



REACHING OUT TO ALL LEARNERS:  
a resource pack for supporting inclusion  
and equity in education

**International  
Bureau of Education**

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If we have unintentionally omitted anyone who has contributed in this project without mentioning their name, we apologise and offer our sincere recognition for their invaluable assistance.



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# FOREWORD

**Ms Stefania Giannini, UNESCO**  
*Assistant Director-General for Education*

Social and educational inclusion is a top UNESCO priority. It is a matter of social justice, human rights and human dignity. As stated in the 2030 Agenda, inclusion implies twining equity and quality to ensure that every learner matters equally. Inclusive policies are imperative to reach Sustainable Development 4, namely to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

The challenge of inclusion has been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic that has amplified a pre-existing education crisis and affected the most vulnerable and marginalized learners hardest. Millions have been excluded from learning altogether during school closures because of socio-economic status, gender, disability and lack of access to technology. Inclusion must be the yardstick of the recovery - to bring all learners back to school, assess learning losses and support those with limited or no access to distance learning opportunities.

This resource pack is embedded within UNESCO’s commitment to inclusion as a culture and a process that affects teaching, learning, curricula, school environments and more. It aims to support Members States in accelerating efforts towards SDG 4, to make education systems work for all children and youth. Reaching out to all learners: a resource pack for supporting inclusion and equity in education is indeed grounded in the conviction and vision that inclusive education entails engaging all learners regardless of their circumstances, affiliations, gender, ethnicity, language background and capacities, and responding effectively to their expectations and needs. It is about appreciating that every learner is special and unique, and recognizing diversity as a strength for making our societies more cohesive and just.

It is crucial to strengthen the connections of the curriculum to social aspirations and global challenges so that learners gain the knowledge, skills, values and competences to shape more sustainable, inclusive, fair and cohesive societies. As we know, the curriculum is a strong driver of educational and social policies. It supports the development of inclusive schools and practices and can encourage the engagement of diverse stakeholders, both from inside and outside the educational system. It is my hope that this resource pack will be an asset for transforming education systems to unlock and fulfill the potential of every learner.





**Mr Yao Ydo**

*Director of the UNESCO International Bureau of Education*

The UNESCO-IBE, as a global Centre of Excellence in curriculum and related issues, emphasizes the relevance of an inclusive curriculum to address the diversity of all learners regardless of their affiliations, gender, contexts, circumstances, and capacities. We understand inclusion as a driver of equitable quality education, implying that all learners can have an equal opportunity to learn.

This broadened conceptualization of inclusive education is well captured in the SDG4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Moreover, the education challenges and implications of the pandemic, have reinforced the challenge of twining inclusion, equality and quality. The nature of the challenge remains the same for each singular context – marginalized, excluded, students from poorest households, girls, learners in conflicts or risky environments, linguistic and ethnic minorities, indigenous backgrounds, and children with diverse capacities.

Positioning inclusion at the core of education and of education systems in the post-pandemic era entails rethinking teaching, learning and assessing to ensure that each learner matters equally. We are at a turning point in history where policymakers and educational leaders have the opportunity to move forward a progressive inclusive education agenda building upon what we have learned during the pandemic and giving effect to the policy principle that all learners are special.

The UNESCO-IBE has at the core of its mandate the development of resources and tools in curriculum and related issues to accompany Member States and educational stakeholders in the definition and implementation of their education strategies and practices. Thus, this Resource Pack aims to support the development of effective curriculum processes in order to mainstream inclusion in education.

We believe that this resource pack will contribute to a broader understanding of the theory and practice of inclusive education across all levels of the education system, and with a focus on the school and classroom levels.





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# INTRODUCTION

The resource pack *Reaching Out to All Learners* focuses on a what is arguably the greatest challenge facing education systems around the world, that of finding ways of including and ensuring the learning of all children in schools. In economically poorer countries this is mainly about the millions of children who are not able to attend formal education. Meanwhile, in wealthier countries many young people leave school with no worthwhile qualifications, some choose to drop out since the lessons seem irrelevant, and others are placed in special classes or schools away from mainstream education. UNESCO estimates that girls aged 12-17 are at particular risk of dropping out of school in low- and lower-middle income countries, whereas boys are more at risk in upper-middle and high-income countries.

Recently, teachers have faced further unprecedented challenges as they seek to find ways of ensuring quality education for all their students within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the nature of these challenges varies depending on the location, a common concern is with those students who are known to be vulnerable to marginalization or exclusion, such as those from the poorest households, refugees and those in conflict situations, ethnic and linguistic minorities and indigenous backgrounds, and children with disabilities. It follows that efforts to ensure educational recovery after the pandemic must be based upon the principles of inclusion and equity.

