RA4AL

RAISING ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL LEARNERS

Quality in Inclusive Education

Report on the conference held in Odense, Denmark on 13th-15th June 2012

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

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INTRODUCTION

This report provides information about the Raising Achievement for all Learners conference, conducted by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (the Agency). The conference was held in Odense, Denmark on 13–15 June 2012, as an event under the Danish EU Presidency. It was co-hosted by the Danish Ministry of Education, the Odense Municipality and the Agency.

The Agency is an independent and self-governing organisation, established by the member countries to act as their platform for collaboration in the field of special needs education. The Agency currently has 28 member countries and is financed by the member countries' Ministries of Education and the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme, as one of the 6 institutions pursuing an aim of European interest in the field of education.

Raising Achievement for all learners is a priority at European level as set out in the Education and Training 2020 Framework (ET 2020). In 2010, the Agency conducted a survey among member countries to set the long-term priorities for their work. This survey also identified raising achievement for all learners as a key issue for investigation by the Agency.

As a result, in Spring 2011, the Agency submitted an application for Raising Achievement for all Learners (RA4AL) – Quality in Inclusive Education as a project supported under Commission LLP Comenius funding. In the Autumn 2011, the Agency was awarded the grant and the project began in November 2011 (Project number: 517771-LLP-1-2011-1-DK-COMENIUS-CAM). The project will run from December 2011 to November 2012.

This one-year project will be phase 1 of a further three year project by the Agency. This longer-term project will involve all Agency member countries and will aim to analyse in depth strategies used to raise the achievement of all learners in inclusive settings.

This report aims to provide a description of the background to the conference and the conference proceedings. Further analytical information will be provided by the RA4AL project synthesis report.

THE RA4AL PROJECT

Policy makers in Agency member countries expressed the need for more information on quality education in inclusive settings as a strategy for raising achievement for all learners. The Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training ('ET 2020') outline a number of Strategic Objectives, the following being of particular significance for the work of the RA4AL project:

- Strategic objective 2: Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training: *'High quality education and training systems which are both efficient and equitable are crucial for Europe's success and for enhancing employability. The major challenge is to ensure the acquisition of key competences by everyone.'*

This project, therefore set out to identify:

- *The issues that need to be explored;*

- *Strategies at the policy level that appear to be successful in raising achievement for all learners in inclusive settings.*

In early project discussions with representatives from Agency member countries, the following questions were posed.

1. What does the topic 'Raising Achievement' mean? Which achievements? What is the meaning of 'raising'?

2. What are the expectations in terms of which learners should be considered?

3. The policy priorities clearly highlight the topic as a quality issue. What does quality mean?

4. How can quality and raised achievements be identified?

In order to explore the above questions and develop a clear rationale for future work in this area, a major conference was planned in collaboration with the Danish Ministry of Education and the Odense Municipal authorities. The conference was held in Odense, Denmark on 13–15 June 2012 and was recognised as an official event under the Danish Presidency of the EU.

To maximise the impact of the project, policy makers for both general and inclusive education and researchers (in inclusive education) from 27 European countries were involved. The conference planning was supported by a Project Advisory Group (PAG) made up of Agency staff members and Agency representatives from Denmark (the conference venue country) and Cyprus (to establish a link with the Cypriot Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2012).

An initial planning meeting was held in January 2012 to prepare for the conference and PAG meetings were held in March and June 2012. A further meeting will take place in October 2012 to discuss project outputs and the final report.

An RA4AL position paper was drafted by Agency staff and discussed at the PAG meeting in March 2012. Following the input of PAG members, the position paper was substantially revised and sent out to all participants prior to the conference. The paper outlined the background to the RA4AL project and set out the project rationale and key issues, in particular highlighting links to work by the Agency. Relevant research relating to the key challenges for national education systems and also challenges at school level was presented to set the context for project discussions at the conference.

Participating countries were invited to present seminars at the conference and, as a guide to seminar content, were provided with a list of key themes relating to the raising achievement of all learners emerging from the position paper.

THE RA4AL PROJECT RATIONALE

The project rationale presented in the Agency position paper states that raising achievement for all learners is not a policy initiative but an ethical imperative. The key challenges of moving to a more inclusive system are likely to include:

- Greater collaboration and community involvement (work with parents, health, social services);

- A more holistic and coherent approach to education, bringing together current priorities such as key competences and sustainable development into one integrated and inclusive agenda;

- A move away from standardisation to greater personalisation in schools;

- Improving teacher education and school leadership to develop the knowledge, understanding, competences (including attitudes and values) to meet the diverse needs of all learners;

- Improved accountability mechanisms that are more closely aligned with inclusive principles.

In order to address the causes of school failure such as poverty, segregation and marginalisation, education services must collaborate effectively with others such as health and social services and work more closely with parents/families. Within schools, issues of poor leadership, ineffective teaching and inappropriate curriculum and assessment must be addressed to provide a supportive and welcoming environment that takes a holistic approach to current educational priorities and ensures that the needs of learners are at the centre of all decisions.

Changes to teacher education and the development of school leaders are needed to overcome the deficit thinking which causes learners from low-income and minority groups to be seen inevitably as low achievers. Such ideas must be challenged and schools supported by the education system to move on from a focus on specific groups to enabling all learners to make the best possible progress. A categorical approach should be replaced by a quality education for all that will build in support – and resilience – for those at risk of underachievement.

