

Teacher education for inclusion across Europe

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Summary: Teacher education issues are high on the policy agenda across Europe and have been raised in many communications both at European and international level. This paper sets out to give a brief overview of the current policy context for teacher education for inclusion in Europe. This paper will also present information from the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education Teacher Education for Inclusion Project that highlights some emerging recommendations for this important area of work. The project draws on several strands of evidence including detailed reports on policy and practice in member countries and an extensive review of European and international literature. Information about the project, together with reports on policy and practice in all member countries can be found at: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/teacher-education-for-inclusion>

Keywords: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education - European policy - Inclusion - Project - Teacher education.

Former les enseignants à l'inclusion en Europe

Résumé : Les questions liées à la formation des enseignants ont une place prioritaire dans le programme politique à travers l'Europe et elles ont été soulevées dans des nombreuses communications au niveau européen comme au niveau international. Cet article propose de donner rapidement une vue d'ensemble du contexte politique actuel en matière de formation à l'inclusion des enseignants en Europe. Cet article présentera aussi une information sur le projet de formation des enseignants à l'inclusion de l'Agence européenne pour le développement de l'éducation des personnes à besoins particuliers qui met l'accent sur certaines recommandations émergentes dans ce domaine de travail important. Le projet apporte certains éléments de pratiques concrètes comportant des rapports détaillés sur la politique et les pratiques dans les pays membres, ainsi qu'une vaste bibliographie sur la littérature européenne et internationale. Les informations sur le projet, de même que les rapports sur la politique et les pratiques de tous les pays membres peuvent être consultés sur : <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/teacher-education-for-inclusion>

Mots-clés : Agence européenne - Formation des enseignants - Inclusion - Politique européenne - Projet.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACROSS EUROPE THE CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

The term *inclusion* is used in an increasing number of countries to encompass a far wider range of pupils vulnerable to exclusion than those identified as having SEN. The 48th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) (2008) recommended that policy makers should acknowledge that: *"inclusive education is an on-going process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the*

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different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination.” (Acedo et al., 2008).

In May 2009, the European Council of Education Ministers agreed a strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training - the Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) agenda. The third strategic objective states that:

“Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants – complete their education, including, where appropriate, through second-chance education and the provision of more personalised learning. Education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights and the environment, as well as combat all forms of discrimination, equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse background.” (ibid., p.7)

The recent Council Conclusions on the social dimension of education and training (Council of the European Union, 2010) note that education and training systems across the EU need to ensure both equity and excellence and recognise that improving educational attainment and key competencies for all are crucial not only to economic growth and competitiveness, but also to reducing poverty and fostering social inclusion.

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (see <http://www.un.org/disabilities/> for the most current list of ratifications) is also gaining momentum and providing a force for change. Article 24 states that inclusive education not only provides the best educational environment for learners with disabilities, but also helps break down barriers and challenge stereotypes.

STRENGTHENING TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher education issues are high on the policy agenda across Europe and globally. The European Commission in *An updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (16.12.2008)* stresses that: *“the quality of teachers, trainers and other educational staff is the most important within-school factor affecting student performance”* (p.8). In particular, the role of teachers and therefore of teacher education in moving towards a more inclusive education system that provides a quality education for all learners is being recognised.

The Commission communication *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education (3/08/2007)*, states: *“Changes in education and in society place new demands on the teaching profession. [...] classrooms now contain a more heterogeneous mix of young people from different backgrounds and with different levels of ability and disability”* (p.4).

Further to this, in the *Conclusions of the European Council of 15 November 2007 on improving the quality of teacher education*, Ministers responsible for Education agreed amongst other things, that teachers should be equipped to meet the challenges of increasing social and cultural diversity in the classroom, stressing that this is crucial for the development of more equitable education systems and for progress towards providing equal opportunities for all.

The *Communication from the Commission on Improving Competences for the 21st Century: An agenda for European cooperation in schools (03/07/2008)* also highlights

the need for initial teacher education to improve the balance between theory and practice and to present teaching as a problem-solving or research-in-action activity linked more to children's learning and progress.

Finally, the Council of the European Union conclusions on the professional development of teachers and school leaders (6 November 2009) states that: "*it is essential not only to ensure that those recruited to teaching and school leadership posts are of the highest calibre and well-suited to the tasks they have to fulfil, but also to provide the highest standard of initial education and continuing professional development for teaching staff at all levels*" (p.6).

TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION EVIDENCE FROM RECENT LITERATURE

In reviewing the literature ² on teacher education programmes from a range of European countries, many common themes emerge. Guojondottir *et al.* (2008) stress the need to develop a holistic approach to inclusion, including issues of equity, poverty and diversity. Saloviita (2005) notes the importance of developing shared terminology and appropriate use of inclusive language while Esteve (2009) and Nuova (2009) state that teaching practice is key in developing knowledge of the "*professional culture of teaching*". Hajkova (2007) also stresses the importance of reflection in transformational learning.

