



ICELAND

Preparatory Workshop on Inclusive Education

Nordic Countries

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UNESCO
International Bureau of Education



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Inclusive education and
Schooling in Iceland

Presentation to Community of practice seminar
Helsinki 6 - 7 March 2008

THE ICELANDIC SOCIETY

- Small 300.000 persons
- Affluent
- High standard of living

1830s first modern public schools

1907 first legislation on public education

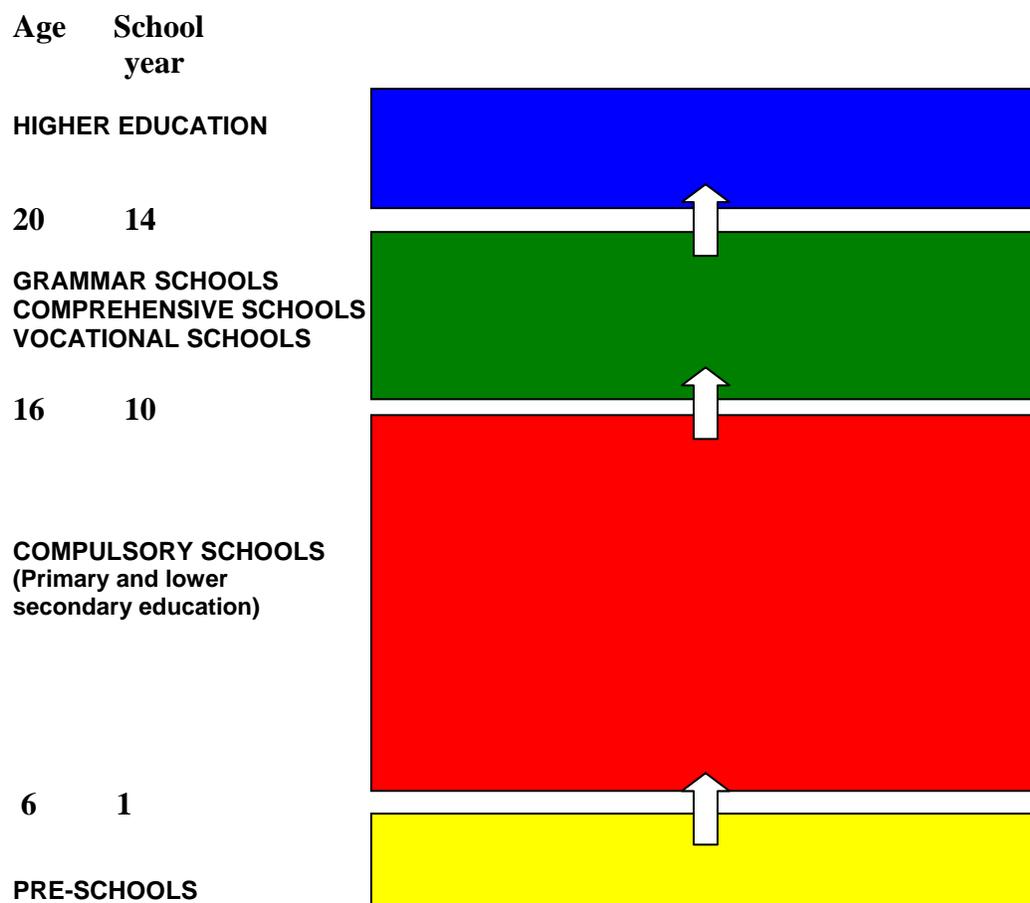
1947 education system formalized

1974 current policy & equality of education introduced

1989 “education for all” and “inclusive education”

2008 new legislation on all levels of education under way

THE ICELANDIC SCHOOL SYSTEM



In Iceland Education is divided into four levels:

- pre-school (leikskóli) up to 6 years of age.
- compulsory (primary and lower secondary in a single structure – grunnskóli) pupils 6–16 years of age.
- upper secondary (framhaldsskóli) students 16–20 years of age.
- higher education level (háskóli) from 20 years of age.

Instruction in all four educational levels is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The majority of the schools are public and most of the few private schools receive support from public funds.

To strengthen coherence in the school system a new Preschool Act was adopted in 1994, the Compulsory School Act in 1995 and the Upper Secondary School Act in 1996.

