Empowering Teachers to Promote Inclusive Education

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

EMPOWERING TEACHERS TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Materials prepared by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full version
Agency:	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
CPD:	Continuing professional development
IBE:	International Bureau of Education
ICT:	Information and communication technology
IEA:	Inclusive Education in Action
ITE:	Initial teacher education
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
TE4I:	Teacher Education for Inclusion
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

EMPOWERING TEACHERS CASE STUDY – METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

This paper sets out the approach taken to developing the Empowering Teachers Case Study, comprising a literature review and analytical study drawing on teacher education policy and practice updates from member countries of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency). The paper outlines the conceptual framework for this programme of work, as well as the purpose of and the relationship between the two case study documents. It also sets out the links between the case study and a second strand of the Empowering Teachers work – the development of a re-designed Inclusive Education in Action: Empowering Teachers: Empowering Learners website with a revised focus on teacher education.

2. Empowering Teachers – conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for the Empowering Teachers work draws on an earlier project conducted by the Agency: Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I), 2009–2012 (please refer to: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/Teacher-Education-for-Inclusion). The TE4I project used a broad definition of inclusive education, developed by UNESCO-IBE:

> *Inclusive education is an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination* (2008, p. 3).

Since this time, the Agency has developed a position, with a focus on education systems that further supports this broader view of inclusion. It states:

> *The ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers* (European Agency, 2015, p. 1).

The Agency does not therefore provide a definition, but a vision that aims to inform and support its work and that of its member countries. This vision also underpins the Empowering Teachers conceptual framework.

In working towards this vision, a major task is to equip all teachers with the necessary competences to provide such high-quality educational opportunities for all learners.

Rouse believes that 'additional needs' are the result of 'a discrepancy between what a system of schooling ordinarily provides and what the child needs to support their

learning' (2008, p. 6). Therefore, it follows that if more teachers had competences – such as those outlined in the Agency's *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (2012) – and the confidence to innovate, fewer learners might be considered to have 'additional needs', as their learning would be supported through the opportunities that are usually available.
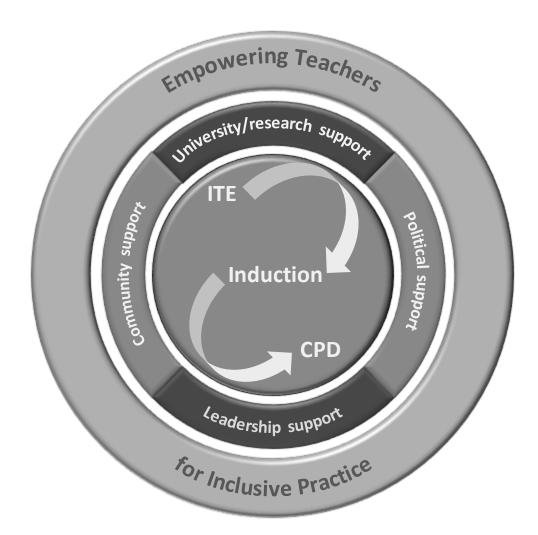
This argument can also be applied to the education of the teachers themselves: they need support to realise that they do have relevant knowledge and understanding and many of the skills required to work with all learners. Jordan, Schwartz and McGhie-Richmond (2009) note that schools may exclude or refuse to include certain learners on the basis that teachers do not have the knowledge and skills to teach them. Rix and Sheehy (2014), however, state that effective pedagogy for inclusion is based on skills already available to teachers, so there is not always a need for 'additional' or 'special' skills to overcome barriers to learning.

Hart et al. (2004) put forward the idea of 'transformability', believing that the capacity of all children to learn can be transformed. They show that, if teachers are not limited by pre-conceived ideas about ability and accept difference as something positive, they can find ways to make learning accessible by ensuring that there are options available for everybody.

The following activities or processes play a key part in the development of such inclusive practice:

- Initial teacher education (ITE): organisation and content (including school practice and evidence-based pedagogy) and the recruitment of a diverse teaching force to provide appropriate role models and connection to local communities.

- Continuing professional development (CPD): models of collaborative, evidence-based practice involving leaders, external experts and the local community within a supportive political context.

- Development and professionalisation of teacher educators (in higher education institutions, local authorities/municipalities and schools).