Inclusive pedagogy improves quality and extends what is generally available to an increasingly diverse range of learners. Approaches that attempt to match interventions with learner characteristics or 'special needs' within the learner are likely to be unmanageable and meet with limited success. Florian (2010) points out: *'It is in the ways that teachers respond to individual differences, the choices they make about group work and how they utilize specialist knowledge that differentiates inclusive practice from other pedagogical approaches'.* (p. 67)

In order to increase learning capacity, a mind set is needed that sees learners as being at different stages in their learning and development – from novice to expert – rather than considering achievement in relation to the 'norm' and differentiating on the basis of judgements about what learners cannot do compared to others of similar age. When teachers have the 'ethic of everybody' (Hart, 2004) and they themselves work collaboratively, appropriate options can be provided for everyone in a learning community.

Educational equity needs to be provided through democratic education principles – such developments cannot be imposed or achieved through narrow accountability measures or testing that may have a negative impact on teaching and learning. Multiple indicators of performance are needed, preferably meaningful local measures of input (adequacy of

resources) process (quality of teaching/learning) and output (what has been learned). Any data needs to be used appropriately to identify possible low achievement and to track the success of policies and progress made towards greater equity.

In summary, inclusion needs to become part of the general education agenda rather than an end in itself and work to raise achievement must be considered an integral part of all school development/improvement to improve the quality of education for all learners.

The full RA4AL position paper can be downloaded at: https://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/ra4al

CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

The conference, held in the Grand Hotel, Odense, opened with a reception at City Hall, hosted by the Odense Municipality. Overall, the conference aimed to:

- explore initiatives and approaches that appear to be successful in improving the quality of education in inclusive settings;

- identify some factors that support the raising achievement of all learners to improve life chances and provide better opportunities for full participation in society;

- raise awareness of the benefits of European co-operation among policy makers and researchers.

The conference programme is available in the Annex 1 of this report and a full list of participants is included in Annex 2.

On Thursday 14th June, the conference was opened by Christine Antorini, Minister for Children and Education in Denmark. Christine Antorini spoke about recent education reforms in Denmark. This presentation was followed by inputs from Harald Hartung, Head of the Jean Monnet Unit, European Commission and Per Gunnvall, Chair of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (the Agency).

A panel of policy makers, Andreas Trakoshis, Cyprus, Imbi Henno, Estonia, Pirjo Koivula, Finland and Gilles Pétreault, France then provided information about current developments in inclusive education in their respective countries. This was followed by a presentation from Agency staff member Mary Kyriazopoulou who set the scene, reminding participants of the key questions on page 5 above and highlighting the project focus on effective approaches for all learners, to support meaningful participation in the learning environment. Agency staff member Verity Donnelly reinforced the project rationale and key challenges set out in the RA4AL position paper (see page 8 of this report).

During the afternoon session, ten seminars were held providing information about a wide range of relevant initiatives aiming to raise the achievement of learners.

On Friday 15th June, the day started with a presentation of key messages from the seminars. The conference rapporteur, Bengt Persson from Sweden then provided a summary of key messages from the conference overall.

After reflections from Jacob Hess from the Department for Inclusion and Education of Children with Special Needs, Denmark, the conference was closed by Henrik Poulsen from the Odense Municipality and Cor Meijer, Director of the Agency.

At the end of the conference, all participants were asked to provide feedback. A summary of this feedback and additional comments is available in Annex 4 of this report.

The following sections of this report will provide an outline of the content of conference presentations and seminar sessions before drawing together the key messages to be considered in taking forward the RA4AL agenda.

Conference exhibition

An exhibition of materials was held during the conference to promote exchange of ideas and networking among the different stakeholder groups – mainstream and special education policy makers and researchers. Materials were provided from Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Malta, Norway, Poland, Sweden, UK (Scotland) and UK (Wales). All exhibition materials are available online at: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/ra4al/country-exhibition-materials

The materials on display in the exhibition provide additional information and background to a number of the country seminars and should be looked at together with the seminar presentation information included later in this report.

MESSAGES FROM THE OPENING SESSION

The conference opened with a presentation from Christine Antorini, Minister for Children and Education in Denmark, who currently holds the EU Presidency. This presentation outlined recent reforms and highlighted many of the issues emerging from early work for the RA4AL project.

Messages from the Minister for Children and Education, Denmark

Minister Christine Antorini stressed that the inclusion agenda in Denmark now went beyond special educational needs (SEN) to focus on quality education to raise the achievement of all learners. While extensive resources are being spent on a high number of learners identified as having special educational needs (approximately 30% of the education budget in Denmark) little was known about the impact of this expenditure. This may be because, for many of these young people separate standards are seen as applying as they are 'outside' the system, dealt with by special needs specialist staff. Although inclusion is not seen as an initiative to save money, it seems that these resources could be better spent to raise the achievement of all learners. However, despite agreement with the values of an inclusive approach and initiatives to promote inclusion, the number of learners in special schools has increased.

From both a humanistic and an economic point of view, all learners have a right to be part of their local learning community and so should receive in-class support alongside their peers. There is a need to move on from the narrow concept of what is 'normal' and strengthen general education so that the whole learning community is considered, encouraging the participation and engagement of all students.

There is a need to invest in teacher education to reduce expenditure on special educational needs and ensure that all stakeholders – children, families and teachers – are involved in education in order to provide safety and security to allow children to learn.

In Denmark there is a new SEN law that attempts to define inclusion. Under the law, less than 9 hours support per week is not considered as an SEN service but a way to meet learner needs through different ways of organising learning, grouping pupils or using extra support staff within a flexible framework. Special needs education will only be provided for students who need individual support or education in special classes/schools for at least half of their time in school.

Mainstream schools will be obliged to offer education according to each student's individual needs. Head-teachers are responsible for the establishment of structures and differentiated education to include students in mainstream education.

