



SUMMARY OF SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS

During autumn 2013, five seminars were held to disseminate early project findings and follow up on issues raised by the site visits. The seminars were held in:

Ljubljana, Slovenia

Flensburg, Germany

Valetta, Malta

Gothenburg, Sweden

Vienna, Austria

The seminars were attended by around 200 stakeholders including policy makers, national/local education advisers, inspectors, school leaders (from mainstream and special schools), researchers, teacher educators, psychologists, teachers (from mainstream schools, specialist settings, resource centres and support services) representatives from voluntary organisations, disabled people and parents.

The discussions that took place during the seminars raised many similar and overlapping issues and have therefore been summarised together in this short paper under headings relating to the key areas discussed.

United Nations Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- The UN Convention on Rights of persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was not mentioned by many countries in the Organisation of Provision project questionnaire. The UNCRPD/ and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child work should be made to work together to ensure the rights of children with disabilities and act as a stimulus for participation.
- Countries need to take note of both Conventions then interpret them in their own legislation. National legislation may therefore reflect principles without direct references. There should not be 'gaps' between the Conventions, national legislation and practice.
- The UNCRPD is seen in some countries as more relevant to social affairs, child protection etc. It should be used in professional development to raise awareness in Education and more widely.
- Under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, (article 24 2c), schools need to accommodate learners with disabilities. How can we measure the quality and effectiveness that underpins learners' rights and enables them to succeed.



- The rights of the child and the rights of parents need to be recognised and balanced. The rights of schools still take precedence in some cases as they can refuse admission if feel they can't meet learner's needs.
- The right to mainstream education may not be the 'right' right. All learners have a right to quality support in their own community but the important factor is appropriately trained and committed educators. The whole school environment needs to be supportive to meet learners' needs (including medical etc.)

Terminology and common understanding of inclusion

- Countries need to clarify the meaning of inclusion - it is about ALL learners. Inclusion is not a placement issue - not everyone must be in the same room all the time but inclusion must be part of each learner's regular experience, with appropriate provision in flexible learning communities.
- Agreement is needed on vision and values - what is quality inclusive education? How does the system really function? We need to change the whole system - not keep adding resources to parts of the whole.
- The term 'inclusion' needs to be 'unpacked' and fully understood - otherwise policy will be reactive and not backed up by theory. A long-term commitment with political buy-in is needed. There are no quick fixes.
- A shared idea of inclusion is needed with an emphasis on the human rather than technical side and the idea that inclusive education is better for all learners in terms of life preparation. 'Long standing 'traditions' must be overcome with a move from a 'medical' mind-set to a school where everyone belongs.
- Inclusion needs to start from the early years - if children grow together they will accept difference. Where children are excluded due to 'difference' in an attempt to keep groups homogenous, 'special' groups become increasingly complex with low expectations and damaging impact.
- Inclusion is not a cheap option and cannot be used to cut budgets. It cannot be an experiment with 'broken' children returning to specialist provision

Monitoring and evaluation

- Education systems value different aspects that do not necessarily support inclusion. There needs to be effective, inclusive ways to monitor and evaluate provision - in particular as high costs are involved. Resources can be used creatively - it is not always about needing more.



- Correspondence of ideas is important with agreement between the ministry, inspectors, school leaders etc. about the definition of success and what quality looks like (taking account of learner's aspirations).
- A focus on testing/output-oriented approaches may not support inclusion. What questions should be asked when monitoring/evaluating? What role should the Ministry of Education play?
- There is a need for data to monitor equity across different groups. This can inform policy decisions, maximise potential and minimise the achievement/attainment gap. It allows the impact of policies to be followed up.
- Inspection needs to focus on early intervention/reduction of support (not on failure or doing wrong) using self -review with support to increase school capacity. What are the key leverage points/influencing factors - in particular for 'middle performing schools'' Coping' with diversity' is not sufficient.
- We need to be aware of risks - these also drive evaluation and improvement e.g. risks of the way support/LSAs are used, risk of itemisation of the curriculum

