum.
- **Shared campus for pre –primary, primary and secondary mainstream education:** In some schools in Latvia children share a campus from age 5 (kindergarten) to age 18 (secondary education). This structure can provide for easier transition from one schooling stage to another and support collaboration between teachers and support personnel.
- **The role of environment in facilitating students' engagement with learning and in enhancing wellbeing.**

