

VOICES INTO ACTION (VIA) ACTIVITY – MALTA

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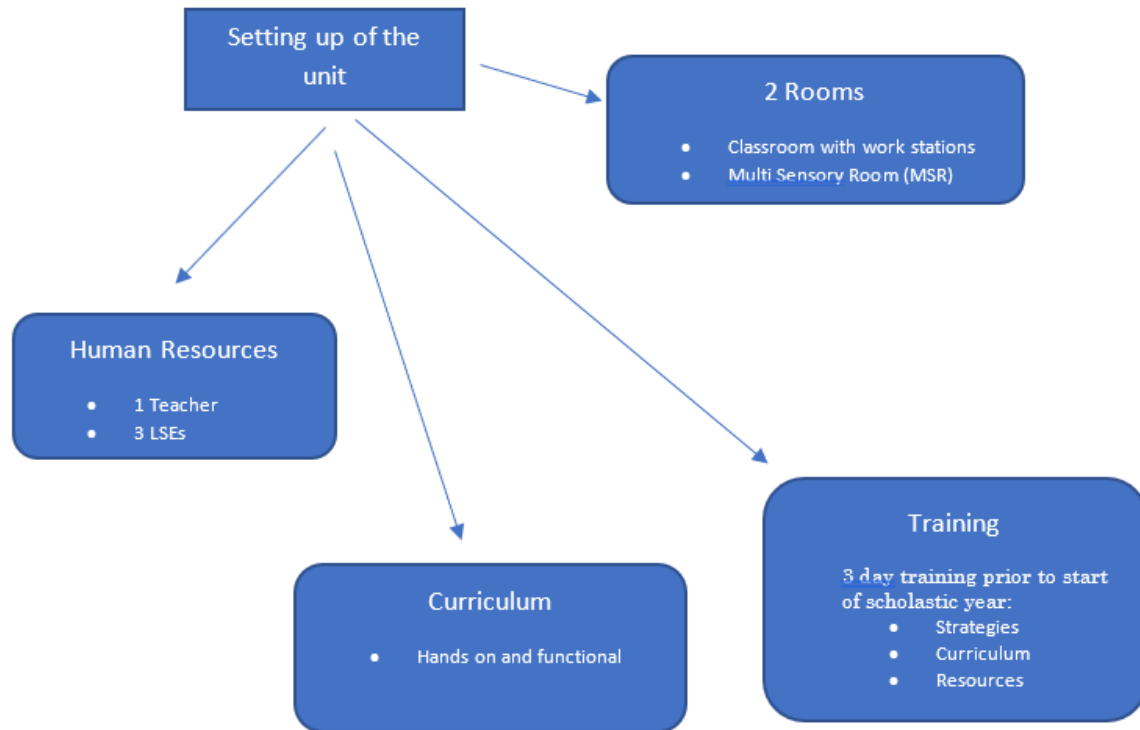
Overview of presentation

- Context
- Description of national activity
- Details on the process, including evidence of materials used
- Evaluation, feedback and future plans
- Challenges / barriers encountered, and solutions at each stage

Context: Autism Unit in a mainstream setting

In line with the National Inclusion Policy, all learners should have access to quality instruction, intervention and support to experience success in learning within a high-quality inclusive education system. The mainstream class might not always meet effectively all learners' diversity, particularly those of learners on the autism spectrum. Thus, some children might need to receive part of their educational provision in a specialised class within the mainstream setting, to ensure that they can have more support and access to a more meaningful curriculum and, at the same time, join mainstream classes for specific lessons.

A pilot project



- A research project took place before setting up of the unit (including various stakeholders: Educators, learners, professionals and parents)
- Piloted in two middle schools in Malta
- Research took place in one Reach Unit

Rationale

Reach Units shall support learners with disabilities by:

- allowing them to develop to their full learning potential, in a calm environment that offers structure, clarity and predictability;
- facilitating optimum inclusion as part of the school community with access to mainstream educational and social learning opportunities that are available and that are deemed appropriate to the holistic development of the learner;
- scheduling individual timetables when learners attend classes both in the mainstream school and in the Autism Unit. Break time is also another opportunity where learners mix with learners from the mainstream in the common area of the Unit.

Focus groups for parents on hearing the voices of families and learners in the Reach Unit

Main aim of the workshop events: A full evaluation of the Unit after one academic year of operation, to enable change to be generated, to improve the day-to-day functioning of the Unit, and possibly expand its use within the context of other learners and teachers in the school.

Methodology: Qualitative, to gain knowledge and understanding of the experiences of learners in the Unit and their families, since transition from primary school.

Methods: Focus group meetings with parents of the learners in one of the two units. Group activities and some individual activities with individual learner.

Participants

- 4 out of 5 parents participated in the focus group session.
- 5 learners participated in the activity carried out in class.

The process – the parents

- One focus group session was held with the parents for a focus group.
- Questions were prepared to facilitate discussion.