Since 1994 the Pre-school is considered first part of the education system. Educational objectives of the pre-school are laid out in national curriculum and elaborated in school curricula in every pre-school. The play is considered the fundamental method of learning. Teacher education for pre-schools currently takes place in universities towards a B.Ed. degree. Along with other teacher education it is supposed to be extended soon towards a Masters degree.

Compulsory school classes are often characterised by mixed ability groups. It is common, however, at this level to divide the pupils into groups according to their ability in individual core subjects. Pupils can then choose between groups progressing at different speeds through the same course material in a particular subject. Those who are more industrious can progress more quickly and those who find it difficult can proceed more slowly and receive more instruction. In a few schools pupils who apply themselves well in these courses can be allowed to take a specific credit unit in an upper secondary school. In this way there is co-operation between compulsory and upper secondary schools.

The lower secondary classes in compulsory schools emphasise special instruction to meet the needs of most pupils. Special instruction is carried out either as support for certain pupils or in the form of special departments. There is also increasing emphasis on educational and vocational counselling. Recent immigrants receive special instruction in Icelandic, both at the compulsory and upper secondary levels, in addition to some provision for instruction in their native language.

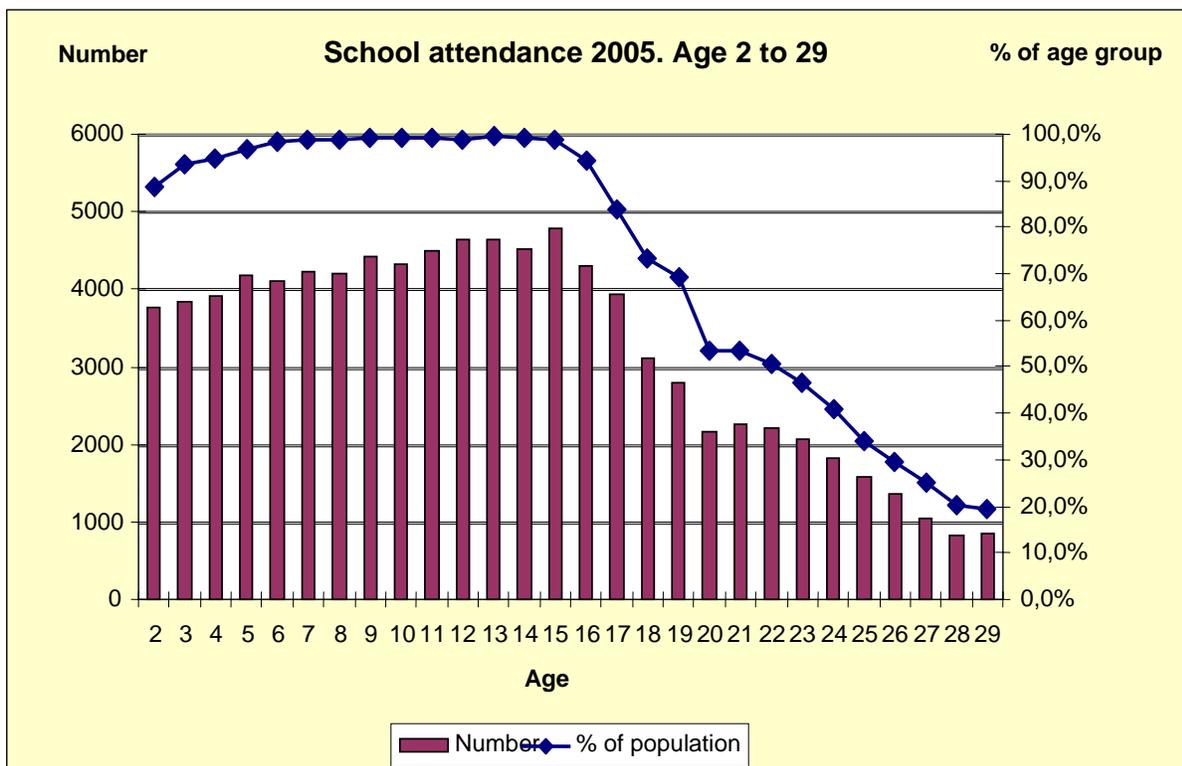
All those who have reached the age of 16 have the right to begin studying at the upper secondary level. An increasing percentage of those who complete compulsory schooling continue their studies at the upper secondary level; during the last decade this increase has amounted from ca. 80% to ca. 93% of each year class.