The entire policy area of youth and children is changing. There will be a task force for the development of an inclusive and interdisciplinary approach in institutions and schools for children across day care, schools and leisure activities.

A new resource centre is also being established to conduct research, to provide knowledge and evidence of inclusive approaches in education and also to provide good practice examples. The centre will support head teachers and teachers. A further fund has been set up to increase the use of IT and digital learning.

Information campaigns are being introduced to create a dialogue and address attitudes to inclusion through schools, parents and organisations of disabled people. The Ministry will work with the teachers union to deal with the challenges of this new legislation.

Messages from the representative of the European Commission

Harald Hartung, head of the Jean Monnet unit in the European Commission stressed the need to move to action to achieve the objectives set out in the ET 2020 Framework. He highlighted the importance of sharing practice as a way forward, bearing in mind the need for local and regional approaches, not 'one size fits all'. A key strategy is also the development of teacher education to ensure that teachers and school leaders achieve the skills and competences for inclusive education.

Harald Hartung stressed the high cost of inequity across the EU and the need to take action to improve the situation. He made reference to the recent report by the Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training (NESSE, 2012) which highlights barriers in education for people with disabilities and what teachers need to do to overcome these. A new initiative in education and training focusing on inequity will lead to a policy handbook for EU member states with concrete examples of actions taken to address inequity.

Messages from country representatives

Panel members from Cyprus, Estonia, Finland and France highlighted their priorities for action to address the RA4AL agenda through the provision of a more inclusive education system. In Cyprus the emphasis is on creating a culture of belonging for all learners and creating awareness of the broad definition of inclusion.

In Estonia, it was stressed that limited school choice, little streaming and grade repetition have contributed to achievement of the PISA benchmarks of less than 15% low achievers in the 3 PISA domains. Work is focussing on greater inter-sector co-operation, collaboration and a teacher education strategy. The main challenges are reducing the drop out rate and improving provision for learners with Estonian as second language.

In Finland recent reforms aim to strengthen the right of all pupils to early preventative support in learning and growth. Three stages of support – general, intensified and special – have been introduced with this support being provided as soon as the need arises. The numbers of learners recognised as having SEN are reducing and more time is being spent in mainstream classes with a reduction in number of special schools. The emphasis is placed on pedagogical assessment and multi-professional co-operation and support is provided through pedagogical methods such as co-teaching, flexible grouping and attention to learning environment. The Ministry are also building a research evidence base and addressing in service teacher education for teachers and school leaders.

In France, there is a move from high levels of grade retention and special schooling to provision according to need with support in mainstream classes (and some special classes in mainstream schools). Under the new law of 2005, many more pupils seen as having SEN are placed in mainstream schools with increased provision such as support assistants. Work is on going to increase collaboration between support organisations and improve teacher education.

The presentations from panel members are available at: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/ra4al/conference

Messages from Agency presentations

Agency staff member Mary Kyriazopoulou reminded participants of the strong link between the RA4AL project content and the European level strategic objectives set out in the ET 2020 Framework. Mary highlighted the focus on meaningful participation in the learning environment and the right of all learners to access a relevant curriculum, including

academic and social aspects of learning. She stressed the importance of agreeing terminology and identifying not only the key factors involved in quality education but meaningful ways of measuring learners' progress and achievement.

Verity Donnelly spoke of the need to reduce school drop-out through 'real-world' learning and to address the achievement gap between certain groups of learners that appears to be increasing in some countries. She drew on recent research suggesting that holistic approaches, greater personalisation and improved collaboration between all stakeholders were required along with improved teacher education, leadership and accountability. Verity stressed the importance of the key competences agenda in developing wider skills and preparing learners for the 21st century – and the need to consider whether to develop 'schooling for consumerism' or 'education for life'.

Verity Donnelly suggested diversity should be used as a lens for transformation and made reference to a number of recent Agency projects that identify similar challenges and discuss issues relevant to the current work on RA4AL.

The Agency presentations are available at: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/ra4al/conference

MESSAGES FROM THE SEMINAR SESSIONS

An invitation was sent to all conference participants to present work on initiatives to raise achievement for all learners. This opportunity was offered to everyone during the exhibition held at the conference but for ten countries, there was a chance to provide a more detailed presentation during the seminar sessions. Countries were provided with a list of suggested themes that had been identified during the research conducted for the RA4AL position paper.

In this section, the main content of the seminar sessions is described.

Michael Søgaard Larsen and Camilla Brørup Dysegaard from **Denmark** highlighted the lack of rigorous, high quality research on inclusive practice. They presented the interim outcomes of a study looking in particular at the effects of various pedagogical interventions (e.g. peer assisted learning, co-teaching, student self-monitoring). Such information would allow teachers and school leaders to make evidence-informed decisions. The seminar concluded that more high-quality research is needed and that this should be rigorous, with a move away from 'opinion' studies to larger studies that also take account of learning environments.

The team from **Finland**, Hannele Cantell, Eija Kauppinen and Pirjo Koivula, presented information about the recent introduction of 3 levels of support. The first level, general support, aims to improve what is usually available in class to provide quality teaching for all. There is an emphasis on pedagogical assessment and support through, for example co-operation between teachers, guidance and counselling, the use of flexible groups and regular monitoring. If needed, the level of special support will be increased to provide an individual programme but with reduced bureaucracy. The initial education provided for teachers is seen as being critically important in developing this approach.