Linked to these activities, Figure 1 summarises the main factors that can impact on the development of inclusive practice.

Figure 1. Empowering Teachers conceptual framework

One key to inclusive practice is the provision of support for teachers by all stakeholders: politicians and leaders (at national, local and school levels), universities and external experts and the local/school community. This support for career-long learning runs through the continuum of opportunities offered by ITE, induction and CPD. These opportunities will all be enhanced by leaders and teachers working together and adopting a learning mind-set; for example, recognising that experienced practitioners can learn from providing support to student teachers and that peer learning can provide a valuable form of CPD.

More specifically, this support involves:

- University/research support, which includes effective ITE programmes, and pro-active teacher educators who can support on-going teacher professional development, based on recent research evidence. It further requires the development of teacher skills in research to enable them to effectively review evidence, collect and analyse data and reflect on and use a range of information to inform their practice.

- Community support, through the formation of effective partnerships with a range of stakeholders. This includes the support of parents, other professionals, local employers and community agencies that may contribute to increasing the skills, knowledge and understanding of teachers and leaders, in turn improving support for learners.

- Political support, through legislation and policy (at national and local levels) to support inclusive education, as well as to provide comprehensive quality assurance, evaluation and accountability frameworks that reinforce consistent messages regarding inclusive practice.

- Leadership support, which refers to national, local and school level support by leaders at every level of the system. In turn, the need for support for leaders, often through networks and collaboration with local/national peer groups, must also be recognised.

However, the main focus is on empowering teachers for inclusive practice (outer ring of Figure 1). First, the meaning of 'empowerment' should be clarified. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'empower' can mean 'to make (someone) stronger or more confident' (undated) – in this case increasing teacher confidence to include all learners in their classes. It can also mean 'to give someone the authority or power to do something' (ibid.). This could, in some situations, mean that teachers are empowered to exclude – to decide which learners have or do not have access to learning opportunities. It is important, therefore, that all parts of this work reflect on what teachers do to ensure that all learners participate and achieve and how they can use their influence to promote learner autonomy.

Teachers need to be confident in carrying out a range of key tasks – for example: assessing, analysing information, planning, putting plans into practice, adapting as needed, evaluating and critically reflecting – with all learners in mind. They need to shift their thinking from 'ideas of "most" and "some" learners to everyone' (Florian and Linklater, 2010, p. 370).

Hollenweger et al. (2015) suggest that, to achieve inclusive practice, teachers have to engage in four specific practices linked to four components – teacher, learner, curriculum and context. They then relate these to the four areas of competence outlined in the Agency's *Profile of Inclusive Teachers*:

- *Learner: Valuing student diversity (students as persons with a right to education). Goal: access, participation and learning, achievement.*

- *Curriculum: Supporting all learners (students as learners accessing the curriculum). Goal: Transforming learning capacity.*

- *Context: Working with others (collaboration and teamwork to build strong learning environments). Goal: Enabling social and physical environments.*

- *Teacher: Personal professional development (teachers as learners responsible for their own lifelong learning). Goal: Competent inclusive practitioners* (2015, p. 50).

Regarding the last point, in particular, teachers need support to be innovative rather than continuing with more traditional ways of 'delivering' content. In order to achieve meaningful learner outcomes, particularly in the longer term, rather than fulfilling short-term tasks, teachers need the confidence to be flexible and to let learners increasingly take responsibility for their own learning.

The key is to empower teachers with principles that they can draw on to understand the different situations in which they find themselves. They can then use their background knowledge, skills and experience to inform their professional judgement and enable them to think clearly and to make effective responses that include all learners. As the case study title suggests, these materials build on this framework to explore approaches to training and support for inclusive teacher practice.

3. Context and coverage

The case study has been carried out in a European context, primarily using information from Agency member countries: Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French speaking communities), Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). However, examples for the Empowering Teachers website have been gathered worldwide, including from Armenia, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, New Zealand, Mexico and the United States.

As the literature review also draws on worldwide research, the issues identified as the main focus for attention and for planning ways forward are felt to have wider applicability, as the examples received from outside Europe have been used as 'points of reference' to ensure the relevance of issues addressed.

