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## **Inclusive Inquiry: A step-by-step guide for teachers**

Inclusive Inquiry is an approach that can be used in school for strengthening existing practices. It focuses on finding ways of including all children in lessons, particularly those who are seen as 'hard to reach'. These might be migrants, refugees and students with disabilities, as well as others that do not belong in a particular group that is receiving special attention. We know from research across Europe that many such students, even though they may be present in schools, are often not engaged in learning.

This guide will help you use Inclusive Inquiry to make your lessons more inclusive. It involves a process of action research consisting of three phases: **Plan, Teach and Evaluate**. They all require dialogue between children and teachers.

The three phases each involve a series of steps. These are all essential to the successful use of Inclusive Inquiry. A levels of use framework (see Appendix A) should be used by teachers to determine how far they have implemented the approach. In what follows, examples from schools in five countries are presented to illustrate the different ways in which the approach can be used.

### **Phase 1: Plan**

#### **Steps:**

**1.1 Join with two other teachers to carry out the action research** – Members of the group must agree to work together in developing their practices, including joint planning of a research lesson and mutual observation as the lesson is used by each teacher.

**1.2 Agree which will be your research lesson** - In forming the trio, it is helpful if all three members are in a position to teach the same lesson plan. If this is not possible, you may choose to trial a particular teaching approach within different lessons (e.g. cooperative group work; role play), or a topic that can be taught in different age groups.

**Example 1:** In the English school, the trio of teachers was from three different year groups. They chose to work on the same topic, that of internet safety, and developed one lesson plan that was taught in all three classes, despite the children being of different ages.

**Example 2:** Similarly, in the Austrian school, the trio consisted of teachers from three different grades, who taught a language topic (Grade 1, 3 and mixed-age grade). As the students in the three classrooms were of different age, the content of the lesson was slightly adapted to the needs of each grade. The teacher presented either new words at Grade 3 and the mixed-age class, or new letters at Grade 1. The basic structure, however, remained the same. In the planning of the research lessons, the main challenge was the different age of the students and the different curriculum in the three classes:

*“Well, it was complicated at the beginning to find something that fits the different grades”*

The teachers agreed that they managed this challenge:

*“We had to find common ground. Well, I think we did well. It was not as if we argued but you could notice that it was challenging to get on the path where all agree: Ok, let’s do it like that.”*

**1.3 Involve a group of student researchers in collecting evidence to support the design of the research lesson** – Three students from each of the three classes should be involved in the action research. Choose students who are representative of the diversity that exists, including some of those who are seen as ‘hard to reach’. Provide training as to how they can collect evidence from their classmates, including using student voice activities. Details about the training and the different ways in which it can be carried out, as well as about the student voice activities, can be found in separate documents. These are: the Training Student Researchers Manual Guidance and the Pupil Voice Toolkit. Student researchers should also be helped to analyse the information they collect.

**Example 1:** In the school in Spain, the group of student researchers, after their training, decided to interview children from the classes that would be observing, before the lessons, in order to gain understandings about how their classmates view learning and teaching issues during lessons. They developed the following set of questions to use in individual interviews with some of their classmates:

Table 1: Questions to ask our classmates

1. Say three things that come to mind when you think of your class...
2. What do you like the most in your class?
3. What do you dislike in your class?
4. Is there anything that you would change in the way your teachers teach?
5. Is there anything you would change on the dynamics of the class with your classmates?

6. Do you get bored in class? Why?
7. Do you understand what it is explained in class?
8. What things would help you for a better understanding of your teachers' explanations?
9. Do you ask for help when you have difficulties? Whom?
10. If you were the teacher in your class, what would you do to help your students to learn?
11. What materials will help you to understand the concepts that are taught?

Following these individual interviews, the student researchers identified the main areas that were highlighted through these interviews, in order to share with their teachers. For example, there were some children who were bored during the English lesson and would like to learn new things because they already knew them. In addition, some students asked for more silence in their class because it was very noisy. Some of the students also wanted more pictorial representations (like "conceptual maps") of some issues. Between all the views of the students, the more divided was that many interviewed students were bored with the textbooks, but for others it was the most helpful material to learn.