A good school is an inclusive school! This was a key message from the presenters from **Germany**, Matthias von Saldern, Wiltrud Thies and Viola Summer. Following an introduction about the importance of a mind set for inclusion, an example of inclusive practice was given from Sophie Scholl School which is organized in mixed age groups (seen as another aspect of diversity). The pupils are very involved in planning and there is a high level of collaboration between all staff and between staff and pupils. To achieve this level of inclusive practice, it was suggested that the following was needed: a leader with vision, teacher skills, close work with parents, a positive school culture and excellent relationships. The seminar concluded with some ways to manage diverse needs in practice. The participants agreed that further research is needed on differentiation to meet diverse needs in heterogeneous classrooms.

Finn Ó Murchú and Clare Farrell from **Ireland** presented work on team teaching to raise achievement of all learners in secondary education.

Teachers reported that using such approaches made them feel less isolated and they welcomed opportunities for feedback from and reflection with colleagues. They felt able to increase co-operative learning opportunities for learners who also gave positive feedback about team teaching. The seminar discussions highlighted the need to clarify what is meant by achievement and stressed that the need to raise achievement also applies to teachers. Team teaching should be seen as part of a 'menu of responses' but the importance of learner involvement was stressed. Further research is needed to support change by focussing on the impact and also providing evidence about using resources in different way. Additional information is available on the conference page under Ireland.

The team from **Lithuania**, Laima Pauriene, Regina Labiniene and Laimute Motuziene, presented a new evaluation strategy that places the emphasis on school self-review and peer-review. In this approach, the focus is on five areas of school development – school culture, teaching and learning, achievements, support for students and school management. Pupils and parents views are taken into account and the external evaluation is seen as supportive – to help schools to look at their own systems and performance. Meeting special educational needs is viewed as an integral part of a quality education system – every teacher is a teacher of learners with special educational needs. Information from the review and external evaluation is used to identify areas for development and build capacity for improvement to make schools welcoming and attractive for all learners.

Alexander Spiteri and Marthese Cini from **Malta** described the importance of holistic, whole school approaches. Such approaches have developed following the evaluation of smaller scale initiatives focused on specific groups of learners. The need to keep the strong elements of such approaches but to improve synergy and co-ordination, empower schools and ensure entitlement for all were identified. Recent reforms are moving towards a more inclusive education system, for example through the removal of streaming and competitive exams and the development of more comprehensive secondary education. The Literacy Strategy has lead to the development of a central service to increase the skills of teachers as an integral part of the school development process. The importance of collegial planning and collaboration, self reflection and evaluation and pedagogical leadership were stressed as key features in the move to quality education for all.

The seminar by the **Netherlands**, led by Chris Struiksma and Marjan Zandbergen, outlined the policy in the Netherlands aimed at raising the achievements of all pupils in general and those with special needs in particular. In order to realise this, legislation is needed on inclusive education, the quality of (secondary) special education and raising the achievements of all learners in the fields of maths and Dutch language. Research, development and practice initiatives must also be developed and funded. The Education Continuum was presented as an example.

An analysis of the present system of diagnosing and referring learners to schools for special education reveals that stakeholders are massively reinforced for their referring behaviour. On the other hand, schools who keep their learners with SEN, are ignored for that achievement. It should not, therefore, be a surprise that numbers of learners considered to have SEN are growing.

To reverse this development, it is necessary to change the reinforcement contingencies through new legislation ('education that fits'). In addition, a realistic educational model for convergent differentiation should be implemented to enable teachers to effectively handle individual differences. Educational arrangements are made for subgroups of learners, whereby their needs are met by means of more or less intensified instruction, rather than through individualised educational plans, since these have proven to be ineffective. For the basic subjects such as language and maths, evaluation and planning must be data driven. The cycle of collection of evaluation data and educational planning must be embedded in the school's system for quality management. This should also be integrated with other quality management tools such as explicit educational standards, high level classroom management skills and a shared pedagogical vision resulting is a positive school climate,

From **Norway**, Liv Frilseth described the flexible pathways in upper secondary and vocational learning that develop skills and help transition to employment. Liv explained the key elements of counselling and support and the detailed planning needed to ensure the

full involvement of learners and parents. Norway is aiming through the programme to include all learners and reduce drop out. Intensive follow up is available for learners who are not achieving well in the 10th grade and upper secondary education. The following elements have been key to success: improving teacher education in basic skills, the development of teacher networks and better collaboration between services for 16–21 year olds. A need for more research has been identified along with increased support for Sami education and more unified approaches across local and regional areas. Finally, the seminar and discussions stressed that it is necessary to increase expectations and opportunities for those with disabilities in particular to achieve greater equity.

In **UK (Scotland)** the aim of 'getting it right for every child' has lead to many improvements but Maggie Tierney highlighted that gaps still exist between children from more advantaged homes and those from disadvantaged families and children looked after by local authorities. Exclusion from schools has been reduced and more school leavers have moved to 'positive' destinations. Overall educational attainment in relation to other countries is also improving. Maggie identified the key elements contributing to this success as: a focus on early years, the curriculum for excellence and a focus on school leaders and quality of teaching. Maggie stressed the importance of staged innovation to ensure the careful management of change and the need for evidence – in particular a measure of what is valued locally. Finally, the need for a culture of 'responsible autonomy' and greater collaboration between all stakeholders was discussed.

Presenting developments in **UK (Wales**), Sue Davies and Irene Allen made reference to a speech by the Minister of Education for Wales in 2011 'Teaching makes a difference'. This set out the need to improve data and tracking of pupils, to focus on literacy and numeracy and to break the link between poverty and attainment to achieve a more equal society. The Wales School Effectiveness Framework includes six elements: working with others, leadership, networks of professional practice, intervention and support, improvement and accountability and curriculum and teaching. This approach has been taken forward by the development of an Inclusion Quality Mark for schools which sets out a range of outcomes assessed on 4 levels which demonstrate whole school inclusive practice. The pilot of the Quality Mark has shown the benefits of regional working, and the active involvement of schools and learners who should be at the centre of all developments.

