



## TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION

### Country Study Visit

Belfast, Northern Ireland, 28<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010

#### Theme for visit

Exploring the Northern Ireland Teacher Competences to develop inclusive practitioners and considering the wider potential implications for the mainstream education system that need to be considered for teachers to use/implement these competences in the best way.

#### Summary of discussions

The following provides a summary of the key points arising during discussions that took place across the 3 day country study visit:

- We need to agree a wider definition of inclusion and move away from deficit thinking and categorising learners.
- Inclusion is a human rights issue and we need to be clear about the type of society we want. Developing inclusive practice requires a 'culture change' and values and attitudes are part of the ethical code of teachers.
- It is important to understand the stages of development which teachers pass through and consider what they bring to their initial training (and therefore what might be needed to expand the 'narrow ground' and avoid teachers defaulting to the way they were taught themselves).
- Although the entire continuum of teacher education is inter-related, the current focus is on initial teacher education. Initial teacher education competences should be seen as a 'foundation' for future development. i.e. teachers are lifelong learners who will continue to develop competences in their continuing professional development and performance review. This relates to the EU Commission agenda on improving teacher quality by:
  - Developing a culture of reflective practice
  - Collaborating with colleagues, parents, other professionals (inter-agency) and develop 'learning communities'
  - Teaching heterogeneous classes (with 'personal interest' in pupils & ability to meet individual needs)
  - Developing leadership skills
- It is not possible to 'deliver' competences. We need to move on from the idea of teachers as 'disseminators of knowledge' to developing their understanding of real learning with a good understanding of curriculum development and assessment issues to meet diverse needs. Competences need to be developed as part of a 'holistic approach' – not a 'tick box' exercise - and used as a basis for professional dialogue and reflection.
- Assessment of competences may be through:
  - Portfolios (assessment for learning – on-going)
  - Standards (assessment of learning - summative) Attention is also needed to ensure a common understanding of competences with possible moderation activities.



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- There is a potential conflict between demands for high academic achievement (e.g. PISA results) and inclusion and achievement of broader outcomes. How can we bring these together and challenge the belief that inclusion will lower standards?
  - What 'staff development' do teacher trainers need? How can research best inform practice?
  - Consideration needs to be given as to how teachers are selected for ITE courses. i.e. broader criteria/experiences as well as academic qualifications.
  - University/college/school partnerships must be developed to ensure that teacher education students are given opportunities for quality teaching practice in inclusive settings.
  - It should be recognised that good teaching is good teaching for all pupils – there are no 'specific' SEN competences. (see research by Norwich and Lewis) Mixed messages are given when staff are qualified to teach only certain groups of learners – we need to develop the skills of teachers to enable them to meet the needs of ALL learners.