



THEMENJAHR

*Gemeinsam leben.
Miteinander lernen.*

LIVING TOGETHER. LEARNING TOGETHER

Report on the main findings and recommendations of the Thuringian Project Education 2013, under the patronage of the German UNESCO-Commission.

Minister of Education Christoph Matschie inaugurated the year with the theme of 'Living together. Learning together' in the town hall of Erfurt on March 19, 2013. The year was under the patronage of the German UNESCO Committee (registered association). Strengthening inclusive education in Germany was an integral part of the UNESCO resolution of June 24, 2011. The main objective of the year was to raise awareness of the topic of inclusion for as many Thuringians as possible and to focus on successfully working together.

A large number of individuals, institutions, clubs, associations and interest groups were invited to discuss ways of sustainable implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). One of the goals of the year was to focus on the goals of the UNCRPD and to develop a common understanding of the concept of inclusive education. The year also offered opportunities to present examples of active integration and inclusion, and the award 'Stories of Diversity' was launched in this framework.

A variety of experiences in Thuringia show that a general attitude towards diversity benefits everybody and leads to enriching insights for all.



A number of examples of successful cooperation have been collected and are displayed below.

1. Tour of schools by the Thuringian Representative for Persons with Disabilities

In October 2013, the Thuringian representative of the government started a tour of schools in Thuringia aiming to get an impression of how shared learning is being put into practice in various schools of all types. He was impressed to see the commitment that teachers, educators, special needs educators and school integration assistants demonstrate to make shared learning successful. On this occasion, parents' and pupils' representatives also took the opportunity to share experiences on basic questions as well as questions specific to their schools. The results can be summarized as follows:

- Inclusion in the education system requires the needs-oriented assignment of qualified teaching and support personnel. The creation of inclusive learning environments requires modern concepts of space; accessibility must be focused on to a higher degree. Freedom from barriers is not necessary in each school as in individual cases modern facilities can compensate for insufficient structural requirements.
- There will always be children who need special support. The qualified personnel at support centers make a vital contribution to this process. In order to develop inclusive educational systems, it is important to make efforts in society as a whole and to continue along these lines sustainably. It is necessary to consider the support of the authorities responsible for financing schools.

2. Consultation of the Erfurt Chamber of Commerce and Industry on inclusion

The project 'Consultation of the Erfurt Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Inclusion' started on 1 July 2013. In addition to numerous other tasks, the advice of companies and people with disabilities has been the most important aspects of the



project. The objective is to improve the integration in working life for people with disabilities and to acquire qualified personnel for the participating companies.

The first networking service entitled 'Inclusion up close and personal' of the Erfurt Chamber of Commerce and Industry was held on 10 February 2014. Here young people with mental disabilities and companies had the chance to get to know each other. A personal placement in a company is of great importance in one's career choice. In addition to information, the networking service which was organized together with the state-wide working group 'Living together. Learning together' offered young people a platform for presenting their strengths and potential.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry announced the following further steps in the project:

- the support of companies for the promotion of integrated training with vocational training centers;
- the support of needs-oriented career guidance including the development of a concept in co-operation with job centers;
- consultations and competence assessments at support centers and integrative schools for young people and their parents;
- implementation of public campaigns and publicity for trainings for people with disabilities;
- talks for economic advisory boards of the different regions on the topic of inclusion in companies.

3. Active Inclusion in the State Vocational School 'Ernst Benary Schule', Erfurt

Pupils with and without disabilities learned together in the same class at the Ernst-Benary-School Erfurt in the vocational preparatory year in 2013/2014. They organized their cooperation on the basis of mutual understanding and tolerance and described their experiences.

My attitude towards the teaching concept of 'Inclusion' was skeptical. Young people with trisomy 21 were to be taught in a class of the vocational



preparatory year? How can this work? The preconditions were inadequate in almost every respect – no special training or continuous professional development (even the characteristics of this medical condition were unclear to several colleagues), no teaching materials, lack of experience and the uncertainty which trainees would be in the group and whether this would work on a social level. Basically an awful lot was missing – but we had something really important – the will to try and the courage to follow an unknown path.

Now I can observe that with the support of a qualified special needs teacher the project is working out better than I could ever have been anticipated. There is a high degree of acceptance and tolerance, pupils are showing emotional intelligence that neither we nor they had expected to experience.

Another teacher reports:

Now after half a year of experience the question I ask myself is: who in the class is actually benefiting from whom? My skepticism has gone, because Natascha and Michael are showing considerable progress in their motor functions and skillfulness and with some classmates positive changes can be observed in their social competences.

4. Joint teaching at the State Regular School Münchenbernsdorf

In the daily life the regular school Münchenbernsdorf shows that inclusive action is not only possible but also necessary during lessons. In alternating phases of inner and outer differentiation, pupils with special needs learn together in the joint classes of 7 and 8. They learn together as one group whenever it is possible and when thematic and social contexts allow for it. They work in groups and carry out projects and experiments. A special needs educator is in constant contact with the teachers of the school. The educational content and how it is to be taught is discussed and agreed upon together.

On the way to becoming an inclusive school, Münchenbernsdorf has gained the experience that mastering everyday life together enriches all partners. Pupils with



special needs participate in shaping the life at school, enjoy breaks, celebrate together, discuss and debate like other pupils.