The presentations from the seminar sessions are available at: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/ra4al/conference

MESSAGES FROM THE CONFERENCE RAPPORTEUR

A rapporteur, Bengt Persson, Professor of Special Education at the University of Borås in Sweden was appointed for the RA4AL conference. His role was to keep an accurate record of key content and to support Agency staff in the task of synthesising the main messages to form the basis of a further 3 year project.

In his presentation, Bengt Persson reinforced the focus of the conference on the key concepts of achievement and inclusion and stressed the importance of sharing knowledge and experience. The following definition by Barton was used as an introduction to the question of how we define inclusive education:

> *'Inclusive education is about responding to diversity; it is about listening to unfamiliar voices, being open, empowering all members and about celebrating "difference" in dignified ways.'* (Barton, 1997, p. 234)

The issue of definition has become increasingly important but there appears to be growing agreement that it is about human rights, equity, social justice and the development of a non-discriminatory society. (Barton, 2008)

While such growing consensus over ideological, political and financial rationales might imply that inclusion is no longer controversial, Bengt Persson pointed out that it is still problematic. A pedagogical rationale is needed, based on reliable evidence. Teachers tend to believe in homogeneity and need to see diversity as a resource and respond to the growing heterogeneity of society. Discussions during the conference highlighted the fact that, although small-scale research is available on a micro (classroom) level, little research is available at a system level, making it difficult to move on from the 'why' to the 'how' of inclusive education.

Bengt Persson, referring to the input of Harald Hartung, stated the need to re-consider the purpose of education as it becomes increasingly difficult to foresee what employment opportunities may be available in the future. The current financial climate raises the need to 'invest to save' as the costs of not taking action are likely to be higher than the costs of action. Financial stakeholders need to be convinced of the need for long term sustainable solutions, including high quality teacher education and continuing professional development to raise the achievement of all learners.

The case of Denmark was highlighted as an example. Here, reliable statistics make up the basis for change. There is a large majority in Parliament with the support of interest groups that makes change possible and finally, there is substantial financial investment in national centres and advisory teams, professional development for teachers and school leaders and a culture of learning from others (Ny Nordisk Skole – New Nordic School).

Bengt Persson presented a number of key concepts that had been raised or discussed during the conference. This included the term 'achievement' and questions about what pupils are expected to achieve and what can be measured. Here, a warning was given about the false quantification of soft values. Other key concepts included aspiration, attitudes and values. The importance of communication and, in particular, the learners voice was frequently raised along with the need for reliable research on effective ways to reduce inequalities. The importance of high expectations and visionary leadership – including pedagogical leadership, in providing meaningful education with opportunities for the participation of all learners was noted as being critical. Regarding quality assurance, the possibility of some common evaluation systems or criteria was suggested to allow comparison and improve possibilities for mutual learning.

Co-operation – including between health, education and social services was another key concept on the list and collaboration though approaches such as team-teaching show the effectiveness of combining competences and expertise to benefit learners.

Finally, during the conference, it was noted that some key concepts were discussed less frequently or were absent altogether. These included: accountability, comparability, competition, ranking, standardisation and testing. Bengt Persson suggested that such ideas – although in frequent use currently, for example in the No Child Left Behind Programme in the USA are not compatible with inclusive approaches.

The presentation closed with a quote from the Welsh seminar: *'Learners are at the heart of everything and we have to make the learners' journey smoother so that they can flourish.'*

TAKING FORWARD THE RA4AL AGENDA – KEY ISSUES

At the close of the conference, Jacob Hess from the Department for Inclusion and Education for Children with Special Needs in Denmark spoke about the importance of increasing social inclusion, the role of co-operation and exchange of practice in the Lifelong Learning Programme and the potential contribution of the RA4AL project to these aims.

Henrik Poulsen, from Odense Municipality quoted Lars Qvortrup (Aalborg University) saying *'Knowledge is the only thing that increases when shared'*. The importance of both co-operation and of sharing knowledge cannot be underestimated.

The following 'themes' have been identified from the conference exhibition, inputs, discussions, seminar sessions and feedback:

1. **Collaborative policy and practice.** To engage and support all learners, but in particular those who may face disadvantage, services should be provided in local communities through close collaboration – in policy and practice – between education, health, social services and other agencies. Co-operation and networking is needed at all levels – national, local area, school and classroom – between all stakeholders, learners and families to ensure both co-ordinated responses and effective use of resources.

2. **Support for school and system leaders.** School and system leaders should receive support to ensure that they have the vision and the necessary competences to establish a positive ethos and provide appropriate leadership for inclusive practice. Diversity should become an integral part of the whole area/school development process, which should in turn bring together all current priorities in a coherent way.

3. **Inclusive accountability.** Approaches to system and school accountability should include a strong element of self and/or peer review to empower stakeholders and should ensure consistency and reinforce inclusive values and practice.

4. **Personalisation through listening to learners.** The voice of the learner must be at the heart of all policy and practice and further supported by working more closely with parents and families to address any support requirements in a more personalised and holistic way.

5. **Professional development for diversity.** Teachers must be active agents in any system/school change and their competences should be addressed through both initial teacher education and continuing professional development. All teachers must develop the necessary values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure the learning and full participation of all learners in every classroom.

