



IRIS Improvement through Research in the Inclusive School
EU-Comenius-project (2006-2009)

Support systems in preschools and schools

IRIS



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Support systems for inclusion of children with disabilities from a research perspective

- The overall aim of this presentation is to highlight some of the main results of the brief reports and collected data on support systems in preschools and schools for children with disabilities
- Focus is on inclusion for all based on:
 - * the right to education
 - * disability policies in the partner countries
 - * present educational systems and accessibility to support



Two key concepts in IRIS

- **Research** as basis for decision-making in practical work, which means that theory and practical experiences go hand-in-hand
- **Inclusion** and inclusive education for ALL irrespective of race, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national, ethnical or social origin, or disability



From integration towards inclusion

- Integration means to be inserted into something already existing (e.g. a school, a class or a group) (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2008)
- Inclusion is never just a physical placement it is a question of community and equal opportunities and it involves many challenges for the children, for teachers and parents (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007)

BUT

only a child who has been segregated or excluded can be integrated



Cont. Integration - inclusion

- Inclusion means to be part of a class or a group already from the start without having been excluded from his/her peers (Ljusberg, 2009)
- An included child starts in preschool with the peers from the neighbourhood and is included all the way through school without any exception (Brodin, 2009)



Why inclusion?

- Learning does not exist in a vacuum but in social interaction with other human beings and all children have the right to learn together with others (Sommer, 2005)
- Inclusive education is also a more efficient use of educational resources (e.g. economical and staff)
- Children should not be devalued or discriminated against or excluded because of their disability or learning difficulty
- Children belong together and do better academically and socially in integrated settings than in segregated settings (Tomasello, 2003)



Cont. Why inclusion

- Inclusion helps to develop friendships between peers and prepare children for adult life in the community
(Matson, 2007; Renblad, 2003)
- Only inclusion has the potential to reduce fear and insecurity, build friendship, to increase respect and understanding of fellow-beings
(Brodin, 2009; Ljusberg, 2009)

All the above aspects have been highly regarded in IRIS



A school for all - the basis for increased understanding of diversity

- ALL children have the right to education (UN, CRC, 1989) but research has shown that exclusion starts early in life
- Inclusion is a process in which diversity is seen as a resource not a problem without solutions
- Inclusion promotes participation and equal opportunities for all (Brodin, 2000)

No child should be left behind...



International documents support inclusion

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993)
- The Salamanca Declaration (1994)
- The Dakar Agreement (2000)
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008)

Austria, Belgium, Catalonia (Spain), Portugal, Sweden and the UK have ratified the above documents and try to follow the principles in them.



The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UN, 1989)

The Convention has 54 articles based on four main principles:

- Article 2 – all children have the same value
- Article 3 – the best of the child to be in the front
- Article 6 –the right to life and development with focus on the early years and play
- Article 12 – children’s opportunities to be heard and influence their own situation

The above articles in the CRC have thus been ratified by Austria, Belgium, Catalonia, Portugal, Sweden and the UK.



The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008)

Shift in focus

- | <u>From</u> | <u>To</u> |
|---|---------------------------|
| ○ Rehabilitation | A rehabilitative society |
| ○ Charity of medical treatment care | Rights to qualified |
| ○ Adjust a child to the norm | Acceptance of diversities |
| ○ Exclusion participation, citizenship in society | Inclusion, |
| ○ Consultation of experts | Self-determination |

“Nothing about us without us”



The new Convention

(Passed May 3rd, 2008)

- The word 'special' is not mentioned in the convention
- 'Inclusive education system' is the norm
- Children have the right to get a diagnose, assessment, intervention, efforts (support services) and be evaluated from policy, organizational, educational and clinical perspectives (Judith Hollenweger, 2008)

Health, education, equality and protection are the keywords in the new convention. The convention does not substitute the CRC – it is a complement for individuals with disabilities



All official documents agree on

- The right to education for boys *and* girls will give all the children the same rights without prioritation of sex or age
- Avoidance of special solutions (e.g. special schools, remedial classes) for children with disabilities, and from different ethnic or religious groups
- Placement should be done in inclusive settings i.e. in a school for all (i.e. to avoid building up segregating school systems with special and regular schools)



Cont. Official documents support

- Education should be free of charge, compulsory and within reach for everybody (CRC). Still many children in the world have to work to support their families, and they do not attend school
- Parents should be allowed to choose other schools than state schools, which is a challenge for the established school system (e.g. for free schools based on religion, ethnicity)

Education in Austria, Belgium, Catalonia, Portugal, Sweden and UK is mainly free, compulsory, within reach for all and all children have compulsory school attendance.

Parents are mainly allowed to choose school for their child



The right to education

Austria, Belgium, Catalonia, Portugal, Sweden and UK.

