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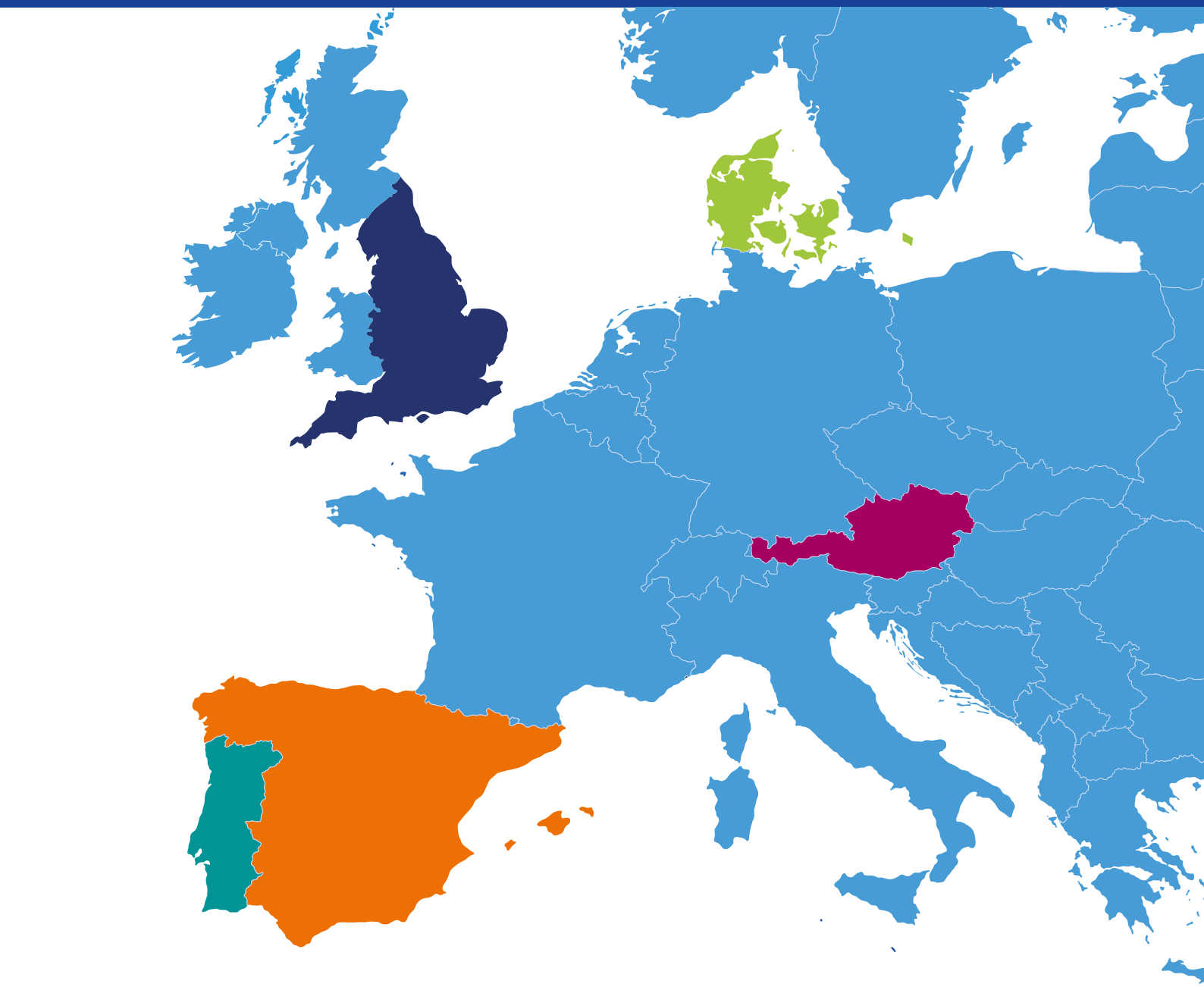
Reaching the 'Hard to Reach'

Reaching the 'hard to reach': Inclusive responses to diversity through child-teacher dialogue

Accounts of developments in the five country networks



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Introduction

'Reaching the hard to reach: inclusive responses to diversity through child-teacher dialogue', a three-year project *(2017-2020)* funded by the European Union, involved primary schools and universities in five countries: Austria, Denmark, England, Portugal and Spain.

The focus of the project was on what is one of the biggest challenges facing teachers across Europe, that of including all children in lessons, particularly those who might be seen as 'hard to reach'. These might be, for example, migrants, refugees or students with disabilities, as well as others who might be overlooked. The project involved the use of collaborative action research. This required teachers and students to participate actively as research partners alongside colleagues from universities, with the aim of improving classroom practices.

With support from their university partners, five primary schools became 'hubs': that is, centres for developing and disseminating the work of the project. During the first year they trialled a new way of working and helped in refining the processes involved within their own schools. Then, during the second year, they each led the training of trios of teachers from five more primary schools to develop a local network. In the final year of the project, all 30 schools expanded the approach in their schools.

Collaborative action research

The project involved the use of collaborative action research. This required teachers and students to participate actively as research partners alongside colleagues from universities, with the aim of improving classroom practices. More specifically, it involved the use of ***Inclusive Inquiry***, an approach that involves trios of teachers cooperating with their students to find ways of making their lessons inclusive. As explained in the project guide, this involves three phases, all of which require dialogue between children and teachers.