Teacher Education and staff development

- Teacher education plays a key role in developing attitudes as well as knowledge and skills. Teachers should be recruited on the understanding that the job is about all learners.
- Teachers should be encouraged to engage with recent research on an on-going basis and to discuss findings with colleagues and parents.
- Initial teacher education and on-going professional development should be done collaboratively between schools and outside institutions in order to ensure the development of the school as well as teachers.
- Teacher educators and the wider workforce need training and on-going support. Could distance-learning materials be developed for teachers (and trainers) at EU level?
- Further work is needed to explore how education and training can develop confidence and increase capacity to meet diverse needs - and develop qualities such as commitment, trust, acceptance and respect. How can we encourage people who are already highly qualified to 'learn', to reflect and to accept uncertainty? Bottom up and top down support is needed with help from 'objective outsiders' (Communities of Practice).



- It is difficult to change routines and teachers who are set in their ways need time and space to talk and reflect and support to feel secure and confident. There are no easy answers and it is OK to make mistakes.
- New teachers need role models/mentoring - there should be a continuum of support for school leaders and teachers that takes an 'active' approach.
- Teachers need to be able to take responsibility for all learners (not delegate to assistants or other staff). Teachers should look at children - not think in terms of additional resources.
- Teachers need skills in assessment and the use of tools e.g. for formative assessment, self-assessment for learning. They need to know what they are assessing and why and to be more aware of different needs and individualisation of learning - 'teaching to the middle' is not appropriate. Teachers also need skills in using new technologies to support inclusion and wider achievement.
- Mainstream schools need to provide 'specialist input' e.g. to support learners with visual/hearing impairments. Specialist knowledge and skills must be maintained. Support needs to be given to children alongside their peers - they should not be taken out of school to get what they need. (Some specialist work could be done after school). If something cannot be taught in the mainstream school community, then we should think of the value of what we are teaching. The school system needs to engage with 'real-life'.
- Cooperation, professional networks and dialogue between stakeholders are essential. Positive results are achieved when learning support assistants and class teachers work as a team, when they are not assigned to one child.
- Teachers should be trusted, given responsibility and time to plan (e.g. making use of flexibility in the system). If the needs of all learners can be met through the curriculum then it can be considered flexible. Short lessons and subject divisions can lead to a disjointed, incoherent curriculum.

Leadership and managing change

'You can't command the wind but you can set the sails' - Norman Green



- How can politicians gain the knowledge they need to support decision-making, without being subject to specific agendas? Use of research evidence is key so that improvement plans are more than just 'someone else's idea'.
- There is a need to recognise the complexity of systems across different levels and improve connections and communication between different levels within the system. Ministries are often too far removed from schools.
- Professional development and close collaboration (at all levels) between stakeholders can bring about effective change (e.g. Use of Robert Dilts - logical levels of change) . Sustainable change needs a change in thinking. How can attitudes be changed and positive mind set developed? (as for example acceptance of smoking in public spaces)
- What support is available for school leaders? Can this be achieved through collaboration, networking with other headteachers, also with researchers and external 'critical friends'. Support is also needed to ensure effective use of resources.
- The role of leaders is critical in developing an inclusive culture. What are qualities of successful inclusive leaders? Should pay be used as an incentive to include learners with disabilities? What is the motivation?
- Support for staff should be provided through a 'team around the teacher' to share knowledge and build competence, providing tools for different needs/situations
- Schools/communities should be more autonomous so that enthusiastic local leaders can be flexible and bring about change e.g. (e.g. a 'pool system' of support hours to be used flexibly, flexible approaches to curriculum and pedagogy).
- Change needs to start with ourselves/our own institutions.' The only thing we can change is the way we work' (Essunga School)

Development of resource centres

- There is a need for clarity about new role for special schools if they are to work as resource centres. What will resource centres do differently?
- There is a need to provide support - – institutional and individual – for the new role and to tackle the risk of transferring the medical model from special schools.