## USING THE RESOURCE PACK

The *Reaching Out to All Learners* resource materials tackle the practicalities of addressing these challenges in schools and other education centres, including early years and further education provision. More specifically, the materials focus on three strategic questions:

- How can schools be developed in order to respond positively to student diversity?
- How can classroom practices be developed that will ensure that lessons are inclusive?
- How can practitioners engage families, partner schools and the wider community in their efforts to become inclusive and equitable?

Whilst the resource pack can be read by individuals, it has been designed to encourage collaborative forms of professional learning in the following settings:

- Within individual or groups of schools to promote the development of policies and practices;
- As part of in-service courses or workshops for teachers;
- Within collaborative action research projects involving schools working with the support of university staff; and
- Within pre-service teacher education courses (although some of the activities will need to be revised in light of the limited experiences of participants).





This introduction explains the content of the resource pack and how it is intended to be used. Suggestions for further reading and additional relevant resources are listed at the end of this document and each of the three guides. **Before sharing any these materials, it is important to review them in relation to the cultural traditions of particular communities.**

In what follows, key concepts are introduced, followed by explanations of the materials in the three guides that make up the resource pack.

## INCLUSION AND EQUITY

In many countries, inclusive education is still thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. This means that the aim is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, migrant status and ability. As such, it starts from the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society. This emphasis on fairness is signaled by the use of the word 'equity' in these resource materials.

Internationally, the year 2016 was particularly important in relation to this policy agenda. Building on the Incheon Declaration agreed at the World Forum on Education in May 2016, it saw the publication by UNESCO of the Education 2030 Framework for Action. This emphasises inclusion and equity as laying the foundations for quality education. It also stresses the need to address all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, gender inequalities, disparities and inequities in access, participation, and learning processes and outcomes.

It is important to recognize that the promotion of inclusion and equity is not simply a technical or organizational change. Rather, it is a movement in a clear philosophical direction that involves the development of a welcoming and supportive culture within educational communities. The creation of such a cultural change requires a shared commitment amongst all those involved, including teachers, students, families and wider communities. It is therefore crucial that those who need to be involved have a clear sense of what is intended. In particular, the terms 'inclusion' and 'equity' must be defined in ways that will speak to a diverse range of stakeholders.

The following definitions provided in UNESCO's *Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education* are particularly helpful:

## INTRODUCTION

- **INCLUSION** is a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners.
- **EQUITY** is about ensuring fairness, where the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance.

The central message is therefore simple: **every learner matters and matters equally**. The complexity arises, however, when we try to turn this principle into action. This is likely to require significant changes in thinking and practice within education systems. This resource pack has been designed with this in mind: it is about the development of thinking, policies and practice.

## CONTEXTS AND CHALLENGES

*Reaching Out to All Learners* is intended to influence and support inclusive thinking and practices in schools and other educational contexts, such as early years and further education settings. An earlier version of the pack has been used in many countries since it was first introduced in 2016. This new version has been developed in the light of lessons from these experiences. In particular, more specific guidance is provided as to how the resource materials should be used to facilitate developments in the field.

The revised version also takes account of the significant new challenges that exist within education systems across the world in relation to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These point to the need for an even greater emphasis on the sorts of approaches recommended in this resource pack, with their focus on ensuring that all children and young people are supported in their participation in schools.

Given the new challenges that exist, there is also a need to place even greater emphasis on the importance of collaborating with families and other services that support children and the wider community. This revised version also takes account of evidence that school-to-school collaboration can strengthen the capacity of individual schools to respond to learner diversity.

## MOVING KNOWLEDGE AROUND

Drawing on experiences and research in various parts of the world, *Reaching Out to All Learners* is focused on making better use of the existing expertise of teachers. This builds on research which suggests that when teachers are involved in decision-making this is likely to promote a stronger culture for participation and learning within schools. There is also evidence that schools where teachers collaborate in developing their practices are more able to improve student outcomes and reduce achievement gaps.

This thinking is in line with the report of the UNESCO International Commission on the Futures of Education<sup>1</sup>, which states:

*The educational response to the COVID-19 crisis has revealed the capacity of educators to draw on their professional knowledge and collaboratively mobilize with a resourcefulness and creativity that could not have been achieved by a public authority simply issuing top down orders.*

1- International Commission on the Futures of Education. 2020. Education in a post-COVID world: Nine ideas for public action. Paris, UNESCO

The report concludes:

*Teachers need to be more recognized and more highly valued; they are essential participants in defining the futures of education.*

The starting point for strengthening the capacity of schools is therefore with the sharing of ideas, knowledge and practices through collaboration amongst members of staff. This can also encourage new thinking and experimentation with alternative ways of working. Research shows that this can be stimulated through an engagement with the insights of students and families, and knowledge from academic research, in ways that challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, not least in respect to the presence, participation and achievement of vulnerable groups of learners.