Most importantly, Inclusive Inquiry involves some students in learning how to use research methods to gather the views of their classmates. The dialogues that this encourages are focused on improvements in learning and teaching. This means that differences amongst students and teachers are used to reconsider existing thinking and practices in ways that are intended to encourage experimentation in order to foster more inclusive ways of working. This, in turn, sets out to break down barriers that are limiting the engagement of some learners.

These developments were informed by research evidence which suggests that school-to-school collaboration can strengthen the capacity of individual organisations to respond to learner diversity[i] . Specifically, collaboration between schools can help reduce the polarisation of schools, to the particular benefit of those students who are marginalised at the edges of the system. There is also evidence that when schools seek to develop more collaborative ways of working, this can have an impact on how teachers perceive themselves and their work[ii] . Comparisons of practices in different schools can also lead teachers to view underachieving students in a new light. In this way, learners who cannot easily be educated within the school's established routines are not seen as 'having problems' but as challenging teachers to re-examine their practices in order to make them more responsive and flexible.

With this evidence in mind, the accounts in this document explain the work of the five school networks. Whilst this followed largely a similar pattern, there were minor variations related to different national policy contexts and traditions.

Developing the networks

Broadly stated, the pattern of development in each of the countries was as follows:

- During the first year of the project, trios of teachers in each of the five hub schools trialed the use of Inclusive Inquiry with their classes, following the specifications presented in the project guide. This pilot phase was systematically monitored by university researchers leading to the production of evaluative accounts of practice. It also led to the creation of resource people in each of the hub schools who could support subsequent developments across the network.

- During the second year, with the support of their university partners, the hub schools established a local network involving five other primary schools. Trios of teachers in each of the network schools received training as to how to use Inclusive Inquiry. Once again, these trials were monitored systematically, leading to further evaluative accounts of practice.

- Throughout this period, teachers in each of the networks met occasionally to share experiences and help one another in overcoming difficulties in using Inclusive Inquiry. This also led to an analysis of the impact of the process on teachers' thinking and practice, and on student engagement.

- During the third year of the project, schools in the five networks were encouraged to use Inclusive Inquiry more widely to support their improvement efforts. In addition, the findings of the project and the materials it developed were shared within each of the five countries.

In what follows, the procedure for training teachers in the use of Inclusive Inquiry is described, plus the way student researchers were trained. This is followed by brief accounts of the networks in each of the five countries and illustrative accounts of what happened in the schools. Finally, a summary is provided of the lessons that can be drawn from the work carried out across the schools in each network.

Training the teachers

The training for the trios of teachers in the network schools was based around a draft project guide and a related set of powerpoint slides. The way these materials were to be used was modelled at a demonstration workshop for representatives of the partner organisations held in September 2018.

The teacher training materials explained that Inclusive Inquiry is an approach that can be used in school for strengthening existing practices. In particular, the materials focused on finding ways of including all children in lessons, particularly those who are seen as 'hard to reach'. Inclusive Inquiry was presented as a process of collaborative action research consisting of three phases: Plan, Teach and Analyse. It was stressed that all three phases require dialogue between children and teachers. The phases each involve a series of steps that are all essential to the successful use of Inclusive Inquiry.

During the training in each of the country networks, a draft Levels of Use framework was introduced. It was explained that this was to be used by the trios of teachers to determine how far they had implemented the approach. Examples from schools in the five countries were also presented to illustrate the different ways in which the approach can be used.

Training student researchers

The training of student researchers to participate in Inclusive Inquiry in each network school was based around a draft manual. This enabled teachers to train and support students to be researchers who would be involved in the process of Inclusive Inquiry. The intention was that they would collaborate with the trios of teachers in making their lessons more inclusive.

The manual explained that the roles of student researchers are to:

- Gather ideas from their classmates in order to understand better how lessons can become more inclusive;
- Work with their teachers to design 'research lessons' that will be informed by their and their classmates' views;
- Observe the research lessons; and
- Take part in discussions with teachers about how the research lessons can be made more inclusive.

The manual was organised in three sections:

1. Planning the training
2. Training sessions
3. Collecting and analysing information

Illustrative examples were provided from the pilot work carried out in the five countries involved in the project and the ways in which they developed the training of student researchers in their schools.

It was stressed that there are different ways in which the training can be provided. Teachers were told that that they therefore had a degree of flexibility in organising the training of student researchers in their school, in such a way that it would fit the realities of their context.

The five networks of schools

In this section we provide brief accounts of the work of each of the five country networks and illustrative examples of what occurred in the schools. As will become apparent, local factors related to national education policies and previous experiences of school collaboration were to have an influence on how each of the networks developed.

Austria: The education system in Austria is relatively centralised, with Federal legislation playing a prominent role in the policies of schools. The network involved five schools in the city of Graz, and one in a suburban area close to Graz, all of which cater for significant numbers of students from disadvantaged and/or immigrant backgrounds. The schools had no previous tradition of working as a group.