5. The Learning Houses at the Otto-Lilienthal-Schule in Erfurt

Pupils with the most different needs learn in mixed age groups in so-called learning houses at the Otto-Lilienthal-Schule in Erfurt. Each learning house has two classrooms and one multi-purpose room that is located between them. 40 pupils from grades 1 to 4, two teachers and one educator belong to each learning house. The pupils remain a member of their learning house during their entire time at primary school. There are stable rituals that support students during their time for learning in a prepared learning environment. Students learn according to their own speed and towards their own objectives. The learning objectives are clearly displayed in the classroom. Pupils use their learning log to document what they learned each day. Portfolios give a very individual and differentiated picture of the skills and proficiency of each individual pupil.

Special needs education takes place during classes in small groups. In the afternoon pupils can choose an activity depending on their interests.

Once a month all pupils from all learning houses present their results in the assembly hall. There is a weekly meeting for parents as well.

6. The inquisitiveness of a social studies course at the Friedrich Schiller grammar school in Mellingen

Dealing with the topic of 'people with disabilities' at a theoretic level is not enough for the pupils of a year 11 social studies course at the Friedrich Schiller grammar school. The members of the course want to know exactly how children with special needs learn, how they master their daily routine and how they cope with their disability. First of all, they organise an integrative sports day. They invite the neighbouring Maria-Martha-Schule to this competition where pupils with disabilities study. The initial uneasiness quickly subsides after it becomes obvious that – while



doing gymnastics, dance, football and basketball – everybody enjoys physical activity in the same way. Pupils talk with each other during a meal together. Summing up the meeting, the pupils of the Friedrich Schiller Gymnasium Mellingen observed that people with a disability are as similar and as different as everybody else. Only through meeting each other do people succeed in reducing fears and prejudices. Inclusion is an important topic for the whole of society.

7. Learning stations in joint lessons at the primary school Floh-Seligenthal

In addition to well-tried individualised instruction, learning stations were introduced in September 2009 for one day a week in grades 3 and 4. It is planned, prepared and attended to by three colleagues. Two classrooms and the computer cabinet can be used for it.

The special needs teacher regularly participates in the team conferences. In addition to planning the teaching content, she can also modify differentiated instructions for the learning stations for children with special needs, according to their level of proficiency. She is always familiar with the learning content. The focus is on opportunities to learn which are task-based and clear. It soon became obvious that learning stations offer a lot of scope for individualised support encouraging pupils to critically assess their way of learning and their progress. Learning stations are positively accepted by the pupils.

8. Class 8a at the State Regular School Ichtershausen

Inclusion is not always easy – this is what teachers and pupils alike at the State Regular School Ichtershausen now know. A boy with a disability comes into a ‘normal’ class, is supported by special needs teachers and in this way can be fostered and challenged. So far, so good. At the beginning difficulties occurred in the form of teasing and a lack of acceptance by classmates. Teachers had to adapt to the new situation in their lessons. Step by step, the difficulties could increasingly be resolved through numerous discussions and intensive planning. The story of Class 8a



shows that it is important when working together to focus on solutions and to involve all stakeholders. Shared experiences are a basis for reducing prejudices.

9. Primary School 'An der Trießnitz', Jena, Jacob Muth Award Winner

When about 15 years ago, the mayor of the town of Jena approached the primary schools of the town for the first time to include pupils with special needs, the head teacher of the primary school 'An der Trießnitz' agreed with his staff to accept this challenge, in spite of his scepticism and reservation. At that point the priority of joint lessons in Thuringia had not been regulated by law. This was the beginning of an intensive process of development at this primary school. According to the head teacher a fundamental change towards a pedagogical self-understanding has taken place at this school. In January 2013 the 'An der Trießnitz' primary school was the only Thuringian school to receive the Jacob Muth prize for inclusive schools. This was in recognition of the fact that they put inclusion into practice in an excellent way. In a way that through inclusion all children were allowed to share quality education and to develop their individual potential.

The Federal Government Commissioner for Matters relating to Disabled Persons the German UNESCO Commission and the Bertelsmann Foundation are the project sponsors.

10. Integrative gathering point for pupils in Dingelstädt

In the framework of the Thuringian model of education 'New learning culture in the communities' (<http://www.nelecom.de/>) in 2008 Dingelstädt, as a pilot community, initiated a series of nelekom-activities to empower children and adolescents. In a current model project, the pupils of the Staatliches Gymnasium Dingelstädt school and the catholic special needs school St. Franziskus, with the support of Villa Lampe Heiligenstadt turned the old gymnasium of the state grammar school into a meeting point. On 10 July 2012 the gathering point was inaugurated. Children and adolescents with and without special needs meet here and find lots of opportunities



for activities together. The young people themselves are responsible for the organisation of the integrative gathering point; they are the main actors. Special activities and events enliven the gathering and make common social experiences a reality. This happens through e.g. 'Schülertreff-Café', art projects as well as rehearsals and public appearances of the school band. Through the agreed cooperation between the state grammar school and the catholic special needs center the project is sustainably anchored in the municipal educational landscape.