6. **Pedagogical approaches for all**. In view of work by the Agency, further supported by recent international research, it is evident that there are pedagogical approaches that benefit all learners, for example team teaching and peer assisted learning. However, further research is needed on effective strategies to support learning and the management of heterogeneous groups in practice.

These themes will be followed up in the project synthesis report and taken forward in later Agency work.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The RA4AL position paper stated that raising achievement for all learners is not a policy initiative but an ethical imperative. The RA4AL conference has helped to clarify that inclusive education is the means to raise achievement for all learners. There is now a need to move on from the 'what' and 'why' of inclusive education to the question of 'how' – what policies and strategies are the most effective in raising the achievement of all learners?

Rather than revisiting definitions of inclusive education or justifying a move to more inclusive approaches, policy makers, school leaders and teachers should commit to key values, get to know learners and identify the barriers that they experience to learning and participation. Learning communities, strengthened by real partnership and collaboration with all key stakeholders and services can then be developed to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to develop their learning capacity and raise levels of achievement.

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ANNEX 1 – CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

RAISING ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL LEARNERS – QUALITY IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (RA4AL)

City Hall and First Hotel Grand, Odense, Denmark
13th–15th June 2012

Wednesday 13th June

18.00   Conference Registration in City Hall, Odense

Exhibition of country initiatives and work by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

19.00   Opening address by Henrik Poulsen, Head of International Relations, Odense Mayor's Department

Welcome by Mr Per Gunnvall, Chair, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

19.30   Reception hosted by the Odense Municipality

Thursday 14th June

09.00   Exhibition of country initiatives and work by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

10.00   Opening Address by Ms Christine Antorini, Minister for Children and Education, Denmark

Opening remarks from:

Mr Harald Hartung, Head of Unit, Jean Monnet, European Commission

Mr Per Gunnvall, Chair, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

10.30   Policy maker panel with Ms Christine Antorini and country responses to the Ministerial address from:

Mr Andreas Trakoshis, Cyprus

Ms Imbi Henno, Estonia

Ms Pirjo Koivula, Finland

Mr Gilles Pétreault, France

11.30   *Coffee break (Lounge Area)*

12.00   An overview of the Raising Achievement for All Learners (RA4AL) project followed by questions and discussion (Ms Mary Kyriazopoulou and Ms

Verity Donnelly, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education)

14.30	Country seminars on research initiatives and responses from policy makers
16.15	Country seminars on research initiatives and responses from policy makers

Friday 15th June

09.00	Presentation of key messages from the country seminars
10.15	Questions and plenary discussion
11.15	Presentation by the conference Rapporteur, Professor Bengt Persson, Sweden: Key messages from the conference
11.45	Reflections on the RA4AL agenda by Mr Jacob Hess, Head of Department, Department for Inclusion and Education for Children with Special Needs, Denmark
12.00	Close of conference:
	Mr Henrik Poulsen, Head of International Relations, Odense Mayor's Department
	Mr Cor Meijer, Director, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

ANNEX 2 – PARTICIPANTS LIST

NAME	ROLE
Ms Eva Prammer-Semmler	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Mr Willi Prammer	Education researcher
Mr Louis François	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Eliane Willems	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Zena Poulli	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Mr Antreas Trakoshis	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Zuzana Kaprová	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Blanka Hrbková Hrudková	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Katerina Vlcková	Education researcher
Mr Jacob Hess	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Helene Hoff	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Anne-Mette Greve Olesen	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Mr Per Fibæk Laursen	Education researcher
Ms Tiina Kivirand	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Imbi Henno	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Pirjo Koivula	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Eija Kauppinen	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Hannele Cantell	Education researcher
Mr Gilles Pétreault	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Sandrine Lair	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Lauren Michaud	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Minna Puustinen	Education researcher
Ms Ulrike Suntheim	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Mr Wiltrud Thies	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Viola Sommer	Mainstream policy maker
Mr Matthias Von Saldern	Education researcher

NAME	ROLE
Ms Nadia Lampropoulou	Education researcher
Ms Ragnheiður Bóasdóttir	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Mr Gunnar Gíslason	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Birna María Svanbjörnsdóttir	Education researcher
Mr Finn O'Murchú	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Clare Farrell	Education researcher
Ms Leandra Negro	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Mirella Della Concordia Basso	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Inita Juhnevica	Mainstream policy maker
Mr Valdis Krastins	Education researcher
Ms Regina Labiniene	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Laimute Motuziene	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Laima Pauriene	Education researcher
Mr Gilbert Steinbach	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Marthese Cini	Mainstream policy maker
Mr Alexander Spiteri	Education researcher
Ms Marjan Zandbergen	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Mr Chris Struiksma	Education researcher
Mr Jens Rydland	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Marit Mjøs	Education researcher
Ms Anne Lium Berger	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Liv Frilseth	Seminar presenter
Ms Justyna Leszka	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Virginia Stafiej	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Dominic Wolny	Education researcher