**Example 2:** In the school in Portugal, the teachers decided to use a different approach. Before starting the training of the student researchers, each teacher asked all children in the class what had helped them learn, whether they had any difficulty in learning or felt involved in the lesson, in their daily routine. As the teacher explained:

*'We did this after working on several subjects: Portuguese, maths, physical education, etc. Then we started to put one student observing his/her own class checking whether all students were actually involved. All children in class had this role. First, it was only observation, no notes taken. Finally, we discussed the topics observed among the whole group. This happened before the selection of the student researchers. The whole class was involved in the activities.'*

**Example 3:** In the English school, the three student researchers from each year group collected the views of all their classmates during a half hour session with the whole class. For example, in Year 5, one of the student researchers introduced the project to the class: *"It's about finding good ways of learning that everybody would like. We have our own ideas so we can inspire you to have your own ideas about what you like"*. Another student researcher added, *"We need as many ideas as possible from all of you so you all have your own say on what you would like. Here are some ideas of our own: group work, pair work, independent, silence"*. These ideas were presented on pieces of paper, each one in a speech bubble, and were stuck in various places around the class,

During the discussion, the student researchers went around to listen to their classmates' ideas. The whole class then discussed the ideas raised by the children. These included: *"To be allowed to have your own choice"*, *"Working outside"*, *"Allowed to have extra breaks"*, *"Allowed to have snacks on each table"*, *"Being able to sit with whichever partner you want"*.

The teacher then wrote down these ideas on new pieces of papers that were stuck on walls around the room so that children could vote for their preferences. When the children finished choosing their favourite options, one student researcher summarised the steps they were going to plan next: *“We’re going to pick the top three and plan a lesson with Ms B, and there will be some other teachers as well to plan a lesson that’s with the top three things everybody has voted”*.

**1.4 Develop a lesson plan that will ensure that all members of the class are engaged in all the activities** – The overall aim is to design strategies and materials that will help all the students to participate and achieve the goals of the lesson. It is therefore important to discuss the learner differences that exist within the school.

**1.5 Make sure that all three teachers and the student researchers contribute to the design of the lesson plan** – Together, the ideas of all the participants should help in making sure that arrangements are made to encourage the participation and learning of all of the students. Student researchers should report on their classmates’ views so that these are taken into account for the design of the lesson. Final decisions regarding the design of the lesson remain the professional responsibility of the teachers.

**Example 1:** Taking into account student diversity, teachers in the Danish school designed a lesson that would create a positive classroom environment and enable children to have a strong sense of belonging. In doing so, they consulted the student researchers. As one of them said:

*‘We were to decide how the classroom should be arranged – how we should be seated in classroom. The problem was that it was difficult to see what was going on at the blackboard and then it is difficult to learn. For me, a tall person was sitting in front of me – and I was not able to see anything.’*

**Example 2:** In the school in Portugal, the focus of the research lessons was on the reasoning of children whilst solving mathematical problems. It was decided that this investigative activity required group work. The idea of working in pairs arose not only from the student researchers but from the opinions gathered in the interviews they did in the classes. As one of the teachers said:

*“When we thought about the lesson, the idea was to do it in trios. Then the research students said they preferred to work in pairs. We did it in maths communication.”*

*Another teacher said:*

*“The students chose the pairs, planned the first lesson and incorporated their idea of working in pairs. At first, they had no other suggestions.”*

**Example 3:** In the English school, the student researchers and their class teachers gathered in a meeting room for half an hour to plan a lesson together, after getting feedback from the children in the three classes. One suggestion that the three classes had in common was to be able to choose their own partners (who they want to sit next to). One teacher had a suggestion: *“My idea is we have the table in pairs already”*, and then *“the children choose where they sit and they automatically choose their own partners”*.

Having music during the lesson was suggested by the students. When a teacher asked if the children wanted to turn on the music for the whole lesson, one student replied: *“We can still hear the music, we can turn it down a bit so we can all hear the person speaking in the background”*. Another teacher had an idea: *“So, maybe what we could do, I don’t know how you guys feel, maybe when the teachers are doing the first bit, while they’re explaining it, maybe we have the music with the volume down so that the children can really concentrate on what they’re doing what they need to listen to. And then, when we start them off on their activities, we can put the music up to help them concentrate. Do you think that could work?”*. The children all agreed with this teacher’s idea.