4. Literature review

The purpose of the literature review is to provide background information from research and, in particular, from recent European level work, to support the analysis of country policy and practice in the case study. The review draws upon research literature from 2010 to present, as well as international and European research and policy literature: material from the European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union, UNESCO, Council of Europe, Eurydice and OECD.

It particularly builds on the work of the Agency's TE4I project, 2009–2012.

The literature review addresses the following questions:

- What are the key features of ITE?
- What are the key features of CPD?
- What are the key features of the teacher educator profession?

The focus was on ITE and CPD for the empowerment of teachers, in order to address the needs of all learners. To reply to the review questions, an initial search strategy was followed to locate papers that focused on the main areas of interest. Most evidence was from peer-reviewed journals. The search process was based on eligibility criteria that were established in advance. The criteria for including and excluding studies (please refer to Table 1) provide a clear guideline to the standards of research that will be used (Meline, 2006).

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria used to identify relevant literature

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Since 2010	Before 2010 (unless considered to be of particular significance)
English language	Language other than English
International studies	N/A
Initial teacher education	Primary – secondary education
CPD of teacher educators/in-service teachers	CPD of other professionals
Systematic reviews, meta-analysis	Opinion, anecdote, narrative reviews

The literature review provides up-to-date background information, which has informed the analysis of country practices in the case study. It also provides information on the European context that, along with the case study and the Inclusive Education in Action (IEA) web examples, will help readers both within and outside Europe to enhance their knowledge about professional learning which can promote inclusive practice (please refer to section 7: Use of Empowering Teachers materials).

5. Collection of case studies

The collection of data around teacher education policy and practice from different countries is considered to be of great value. As Peček and Macura-Milovanović suggest:

> *The conceptual and philosophical problems of equity and education for all are shared concerns. International studies are therefore indispensable as it is easier, with distance and through comparisons with other contexts, to recognise one's own problems and paths to solving them* (2015, p. 272).

The case study aims to provide an analysis of country policy and practice in some European countries to highlight what is working and to identify challenges that will require further attention. It has to be noted that the methodology followed for the purposes of this report does not fall within the traditional definition of 'qualitative educational research'. However, it adopts a research strategy which is close to a 'qualitative' case-study approach (European Agency, 2010, p. 14), as it seeks to describe a phenomenon:

> *… from the perspective of those being studied; with the use of unstructured methods which are sensitive to the social context of the study; the capture of data which are detailed, rich and complex; a mainly inductive rather than deductive analytic process* … (Spencer et al., 2003, p. 3).

This project follows the methodology implemented in previous work that used case studies, such as the IEA project (European Agency, 2010) and OECD's *Improving School Leadership* activity (Pont et al., 2008). These reports introduce this innovative case study strand by highlighting examples of innovative practices. In particular, OECD stresses that the case studies can 'inform debate, guide innovative practice, provide reference and help frame school leadership policies in OECD countries' (Pont et al., 2008, p. 16).

This report uses a case-study approach, as it:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, i.e. ITE and CPD, using country examples;

- uses triangulation of methods (research, country examples, input from experts, previous reports);

- uses prior theoretical propositions that have been established from the literature review, which guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

The case study draws on the earlier work by the Agency in the TE4I project (http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/Teacher-Education-for-Inclusion). This project made a number of specific recommendations in terms of both wider policy and specific areas focused on increasing teachers' capacity and

capability for inclusive practice. In designing this case study, these recommendations have been used as the basis for a short questionnaire, to gather information regarding developments in teacher education and CPD in Agency member countries since 2012 (please refer to Annex 1).

The questions focused on:

- Recent developments in legislation and policy that may impact on teacher education

- Developments in the areas of teacher recruitment and retention and any initiatives designed to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce

- Research into the effectiveness of different routes into teaching and the organisation and content of ITE for inclusion

- Relevant developments in CPD

- Work on the recruitment and professional development of teacher educators.

To collect the case study information, an open invitation was made to the Agency's 29 member countries to submit their case study examples. More specifically, the details of the study were sent to all nominated country experts from 25 countries that worked on the Agency TE4I project. Where experts had moved to new posts or retired, the questions were sent to the Agency Representative Board member and National Co-ordinator.

In total, thirteen responses were received, from Austria, Belgium (Flemish speaking community), Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, UK (England) and UK (Scotland). Additional country/policy information was received from France, Malta, UK (Northern Ireland) and UK (Wales).