There is considerable drop-out in upper secondary school, especially for the first year. In recent years several ways have been sought to reduce the drop-out rate, among other things with strengthened educational counselling and more varied course offerings.

Several upper secondary schools offer full year remedial instruction. This

instruction is especially intended as preparation for upper secondary school studies and for pupils with very poor preparation for enrolment in upper secondary school programmes.

In mainstream classes at upper secondary schools, pupils with disabilities and immigrant students are assisted with their studies, by for example in sign language or Icelandic as a second language.



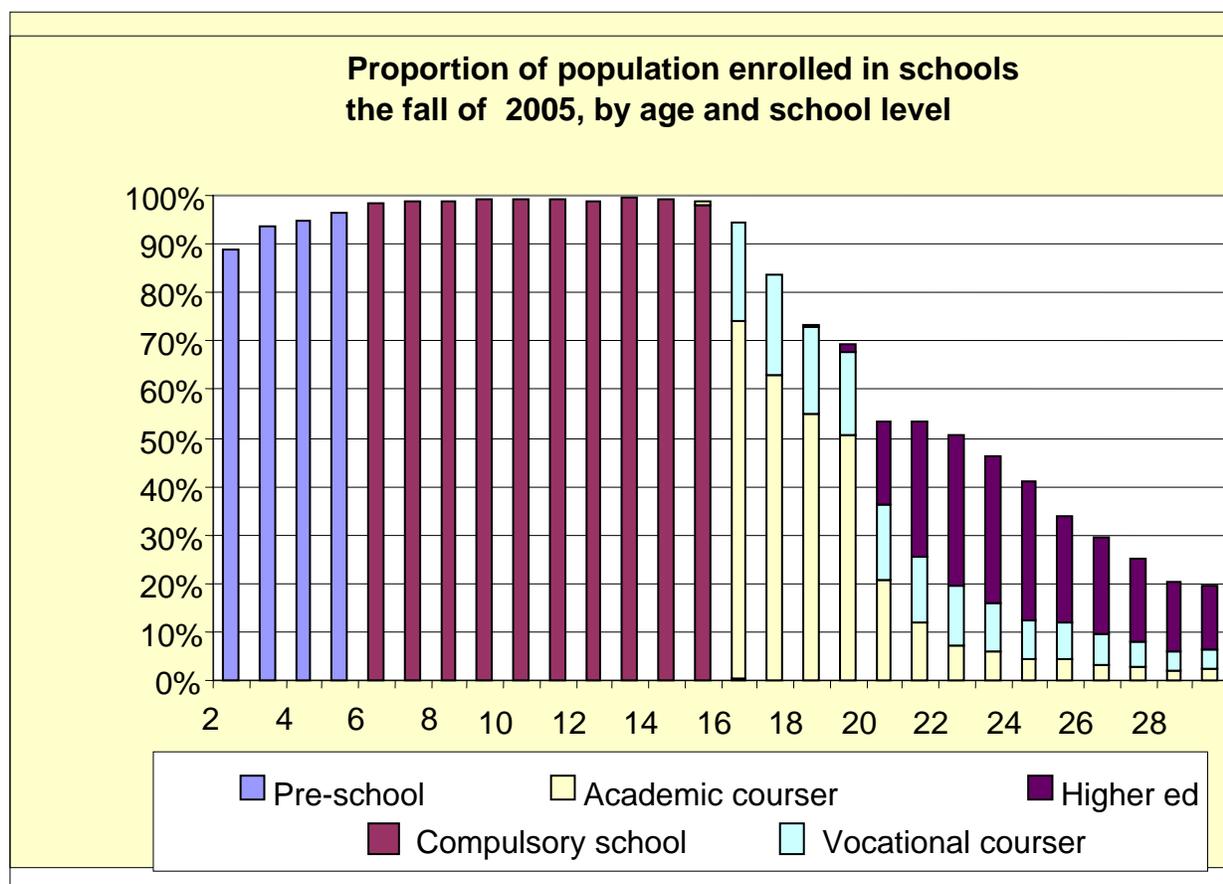
Inclusive education – Education for All – is formally the guiding policy for the national education system in Iceland from early years to upper secondary education. This means addressing and responding to the learning needs of all pupils without treating or defining pupils in need of special support any different from other pupils. In accordance with this there is no separate legislation for special education at any of the four levels of education in Iceland.