In all countries the rights to education have influenced the national legislation and the support seems in many respects similar for children with disabilities

- | <u>Country</u> | <u>Year for disability acts</u> |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| ○ Austria | 2004 (act with 14 rights) |
| ○ Belgium | 2004 (2 school systems) |
| ○ Catalonia | 2006 |
| ○ Portugal | 1986 – 1991 – 1994 (revised 2008) |
| ○ Sweden | 1968 - 1994 (revised 2008) |
| ○ UK | 1990 – 2002 – 2004 – 2007 |

All Acts have passed earlier and the existing acts are often revised versions of the first one.



Cont. Right to education

- School starts normally between 5-7 years and often starts in preschool and kindergarten from early years (normally 1 to 3 years) – and all children have the right to education according to their prerequisites
- Most children grow up and live with their families – former institutions have been abolished or will be abolished in the near future
- Compulsory school attendance (duty) for all children despite kind and degree of disability
(in Sweden legislation on compulsory school attendance for all passed in 1968,
in UK the right to education was stated in legislation from 1970)



Disability policy

- All countries except Belgium have one school system for all children but new legislation is on it's way.
- BUT also Austria, the UK and Portugal have special schools even if it is not the first choice for a child with disability. Sweden has special schools for deaf children.
- All children with intellectual, motor, visual, hearing, emotional, social, behavioural disorders have the right to have their needs met.



What kind of support and who can receive support?

- Educational support in school always starts with assessment of the strength and weakness of the child – therefore an Individual Education Plan (IEP) should be developed in cooperation between parents and teachers and the child
- The next step is the intervention which starts with goal setting and a plan how to reach the goals. Goal attainment scales (GAS) can facilitate this work and the goals can be evaluated and changed when the work goes on.



Educational support – how do we solve it?

- Communication is essential for all human beings and communication means to share feelings, actions and experiences
- Children need assistive devices to influence daily life, e.g. communication aids, but also other kind of technical devices to compensate e.g. a motor disability
- Adapted teaching material and some pupils need the material in advance in order to be prepared for the lessons



Educational support – how do we solve it?

- Adaptations of the curricula in order to make it fit all children and adaptations of the physical environment (e.g. the classroom)
- Access to competent, well-educated teachers and access to special educators and personal assistants for children in need of extra support in school
- From the country reports it appears that a majority of the children receives specialized teaching support in school



Which are the critical points?

- A close cooperation between home and school is necessary and although all countries state that their schools involve parents – we know that there is not always done
- Some parents do not want to be involved which the school must respect. Other parents feel that they cannot contribute as they see the teachers as experts and undervalue their own roles. Therefore parents also need support.



Critical aspects from the country reports

- Technical devices are not free of charge in all countries (but based on charity which is against the new convention (2008))
- Specialized teaching support is not obtained in all schools and results in a maintenance of the special schools – or special solutions
- Support for all kind of disabilities (e.g. the ever increasing group of children with AD/HD) is still a problem and only a minority have so far been diagnosed e.g. in Sweden (Ljusberg, 2009)



What are the challenges of inclusion?

Objections against inclusion:

- Obstacle 1. The environment is not adapted
- Obstacle 2. Too many pupils in the class
- Obstacle 3. No teaching material is available
- Obstacle 4. Lack of time to support each child
- Obstacle 5. Lack of experienced teachers/leisure time leaders
- Obstacle 6. Limited support from the head of the school

The obstacles concern both the pupils and the teachers/leaders and the parents and need to be removed



Solutions for improving inclusion

- The physical environment need to be adapted, e.g. the classroom, the school yard, the lunch room
Physical accessibility (motor disorders, visual impairments, hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities) (1)
- The accessibility can also deal with technical devices (e.g communication aids) to be able to participate in all activities (1)
- Few pupils in each group/class could improve and facilitate communication between the teacher and the pupils, and between the pupils, i.e. small classes (2)



Cont. Solutions for improving inclusion

- Teaching material need to be developed by the teachers in good time before the lessons (3) and the teachers therefore need more time for preparation (4)
- The activities need to be planned in detail in order to avoid obstacles (4)
- The teacher must choose activities that fit all or most pupils (professionalism) (5)
- The teachers need support from the school leader (head of the school) (6)



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- The results from the brief country reports show that “on paper” the situation for children with disabilities seem to be fine and many types of support are the same or similar in all our countries
 - However, we feel that there is a great discrepancy between goals and reality and we believe that the support systems described in the country reports represent a desire of how it should be but not as it really is.



Hopes

- We hope that the Teacher training package including the Aide Memoir, which is one of the main results in the IRIS project, will be the tool that will make the teachers aware of the support that is needed to challenge the school systems in Europe



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