## KEY IDEAS

Based on this thinking, *Reaching Out to All Learners* provides detailed guidance on how the materials should be used. This involves a focus on:

- **CLARITY OF MEANING** – The resource pack seeks to promote the development of new ways of addressing diversity among learners. Within the materials, much importance is attached to the need for a common understanding of the purposes of this approach.
- **ANALYSIS OF CONTEXTS** – The aim of the resource pack is to draw attention to and find ways of overcoming aspects of current thinking, policy and practice that may be creating barriers to the presence, participation and achievement of some children and young people.
- **BUILDING ON EXISTING PRACTICES** – Recognising that there are usually effective practices that can be built upon within any context, the processes recommended in the resource pack encourage the exchange of expertise within and between schools, and with families and the wider community.
- **WORKING COLLABORATIVELY** – Rethinking practice in relation to inclusion and equity is likely to involve periods of ‘turbulence’, as business-as-usual ideas are challenged. The materials therefore emphasize the importance of promoting mutual support among stakeholders.
- **EVALUATING PROGRESS** – As the resource pack is used, there is a need to collect evidence regarding the implementation and impact of the changes that are introduced. This can also help in ensuring effective implementation.
- **MANAGING CHANGE** – The use of the resource pack has to be managed and led collectively. Thus, the three guides stress the importance of strengthening leadership practice at all levels, including the classroom level.

## INTRODUCTION

It must be noted that *Reaching Out to All Learners* is intended to be used flexibly in response to culturally diverse contexts that are at different stages of development and where resources vary considerably. With this in mind, extensive use is made of examples from different parts of the world to encourage the development of new ways of *reaching out to all learners*. In the case of small schools, particularly those where there is a single teacher, it will be helpful for a group of schools to work together with the materials.

## THE MATERIALS

*Reaching Out to All Learners* consists of three inter-connected guides:

**GUIDE 1. LEADING INCLUSIVE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT** – This guide supports senior staff in reviewing and developing their schools in order to make all their students feel welcomed and supported in their learning.

**GUIDE 2. DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS** - The aim of this guide is to support teachers in developing more effective ways of engaging all children in their lessons.

**GUIDE 3. WORKING WITH PARTNERS** - This guide encourages schools to collaborate with each other, and with families and the wider community.

All three guides emphasize processes of collaborative inquiry, within which those using the materials are encouraged to work together in reviewing and developing their thinking and practices. The idea behind this approach is that it will help to improve the presence, participation and achievement of students.

Each of the guides provides the following:

- An introduction that explains the agenda of the guide;
- A discussion paper based on evidence from international experiences and research;
- A framework of indicators and questions that can be used to focus discussions (see Appendix for full list);
- Illustrative examples from the field in the form of accounts of practice; and
- Guidelines for using the materials to stimulate a process of review and development within an educational centre.

In addition, there are suggestions for further reading and links to relevant audio-visual materials that can be used to support professional development activities amongst members of staff.

## COORDINATION

It is recommended that, in using *Reaching Out to All Learners*, schools should form a coordination group made up of teachers (and, where appropriate, students, support staff and family members) who have capacity to provide leadership for using the resource pack. One member of this group should be the headteacher or another senior member staff.



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The coordination group should include colleagues who will provide a variety of perspectives on the work of the school. They should also be willing to see differences amongst students as a stimulus for reflection and change.

The tasks of the group are to:

- Provide leadership as the resource materials are used to promote inclusion and equity;
- Facilitate processes of collaborative inquiry amongst staff and other members of a school community;
- Support and challenge one another in relation to these activities; and
- Present and discuss their experiences at various school and external events.

It is worth noting, too, that participation in the coordination group may open up opportunities for professional and career development.

Finding time for the coordination group to work with their colleagues in using the activities suggested in the resource pack will be essential. The challenge for school leaders, therefore, is to find ways of making this possible. Here, it is worth noting that the evidence is that time investment of this sort in the professional learning amongst staff members is likely to pay off in terms of the learning of children and young people.

Each of the guides presents a series of professional development activities. These could be used individually as the basis of a single workshop session of one-hour duration or less. Alternatively, a professional development day could be designed around all the activities in one of the three guides.