In short Education for All means that:

- There is equal opportunity for all to attend school and acquire education in accordance with their ability and needs.
- Schools must attend to the ability and needs of all pupils.
- Pupils and/or their parents decide on which school they attend.
- Pupils in need of special support have the right to special provision.

A number of implementing Regulations have been issued providing for various policy details. The Icelandic government has also ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Child (1992) and adopted the Salamanca Declaration (Salamanca 1994) and the Education for All Declaration (Dakar 2000).

There is a separate legislation on the affairs of the handicapped (1992) that stipulates that all individuals with handicap (defined as mental retardation, psychiatric illness, physical disability, blindness and/or deafness as well as handicaps resulting from chronic illness and accidents) shall be helped to live and function in a normal community along with other people.



Iceland – Special education needs					
Number of compulsory school aged pupils (including those with SENs)	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total	Year of reference	Notes and Source
	43,864	472	44,336	2005	Source: Statistics Iceland (The National Statistics Office of Iceland).
Number of compulsory school aged pupils who have SENs (in all educational settings)	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total	Year of reference	Notes and Source
	887	0	887*	2005	Source: Statistics Iceland * Around 20% of the whole school population are recognised as having some form of special needs. These figures represent children with the most severe needs.
Pupils with SENs in segregated settings	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total	Year of reference	Notes and Source
	146	0	146	2005	Source: Statistics Iceland.
Pupils with SENs in inclusive settings	Public Sector	Private Sector	Total	Year of reference	Notes and Source
	741*	0	741	2005	Source: Statistics Iceland.
Compulsory age phase	Compulsory age range is 6-16 years.				
Clarification of Public - Private sector education	Public sector education is provided completely by the State. Municipalities pay for most of the costs in so called private schools; parents only pay a small amount of the costs.				
Legal Definition of SEN	<p>There is a separate legislation on the affairs of the handicapped (1992) that stipulates that all individuals with handicap (defined as mental retardation, psychiatric illness, physical disability, blindness and/or deafness as well as handicaps resulting from chronic illness and accidents) shall be helped to live and function in a normal community along with other people. For this purpose, where a handicapped person's needs are not covered by general services within the fields of education, health and social services, special services, detailed in the law, shall be provided.</p> <p>Compulsory school: the most important legislation which affects the provision of special education is the law concerning compulsory education passed in 1995. The law stipulates ten years of compulsory schooling for children and adolescents between the ages of six and sixteen. The term special education is, however, nowhere to be found in the law. The ideology is that the compulsory 'basic school' shall be inclusive, catering for SEN as well as other educational needs of its pupils. Since 1 August 1996, all compulsory schools, including special schools and units, have been run by local municipalities.</p> <p>One article of the law (article 37) specifies that children and adolescents who need special education because of specific learning difficulties or because they have emotional or social problems and/or are handicapped, have a right to special support in instruction in their studies. The main policy is that such instruction should take place in their local home school. If a pupil's parents or guardians, teachers or other specialists feel that the pupil is not receiving suitable instruction in its home school, the parents or guardians may apply for the pupil to attend a special school. The instruction can be on a one-to-one basis or take place in a group within or outside the mainstream classroom, in special departments within schools or in special schools.</p>				

	<p>A regulation for special education is based on the law. The regulation for special education in compulsory education is the only regulation for this purpose at the four school levels. It deals with all special needs teaching at the compulsory school level. According to this regulation, special education involves changes of educational aims, curricular content and teaching context and/or methods as compared with what other pupils of the same age are offered. Special education is organised on a short- or long-term basis depending on the needs of the pupils, possibly lasting his or her entire schooling. The municipalities are obliged to ensure access to a special school or a special unit for those pupils whose disabilities make it impossible for them to take advantage of educational facilities in their local school.</p> <p>The municipalities are also obliged to offer education for children who are in hospitals or are sick for a long period.</p> <p>References: The law of the handicapped (1995) and the compulsory school act (1995).</p>
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Children are classified according to their primary handicap (deafness, blindness, physical handicap, mental and multiple handicap and socio-emotional/ psychiatric problems). Within the larger schools and units, they are grouped roughly by age, but in smaller schools they are taught together irrespective of age. Most pupils in special units located in mainstream schools are included for part of the time in regular classes and this makes the sizes and composition of the groups is variable during the day.