NAME	ROLE
Ms Filomena Pereira	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Carla Sampaio	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Manuela Sanches Ferreira	Education researcher
Ms Bojana Globačnik	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Mr Alen Kofol	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Irena Lesar	Education researcher
Ms Agneta Gustafsson	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Mr Peter Gröndahl	Mainstream policy maker
Mr Bengt Weidow	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Christina Dravins	Education researcher
Ms Judith Hollenweger	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Mr Philippe Claude Dietiker	Mainstream policy maker
Mr Christian Liesen	Education researcher
Mr Brian Currie	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Faustina Graham	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Elizabeth Armour	Education researcher
Ms Margaret Tierney	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Irene Allen	Policy maker for Inclusive Education
Ms Glynis Wilson	Mainstream policy maker
Ms Sue Davies	Education researcher
Mr Finn Christensen	National Coordinator (Denmark)
Ms Kalomira Ioannou	National Coordinator (Cyprus)
Mr Harald Hartung	European Commission
Mr Bengt Persson	Conference Rapporteur
Mr Rodrigo Mendes	Rodrigo Mendes Institute, Brazil
Mr Augusto Galery	Rodrigo Mendes Institute, Brazil
Mr Adauto Rosa	Rodrigo Mendes Institute, Brazil
Mr Thiago Rocha	Rodrigo Mendes Institute, Brazil
Ms Sinéad Middleton	Department of Education and Skills, Ireland
Ms Camilla Brørup Dyssegaard	Ministry of Children and Education, Denmark
Mr Michael Søgaard Larsen	Ministry of Children and Education, Denmark
Mr Henrik Poulsen	Odense Municipality
Ms Pia Dahl	Odense Municipality
Ms Karina Amtkjær Schrøder	Odense Municipality
Mr Per Ch Gunnvall	Agency Chair
Mr Cor J. W. Meijer	Agency Director
Ms Mary Kyriazopoulou	Agency project team

Ms Verity Donnelly	Agency project team
Ms Klára Somogyi	Agency project team
Mr András Lénárt	Agency project team
Mr Morten Olstrup	Agency project team

ANNEX 3 – COUNTRY SEMINARS

Denmark

An early report from a systematic research mapping of the international research of effects on pupils of inclusion/inclusive measures – Michael Søgaard Larsen, Head and Camilla Brørup Dysegaard, Postdoc, Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research

Finland

Support in learning and school attendance in Finland: New model for all learners and teachers – Hannele Cantell, University of Helsinki, Eija Kauppinen and Pirjo Koivula, Ministry of Education

Germany

Germany in Transition – Matthias von Saldern, Leuphana Universität, Lüneburg, Viola Sommer, Thüringer Institute for In-service Teacher Training, Curriculum Development and Media and Wiltrud Thies, Sophie Scholl School, Gießen

Ireland

Supporting achievement for all in mainstream schools in Ireland – Finn Ó Murchú (Department of Education and Skills) and Clare Farrell (National Council for Special Education

Lithuania

External evaluation for higher education quality and achievements – Laima Pauriene, National Agency for School Evaluation Regina Labiniene and Laimute Motuziene, Ministry of Education and Science

Malta

Developing an Inclusive Literacy Attainment Strategy for Maltese Learners – Alexander Spiteri and Marthese Cini, Ministry of Education

Netherlands

Raising achievements for all pupils in the Netherlands: policy and practice! – Chris Struiksma, CED-Groep and Marjan Zandbergen, Ministry of Education

Norway

The Norwegian model of VET – strengths and challenges – Liv Frilseth, Education and Training Directorate

UK (Scotland)

Raising educational attainment in Scotland – Maggie Tierney, Head of Performance, Governance and ICT, Scottish Government.

UK (Wales)

The Inclusion Quality Mark for Wales – Sue Davies, Head of Social Justice and Inclusion, Trinity St David, University of Wales, Irene Allen – Welsh Government

ANNEX 4 – CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

Collated Feedback Forms (51 in total)

Aspects of the meeting	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Usefulness of materials sent out in advance of the meeting	38	10	3		
Practical organisation of the meeting	47	4			
Usefulness of the exhibition and networking session	19	24	8		
Usefulness of the seminar sessions*	39	5	3		
Quality of presentations and panel discussions	33	12	6		
Quality of the venue	42	8	1		

* **-** 4 delegates did not answer this question

Experts' reflections on the specific issues:

1. What was your impression of the overall structure of the programme; balance of input/discussions, timing of sessions etc.

- Very good balance between seminars, discussion and networking
- Well organised, good structure, enough time for inputs/discussions, good timing
- Well balanced
- Excellent, very good planning of all sessions, the overall structure of the programme very well prepared
- The programme was very carefully planned and implemented in all aspects
- This was all in very good balance
- Very well organised, intense but interesting
- Balanced – good timing
- Balance was very good. Timing was good and advance notice was adequate

- Working groups

- Timing was excellent and the programme was very well organised and structured

- It was perfect

- Structure and organisation was very good – key speakers presentations with following discussions, good practice

- Very good

- My impressions were good on this point

- The balance of input/discussions was good, time for seminar session was well planned, it was enough time for presentations and discussions

- Programme was very well structured

- Very good

- Excellent organisation, timing exact – all important for a good conference

- It was good

- Another discussion session after the presentation of the seminar key issues in smaller groups would have been fine. Time for reflections has been too short

- Very well organised, may be better to discuss more in the sessions

- Besides the seminars, the input of Verity Donnelly and the 'critical friend' (Sweden) were very valuable and useful

- Very good

- It was very well organised

- Really good, except for the discussion after presenting the key messages from the country seminars. A guided discussion would have been better, or even another session of group discussions

- A well structured programme that allowed the discussion of all ideas presented by countries involved in the sessions

- Very well planned. Sessions were balanced – not too long for people to concentrate. Discussions were meaningful

- Very good structure, professional discussion, open atmosphere, a little bit short time for reflections of the seminars directly after the presentations

- Good structure, sometimes too much input – less discussion. I prefer much more posters

2. Do you feel that outcomes planned for the meeting were fulfilled? If not, why not?

- Yes

- Yes

- Yes they were

- Considering the time available, the outcomes were fulfilled, more time would have allowed the opportunity to discuss in more detail and depth the issues and ideas that were introduced