The case study methodology requires multiple sources to shed light on the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2009). This study used a variety of sources: information provided by countries, research, input from experts and stakeholders in the field, and knowledge developed in international workshops organised on relevant issues. Material has also been used from the Organisation of Provision to Support Inclusive Education project visit reports (http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/organisation-of-provision) in particular, as these provide direct access to the views of teachers and school leaders who were involved in focus groups and interviews. According to Cohen et al. (2011), providing examples of real people in real situations can enable the reader to have a greater understanding of the relevant issues. Information collected for this study therefore provides an update on country policy and practice in both ITE and CPD, with some recent practice examples linked to key issues.

Critical issues

Drawing on the country information received and recent research evidence in the literature review, the case study provides some analysis of Agency member country policy and practice in order to present critical issues or key 'learning points' for each theme. The practice examples are used to show how different countries have addressed various challenges, exemplifying responses that should be applicable to a range of policy contexts.

The focus is first and foremost on what needs to be done to support teachers to become inclusive practitioners. The examples relate to the policy context needed to support such practice (in section 4 of the case study) and then, in subsequent sections, to the areas of competence required by inclusive teachers.

Peer review

The case study and the literature review have been shared with a small peer-review group with particular expertise in the field of teacher education and a strong background in teacher education for inclusion. The group was known to be familiar with recent literature in this field of work and also with a range of policy contexts across Europe and beyond.

The peer reviewers were:

- Judith Hollenweger, Pädagogische Hochschule, Zürich

- Lani Florian, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh

- Ulrike Suntheim, Centre for Diversity and Teaching Development, Goethe Universität, Frankfurt.

The peer-review group was asked for comments on the range of literature included and the links between this review and the case study. They looked in particular at the critical issues identified and considered the priority areas for further attention and discussion in the final section (implications and ways forward).

It is therefore felt that this process increased the rigour and trustworthiness of the study, as group members were able to verify critical issues in line with their experience (Anfara et al., 2002).

6. Inclusive Education in Action: Empowering Teachers: Empowering Learners website

The second strand of the Empowering Teachers work is the development and re-design of the original IEA website, developed with UNESCO in 2009/2010. The project aimed to provide an online resource for international policy-makers working to develop equity and equal opportunities within education systems globally. The

IEA project aimed to bridge the 'policy to practice' gap and to support policy-makers by providing some interesting examples as a stimulus for ideas and discussion.

On the original site, the examples were linked to the suggested actions in the UNESCO *Policy Guidelines* (2009) and examples could be accessed by exploring policy concerns, policy questions or gaps to be resolved. Examples were organised by thematic areas, geographical regions/countries, suggested actions or by the type of materials (e.g. photographs, videos, etc.). In the earlier work, due to constraints of time and resources, 15 suggested actions were selected as a focus.

As examples from the original site are still widely used, it has been decided to archive this material so that it can still be accessed.

The re-designed site will now focus primarily on teacher education and CPD. The UNESCO *Policy Guidelines* are undergoing further development, so current examples link to broad themes: pre-service teacher education, CPD, development of teacher educators, and development of technology skills and use of ICT. In future, it may be possible to link more closely with the specific content of the revised *Policy Guidelines*.

Call for examples

A number of examples relevant to teacher education were identified on the original IEA site. Fifteen countries were contacted for updated information and four of them have submitted updated or related examples.

A call for examples was also sent to Agency TE4I project experts, other country contacts involved in teacher education, Agency networks of consultants/advisers, and other linked organisations (and via UNESCO to its networks). The call was also published on ResearchGate, an online resource that connects researchers to enable the sharing of outputs, knowledge and expertise. The template used to gather information is included in Annex 2. Examples were requested for four categories:

- Pre-service teacher education
- CPD
- Development of teacher educators
- Development of technology skills and use of ICT.

Learning from experience gained during the original IEA project, the template was changed to ask authors to also include reflections on their own experience to provide 'learning points' to share more widely.

Around 30 examples have been received in total.

Links between the IEA website and the case study

On the basis of the country practice described in the case study questionnaire, contacts were asked to also provide an example for the website. In some cases, this provided a more in-depth analysis of the country practice, adding to the richness of the case study information. In addition, some examples received for the website (from European contacts who had not responded to the case study questionnaire) were also used to add further country information to the case study.