There are six segregated special schools that serve pupils with disabilities in the compulsory school age phase. These are: a school for deaf pupils, a school for children with psychiatric disabilities, two schools for adolescents with socio-emotional difficulties and two schools for children with mental handicap and multiple disabilities. None of the above-mentioned schools offers boarding facilities. These schools, like all other compulsory schools, were, by 1 August 1996, transferred from the state to the municipalities.

In addition to the above-mentioned special schools, there are six special units within local schools that have the same role as the schools: three for autistic children, one for the blind, one for the motor impaired and one for children with mental handicap and multiple disabilities. All these units are located in mainstream schools and the pupils are included in regular classes part of the time.

In some schools there are special units for children with some SEN set up as a temporary solution. Pupils in these units are usually in close contact with the mainstream classes.

Curricula

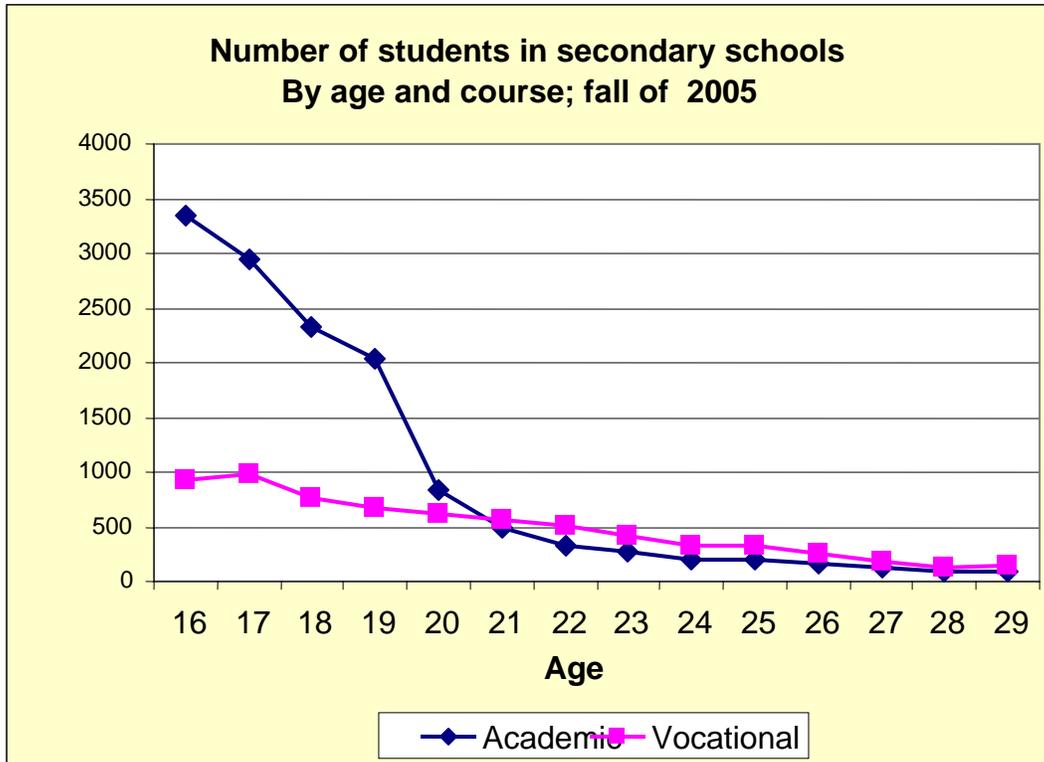
The Education for All policy places emphasis on the National Curriculum Guides for preschool (1999), compulsory school (2007) and upper secondary school (1999). The Curriculum Guidelines had never before been worked on at the same time, but this approach assures conformity of goals for both levels of schooling. In drawing up the National Curriculum Guides, in the organisation of study, and in producing and selecting study materials, special effort was made to ensure that the opportunities for study accessible to all pupils are as equal as possible.

The objectives of study and instruction, and the working practices of preschool, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools shall be such as to prevent discrimination on the basis of origin, gender, residence, class, religion or handicap. All school activities shall take into account the varied personality, maturity, talent, ability and interests of pupils.

