



TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION

Country Study Visit

Utrecht, Netherlands

Monday 31st May to Wednesday 2nd June

Theme for the visit

How competence profiles fit in with developing policy initiatives for inclusive education. Specifically, exploring what policy frameworks for teacher education as well as inclusive education are needed for such a profile to be implemented

Summary of discussions

These points are overall key issues raised during the meeting:

- The ultimate goal of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) should be to provide quality education for all pupils
- The importance of student teacher beliefs as a starting point for ITE
- ITE should promote a view of 'difference as normal'
- ITE is the foundation for teacher lifelong learning
- We need to consider the process of 'Teaching children, by teaching teachers, by teaching teacher educators'
- There is a need for clear Continuous Professional Development (CPD) pathways and opportunities for teacher educators.

In relation to policy for ITE and inclusion, the following points were apparent:

- There are dilemmas of funding in ITE and CPD for short term initiatives and not long term developments
- There is a perceived need for policy requiring compulsory study of inclusive education in ITE
- There is a need for all stakeholders in ITE to share a common language
- The need for integrated policy between:
 - o Inclusive education
 - o ITE (for teachers and teacher educators)
 - o CPD (for teachers and teacher educators)
 - o Educational research



Detailed discussions were held during a 'Diner Pensant'. The discussion centred around a number of key questions (marked in italics below). The summary of key discussion points are presented here.

What attitudes do mainstream teachers working in inclusive settings need?

- Consider that you actually don't know everything
- Your own attitudes are hard to see for yourself; other people can see, so feedback is important
- Deal with critics, accept that you are not perfect
- Attitudes can be seen by asking questions
- Ask yourself the question: "why do I do what I do?"
- Teachers should know that all children can learn
- Children should know consequences
- It is not possible to teach attitudes
- Never stop learning
- Accept help from others
- Key words:
 - Flexible strategy
 - Open minded
 - Respect
 - Reflecting on your own behaviour
 - Curiosity
 - Confidence

What knowledge and skills do mainstream teachers, working in inclusive settings need?

- Basic knowledge of disorders
- 'Survival skills'
- Flexibility in strategies; try different approaches. Learn different ways to use and reach the goals that are necessary to work with different children
- Reflecting on your own behaviour is important. Sometimes problems are generated by the behaviour of the teacher, not the behaviour of the child
- Know that difference is ordinary
- Mainstream teachers are already qualified, but sometimes they need support
- Work more efficiently; use support for more children
- Don't make the strategy too personal for a child with special educational needs. No child wants an adult next to him/her the whole day. He/she wants to be part of the group.



What initial education to develop both (attitudes and skills) do mainstream teachers working in inclusive settings need?

- More focus on leadership
- Initial education does not prepare the teachers for inclusive education
- Teach about *needs*, not about disorders
- Know what to do when and know what not to do when

What systemic changes are needed to allow teachers to implement their education?

- More resources are not always the solution. Change the way we use the available resources
- Stop unnecessary labelling, stop blaming the children
- Teachers must regain their trust in their behaviour
- Change the system of accountability. Make it more flexible. Make one school responsible for the funding of Special Needs Education
- Don't allow schools to exclude children
- More support for the teacher; professional development of teachers
- Organise the support; the support should be built in the structure of the school.
- Change the curriculum
- Rediscover active learning and good teaching
- Give teachers additional time to study (10 days a year)
- Give teachers a personal budget to study co-teaching
- Teachers are not trusted. Now, too many professionals tell you what to do
- Recognize that a teacher is a specialist. Now, teachers are not seen by society as professionals. As a result, they don't act as professionals.

What policy framework is needed for all of the above to happen?

We can identify certain policy triggers for inclusion or exclusion:

- funding mechanisms for SEN
- 'degrees of segregation' within the mainstream school system
- the system focus on academic outputs for education
- a single versus multiple curricular for all learners
- attitudes and beliefs regarding inclusion communicated via policy

Other non-educational areas of social policy working towards aspects of social cohesion need to support educational policies in order to have a positive impact on inclusive educational research.

Inclusive education policy should:

- provide a clear vision for inclusion as a long term aim
- be clear that teachers have a responsibility for all learners in their classrooms



- celebrate differences
- clarify that inclusive approaches are for the benefit of everyone
- recognise and support the role of teachers as co-developers of the curriculum

Teacher Education for inclusion policy should:

- include compulsory continuous professional development for inclusion
- be geared towards promoting teachers' status as a profession
- aim at ensuring a wider demographic within the teaching workforce (i.e promotes diversity of teachers)

Different stakeholders should be involved in all relevant areas of policy making - different tools can be used to facilitate this (i.e. ICT).

Teachers' inputs to policy consultation should be prioritised, open and transparent.

Poly must break the 'blame cycle' and promote a culture of collaboration between different stakeholders, rather than competition or conflict.

A new type of policy development cycle can be considered involving: proposals from key experts put into a framework for action; pilot projects developing the framework for action conducted at school, regional and national levels; cascade dissemination of results; evaluation of pilots by external organisations; policy drafting based on the results of the above (which then leads to new legislation. [This policy development model is being implemented in Finland].

Major policy initiatives and changes often need a 'visionary' leader who is prepared to take risks.

Policy for inclusive education must aim to achieve a balance between academic achievement and social aspects of education. The concept of overall well-being is crucial. 'Looking beyond the borders of education' should be the wide focus of policy for inclusion.

Policy for the 21st century schools has a number of inter-related and supporting elements:

- 1 – policy for the curriculum that is: for all learners; competency (and not subject area) focussed.
- 2 - policy for teacher education to implement the above curriculum that is: competency (and not subject area) focussed; aimed at developing reflective practitioner teachers.
- 3 – policy for school effectiveness.
- 4 - Policy for educational research to provide 'evidence' to guide and support the above policy areas.

In addition it may be necessary to have a 'meta' policy mechanism to ensure the integration and effective co-ordination of the above elements.