Other key issues discussed include: the need to close the theory- practice gap (Munoz, 2009; Mattson, 2006; Molina, 2006) and to develop critical skills in research and develop a "*research attitude*" (Rodrigues, 2009). Dispositions such as resilience, positive attitudes towards disability and beliefs regarding the potential of learners with diverse needs are considered to be essential (Tubele, 2008; Vandeputte *et al.*, 2007). Many other researchers point to the need to remove the 'experience based barriers' which arise because students themselves were not educated in inclusive settings (Nakkari, 2008).

The development of skills to ensure positive relationships with peers and pupils and regard for pupil voice (Molina, 2006; Kaikkonen *et al.*, 2007); knowledge of learning (*i.e.* constructivist approaches), personalisation and support strategies (Casonova *et al.*, 2006; Kavkler, 2009; Onfrih, 2008; Cefai *et al.*, 2007) and the need to undertake research and improve networking among teacher educators (Franzkowiak, 2009) are also described together with the importance of developing initial teacher education institutions' understanding of disability and inclusion (Cardona, 2009).

Collaboration is widely considered to be an essential skill for inclusive teachers but is also key for teacher educators teaching on special and mainstream teacher education programmes who need to work to "*merge*" content in order to better prepare all teachers to meet diverse needs (Pugach and Blanton, 2009). Acedo *et al.* (2008) express the view that due to the diversity of difficulties with which all teachers are confronted, separate pre-service education tracks (special and mainstream), are unhelpful and this view is supported by Young (2008) who suggests that the implied

2. <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/teacher-education-for-inclusion/teacher-education-web-files/TE41-Lit-Review.pdf>

need for an ever greater range of qualifications and specialisms limits who teachers think they can teach.

Overall, Hollins and Gunzman (2005) suggest that teacher education requires the reduction of prejudice, development of an *equity pedagogy* and field experiences to increase understanding of and sensitivity to cultural diversity. The literature therefore supports the need to move towards initial teacher education that prepares all teachers to meet the increasingly diverse needs of learners in today's classrooms.

THE EUROPEAN AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT IN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION PROJECT

The Agency three-year Project on Teacher Education for Inclusion involves 25 European countries and focuses on the education of all teachers and how they are prepared to work in inclusive settings with the initial education phase as a priority. Following an initial survey of Agency member countries on key issues and challenges associated with teacher education for inclusion, more detailed information was gathered regarding policy and practice in a questionnaire to participating countries. An extensive review of European Policy documents and worldwide research conducted since the year 2000 has provided further evidence for the project. (See: <http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/teacher-education-for-inclusion>)

Study visits and project meetings have made an important contribution to the project by providing opportunities for debate about key issues and representatives from DG-EAC, OECD-Ceri and Unesco-IBE have been involved to ensure consistency with other European and international initiatives in this area of work.

A PROFILE OF INCLUSIVE TEACHERS

At the start of the project, Agency member countries requested information on the competences, attitudes, knowledge and skills required for all teachers working in inclusive settings. The project has, therefore, worked on developing a profile of inclusive mainstream teachers that identifies four core values essential for all teachers working in inclusive education. These core values are:

- Valuing pupil diversity – pupil difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education.
- Supporting all learners – teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements.
- Working with others – collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers.
- Continuing personal professional development – teaching is a learning activity and teachers must accept responsibility for their own lifelong learning.

The final profile will be available towards the end of 2011.

EMERGING PROJECT FINDINGS

Based on evidence from the policy review, literature review and information from member country reports, the emerging findings from the project work to date are set out below:

1. Wider systemic reform is needed to ensure the development of inclusive schools and support teacher education for inclusion.

2. Any reform must include clarification of the language around inclusion and diversity and a clear understanding of the underpinning premises associated with and the implications of using different terminology.
3. Policies should be introduced to develop a *continuum of support* to meet the full diversity of needs, moving away from categorisation and labelling.
4. Accountability measures should reflect the importance of wider achievement more closely aligned to inclusive principles.
5. Policies should support effective recruitment and retention of teachers and increase the diversity of the teacher workforce.
6. Further research should be carried out to establish the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed by teachers to meet the diverse needs of all learners and to highlight the necessary content, organisation and professional education routes to develop these. This should include explicit attention to the *theory-practice gap* and ways to provide positive practice experience of inclusive settings for student teachers.
7. Long-term research is needed to investigate *quality* inclusive practice and to explore the use of areas of competence to support quality assurance of teacher education and follow up of new teachers.
8. The recruitment, induction and on-going development of all teacher educators should receive further attention to enhance the *professionalisation* of this important role.
9. Schools and teacher education institutions should work more closely to provide good models of practice and appropriate inclusive placements.

CONCLUSIONS

The OECD (2005) points out that raising teacher quality is the policy most likely to lead to gains in school performance. Similarly, there is wide agreement among the professionals working with the Agency project that educating teachers to respond to diversity is likely to be the policy having the greatest impact on the development of more inclusive schools and communities.

The reform of teacher education must be part of wider systemic reform that requires the principle of inclusion to become an integral part of the thinking of policy makers and other stakeholders. Such change inevitably takes time and highlights the importance of consistent, long-term, holistic policies.

The Agency project provides some clear ideas about possible ways forward towards a more equitable education system – and a more just society – and it is hoped, will provide inspiration to continue the journey to provide a quality education for all learners.

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