Another question was raised about whether they should put the music on while the children were working with their partners. One student researcher said: *“Maybe just quieter, so they can hear each other”*. The teachers thought this was a good idea. After agreeing on how the music would be used during the lessons, the student researchers and the teachers moved on to discuss what and how they were going to teach.

## Phase 2: Teach

### Steps:

**2.1 Use the lesson plan with your class** – In using the lesson plan, try to ensure that all members of the class are participating and learning. Where you think it is necessary, make adjustments in the plan as the lesson proceeds. Before the lesson, you must inform students that this lesson has been designed taking into account their views and that there will be observers in the classroom.

**Example 1:** In Denmark, the first lesson consisted of the following activities:

1. Welcome and a dialogue about the plan for the lesson.
2. Video on different means of transportation and the children are to say the English words aloud.
3. A game ‘mix and match’ in which the children are on the floor with cards in their hands. They are supposed to contact one another and say aloud the English word of different means of transportation. When instructed, they have to find the person with the same card.
4. Working with a work sheet and the children are to read aloud and listen to one another. Afterwards, they were asked to comment on the process of collaboration.
5. A play. Find the way to granny’s house by taking different means of transportation and pronouncing them on the way.
6. Week schedule. This is a very popular form of learning arrangement amongst the children. The teachers plan the various tasks and then the children can choose for themselves which tasks to do, with whom and when.

**Example 2:** In Spain, in a Science lesson, the students were organised in four groups of five students, each of them with a theme assigned: conductive materials and non-conductive, static electricity, origin of materials and changes of state of matter. The structure of the lesson was: the teacher began recalling what had been done in previous classes (each team had sought information about the assigned topic and set up an experiment with the purpose to explain it to their peers). Afterwards she reported the objective of the class: to present the experiments by each workgroup. To do this, each group presented a brief description of its topic (all members commented something), and then students moved around the class and the tables to do the experiments that had been prepared by their peers. In each experiment there was always a member of the team to explain it to classmates who visited all the activities in a rota. After watching the experiment of a group, the students had to complete an exercise sheet, that had been prepared by the teacher, in order to check if they have understood the activity and got the adequate knowledge included in the curricula of this subject.

**2.2 Involve your two colleagues and student researchers in observing the responses of class members** - As you teach the lesson, the other two teachers and student researchers should observe what happens, focusing on the following questions:

- How are the students encouraged to participate and learn in the lesson?
- What factors seem to prevent some students from participating and learning in this lesson?
- How do students contribute to others' participation and learning?

The teacher observers should make written notes of anything they see as being significant in relation to these questions (use the Observation Grid in Appendix B). Student researchers can use the same grid or other ideas explored in the Training Student Researchers Guidance Manual, in more detail. The student researchers should NOT observe their own classes.

**Example:** In the Portuguese school, year 1 children kept brief notes whilst observing such as:

*“Students do not always raise their hands when they want to talk”;*

*“When the students do not know the subject matter, they make many theories”*

*“The teacher helps when the students need”*

*“While working in pairs, they do not always agree but that does not hurt”*

*“Sometimes they speak very loud but are engaged in the task”*

Here it is important to remind the student researchers that the focus of the observation should be on what might help children participate, or what might make it difficult for them to participate.

**2.3 Collect the views of all students about the lesson** – After the lesson, the student researchers who observed the class should be asked to collect reactions from the children who participated in the lesson. You will need to help the students to make arrangements for this to happen.

**Example 1:** In the English school, the student researchers prepared a grid with key questions that they handed out to all the children in the class in order to get their views about the lesson. The questions were specific about the lesson activities such as: How much did the choice of activity help your learning? (1-10 scale), How much did the choice about who to work with help your learning? (1-10 scale) and Any other comments.