## SYSTEM CHANGE

The *Reaching Out to All Learners* materials can also be used to support efforts to develop a strategy for promoting inclusion and equity across an entire education system. This might be at a national, regional or local district level. In such contexts, use should also be made of UNESCO's '*Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education*'<sup>2</sup>.

Published by UNESCO in 2017, this guide is intended to support system-wide change for overcoming barriers to quality educational access, participation, learning processes and outcomes, and to ensure that all learners are valued and engaged equally. An assessment framework is presented in the guide that focuses on four key dimensions: concepts, policy statements, structures and systems, and practices. Additionally, the evidence from international research included in the guide will assist those who use it to learn from the progress made by other countries towards the development of more inclusive and equitable education systems.

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2- UNESCO. 2017. A Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education. Paris: UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254>



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*Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>



# LINKS TO RELEVANT RESOURCES

**Note:** Before introducing these resources to others it is important to ensure that they are appropriate for the particular context.

**'Inclusion and Education: All Means All'**. The animation video about The Global Education Monitoring Report 2020 is particularly useful as an introduction to the importance of inclusion in education:

<https://youtu.be/kEyjlqixq9c>

**'The Universal Design for Learning'**. A framework that is widely used internationally to make learning inclusive and transformative for everyone: <https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl>

**'Every school is inclusive: to some degree'**. This interview explains international developments over the last 30 years in relation to inclusion and equity in education: <https://youtu.be/oKzO9ngdNcA>

**'The Enabling Education Network (EENET)'**. An information sharing network that focuses on issues relating to inclusive and enabling education, primarily in resource-poor contexts. Its information sharing activities are open to everyone: <https://www.eenet.org.uk/what-we-do>

**'Prospects'**. This journal special edition on the theme 'Inclusive education: New developments, new challenges' provides accounts of developments across the world:

<https://link.springer.com/journal/11125/volumes-and-issues/49-3>

**'UNESCO Resources'**. These are available in a range of languages to promote inclusion and equity in education: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/inclusion-in-education/resources>

**'Inclusive classrooms'**. A selection of resources on a range of issues to do with practice:

<https://www.readingrockets.org/article/websites-blogs-and-media-about-inclusive-classrooms>

**'Why we need LGBTQ education'**. This talk by a young student could be used as prompt for discussion:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWieTvjkj0k>

**'Escuelas Inclusivas'**. These materials in Spanish include videos of experiences of promoting inclusion in schools in Chile:

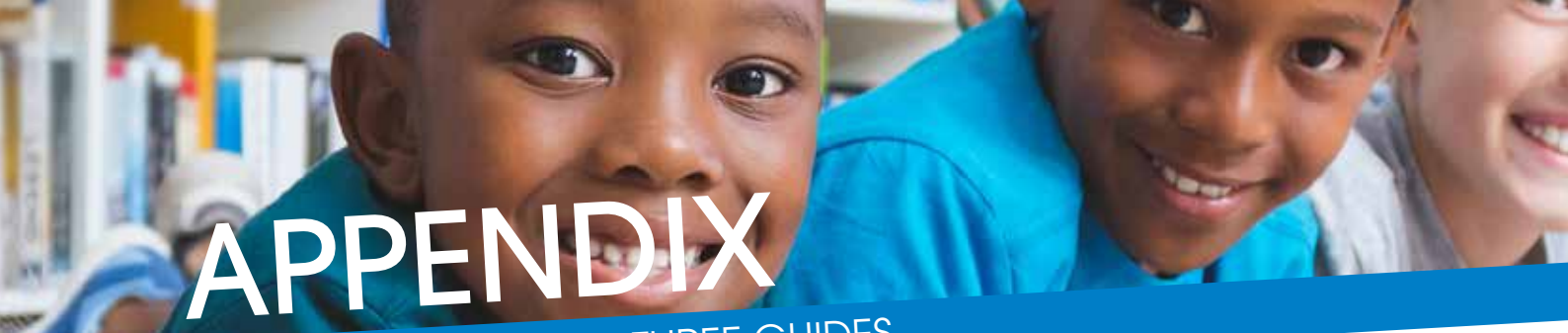
<http://oce.uaq.mx/index.php/galeria/galeria-de-videos/escuelas-inclusivas-oei-novasur-2015>

**'School Education Gateway'**. Provides a variety of resources in relation to a range of relevant themes:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/SchoolEducationGateway/videos>

**'Edutopia'**. Evidence-based learning practices focused on a range of topics:

<https://www.edutopia.org/videos>



# APPENDIX

## FRAMEWORKS FOR THE THREE GUIDES

Each of the guides is built around a framework of indicators and questions that are intended to be used to stimulate reviews and planning within schools and other educational contexts. These are as follows:

### GUIDE 1. LEADING INCLUSIVE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

#### 1.1 Everyone is made to feel safe and welcome

- Do students in the school feel safe?
- Are parents and visitors made to feel welcome on arrival at the school?
- Is accessible information about the school made available?

