

## **TDIVERS PROJECT**

### **International Conference**

#### ***Learning Together to Live Diversity: Comparing Inclusive Schooling in Europe***

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The development of the international conference (*Learning Together to Live Diversity: Comparing including Schooling in Europe*) held in Luxembourg, during the 14-15th November promoted by European project "TdiverS" members, has already had a positive impact and it will have more impact in the future on several levels and for the different agents and participating involved in it.

1. In the first place, there is no doubt that it has been relevant for the own welcoming country, Luxembourg, to the extent that the implementation of the policy of inclusive education in this country is relatively recent in comparison with other occidental countries.
2. In this context, it is a very valuable opportunity to understand, analyze and discuss the experiences and knowledge provided, both by those "inclusive educational schools from Luxembourg" present at the meeting, as by others invited schools from countries involved on this project: Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, Spain and Sweden.
3. It's very important that teachers that are just facing the requirements of inclusion perceive directly from their peers (other teachers) that this is "possible" and "real", not only a desideratum or a theoretical exercise.
4. But it is also very necessary to complement this experience with reflection and rigorous analysis. For this reason the contributions made by the "academics" that make up the project team, together with the teachers, have resulted in a significant "inspiration" for all and a great opportunity to reflect about the conditions and developmental processes that enable progress towards more inclusive cultures, policies and practices.
5. Regarding this, in the first place, the contribution made by Professor Justin Powell from the University of Luxembourg (*"Challenges, paradoxes and Opportunities: Comparative Research on Student Disability and Inclusive Education"*) has to be emphasized. He revealed relevant aspects both of the "state of the question" of inclusive education at an international level along with significant details of the situation in Luxembourg.
6. This contribution was greatly enriched and complemented with the results of the research carried out by Kerstin Merz-Atalik and Peter Hudelmaier-Mätzke, Ludwigsburg University of Education (*"Voraussetzungen und Hindernisse bei der Umsetzung der UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention in Luxemburg: Eine Erhebung der Erfahrungen von SchülerInnen, LehrerInnen und Eltern ausgewählter Schulen im Auftrag des Ministere de L'Education Nationale"*) about important variables that

affect inclusive education, such as the attitudes and conceptions of teaching staff regarding the challenges of inclusion in education.

7. Those analyses helped to highlight, first of all, the fact so many times mentioned that the outstanding educational inclusion is a "process" that arises of a social cultural and educational context. It cannot be changed from the outside or extrapolated from one country to another.
8. It does not fit or make sense to make moral judgments or comparisons with regard to the fact of being "more or less" advanced in this way. What is necessary is that each of us, in our circumstances – being a "country" a "school" or a teacher "in our classroom" -, find the motivation, and the right conditions for moving towards the goal of developing policies or practices in a more inclusive way and, above all, be able to sustain the effort required to do this over time.
9. In this line of thought, the analysis provided by both lecturers, revealed that the barriers that must be confronted in this long journey toward inclusion are almost identical, in almost all the educational systems, schools and classrooms, Some barriers identified were the following:

- a. A overloaded educational curriculum greatly pressured by the international political/national accountability policies based on standardized a test that only assesses some important knowledge and skills but that is clearly insufficient.

- b. Faculty attitudes and conceptions (sometimes rooted in their initial training) who attributed the difficulties for the inclusion of some pupils on the basis of their conditions or personal characteristics. Doing this in detriment of a more contextual and interactive analysis where, precisely, their own practices and modes of teaching would be considered.

- c. Rigid and inflexible models of school organization. For this, schools are little adapted to the diversity of interests, abilities and motivations of their students

- d. Poorly diversified ways of teaching, the kind we would call "one size fits all". Classes and activities with little accessibility for all which makes impossible the adjustment to the educational needs of some pupils.

- e. Practices of categorization of the student with a greater risk of exclusion, as is the case of students with special educational needs (s.e.n), which ends up affecting negatively the expectations of their teachers, their peers and, even in different cases, of their own families.

- f. A vicious circle of *self-fulfilling prophecies* about the performance of those students that due to the effects of negative expectations has received an impoverished teaching.

- g. Ordinary teachers that delegate responsibilities over those pupils considered as having s.e.n in the teachers considered as "specialist" (teachers in special education), based on the assumption that those specialist teachers have the *expert knowledge* for working with these students.

h. And as a result of all this, a *status quo* consolidation that complicates the processes of inclusion and ends up as the justification of the use of more segregated options.

10. On the contrary, the “World *café*” was an extraordinary opportunity to observe and analyze inclusive educational practices - in different educational stages and around different subjects of the curriculum, and was a clear demonstration of the dialectical relationship between inclusion and exclusion.
11. The relaxed, flexible and close - not hierarchical - format, contributed strongly to facilitate a fluid and useful exchange not only on the concrete practices, but also on the conditions and processes which facilitate their implementation.
12. A comment spread among the participants was the lack of time - result of the limitations imposed by the available budget for the event- , either for and in-depth analysis with their colleagues from other countries or settings, or to participate in different "tables". But it is also true that contributions were made very relevant to guide the processes of school improvement toward more inclusive cultures, policies and practices
13. The contributions that could be highlight are the following:
  - a. Ways of teaching that capture the curiosity and the motivation of the student, such as the work by *research projects*
  - b. Different formats of collaborative and cooperative work, both among the students, and teachers alike.
  - c. Classrooms rich in stimulus and choice opportunities, with mixed materials and frequent use of ICT
  - d. Teaching staff that trusts and listen with sincerity what their students have to say to improve their teaching practices and assessment in order to do it more inclusive.
  - e. Faculty "specialist" that participates fully in the classroom, often in the form of co-teaching with classroom teachers.
  - f. Opening of the schools to their community. Clear strategies to promote and facilitate the involvement of families within a framework of mutual trust and shared responsibility.
  - g. Teaching Teams that know how to look for and take care of the moments for reflection and analysis of their practices and the relationship of these with the *values* they want to keep inclusive
  - h. Leadership teams that contribute to create the conditions and the climate of relations necessary to cope with the constant challenges and “turbulences” of the process toward a more inclusive education.

14. The Conference also led to the knowledge of some relevant bibliographic sources on the topic of inclusion and, above all, the viewing of a splendid audiovisual work on including schooling in Luxembourg (Jean Jaurès Schoul, Esch).
15. Thanks to those videos we had the opportunity to hear the "voices" of students from a Luxembourg school about diversity, their attitudes towards it and their commitment to equality. Their spontaneous, fresh and direct stories were the best and most powerful argument in favor of a more inclusive education and motivation that will have a great impact on the attendees willing to put these values into action.