



INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (IECE) PROJECT

EXAMPLE OF IECE PROVISION: SWITZERLAND

1. Abstract

The following describes one classroom in a pre-primary school in Canton Ticino, Switzerland, CH.

Pre-primary school in Ticino caters for children from the age of 3 to 6. According to current legislation, pre-primary school 'enhances the socialisation of the child through the development of their physical, affective and cognitive abilities.' Pre-primary school is free of charge for all children and is compulsory from the age of 4.

The institutional model in Canton Ticino can be considered as partially inclusive. All the children, including those with learning disabilities or special needs, are included in mainstream classes, as long as they meet the basic requirements indicated in the school programmes.

For those who are unable to meet these requirements, two different options are offered by the system: either a child is enrolled into one of the so-called 'special classes' (with a high level of personalised teaching) which are distributed around the region and located on mainstream school sites, or, if the child's needs require it, they can be enrolled into a more protected environment in a special class within a private institution, with an option for residency.

In Canton Ticino, the number of children registered in special classes has always been less than half of the Swiss average (2% in Ticino, 5% across Switzerland).

In 2011 new legislation for special schools was approved in Ticino. In the New Legislation for Special Pedagogy (2012), the inclusion of children with special needs in regular classes is explicitly indicated as an available option.

The following case study was started within this new regulatory framework.

The school has been chosen on the basis of the following criteria:

- the openness of the municipality to embrace the inclusive classroom;
- the number of children registered in the mainstream school and the law indications;
- the support of the project by the whole school;
- the clinical records of the children already enrolled in the special school and living in the area.

In the inclusive classroom, children with special needs are officially registered at the



special school, while all the other children are registered at the mainstream pre-primary school. The class teacher is accompanied by the specialist teacher.

Due to organisational differences, intense networking activity is needed to carry out this project. Pre-primary schools are managed by the municipality, while special schools are managed at a regional level. The networking includes sharing and socialising with the parents and families of all the children involved regarding the project, its vision and its objectives.

The aim of this pilot experience is to try a new form of inclusion for children with special needs in a mainstream classroom, giving them the opportunity to develop social skills through relationships with their peers and differentiated and personalised teaching.

The collaboration between teachers with different experiences and training should allow every single child to develop their own personal skills.

The project aims to promote daily interactions between children from the special school and children from the mainstream school and assumes that such interactions will bring reciprocal benefits.

It was decided to limit the project to the pre-primary school years. At the end of the second year, an evaluation of the pedagogical needs of each child in the special school will be conducted, which will be used to decide how each pupil will continue their education.

It should be noted that this document will refer to three different levels: the national level (Switzerland), the regional level (Canton Ticino) and the local level (municipality). The organisation of the pre-primary school, with regards the number of children in each classroom and the teachers' contracts, is locally managed under the supervision of the regional authority. In the special school, decisions are made at a regional level. The two regional managing institutions are different and independent from one another.

2. Inclusive features

Children in the inclusive classroom are registered as pupils of the special school and may benefit from services provided by Special Pedagogy Legislation (employees, transportation).

Given that this is a pilot phase of the project and given the young age of the children involved, it was deemed appropriate to assess the children's individual needs at the end of each academic year, after which the decision to renew each child's registration to the special school is made.



In traditional forms of inclusion, children with special needs do not easily attain regular attendance. This experience aims at finding a method of inclusion that is more adequate for the needs of each individual child, starting with resources rather than difficulties.

The co-teaching practice, involving a primary school teacher and a specialist teacher, provides good timetable coverage and, at the same time, a new professional understanding which is applied in the classroom

The inclusive classroom is organised to ensure an adequate number of pupils to allow the inclusion of the group of children with special needs. For this reason, at the end of the school year 2013/14, the school head teacher, together with the teachers, re-distributed the pre-primary school pupils so that the inclusive classroom would have a maximum of 15 pupils: 5 pupils from the first level (3 to 4 years age), 5 from the second level (4 to 5 years age) and 5 from the third level (5 to 6 years). The composition of the classroom was then balanced in terms of number and gender of the pupils.

Resources are provided to both the pre-primary school teacher and to the specialist teacher. The selection of the teachers involved was based on several factors:

Pre-primary school teacher

At the beginning of the academic year 2012/13 the project was presented to a group of school teachers and one of them volunteered. The school head considered the profile of the teacher to be adequate for the project, since she had shown flexibility, willingness, openness to change, a focus on personal and professional development, openness to new forms of collaboration with her colleagues and the inclination to accept children with behavioural issues in her classroom. Furthermore, she was the only teacher in the institute with a full time contract, which, while not fundamental, was something to take into consideration. The school head informed the municipality of the decision and the project was put into effect.

Specialist teacher

Teachers employed in special schools are trained to work with children of different ages, from 4 to 18. It was therefore considered important that the chosen teacher had previous experience with young children. As this was a new project, it was considered relevant that the teacher was ready to invest her own personal resources in the collaboration with the pre-primary school teacher and in the constant monitoring of the ongoing project. The teacher was also pro-active in finding new solutions for the new school. As the project started, children with special needs were included in the classroom part time, every morning for five days a week. The specialist teacher therefore has a part time contract and only works



when the children with special needs are included in the mainstream class.

The chosen teacher volunteered to be a part of the experience, had a collaborative attitude and strong adaptability to the new environment. Teachers working with children with special needs are used to collaborating with colleagues, so while it is not a new experience for them, it is quite challenging to do it in a classroom with 20 children whilst preserving and respecting everyone's individual needs.

3. Inclusive highlight

Specific aspects of this project are of particular interest:

- The consensus-building process at a social and institutional level (municipality, public administration, school, families);
- Its inclusion in a more general reform process, which involves compulsory schooling and has inclusive education as a milestone;
- Reference to the tradition of the Canton Ticino pre-primary school to pay particular attention to the topic of inclusion;
- The low number of children registered to special schools in Ticino, when compared to the national average.

4. Other evidence of quality IECE

- (a) External recognition: The experience is observed with interest by political institutions who consider it to be relevant. This is shown by their willingness to invest economic resources in the project. A similar project at the University of Teacher Education in Canton Ticino is currently being monitored;
- (b) Children and families: The project is just beginning, and as such to make any statement with respect to this aspect is premature;
- (c) Workforce: Please refer to the the inclusive features section;
- (d) Collaboration: All the stakeholders are involved. The process is based on common ground principles and their meaning for the social and scholastic community.