#### 1.2 Students are equally valued

- Is the work of all students acknowledged and, where possible, displayed around the school and classrooms?
- Are all students encouraged to take part in all school activities?
- Do some students have a leadership role in the school?

#### 1.3 There are high expectations for all students

- Do all students feel that they are expected to achieve?
- Are the achievements of all students celebrated?

#### 1.4 Staff and students treat one another with respect

- Are there warm and friendly relationships between staff and students?
- Is respect shown for different languages, cultural traditions and religious beliefs?

#### 1.5 There is a partnership between staff and families

- Is there effective communication between homes and school?
- Do parents feel they are involved in supporting their children's learning?

#### 1.6 The school is accessible to all students

- Are efforts made to overcome potential barriers to participation and learning?
- Can students and adults with disabilities gain access to all parts of the building?
- Are students who speak a different language helped to participate?

#### 1.7 Senior staff support teachers in making sure that all students participate and learn

- Are there regular staff development activities focused on the improvement of teaching?
- Do senior staff observe lessons and offer supportive suggestions for improvement?
- Do teachers have opportunities to observe one another's practices?





### **1.8 The school monitors the presence, participation and achievement of all students**

- Are there systems in place for checking on student attendance in school and during lessons?
- Is the school aware of specific reasons why students do not attend school at times due to practices in the wider school community?
- Are students offered opportunities to comment on how it feels to be a member of the school?
- Is the progress and achievements of every student tracked?

## **GUIDE 2. DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES**

### **2.1 Teaching is planned with all students in mind**

- Do lesson activities take account of student interests and experiences?
- Are varied teaching methods used?
- Do the students understand the purposes of lesson activities?

### **2.2 Lessons encourage the participation of all students**

- Are all students addressed by their name?
- Are there materials that engage the interest of the students?
- Do students feel they are able to speak during lessons?
- Are lessons culturally relevant?
- Are boys and girls encouraged to speak equitably?

### **2.3 Students are actively involved in their own learning**

- Are students encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning?
- Does the classroom environment encourage independent learning?

### **2.4 Students are encouraged to support one another's learning**

- Do seating arrangements encourage students to interact?
- Are students sometimes expected to work in pairs or groups?
- Do students help one another to achieve the goals of lessons?

### **2.5 Support is provided when students experience difficulties**

- Do teachers watch out for students experiencing difficulties?
- Do students feel able to ask for help?

## APPENDIX: FRAMEWORKS FOR THE THREE GUIDES

### 2.6 Classroom discipline is based on mutual respect

- Are there established rules for taking turns to speak and listen?
- Do students feel that classroom rules are fair?
- Is bullying discouraged?

### 2.7 Students feel that they have somebody to speak to when they are worried or upset

- Are the concerns of students listened to and addressed?
- Do teachers make themselves available for students to talk to them privately?

### 2.8 Assessment contributes to the achievement of all students

- Do teachers use assessment to encourage learning?
- Are students given constructive feedback on their work?
- Are students helped to revise for tests or examinations?
- Do teachers ensure that diversity is respected, even within one unified formal assessment system?

## GUIDE 3. INVOLVING PARTNERS

### 3.1 The school is organised in ways that enable staff to engage with external partners

- Is there flexibility in the way the school day is organised so that staff members have time to link with partners outside the school day?
- Do senior members of staff see part of their role as making links with external partners?

### 3.2 Teachers involve family members in supporting the learning of their children

- Are family members encouraged to come into school to support learning and social activities?
- Are parents/carers involved in their child's learning activities at home?
- Are meetings held where teachers and parents discuss their child's progress?
- Are these relationships culturally responsive?

### 3.3 Regular information is provided to families regarding the progress of their children.

- Do families receive progress reports on their children?
- Are families contacted when their child makes some significant contribution in the school?
- Does the school publish newsletters or use other ways to keep families in touch with interesting developments?

### 3.4 The school is a member of networks and partnerships

- Is the school an active member of any school networks or partnerships?
- Do senior staff take a role in coordinating any school networks or partnerships?

### 3.5 Teachers have occasional opportunities to visit partner schools in order to share practices

- Are visits to other schools encouraged and organised?
- Does the school encourage teachers from other schools to visit?