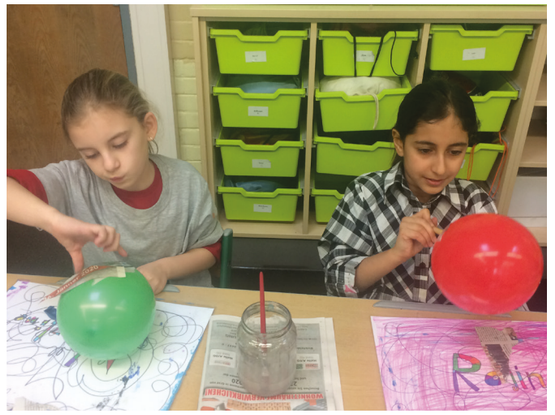
A letter sent to the headteachers prior to the project provided an outline of what was involved. It also included project newsletters and an explanation of the commitments involved, including a requirement that three teachers from each school should attend three training sessions taking place in the University. Schools were also expected to provide their written consent to participate, including parental consent for their children to take part. All the schools have students categorised as having special educational needs and some of the participating teachers were special education or second language specialists. The training sessions were each three hours long and participants received teacher education credits for attending.

In terms of the challenges of participating in the project, schools reported difficulties regarding time and workload. Mention was also made of what was referred to as a 'behind closed doors mentality' that had to be overcome in order to make use of Inclusive Inquiry. Reflecting on what had worked well, those involved pointed to the following factors: a supportive headteacher, who thinks that the project is relevant for the whole school and is able to organise teachers who will substitute for the specific lesson; teachers who work well together and are willing to receive feedback; patience; and teachers that were able to value the great impact of student's feedback.

The following example illustrates the type of development that occurred in the Austrian schools:

> The trio of teachers in one of the Austrian network schools consisted of three women who teach different grades. Having engaged all members of their classes in activities that helped them think about teaching and learning, they each chose three student researchers that they felt could be seen as 'hard to reach'. The aim was to train these nine students to observe lessons and to reflect on the reasons why some students do not follow a lesson, or cannot learn well.
>
> Various strategies were introduced to help the student researchers collect information. For example, they were given symbolic 'research glasses' that were intended to help them think about what is involved in observation. The students were also trained to observe lessons using various games. On another occasion, the children looked at photographs of classrooms and were asked to discuss: Do you know which of these pictures shows people learning?
>
> The subject of the research lesson was German language arts. The goal was to read and explain a story to the students, in order to improve their reading comprehension and writing. Following discussions with the student researchers, the teachers decided to start the lesson with reading and discussing the story. After that, there were to be 'stations' with different worksheets, as well as a station where the children could paint and build the figures of the story. At the end of this work phase, time was dedicated to reflecting on what had been learned during the lesson.

> During the discussion after the first of the three lessons, the student researchers noted that all children were working in a very motivated and concentrated manner. They also stated that the children knew what they should do. One child mentioned that it would be fine to repeat and talk about the story with the whole class again, after the teacher read out the story :
>
> *Teacher 1: Think again, if that was YOUR lesson now.*
>
> *Teacher 2: Do you have any idea what else you could do that would be fun?*
>
> *Student 1: To tell the story and then ask the children what the story was about.*
>
> *Teacher 2: Ah, to discuss the story.*
>
> *Teacher 3: Discuss what's going on in the story.*
>
> *Teacher 1: Ah, then talk about it with the whole class.*
>
> In the discussion after the second research lesson, the student researchers mentioned that that the tasks had gone well and that all students understood what they had to do. They also noted that it was quite loud in class and that many children talked with each other.
>
> Following these discussions, it was agreed that in the third lesson the teacher would project slides to show the pictures of the story book:
>
> *Student 4: It's better with the book, because with a little book you can read too and when it's so big you have to look so much.*
>
> *Teacher 2: Okay, then we'll read that out of the book again. It is good that we discuss this now.*
>
> After the third lesson, one of the teachers commented that she had noticed that the student researchers seemed to be concentrating, even though they were hearing the story for the third time. The teacher leading the lesson thought that, after hearing the story for the third time (because she was a researcher), one of the student researchers who has some problems with German now finally understood what the story was about, since she was able to answer specific questions regarding the story. This led the student researchers and teachers to conclude that repetition is not necessarily a bad thing, although the teachers were reluctant about it because they tend to think it is too boring for the students.
>
> At the end of the round of three research lessons, the student researchers and teachers reflected together on what had emerged from their action research. This led them to draw the following conclusions:
>
> - It was very important to allow sufficient time for station work;
> - Repetition of lesson content can be helpful and is not necessarily boring for the students; and
> - Students should be allowed to help each other if they have questions about the content of a lesson.



England: There is a long tradition in England of schools forming partnerships to support their improvement efforts. More recently, national policy changes have involved an increased emphasis on the idea of allowing English schools greater autonomy. This is set within a policy context based on market forces as the main improvement strategy, something that is hardly conducive to the idea of schools collaborating. It involves schools being funded directly by national government, rather than through a local authority. Known as academies, these schools are usually linking together in multi-academy trusts, i.e. groups of schools that are intended to provide mutual support.

The English network consisted of six schools in the city of Southampton that are all members of one such trust. The schools are all reasonably close to one another, such that contacts between them is relatively easy. The hub school serves a diverse population and is committed to identifying ways of making sure that all children are included in the learning process. A senior teacher in the school was designated as the project coordinator and given time to support schools across the network as they used Inclusive Inquiry. The meetings of representatives of these schools proved to be particular fruitful in the way they encouraged teachers to learn from one another and challenge each other's interpretations of their experiences.

The following example provides a flavour of the developments that occurred in the English schools:

> This account involved three teachers who decided to focus on literacy; more specifically, how students edit their own writing in order to improve it. The usual way of doing this involved three stages: students editing alone by highlighting with colour pencils; sitting with a partner and reading loud to discuss together; and then children going back to correct their own writing.
>
> Student researchers who were seen as 'hard to reach' in relation to the specific task were chosen. They took part in training sessions, including practice observations in classrooms.