- Yes

- Yes, absolutely

- Yes

- Fulfilled

- Yes, completely, the conference is in connection with the bi-annual meeting in Ljubljana

- Yes, this is an excellent starting point for the project

- Yes

- Meeting was successful with good overview of the project, also about trends of inclusion education in European countries

- Outcomes – if they were sharing information and experiences and the state of the art, then they were fulfilled

- Outcomes planned for the meeting were fulfilled. I would like to hear about more concrete constructive decisions – for the future

- Partly – yes. It is difficult to say about outcomes, all material of seminars and other presentations must be analysed

- Maybe that outcomes should be more visible

- Yes

- Yes

- Yes

- Outcomes were fulfilled

- Not really – After all the excellent inputs, it would have needed session in small groups to figure out the key issues for the project

- I think that the outcomes were fulfilled

- Maybe there are more questions than (early) answers, but this shouldn't be a problem – questions are valuable to make a good project plan. I am sure that the outcomes are valuable for creating an interesting project plan. The presentation by the conference rapporteur will help a lot, that was good!

- Yes I do

- Yes they were

- Yes

- Cannot answer, future will show results (= new project)

3. What did you find the most useful aspects of the meeting and why?

- Hopefully the meeting will contribute to a mutual understanding of the project

- Most interesting was the opening address by Christine Antorini, the big changes in Denmark towards inclusion aspects and the response from Finland. The country seminars were also interesting with possibilities for further discussion.

- Inclusive education, sharing experience by all the members of the conference, information on how this important issue is dealt with in other countries

- Inputs from different countries, new ideas concerning policy and practice, exchange of views, perspectives and knowledge, the opportunity for open dialogue

- The seminars – because there we got the opportunity to exchange opinions around the subject

- It is difficult to choose between aspects as the whole meeting was interesting, useful and no aspect could have been left out

- Country seminars and presentation of the key messages from the country seminars

- The workshops opened up conversations and allowed us to share and engage

- The new planning of countries on legislation (model of Finland)

- Networking and sharing experiences

- Good points, discussions with other countries

- Explanations about different systems to compare efficiency

- Bringing together education policy makers, representatives from inclusive education field and research.

- Experiences from politics from other countries, the interest of others to apply reasonable solutions in their countries

- Most useful aspects of the meeting was some interesting representations of country seminars

- The most useful aspect was the possibility of sharing information on inclusive education and on good practice examples. It was interesting to know about research in this field

- Maximal potential of the children have to be seen according to the expectations

- Meeting professionals and practice from very different countries. Hearing about the project RA4AL (overview on 14th, reflections on 15th). Presentation by the conference rapporteur

- Hearing from other countries, seeing similarities, realising that we are on a journey – no instant solution

- To find that people all around Europe are thinking similar in question of school improvement and achievement for all children, because all children are special. Team teaching and the importance of leadership for building professional learning communities are important.

- Sharing information with countries, sharing knowledge. The country presentations have been very useful and informative

- Informal debates, interesting final presentation

- Seminars – getting other perspectives

- To hear about the other countries activities

- The progress reports from the other countries

- Get an overview on activities in many countries of the EU, see that all countries stress the worth of good teaching as well as the importance of school culture and research in the long term. Also: we not only need inclusive schools, but inclusive society

- The most useful aspects of the meeting was the sharing of experiences and best practices

- The seminars and the reporting of them on Friday morning

- Exchange of examples of good practice. Planning steps forward

- Exchange, exchange, exchange – to find a common way to real inclusion

Further remarks or comments:

- Thank you for an interesting conference

- All the countries have to have such meetings to learn from each other, to share experience, to underline the key issues of inclusive education

- It is a critical and valuable initiative and my hope is that it is only the beginning of a complete research project aiming to raise achievement for all learners in the European countries, both in the level of policy but most importantly of practice and implementation

- Very well organised

- Congrats! Wonderful!

- Great conference, very professional

- Focus on understanding change as well as inclusion. Examine role of students as agents of inclusion in raising achievement for all. Thank you for the conference – (Ireland)

- We need to continue with the project in this way – conference and project working with the experts on the national level is important! (network of the experts)

- The windows in the hotel room were dirty

- The key messages should be concrete, constructive and useful for the decisions to the future

- I wish success in this important activity of the EA

- Looking forward to phase 2 in the project RA4AL

- For the next stage:
  Simple, clear steps forward
  Helping and supporting countries to move 'from where they are' – we are not all at the same starting point

- I really enjoyed the country sessions and was surprised about the quality of discussions and presentation. Study visits in different countries would be great in the programme

- I would like to see the debate. Starting with the use of the word 'inclusion'. Is it time to stop using it, because it has become a 'buzz' word? I feel that talk on 'diversity' should start being adapted – catering for diversity includes ALL RA4AL > DIVERSITY

- A very good organisation team!

Raising Achievement for all learners is a priority at European level as set out in the Education and Training 2020 Framework (ET 2020) and the high cost of school failure is increasingly being recognised. Raising the achievement of all learners is not a policy initiative but an ethical imperative that will best be achieved by providing quality education in inclusive settings.

The Raising Achievement for all Learners – Quality in Inclusive Education project conference was held in Odense, Denmark on 13th-15th June 2012, as an event under the Danish Presidency of the European Union. The conference was co-hosted by the Danish Ministry of Education, the Odense Municipality and the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

In order to maximise the impact of the project, the conference involved policy makers for both general and inclusive education and researchers (in inclusive education) from 27 European countries.

This report provides a summary of the conference proceedings, including inputs, seminars and discussions and presents some key messages and emerging themes to be followed up in future work.

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