A National Curriculum Guide for special units in upper secondary schools was published in the year 2000. The special units operating in upper secondary schools have special curriculum guidelines to meet the needs of disabled pupils. The programme offered by these units has three different levels depending on the needs of different pupils and lasts four years.

In the last decade a growing number of immigrant children have entered the Icelandic school system. There is a growing awareness among politicians and educators of their cultural and educational needs. This important field is though in the initial stage in Iceland.

The national curricula emphasises the development of school based “Welcome plan” and introductory courses. The emphasis is on language and cultural skills. Special section on Icelandic as a foreign language in the national curriculum. The largest immigrant populations in Iceland speak Polish, Serbo-Croatian and Thai languages.



The traditional drop-out rate in upper secondary schools is of high concern. It has decreased gradually in recent years, but not fast enough. Highest drop-out is among “rural boys” and “immigrants”.

Focus is on

- Fragmentation and continuity in the curriculum
- Academic bias in the curriculum
- The role and composition of the Matriculation examination

The status and interrelationship of Academic courses, Art courses and Vocational courses in lower and upper secondary education.

Inclusion into schooling vs. Inclusion into education

Equal access to school vs. Equal access to education

Equality => quality

UNESCO Roadmap towards Inclusive Education (first draft)

„The need to communicate, disseminate and put forward a broader concept of inclusive education to include all children taking care of their diverse learning needs is recognized in all regions. Inclusive education is increasingly seen as a way of attaining a high-quality equitable education regardless of their physical, intellectual, economic and social condition”. (UNESCO)

Ownership of concepts

Special education

Inclusive education

Special needs

Social inclusion

Historical location of concepts

What does individualized education mean?

Individualism and individual education have been prevailing parts of modern educational discourse in Iceland. But at each period they are shaped by the dominant political ideology.

At the turn of the 20th century, the public school took advantage of the ideology of Nationalism in its tribute to individualism in education. The issue was:

How can the individual contribute to society?

Mid-century brought political independence to Iceland and development of welfare state. The post-war school emphasized the Social Democratic project:

How can society make the best use of every individual?

The state was striving for every single “human capital”. This was the heyday of special needs education.

The society is still changing. The current school builds on the neo-liberal dogma:

How can the individual make the most out of social competition?

Today the student is expected to make his/her own destiny through a self-directed curriculum that seems to be the individualized educational project aligned to the Zeitgeist at the turn of the 21st century; neo-liberalism. (*Ingrid Carlgren et.al. Changes in Nordic teaching practices: From individualized teaching to the teaching of individuals*)

Some authors now talk about **personalized education** or extending the concept of **inclusive education** beyond the disabled students.

Every **person** should have the right to capitalize on his or her **competences**

Current National Curriculum in Iceland demands:

It is the responsibility of each school to adapt their own instruction as best suits the needs of their pupils. Pupils are entitled to work on tasks suited to their academic ability and capacity (Nat'l curriculum, p. 22).

The current national curriculum claims that the organization of instruction and learning as well as the selection of learning material shall secure equal opportunity of every pupil.

Equality in education

One of the basic tenets of educational effort is equality in education, which involves offering pupils suitable studies and instruction and giving them the opportunity to work on tasks of their own choosing. This does not necessarily mean the same solutions for everyone, but rather comparable and equivalent opportunities. The tasks undertaken should appeal equally to both boys and girls, rural and urban pupils, whether disabled or not, regardless of origin, religion, sexual orientation or ethnicity. (Nat 1 curriculum)

Challenges we face:

- define diversities in education and respond to them by reconstructing national curriculum making
- focus on students who are at risk of being marginalized and excluded from the school, and of obtaining low learning outcomes
- reform the educational system to ensure coherence and continuity in “personalized education”

Who are the marginal students today?

- Mentally and physically disabled pupils
- Immigrant pupils, especially in secondary schools
- Undefined drop-out students

Service of rural populations has been enhanced in recent years by new information & communication technologies.

Life-skills vs. Traditional school subjects

Curriculum framework

Levels of competences

(EU coordination of higher education and vocational education)

Competence \leq knowledge + skills

General curriculum, not subject based curriculum

“Real competences” -- learning outcomes – multiple intelligences

Inclusion into education vs. Inclusive education