Meanwhile, all the children in the three classes were asked to write their ideas about how to improve the lesson and place them in a post box. These were analysed by the student researchers, with the support of the teacher who was leading the training. As a result, four ideas were incorporated into the research lesson: using different colour pens for highlighting; choosing which partner they were going to work with; reversing steps 2 and 3 of the process; and having a break during the lesson.

After each research lesson the teachers and the student researchers got together to share their thoughts on what had occurred. So, for example, after the first lesson, the use of the pens was discussed:

Student 1 (Boy): I find the pens much easier to write with, coz they're light. Some people played with the purple pens because they click.

Teacher 1: Interesting. How did you find the pen?

Student 2 (Girl): I thought the pens were better. But some of them were smudgy. So, I got some smudges on my book.

This led the teachers to reflect:

Teacher 2: I put down that there was a lot of smudging. Whether you're left or right handed. Didn't dry instantly.

Teacher 3: I also thought maybe the yellow colour wasn't very practical. It's quite hard to see. But the other thing I do think was that they were focusing…. on the task. And, they seemed to be engaged and seemed to be sharing them well. So that was good.

Another issue discussed was the idea of children choosing their own partners, an issue that had provoked a lot of discussion at the planning stage:

Student 1 (Boy): I didn't see them talking about things. I actually saw them concentrating on their work and talking about their work.

Teacher 1: Because we were worried, weren't we? If you chose a friend you might just talk about things that you've got in common, but they didn't do that. Oh yeah. I was impressed with that too.

The conversation continued:

Student 3 (Boy): I saw that a few people looked, it took a bit longer to get a partner.

Teacher 1: I also saw people looked a bit lost, who didn't know who to go with and they were stood left on the carpet. What could have helped that situation?

Discussions between the children and teachers highlighted that the break in lesson 1 was very distracting, with some children not taking part in it, whereas other went out of the classroom. So, they decided to use yoga in the second lesson, which proved to be something that all children took part in. For the third lesson they introduced a more active kind of music, which again proved to be more successful in getting all the children to take part in the activity.

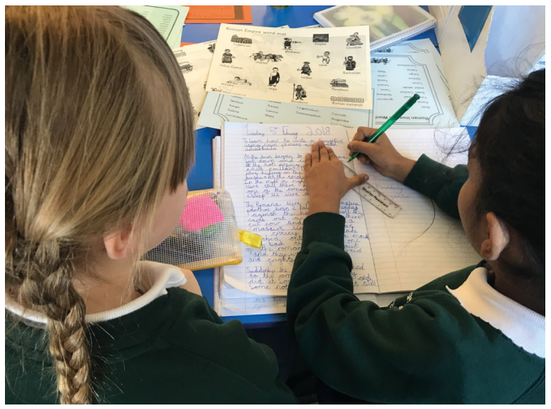
Perhaps the most radical change, however, was to do with the order in which the steps of the editing phase were introduced: what was usually step 3 (spelling and grammar) was introduced as step 2, followed by what was usually step 2 (partner work). During the analysis of the final lesson, the teachers felt that, possibly, this change helped more with focusing on making sense during partner work, as opposed to partners only focusing on spelling.

At the end of the process some clear messages came from the student researchers as to how the whole process had helped them, particularly in relation to their confidence:

'It's just that it makes me want to do more things, yeah, it just makes me want to do more things…. Things that I don't normally want to do, so like standing up and talking to everyone.'

'I thought it also helped my confidence because I can be quite shy sometimes and it's a different feeling when you actually feel brave enough to stand up in front of people and say something.'

'… at the beginning when I came here, before I was a pupil researcher, when teacher asked anyone to answer the questions, I never put my hand up because I didn't have my confidence. And when I was a pupil researcher, I put my hand up.'



Denmark: There is a strong tradition of promoting democracy within the Danish education system, such that Inclusive Inquiry would seem to fit well. Despite this, there were considerable difficulties in getting schools to participate in the project. It seemed that teachers felt under considerable pressures and school headteachers were reluctant to add to these.

The six schools that participated came from the region of Sealand. Five of them came from the northern part of the region and the sixth came from the southern area. The schools had no previous working links. The hub school has two departments: one for students in grades 0-5 and the other for grades 6-9. It serves a diversity of students and is committed to an inclusive agenda. 25% of the students are minority children, with an origin other than Danish, and this number is increasing. In addition, several pupils live under difficult socio-economic conditions related to unemployment or low income. The overall ambition of the school is to challenge every child to reach the full potential. A dual focus on pupils' learning and personal development is perceived as a precondition for positive learning outcomes and wellbeing. Four of the additional schools are similar in size, serving a similar diversity of students and are committed to the inclusive agenda. The school in southern Sealand does not serve children with an origin other than Danish. This school serves a group of pupils (40%) that live under difficult socio-economic conditions related to unemployment or low income.

The following example provides a sense of the types of development that occurred in the Danish schools:

> The trio of teachers in this school consisted of two experienced women teachers and a younger male teacher. The approach they used was unusual in that they divided all their students into different working groups and organisational settings.
>
> The teachers used a range of criteria to select the student researchers, such as:
>
> - Boys who do not easily participate in learning activities and who need to have directions from teachers in order to be motivated.
> - Boys who tend to be noisy and find it difficult to concentrate.
> - Quiet girls, who are often low achievers in literacy and numeracy, and high achievers in creative/aesthetic subjects.
> - Students who do not engage in self-reflective processes.