### **3.6 Senior staff support their colleagues in their partner schools in reviewing policies and practices**

- Is the headteacher and other senior members of staff involved in peer review processes with colleagues in other schools?
- Is the school willing to provide support when another school faces difficulties?

### **3.7 The school works closely with other agencies that are involved with children and their families**

- Are staff from the health, social welfare and child protection services involved in the work of the school?
- Does the school have links with voluntary organisations, including family support groups?

### **3.8 The school has strong links with local community organisations**

- Does the school have links with local businesses, voluntary associations and higher education institutions, and indigenous communities ?
- Does the school use the media to promote its work?









LEADING INCLUSIVE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

# GUIDE 1

The aim of Guide 1 is to support senior staff in reviewing and developing their provision in order to make all their students feel welcomed and supported in their learning. It addresses the following overall question:



*How can schools be developed in order to respond positively to student diversity?*

The Guide is intended to be used in schools and other educational centres, including early years and further education settings, to review the current situation in relation to inclusion and equity in order to determine ideas for moving forward. Whilst the materials can be used in different ways to suit particular contexts, a series of linked activities are recommended to encourage review and inclusive developments in schools.

These are:

- **ACTIVITY 1: Making sense of inclusion and equity in education**
- **ACTIVITY 2: Using the school review framework**
- **ACTIVITY 3: Accounts of practice**
- **ACTIVITY 4: Carrying out collaborative inquiry**

All these activities involve structured group projects that are intended to stimulate participation in discussion,

It is anticipated that, having taken part in these projects, participants will agree and implement an action plan for moving their school forward. Suggested further readings and links to relevant resources are provided at the end of this document.



# ACTIVITY 1

## MAKING SENSE OF INCLUSION AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION

### AIM

**To help participants become clear about what is meant by inclusion and equity in education.**

### PROCESS

1. Read the discussion material 'Towards schools for all'.
2. Discuss the content with a partner.
3. In larger groups (fours or sixes), discuss the following issues:
  - What do you think about the definitions of inclusion and equity that are presented?
  - How relevant are these definitions for your own cultural context?
  - Do you agree that schools can achieve excellence through a focus on the progress of all their students?
  - What do you think about the idea of schools working *cooperatively* rather than *individualistically* or *competitively*?
  - What are your thoughts about the idea of an inclusive school culture?
4. Present your findings to the other groups and consider the implications for future actions within the school.

## DISCUSSION MATERIAL: TOWARDS SCHOOLS FOR ALL

*'The evidence is conclusive: equity in education pays off. The highest performing education systems across OECD countries are those that combine high quality and equity. In such education systems, the vast majority of students can attain high level skills and knowledge that depend on their ability and drive, more than on their socio-economic background.'*

OECD (2012)

Throughout the world children enter schools from different backgrounds, have different experiences of education, and leave with very different results. In most countries the poorest children and young people tend to lose out most starkly, achieve the worst results and attend the lowest performing schools.

Girls aged 12-17 are at particular risk of dropping out of school in low and lower-income countries, whereas boys are more at risk in upper-middle and high-income countries. More recently, schools have faced unprecedented challenges as they have tried to find ways of ensuring quality education for all their students within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are, however, both lower- and higher-income countries that have made progress in addressing these challenges, whilst at the same time having high overall standards. The implication is that schools can become more effective through a focus on the progress of all of their students. These materials are intended to help schools consider the practical implications of this way of thinking. The ideas they present are informed by the findings of international experiences and research.

### INCLUSION AND EQUITY

The promotion of inclusion and equity is not simply a technical or organizational change. Rather, it is a movement in a clear philosophical direction that involves the development of a welcoming and supportive culture within school communities. The creation of such a cultural change requires a shared commitment amongst school staff. It is therefore crucial that those who need to be involved have a clear sense of what is intended. In particular, the terms 'inclusion' and 'equity' must be clearly defined in ways that will speak to a diverse range of stakeholders.

The following definitions provided in the UNESCO *Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education* (2017) are particularly helpful:

- **Inclusion** is a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners.
- **Equity** is about ensuring fairness, where the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance.



The central message is therefore simple: *every learner matters and matters equally*. The complexity arises, however, when we try to turn this principle into action. This is likely to require significant changes in thinking and practice within schools. This resource pack has been designed with this agenda in mind: it is about the development of thinking, policies and practice within schools.

## AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

There is not one single model of what an inclusive school looks like. What is common to highly inclusive schools, however, is that they are welcoming and supportive places for all of their students, not least for those with disabilities, learners from national minorities and others who experience difficulties in learning and/or socialisation. This does not prevent these schools from being committed to improving the achievements of all their students. Indeed, they use strategies for strengthening achievement that are typical of those employed by all effective schools. The emphasis on supporting vulnerable students contributes to the development of these strategies.