**Example 2:** In the Austrian school, the teachers followed a slightly different approach. At the end of each lesson, the teachers summed up the content and asked the students about their opinion on the lesson. They did so by asking the whole class how they managed the work and how they liked it. In one of the classes, the daily routine is that the students give feedback about their own learning (e.g. whether they did well in the lesson or not) by explaining why they should or should not receive a smiley (i.e. a reward system next to the blackboard). Since the students are used to this routine, this feedback method was kept also during the research lesson in that class.

**2.4 Consider how far all members of the class are engaged in the lesson** – Drawing on the observation notes and the views of students, you should assess the extent to which all of the students participated and achieved the goals of the lesson. Remember to consider any adjustments made by the teacher during the lesson.

**Example 1:** In the school in Denmark, the teachers worked together for a lesson on various means of transport. Looking at their observation notes, the student researchers noticed that the time spent on the worksheet, where children were asked to work in pairs and to say different means of transportation aloud, was the part of the lesson when most children were less likely to participate. This led the teachers to reflect on actions they needed to address this issue.

**Example 2:** In the Spanish school, the student researchers noted how children, who were sitting at the back of the class, were not paying a lot of attention, compared to those who were at the front. Again, this led the teachers to review their approach.

**2.5 After the lesson, meet with your two colleagues and the student researchers who observed the lesson to review what happened** – Here the aim is to consider ideas that will be helpful in refining the lesson plan before it is used again.

**Example:** In Austria, the research lesson was a 90-minute language lesson, consisting of three parts:

- i. Introduction of the new words/letters (mainly focused on the teacher, trying to involve students and to create a class dialogue)
- ii. Working at different stations on the new content (students' free choice of station to work on)
- iii. Summing up the new content (teacher guided: collecting students' impressions)

At the end of the first lesson, discussions took place between teachers and the student researchers who had observed the lesson. They all agreed that the first part took a long time and that the students got impatient, since the introduction of the words took too long.

During the focus-group interviews the student researchers felt that the introduction was too long and not very interesting:

*"Yes, [this part] took too long"*

*"Some students, understood it [what they had to do] a bit later"*

During the reflection after the lesson, a teacher commented:

*"I have noticed, so I think that the introduction was too long, because the children were very restless. So with the children I noticed that they did not listen anymore".*

**2. 6 Refine the lesson plan before it is used by the next member of your trio -** Working with your colleagues and the student researchers, reflect on what emerged from your review of the lesson in order to make any changes that will help to make the lesson plan more inclusive.

**Example:** In Austria, there were three changes from the first to the second lesson. These were:

- i. Shortening of the teachers' introduction at the beginning of the lesson (from 35 minutes to 15 minutes).
- ii. The quantity of words introduced in this part was also reduced.
- iii. The introduction of the stations lasted 7 minutes. A positive impact of this change was recognisable in the following two lessons (students were less impatient).
- iv. After observing the impact of students cooperating in the first lesson, it was decided that cooperation between the students should be accentuated.

In the second lesson, the teacher explicitly stated that students should work together and help each other. Students formed pairs or groups of three and supported each other. Children were given more time to speak their mind about the activities during the lesson.

Concerning the last part of the lesson, the adaption made was to ask the students' opinions on the tasks of the lesson ("Which stations did/didn't you like?" "What other stations should be introduced next time?"). This was then incorporated in lesson 2 and lasted 5 minutes.

Following the second research lesson, additional changes were made:

- i. An additional station was added, that of rope skipping, where students had to say the syllables of one word while rope skipping (each syllable was one jump). They had to do this for all the words learnt during the lesson. This activity was created based on students' feedback that they would like to have more stations where they could move.
- ii. Students could choose freely where to sit. Teachers discussed this beforehand and were not sure if this would work out or result in a slightly chaotic situation in the classroom. Students, however, dealt really well with this freedom and they accepted the change immediately.

### Phase 3: Evaluate

#### Steps:

**3.1 Once all three teachers have used the lesson plan, discuss its impact on the engagement of all members of the classes** – This should involve discussions with the student researchers in order to ensure that their ideas are taken into account. It is important to take note of different views that exist. These may stimulate new possibilities for making lessons more inclusive.