The student researchers were asked to participate in activities arranged by the teachers with the purpose of gathering views from the three classes about 'good teaching' and 'preferred learning arrangements and learning environments'. Their role as researchers was defined as being the students with 'big ears and sharp eyes'.

From the outset, the teachers worked with the student researchers in analysing the information they had collected from their peers. They then formulated two possible lesson plans. It was then up to the students to choose which one they preferred to try out. Both lesson plans focused on animals.

During the three research lessons, the 70 students from the three classes were placed in different rooms and zones. Some were reading on sofas, some worked on I-pads, some were writing and some were playing. Before each of the lessons, the teachers met with the student researchers to discuss the focus of their observations. It was emphasised that the focus on should be on the practice of teaching and how students respond.

During the analysis of the first lesson, the focus of the student researchers was on variation and shifts that had occurred. For example;

Student 1: …. some of us finish the assignment early. It gets boring. Maybe we could get another assignment. However, it is not going to be a reward. Otherwise, we will not do a good job. On the other hand, choose an animal that you know all about on beforehand.

Teacher: What could be done about that?

Student 1: Maybe we could have more assignments to choose amongst. For instance, when you finish the assignment you have to draw an animal.

Teacher: So, it would be nice to shift between exploring, drawing, writing and sharing knowledge.

One of the teachers went on to ask about how the lesson could be changed and improved:

Student 1: We could have a break and maybe the lesson should have lasted longer. A longer period to work with the assignment and then a break in the middle.

Student 3: Yes, then you get air to the brain and then you feel more perky.

Teacher: Is it a break that you decide, or a pause teacher decides?

Student 4: We are to decide it ourselves. You can feel it yourself – when you need a break.

Following the second lesson, the teachers and student researchers discussed how the adjustments decided after the first research lesson had influenced the participation of peers. At this stage, the student researchers were much occupied with working-partners and well-functioning working groups. In particular, they discussed why some groups did not work well and what the teachers are to do about it.

In discussing how to plan for the next lesson, the students proposed many different ideas. As a result, the final research lesson changed a lot according to the plans produced together by the teachers and student researchers.

In a final reflection with the teachers, the student researchers stated that the project had been inspiring for them. At the same time, the teachers argued that methods used to discuss lessons with their student had moved their thinking and practice forward. Subsequently, other teachers in the school were inspired by the work of the trio to discuss arrangements for promoting wellbeing in their classrooms.

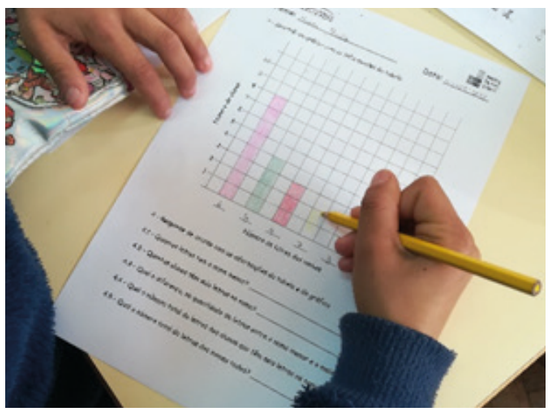
Portugal

Portugal: There is a well-established tradition of schools working in local area clusters, which started in 1998. Creating the Portuguese network was therefore relatively simple, since the six schools are all in an existing cluster of nine schools established in 2013, within the municipality of Faro. An initial meeting (September 2018) was held at the University with all the primary teachers of the cluster of schools as an informative and motivational initiative to the project. The range of schools involved cover all levels of schooling, from early childhood education (3-year-olds) to secondary education (12th grade, end of compulsory education). In Portugal all public primary schools are the responsibility of the respective municipalities in a variety of key aspects (e.g. maintenance of buildings and outdoor spaces; acquisition of teaching equipment and materials; school assistants, etc.), except in contracting of teachers , which is a responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

Many of the students in the six schools come from low social economic backgrounds, including a significant minority who belong to gypsy communities. At an intermediate meeting, in January 2019, held in one of the schools, the trios/duos of teachers presented a written synthesis of the path taken so far and showed how far they had advanced in the levels of use framework.

The following example provides a flavour of the developments that occurred in the Portuguese schools:

> In one small school there only only three teachers, each of whom works with a different age group. Three student researchers per class were nominated for training. A teacher explained:
>
> *…we made and applied an observation grid containing several topics of simple observable student behaviours in the playground… That was a good training exercise.*
>
> The trio decided that the subject matter of their research lesson would be mathematics. Of course, the level of complexity and the support materials chosen for each class had to be adapted to the different age levels of the classes. An interactive whiteboard was used in all lessons as a common resource and a series of worksheets was prepared appropriate for the different age groups.
>
> During the initial planning phase, the students contributed to the design of the research lessons, covered important aspects like the organisation of the classroom and the way they most liked to work: individually, in pairs and as a whole class.
>
> Reflecting on the experience of observing the first of the research lessons, a student commented:
>
> *I think cooperation between students is good. The teacher does not always have time to attend all the students at the same time. If we don't know the subject we can learn it from a colleague that is more advanced than us. But if we know the answer, helping a colleague is a good way to strengthen the knowledge we already have. But we should always check the answer with the teacher.*
>
> Later, one of the teachers explained:
>
> *Between the first and second research lesson we decided to use the students' first names as the set of data to be analysed. We could use other data but, in addition to having a greater number of variables to consider and easy to understand, the use of children's names is a factor of integration and extra motivation. We must remember that this class is quite diverse and has many learning problems. We must take every opportunity to enhance motivation.*
>
> The third research lesson was with a 3rd grade class and involved simple statistics. Certain specific terms used proved to be difficult for some students to understand; for example, a student had recently arrived at the school and did not speak much Portuguese.
>
> To overcome this complex problem, the teacher used metaphors and examples from real life, closer to the daily experience of the students. From their observations, the student researchers noted that cooperation between students had proved to be helpful in this respect. It was also evident that those students experiencing more difficulties naturally accepted this form of support, and even asked for help from their peers.
>
> In the meeting that followed this third research lesson, a teacher explained that this had now become a deliberate strategy:
>
> *Sometimes, when working in a group, students explain better than the teacher can. They use a language of their own. It has happened to me that I had difficulty explaining a subject to a student. I asked for the help of another student and let the two work together. After a while, I hear a WOW! in the classroom. They had found the solution. This made me question what words the colleague used that I did not.*