Successful schools are inclusive in the sense that all the students are expected to make progress in their learning. They are also safe, welcoming and free of violence, including gender-based violence. This does not happen by chance. Rather, it occurs as a result of the way the school is managed in order to create an atmosphere where everybody – students, staff and families - feels valued and supported. Another key factor is the emphasis placed on monitoring and supporting the individual progress of all the students.

When schools are successful in moving towards a more inclusive direction, there is usually a degree of consensus amongst adults around values of respect for difference and a commitment to offering all students access to learning opportunities. Whilst this consensus is unlikely to be total, it is indicative of the growth of a *culture of inclusion*.

In such contexts, there is likely to be a high level of staff collaboration, joint problem-solving and shared responsibilities. Similar values and commitments may extend into the student body, and amongst families and other community stakeholders associated with the school. These schools are also likely to be characterised by forms of organisation (such as specialist support being made within the classroom, rather than by withdrawal) and practices which could be regarded as participatory by definition (such as cooperative group work).

## ORGANISATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

What we see in more inclusive schools are forms of organisation that are intended to co-ordinate the actions of staff and children behind agreed principles. These have to work in ways that do not reduce the discretion of individual teachers to practice according to their own preferences.

Teaching is a complex and often unpredictable business that requires a degree of improvisation. Indeed, a significant hallmark of an inclusive school is the degree to which the teachers are prepared to adjust their practices in the light of the feedback they receive from members of their classes.

Consequently, teachers must have sufficient autonomy to make instant decisions that take account of the individuality of their students and the uniqueness of every encounter that occurs. What is needed, therefore, is a well-coordinated, co-operative style of working that gives individual teachers the confidence to improvise in a search for the most appropriate responses to all the students in their classes.

Relationships are the key to establishing greater coordination. Research suggests that school relationships may be structured in one of three ways: *individualistically, competitively or cooperatively*.

In schools with an individualistic form of organization, teachers tend to work alone to achieve goals which may be unrelated to the goals of their colleagues. Consequently, there is little sense of common purpose, no sharing of expertise and limited support for individuals. Furthermore, such schools often move towards a more competitive form of organization.

In a competitive system, teachers (and students) strive to do better than their colleagues, recognising that their fates are negatively linked, since the success of any individual is likely to be enhanced by the failure of others. In this win-lose struggle to succeed, it is almost inevitable that individuals will celebrate difficulties experienced by their colleagues, since these are likely to increase their own chances of success.

Clearly, the organisational approach that is most likely to create a positive working atmosphere within a school is one that emphasises cooperation. Therefore, the aim must be to encourage a system within which the efforts of individuals are coordinated in order to maximise their collective impact. In such a school, individuals are more likely to strive for mutual benefit, recognising that they all share a common purpose and, indeed, a common fate. Furthermore, individual teachers know that their performance can be influenced positively by the performance of others. This being the case, individuals feel proud when a colleague succeeds and is recognised for their competence.

## ADDRESSING BARRIERS

Like all major policy changes, progress in relation to inclusion and equity requires an effective strategy for implementation. In particular, it requires new thinking that focuses attention on the barriers experienced by some learners that lead them to become marginalised as a result of contextual factors, such as inappropriate curricula and assessment methods, inadequate teacher preparation and support, and forms of teaching that do not take account of learner diversity.

Barriers may also be to do with the assumptions upon which practice is based. This may be connected to deeply entrenched systems of marginalisation that sort and segregate students by classifications to do with race, ability, gender, language, ethnicity and socio-economic status. All of this means that progress in relation to inclusion is complex and context-specific.

The implication is that overcoming such barriers is the most important means of developing forms of education that are effective for all students. In this way, the focus on inclusion and equity becomes a way of achieving the overall improvement of education systems.

## USING EVIDENCE

In order to move forward, it is important to know who is included, who feels marginalised and who is excluded. Therefore, we need to ask questions such as: *Which of our students are absent? Who is missing out? What are the barriers experienced by these learners?*

Engaging with evidence in relation to these questions can help foster the development of practices that are more effective in including hard to reach learners. Specifically, this can create space for rethinking by interrupting existing ways of working within a school. Particularly, powerful techniques for generating evidence involve the use of mutual lesson observation, sometimes through video recordings, and comments collected from students about teaching and learning arrangements within a school (see the Collaborative Inquiry Guide provided below for more details on methods for collecting evidence).