The process – the learners

- A task was given to the 5 learners attending the Reach Unit.

Evidence of 'Space'

Possible sources of evidence:

- Any documents used, i.e.
 - Consent forms, information sheets
 - Focus group session with parents recorded
 - Meeting notes
 - Photos during activity with learners
 - Learners' activity

Consent forms/information sheets

PARENT/CARER LETTER

Dear Parent/Carer,

You and your son are being invited to take part in a focus group session (parents) and activity (student) to evaluate the operation of the REACH unit. The study is being carried out by Ms Josanne Ghirxi and Dr Jonathan Camenzuli.

Should you agree that you and your son to participate in the focus group session/activity, you will be asked to participate in a focus group session which will focus on your experiences on the REACH Unit during this scholastic year. Also, your son will carry out an activity in class to show what he like/disliked about the Autism Unit. This activity will not involve intervention work and efforts will be made to have minimal impact on your child's school/your daily routine.

You and your child have the right to withdraw your consent to participate in the focus group/activity and can request for their data to be destroyed at any time by contacting Dr Jonathan Camenzuli (i.e., Personal Data Protection Officer, jonathan.camenzuli.2@ilearn.edu.mt). Measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality of all the participants and the school. The information gathered will be used collectively for policy analysis and development purposes (i.e., policy reports, journals and conferences etc.).

Should you wish to participate, please sign and date the consent form below to confirm your consent that you and your son will participate in the activity.

Should you have any queries or wish to seek confirmation on any of the above issues, please do not hesitate to contact Dr Jonathan Camenzuli on 2598 3429.

Yours sincerely,

Josanne Ghirxi and Jonathan Camenzuli

Title: Evaluating the REACH Unit

PARENT/CARER CONSENT FORM

If you agree on and approve of your child taking part in the activity, please complete and sign the consent form below:

- | | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read the above letter, have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions, and had these answered satisfactorily. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I understand that my and my child's participation in the focus group session/activity is voluntary and that I am, and they are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, by contacting Dr Jonathan Camenzuli (i.e., Personal Data Protection Officer, jonathan.camenzuli.2@ilearn.edu.mt). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that the focus group sessions will be audio-recorded and activity carried with my child collected. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to the use of extracts of my contributions and that of my son's anonymous quotes, in the form of speech marks ("...") and my child's work from the drawing activity. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in public documents (i.e., policy reports, briefs, books or journals) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I agree to take part in the above focus group session/activity

Name of participant

Date

Parent' Signature

Focus group sessions with parents



Questions

- Day-to-day school life
- Feeling part of the Unit and the whole school community
- Strengths of the Unit; areas for suggested improvements; challenges encountered

Questions - Focus

Day to day school life

- Which aspect of the day worked well?
- What did you like in teaching and learning?
- What about the social aspect?
- Have there been any particular aspects of the day-to-day life, which have been more difficult or worrying for you as a parent, or for your child?
- Have you been given opportunities to discuss these with the Unit staff, and reach a solution?
- How much direct interaction do you have with your child's teachers/LSEs?

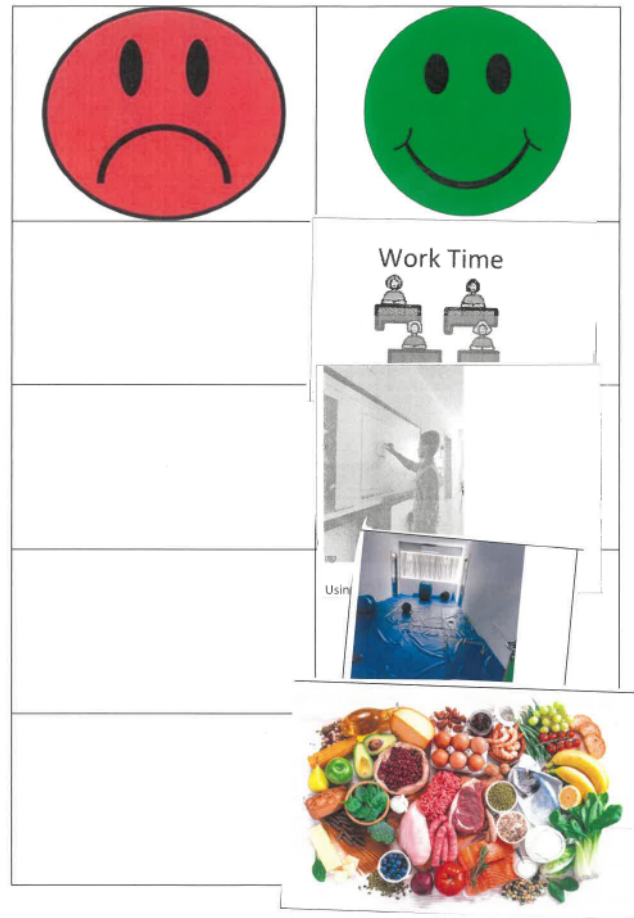
Feeling part of the Unit and of the whole school community

- Looking back over the whole year, do you feel that the Unit is a part of the whole school?
- In what ways do you feel part of the whole school community? For example, parents' committees, meeting, social activities, school concerts, sports etc
- Do you think there are any suggestions so that parents of children in the Unit feel more a part of the whole school?