Spain: The six schools that took part were located in various districts in and around Madrid. The schools had no previous experience of working as a group. This was another country where it was difficult to enrol schools in the network. Once again, reference was made to the pressures faced by teachers. Nevertheless, those involved were keen to learn from one another's experiences of using Inclusive Inquiry. Across the six schools, the research lessons focused on a range of school subjects, including language and literature, science, maths and English. Improvements introduced included work on student motivation, connecting previous knowledge and new content, and collaboration amongst students.

In reflecting on their experiences, those involved talked about how the project helped foster their professional learning, but that finding time and having teachers to replace them during the observations was a problem. Teachers valued opportunities to observe one another and to think aloud together, as well as highlighting the benefits of the experience for teachers and students. They also argued that changes in policy were adding to the pressures they faced in working within a network like this. In this process, the support of the principal was seen as a key factor. In addition, the network schools made considerable efforts to communicate their work on the project to families, local administrators, inspectors and politicians.

The following example illustrates the kinds of discussions that occurred in the Spanish schools:

> In this trio, one was a teacher of Spanish language and literature in the 6th grade, another of nature sciences in the 1st grade, and the third a teacher of mathematics in the 5th grade. Selecting the student researchers, the teachers chose some shy students, who found it difficult to participate in class and interact with other classmates, inside and outside the classroom. There were others with low self-esteem who needed to recognise their abilities and be valued by the peer group. The trio of teachers carried out the training of the students within school hours.

Before the planning of the research lesson began, a meeting was held with the teachers and the research students to engage with the information they had collected from their peers. Then, after each lesson, the teachers and the research students met to discuss what had been observed. At these meetings the students gave their opinion based on their observations and information collected through interviews with students in their classes, and so did the teachers.

At the end of each lesson, the student researchers also interviewed at least one student in the class and then met with the trio of teachers to discuss the lesson. The students gave their opinion about what they observed, highlighting whether or not they had participated in class, whether they had paid attention, whether someone seemed distracted or not participating by answering the teacher's questions or doing the individual or group tasks that were requested.

So, for example, after one of the lessons, some situations were detected that made the class more difficult, such as the excessive number of students who asked questions and the teacher's difficulties in responding to all of them. The teachers also reflected on the participation of students they saw as being hard to reach. For example:

Teacher 1: *In general, they participated and did all the activities.*

Student 1: *They all wanted to go to the blackboard, and they have been attentive and interested in what the teacher and his classmates said. No one was distracted by the iPad, or at least I didn't see it. They haven't bothered their classmates but not in the last exercise you did.*

Student 2: *Some didn't agree to work together and talked too much.*

Student 3: *I also saw that they asked a lot of questions and the teacher had to go from one to the other all the time. But in the first tasks, they concentrated and did the exercises. They participated a lot.*

Following a second cycle nature science class, taught in English, the following dialogue occurred:

Teacher 1: *They need more guidance on what to do. I think it is necessary to set more guidelines in order to "mark" the different steps. Group work has to be very structured and clear about what they have to do.*

Student 1: *They liked it. Different things to learn the same thing. But in the last one there are children who didn't know what they had to do. There are also children who were distracted.*