**Example:** In the school in Spain, the student researchers and teachers identified the changes in the class and how they linked with students' proposals: active methodology, work in groups, with opportunities for all students to participate. It was also noted that a clear structure in the lesson with a start, a time for the development of activities and another for the closure, reflection and some kind of evaluation, helped in enabling all children to participate. In addition to that, it was felt that the collective reflection at the end of each lesson helped the next teacher to identify issues that needed to be addressed during the next trial of the research lesson; e.g. to facilitate students to have a reference/script for the task to be carried out, in order to ensure the participation of all students in the activity, rather than leaving the students completely free to develop the task they have to prepare.

The students explained how much they had liked being researchers, what they had learned and requested and that it would be nice if all the students could have the opportunity to participate in an activity like this as researchers. One of the teachers thanked them for the opportunity to (*re*)think about her teaching and how to improve it:

*“Thank you....for your comments; they help me a lot because they are voices of the children (students in the same range). As a teacher we see you from one point of view, from a particular perspective....Collecting your opinions is as useful as or even more than the one of an adult ...Now as a teacher I recognise that it is very important to listen to you, to move and be into your own reality...”*

### **3.2 Draw conclusions regarding what has been learnt about making lessons**

**inclusive** – The purpose of this concluding discussion is to bring together the views of all three teachers and the student researchers in determining the findings of the action research. It would be good to agree a short written summary of these conclusions. These should be shared with all class members.

**Example 1:** The main ideas that the teachers identified in collaboration with the student researchers in the English school were to:

- Give students more choice of activities;
- Allow students to make their choices about who to work with; and
- Use a 'no hands up' approach, where children are asked not to put their hands up when the teacher asks a question. Instead, the teacher chooses who is going to answer the question. This allows for more participation from the children.

**Example 2:** In the Austrian school, the main ideas that emerged about making lessons more inclusive were:

- Encouraging the students to work in pairs or cooperate in some other way.
- Keeping some sort of routine in the lesson was important. The mixture of already known tasks and new tasks was crucial during the lessons.
- Choosing between tasks.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Reviewing implementation: The levels of use framework**

The levels of use framework enables trios of teachers to determine how far they have implemented the approach. In this way, members of a trio can identify areas that need further attention.

The model used within the project, Inclusive Inquiry, requires a series of interconnected actions that are described in the list of indicators below. Through discussion, trios of teachers should occasionally rate the level of use for each individual indicator, using the following criteria:

- a. A start has been made
- b. Partial implementation
- c. Fully in place

The aim is to move to the situation where each of the indicators is fully in place.

#### **Using the indicators**

Each member of the trio should circle the response for each indicator that best fits their current assessment of the actions taken to introduce Inclusive Inquiry. They can then compare their views with their two colleagues in order to determine areas that need further strengthening.

#### **Phase 1: Plan**

- 1.1 A trio of teachers has been formed to carry out action research
- 1.2 The trio have agreed about which will be their research lesson
- 1.3 The trio have involved a group of student researchers in collecting evidence to support the design of the research lesson
- 1.4 A lesson plan has been developed that sets out to ensure that all members of the class are engaged in all the activities
- 1.5 The three teachers and the student researchers have all contributed to the design of the lesson plan

#### **Phase 2: Teach**

- 2.1 Each teacher has used the lesson plan with their class
- 2.2 On each occasion, the two colleagues and student researchers observed the responses of class members
- 2.3 The views of all students about the lesson were gathered
- 2.4 Decisions were made regarding the engagement of all members of the class
- 2.5 After each lesson, teachers and student researchers met to review what has happened
- 2.6 The trio refined the lesson plan before it was used by the next member of the trio

#### **Phase 3: Evaluate**

- 3.1 After the three teachers had used the lesson plan, the trio and student researchers discussed its impact on the engagement of all members of the classes
- 3.2 The trio and student researchers drew conclusions regarding what has been learnt about making lessons inclusive

N.B. At various stages, members of the university partner group will join the trio in using this framework to help in monitoring progress and determining further actions that may be needed.

**APPENDIX B:  
OBSERVATIONS GRID:**

**How are the students encouraged to participate and learn in the lesson?**

**What factors seem to prevent some students from participating and learning in this lesson?**

**How do students contribute to others' participation and learning?**