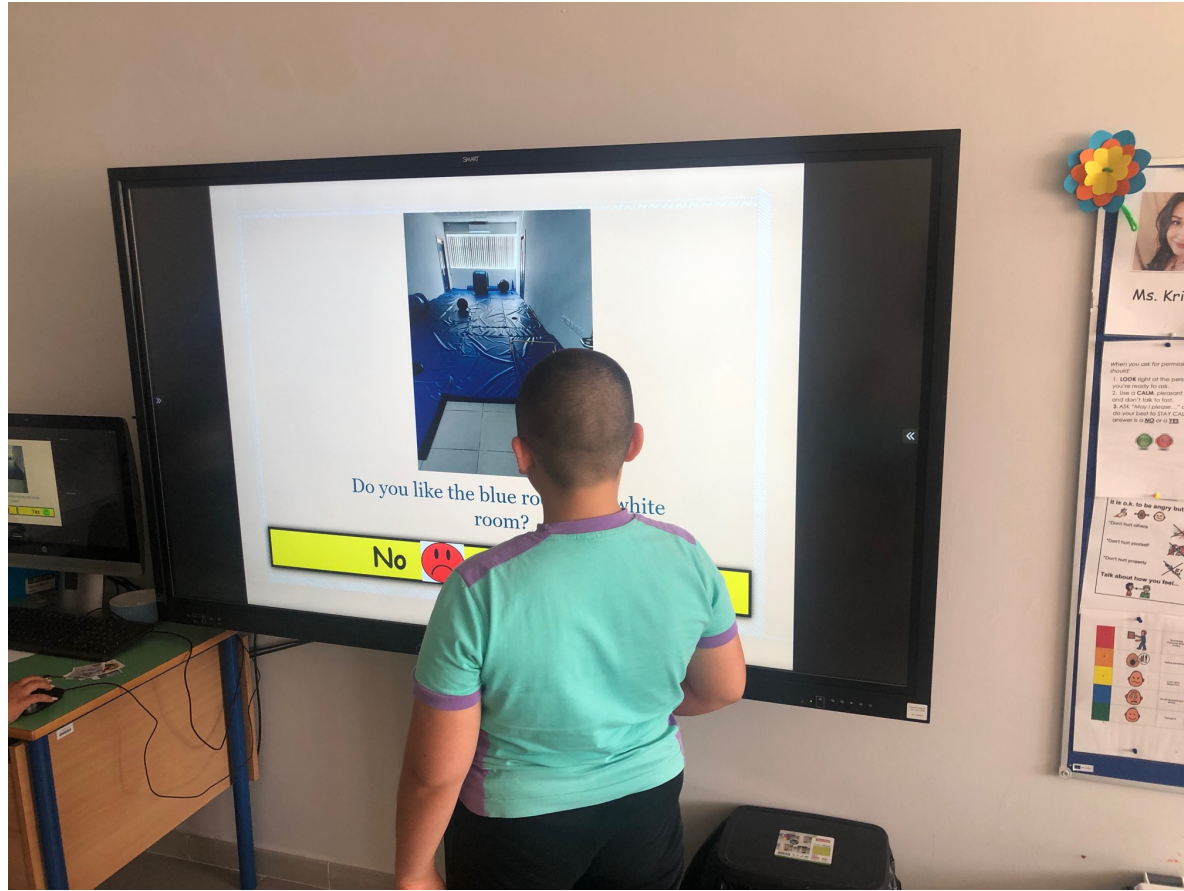
Strengths of the Units; areas for suggested improvements; challenges encountered

- Other than what we have already talked about, in which ways do you think the Unit is a good opportunity for your child?
- Are there any aspects of the Unit that you think could be improved, to make the experience better for the parents, the children, and the staff?
- What have you and your child found to be the most challenging aspects of being part of the Unit?
- What have you and your child found to be the most successful aspects of being part of the Unit?
- What advice might you give to parents who are thinking of enrolling their child in the Unit for the next academic year?

Learner activities (1)



Learner activities (2)



Evidence of 'Audience'

Possible sources of evidence:

- A record of stakeholders who were present and their roles in the activity
- Focus group session was recorded; photos taken of activity with learners
- Reflective notes taken during focus group session and learners' activity

Evidence of 'Voice'

Possible sources of evidence:

- Any products produced as outputs, i.e.
 - Student work (photographs, drawings, etc.)
 - Recordings/transcript of focus group session with parents

Challenges

- Involving the learners in the project
- Timeframes

Contact

www.european-agency.org

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