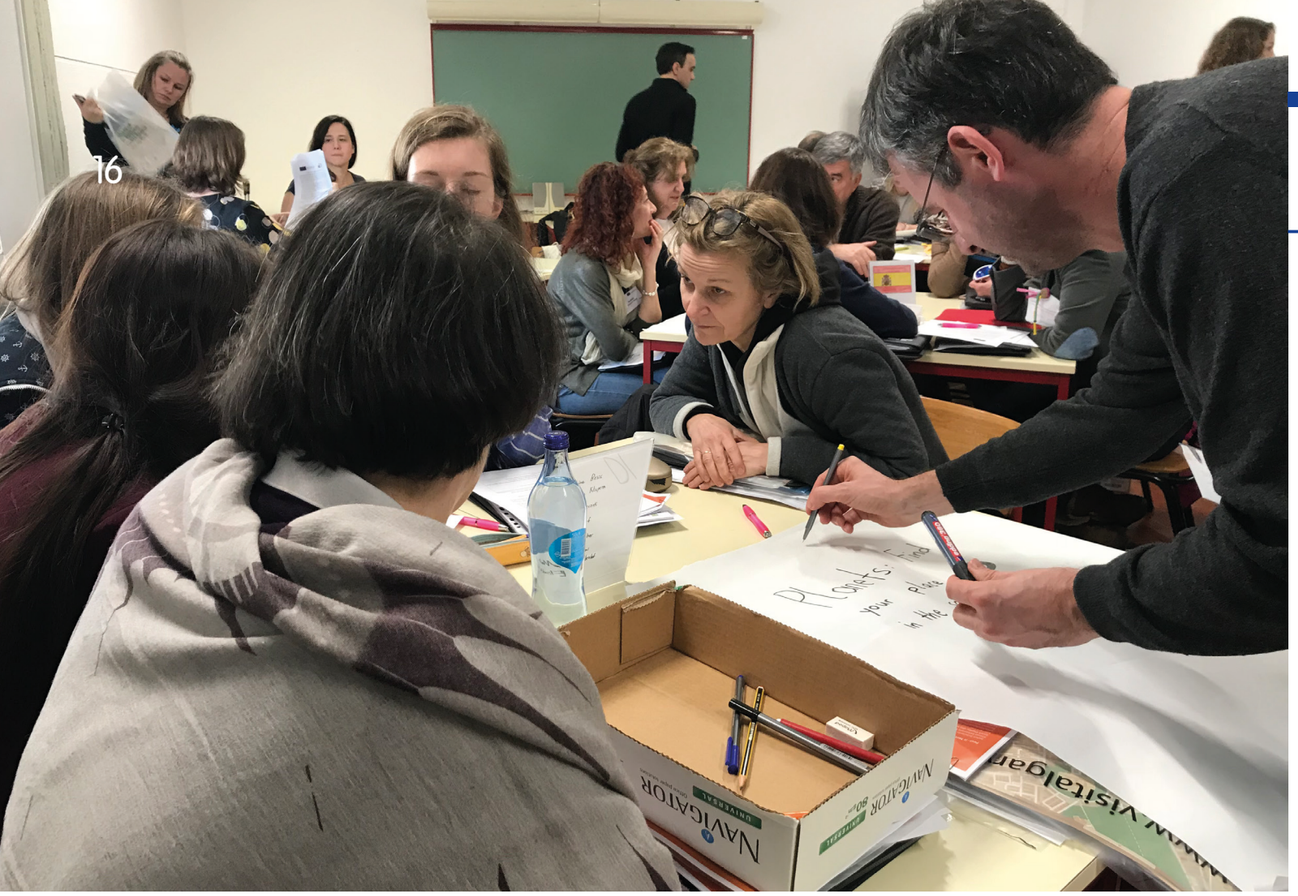
Teacher 2: *Some have been able to organise themselves but others need more guidelines.*

Student 2: *They liked all the activities, they worked well, although in some groups such as the one at the table who knew it very well did not leave the others.*

The conversation moved on to consider what actions were needed for the next lesson:

Teacher 2: *In the final groups I think it would be useful to have more heterogeneity in terms of levels. To be one of the first times that you work in a group has been good. They have to learn to collaborate and we have to teach them how to do it.*

Teacher 3: *Starting with activities in which they move is good for this group. We need to avoid 'dead' moments.*



Drawing the lessons

At a meeting held in June 2019, representatives of the partner organisations shared the findings of the work carried out in their country networks. This led to a discussion of the overall lessons that had emerged from this international programme of action research.

Whilst recognising the variations that existed within schools, and between the five networks, the evidence points to the impacts summarised below.

Impacts on students. Most importantly, there was evidence from all five country networks that the involvement of students in Inclusive Inquiry led to noticeable improvements in students' attitudes to learning. Put simply, students were more engaged in lessons and more positive about themselves as learners.

Whilst this was most striking in relation to those students who had taken on the role of researchers, teachers in some schools reported that they had seen similar impacts on other members of their classes. It was explained, that students in general seemed to see themselves as having more active roles within classroom activities as a result of their having a say in the way lessons were designed and evaluated.

A particular aspect of this was referred to by some teachers as children 'becoming more autonomous' learners. Others talked about how students had developed a greater ownership of their learning. One teacher summarised the views of many others when she said, *'I have never seen my children so involved'.*

A feature that was noticed in some of the schools was how giving students' choice within lessons regarding activities had helped to foster this increased sense of engagement amongst students. Teachers also talked about how this had led them to have greater sensitivity towards the preferences of children when it came to how best to learn.

Across the five country networks there was particularly strong evidence of the way that being a student researcher had impacted on individuals. Many of these children talked of their pride at being asked to take on this role and how it had led to improvements in their self-confidence. Here it is worth noting that these students had been chosen because they were, in some way or other, seen as being 'hard to reach' by their teachers. Some of these were children viewed as being shy or socially marginalised within their classes. Others were students with long records of difficult behaviour, some of whom were seen to become far more integrated into their school.

It was also interesting to hear some of these children talk with sensitivity about the demands on their teachers. Indeed, some talked about their realisation of how hard their teachers work as a result of being involved with them in lesson planning

Impacts on teachers. Many teachers talked of the value of planning and reviewing lessons with their colleagues and with the student researchers. Having opportunities to see other teachers at work was particularly valued. This reminds us of the professional isolation that still exists amongst teachers in many schools.