Finally, it was also possible to use the examples to consider contexts beyond Europe and to assess the applicability of key issues identified by the case study to worldwide contexts.

7. Use of Empowering Teachers materials

According to Cole, professional learning:

> *embraces both learning acquired through professional development activities and activities designed to guide improved performance … the term also helps to situate the teacher/learner rather than the development program at the centre of the action* (2004, p. 3).

Professional learning has been found to be relevant and interesting for educators when it is 'open', i.e. when ideas and resources are freely exchanged, for example in online environments (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014). As such, the case study could be used collaboratively, as a stimulus for dialogue, to help:

- policy-makers to identify and address key factors that support effective policy development and implementation around ITE and CPD for inclusion;

- local area/school leaders to raise awareness of inclusive practice and consider community/school development needs;

- leaders/teachers to work in 'communities of practice' to share knowledge and practical solutions to current challenges.

The examples on the website may also be used in this way and could additionally be used in conjunction with the revised UNESCO *Policy Guidelines* to exemplify innovative practice and to prompt discussion and further innovation within national/local networks.

The examples on the web area bring together the latest thinking and practice on different types of teacher professional learning from different contexts. In this work, teachers are seen as learners, and the web examples provide opportunities for professional learning by highlighting the critical issues and the key 'learning points' that should be considered when applied to other countries/regions. The accessible

text, the web links and other multi-media materials on the website provide a resource to support decision-makers at national and local levels in enhancing teacher professional learning in order to promote inclusive practice.

8. Final remarks

It is hoped that the case study will help to inform policy-makers and other education stakeholders about the main considerations in empowering teachers to develop more inclusive practice, through ITE, induction, CPD and on-going support. Finally, the IEA: Empowering Teachers: Empowering Learners website extends the examples into a wider range of contexts, beyond Europe, and has the potential to further support the development of inclusive practice by bringing together many web-based resources, practical suggestions and ideas.

The importance of the contribution made by teachers, as well as the complexity of their work, is widely recognised. There is now a need for greater understanding, at all levels, that inclusive education 'is for all teachers and for all learners' (European Agency, 2012, p. 37) and, crucially, all teacher educators.

ANNEX 1: COUNTRY QUESTIONNAIRE

EMPOWERING TEACHERS

Following the Agency Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I) project (2009–2012), we are contacting all project experts to ask for some information about recent developments in this area of work. This information will form a key part of our work for UNESCO on Empowering Teachers. (See attached summary for further information).

Please answer the short questions below and let us know if you are happy for us to contact you for further information. Please tick the boxes by the questions at the bottom of page 3 to let us know if you can contribute to our updated literature review (in particular papers in your own country language) and/or if you can provide an example for the updated Inclusive Education in Action (IEA) website.

1. Please summarise below any legislative/policy changes in your country (since 2012) that have had an impact on inclusive education and teacher education in particular?

2. Please note below any recent developments that have affected or are likely to affect teacher recruitment and retention and, in particular, any attempts to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce?

3. Please provide details of any recent research in your country into the effectiveness of different routes into the teaching profession and/or the organisation and content of initial teacher education (including the provision of teaching practice in schools).

4. Please give details of any recent initiatives to support the professional development of in-service teachers with regard to inclusive practice.

5. Please note any developments regarding the recruitment and professional development of teacher educators (based in higher education institutions or in schools)?

Please write your name, role and contact details below if you would be happy for us to contact you for further information on any of the points above.

Name:

Role:

Email:

Phone:

☐ **I would be interested in providing an example for the Inclusive Education in Action website.**

☐ **I am able to provide details of recent research on teacher education for inclusion for the updated literature review. (A template will be sent to you.)**

Thank you for your help!

ANNEX 2: TEMPLATE FOR WEB EXAMPLES

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ACTION (PHASE 2) – EMPOWERING TEACHERS

Overview

Themes

Pre-service teacher education; Development of technology skills/use of ICT; Continuing professional development; Support for teacher educators

What are the main aims of the initiative/programme of work?

Background

Issues addressed

Implementation

Key outcomes and impact

Evaluation

Future developments/sustainability

Learning points

Supporting materials

Contact

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