- Parents want 'full service' - all day school/activities. There can be no discrimination between those with/without disabilities. Can mainstream schools provide these services for all learners?
- Could the transfer of resources to mainstream provide an incentive to include all learners?
- Resource centres have a key role to play in providing expertise for learners with more complex needs - this expertise must be maintained.

Parents

- Parents have rights but need honest guidance - not contradictory professional advice - to enable them to make an informed choice. Who is advocating for the child? Parents may also influence policy as well as the placement of their own child.
- Special education is very expensive and special schools are supported by many parents/voluntary organisations who feel that more resources are available in such settings. While special schools remain open - they will be chosen by such parents.
- Pressure for results is increasing but evidence shows that inclusion does not lead to poorer outcomes and benefits of inclusion should be highlighted. Families should be involved in any assessment and be empowered to follow progress

Multi-agency work

- In bringing agencies together, a period of consolidation, evaluation (with critical friends) and building up shared frameworks is needed (e.g. shared assessment, shared funding priorities, shared professional development). Culture, professional constructs and expectations must be shared between agencies and multi-agency and pedagogical approaches combined to use resources in best way.
- Co-ordination between agencies is a key factor and can provide support to schools/teachers to support the holistic development of children. Services should support the change of environment not only the individual.
- The importance and influence of specialist services can be over estimated. While specialist knowledge and skills must be retained such resources and time must be used in the best way to provide quality support - and increase capacity. A child's time in school with appropriate support may have more impact than a small input from other services (psychologist, counsellor etc).



Critical factors in quality provision

Quality provision that supports all learners (in particular those with disabilities) is likely to have the following features - all requiring collaboration and co-operation at all level of the system:

- Strong politicians who work on 'inclusion for life' (not for a 5-year term) and who support local/school leaders
- Conceptual clarity - agreement on common principles
- Plans to move from individual support to enabling environments, providing support that 'skills up' staff and increases capability
- Stakeholders who see inclusion as an integral part of the school improvement agenda
- Leaders who engage in self and peer review/evaluation and use data and research evidence to inform improvement and work with others in networks/communities of practice (with links to University etc.)
- Effective coordination and team work between agencies
- Good social and communication skills and the ability to listen to others, particularly young or vulnerable learners
- 'Distributed' or shared leadership with networks for peer support that encourage creativity and innovation
- Leaders who focus on pedagogy, learning and 'people skills' - with reduced administrative/budget tasks
- Leaders who work with willing people to spread thinking and practice - and enable sustainability and succession to be planned
- Leaders who use specialist expertise, multiagency services and other resources creatively to benefit everyone in the school community
- Leaders and teachers who are open minded and flexible and who accept all learners with concern for their well-being.
- Leaders and teachers who see the possibilities in all learners, take responsibility and do not play the 'blame game'



- Leaders who support teachers/other staff through coaching and mentoring, who ask staff about their needs to personalise and support further learning
- Leaders who provide time and space for meetings and enable staff to use their strengths, be engaged in their work and involved in decisions. Such actions keep people in post for continuity.
- A clear purpose - with leaders/teachers who recognise the importance of knowledge as well as softer skills
- Leaders/teachers who are pro active and focus on early intervention
- A positive atmosphere, laughter and good relationships
- Open classrooms with teachers who see heterogeneity as a positive factor and who do not categorise/label learners
- A view of support as the norm for all learners and who use predictability and structure to good effect
- A coherent curriculum framework with the flexibility to meet all needs
- Schools/teachers who use a range of teaching and assessment approaches to benefit all learners e.g. portfolio assessment , cross curricular teaching, discovery learning
- Teachers who describe learners in positive terms and are prepared to go "off the road" and problem solve to find new ways to do things

Main challenges

- All schools need to engage in on-going improvement - to offer places to all children and meet all needs. They need knowledge/competence to recognise and understand each child, to adjust teaching and take a preventative, proactive approach (moving from a focus on the individual to a system focus)
- Challenging behaviour remains the greatest challenge - school culture needs to change so it is 'cool to be good'
- Including children with intellectual impairment is a challenge. How do we manage and sustain this?