Getting to know what other colleagues do led to the sharing of expertise and resources. It also helped to make the familiar unfamiliar, as teachers focused on and discussed matters of detail, such as instructions for carrying out tasks, forms of groupwork and the use of feedback to students. For example, one teacher commented: *'It's the small things that matter',* whilst another teacher noted: *'We see things we do not notice when we lead the class'.*

Having student perspectives on these issues helped to introduce a greater challenge to these discussions, such that, sometimes, the taken for granted assumptions of adults regarding what makes learning possible were challenged. This, in turn, made some teachers express *'surprise on what children can offer'.* In some instances, it also led teachers to become more sensitive regarding individual students and how they experience classroom life.

Impacts on schools. In a way that had not been anticipated, there was evidence of the way that the introduction of inclusive Inquiry within the networks had led to changes in the life of schools. Teachers in some schools talked about how it had helped create greater democracy within their school communities, as adults saw the potential of their students to help foster improvements.

There were discussions, too, about how this had led teachers in some schools, but not all, to recognise how they had moved from their initial focus on asking students to provide feedback on their lessons towards more constructive forms of dialogue. This had stimulated creativity and experimentation in order to explore more inclusive forms of teaching and learning.

Some teachers talked about how the introduction of Inclusive Inquiry was changing what they referred to as the *cultures of their schools.* This was a process that implied deeper changes in attitudes and beliefs as to what might be possible, particularly with students who had previously been seen as problems. In practical terms, this involved changes in relationships: between teachers; between students; and, crucially, between teachers and their students.

Widening the impact

During the third year of the project, various developments occurred that were designed to widen the use and impact of the Inclusive Inquiry approach within the five participating countries. These experiences threw further light on the factors that can help in its implementation, as well as providing deeper understanding of the challenges involved and how these can be overcome. They also confirm evidence from research that shows that, as far as educational change is concerned, 'context matters'[iii]. That is to say, efforts to introduce innovations have to expect that local factors to do with existing policies, traditions and cultures will influence the way new ideas are shaped.

Given all of this it is not surprising that the project experiences during the third year varied from country to country. Each of the five hub schools made efforts to extend the use of Inclusive Inquiry across all of their classes. In one case, this did not go well. As one of the researchers commented, 'this is not a happy story'. It seemed that, despite the interesting work that had previously gone on in the school - referred to as being 'inspiring' - changing circumstances made further progress difficult. At the heart of the problem, were changes in senior personnel within the school, plus administrative pressures from administrators in the local district.

What happened in the other four hub schools was much more encouraging. Each of these schools were able to extend the use of Inclusive Inquiry to all of their classes. A key factor in these schools was the decision of the headteacher to make the approach a central feature of the schools' development plans for the year. This involved the designation of some teachers as the facilitators for specific age groups. In one case, for example, an experienced teacher was given half a day each week to coordinate the project in her school and support other schools in their network. It was also helpful in one country that teachers were awarded credits for their participation that have implications for career progression. In another country an award system for schools proved to be encouraging.

Schools also found it useful to agree an overall theme for their efforts to promote inclusive practices. In one school, their first theme was 'everybody being nice and polite to one another', across all of the 12 classrooms. They later went on to explore aspects of mathematics teaching. Another school focused on the development of aspects of learning in all 15 classes, such as handwriting, spelling, editing and reading for enjoyment. With the youngest children they looked at managing their own time. Interestingly, two schools made efforts to draw family members into their activities, something that could be developed in the future.

Other contextual factors created barriers to the implementation of Inclusive Inquiry. So, for example, the requirement of national policy in one country meant that lessons are of 90-minute duration. It was hardly surprising that student researchers in this school found that observing whole lessons to be boring. So, the teachers decided to limit the observations to no more that between 20 to 40 minutes.

The further development of the project networks, each made up of six schools, was clearly influenced by contextual factors. So, for example, two of networks were in countries that each have a history of school-to-school collaboration. In these contexts, the networks were created within existing clusters of schools, which have their own established management arrangements. Both networks appointed a coordinator from one of the partner schools. Predictably, the strengthening of these networks continued into the third year, with more schools joining the partnerships.

In the other three countries, schools tend to work in isolation from one another. This meant that, although schools seemed to welcome the opportunity to share experiences, the partnerships remained as a temporary arrangement that, to varying degrees, were difficult to sustain.

In all the schools, aspects of national policy were seen to influence progress. In particular, some countries allowed schools a degree of autonomy that allowed for locally led innovations to be introduced. Elsewhere, more centralised policies, including national accountability systems, left school leaders trying to manoeuvre spaces for changes to be introduced. In certain contexts, the emphasis on schools competing for students within their local area made partnerships more difficult to establish.

Conclusion

An important factor in the development of the project were the relationships that developed between colleagues across the schools within the five national networks. In particular, the links that developed between representatives of the five networks through occasional meetings and visits to schools in other countries added another level of networking. In particular, this led to further stimulus for mutual learning as colleagues were confronted with forms of practice and ways of thinking that were different to their own.

All of this underlines the potential of differences to stimulate reflection, rethinking and experimentation. In such contexts, diversity becomes a catalyst for positive change. Networks of schools from different countries offer possibilities for this to occur, although, as explained, setting them up can be challenging.

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i. See various chapters in: Muijs, D., Ainscow, M., Chapman, C. and West, M. (2011) *Collaboration and networking in education.* London: Springer

ii. Ainscow, M. (2016) Collaboration as a strategy for promoting equity in education: possibilities and barriers. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community,* 1 (2), 159 – 172

iii. Ainscow, M., Chapman, C. and Hadfield, M. (2020) *Changing education systems: a research-based approach.* London: Routledge


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