Under certain conditions, such approaches provide interruptions that stimulate self-questioning, creativity and action. In doing so, they can lead to a reframing of perceived problems that, in turn, draws the teacher's attention to overlooked possibilities for addressing barriers to participation and learning. In this way, differences amongst students, staff and schools become a catalyst for improvement.

## TEACHERS LEARNING TOGETHER

Evidence from the OECD suggests that countries where teachers believe their profession is valued achieve higher levels of equity in learning outcomes. With this in mind, schools need to be reformed in ways that will lead teachers to feel supported in responding positively to student diversity – seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed but as opportunities for enriching learning. In this way, a consideration of difficulties experienced by students can provide an agenda for change and insights as to how such changes might be achieved.

All of this points to the importance of forms of leadership that encourages colleagues to challenge one another's assumptions about particular students and what they can achieve. As explained above, research suggests that this can lead schools to develop an 'inclusive culture'. Within such schools, there is a consensus amongst adults around values of respect for difference and a commitment to offering all students access to learning opportunities.

This consensus may not be total and does not necessarily remove all tensions or contradictions in practice. On the other hand, there is likely to be a high level of staff collaboration and joint problem solving, and similar values and commitments may extend into the student body, and to parents and other community stakeholders. The implication is that senior staff within a school have to create a climate within which professional learning can take place.

### THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

A school that is based upon a cooperative structure that encourages an engagement with evidence is likely to make better use of the expertise of all members of its community. It does this by providing sources of stimulation and enrichment that will foster their learning and development, and encourage positive attitudes to the introduction of new ways of working.

This may require new thinking and practices amongst headteachers and their senior colleagues, who have to:

- Challenge the status quo of traditional approaches to teaching;
- Inspire a clear mutual vision of what the school should and could be;
- Lead by example, using cooperative procedures;
- Encourage staff members to persist and keep striving together to improve their expertise; and
- Promote collaborative relationships with families and communities.

Senior staff must also place a strong emphasis on the building of cooperative teams and the use of collaborative inquiry to stimulate experimentation with new ways of working.



# ACTIVITY 2

## USING THE SCHOOL REVIEW FRAMEWORK

### AIM

**To begin the process of reviewing the school in relation to inclusion and equity.**

### PROCESS

1. The School Review Framework is introduced to participants, noting that the indicators and questions are based on international research regarding the factors that are associated with progress in developing schools that are inclusive and equitable.
2. Using a four-point rating scale, individual participants score the performance of their school against the indicators, where:  
**A means:** The school is doing well. There are several significant strengths, and no obvious weaknesses.  
**B means:** The school is doing quite well. On balance, strengths outweigh weaknesses.  
**C means:** The school is not doing very well. On balance, weaknesses outweigh strengths.  
**D means:** The school is doing badly. There are no obvious strengths and several significant weaknesses.
3. Participants share their thoughts on this process and discuss implications for next steps in relation to these questions:
  - What are the strengths that our school can build on?
  - What are the main challenges and how might these be addressed?
  - What should our next steps be?



## THE SCHOOL REVIEW FRAMEWORK

### 1.1 Everyone is made to feel safe and welcome

- Do students in the school feel safe?
- Are parents and visitors made to feel welcome on arrival at the school?
- Is accessible information about the school made available?

### 1.2 Students are equally valued

- Is the work of all students acknowledged and, where possible, displayed around the school and classrooms?
- Are all students encouraged to take part in all school activities?
- Do some students have a leadership role in the school?

### 1.3 There are high expectations for all students

- Do all students feel that they are expected to achieve?
- Are the achievements of all students celebrated?

### 1.4 Staff and students treat one another with respect

- Are there warm and friendly relationships between staff and students?
- Is respect shown for different languages, cultural traditions and religious beliefs?

### 1.5 There is a partnership between staff and families

- Is there effective communication between homes and school?
- Do parents feel they are involved in supporting their children's learning?

### 1.6 The school is accessible to all students

- Are efforts made to overcome potential barriers to participation and learning?
- Can students and adults with disabilities gain access to all parts of the building?
- Are students who speak a different language helped to participate?

### 1.7 Senior staff support teachers in making sure that all students participate and learn

- Are there regular staff development activities focused on the improvement of teaching?
- Do senior staff observe lessons and offer supportive suggestions for improvement?
- Do teachers have opportunities to observe one another's practices?

### 1.8 The school monitors the presence, participation and achievement of all students

- Are there systems in place for checking on student attendance in school and during lessons?
- Is the school aware of specific reasons why students do not attend school at times due to practices in the wider school community?
- Are students offered opportunities to comment on how it feels to be a member of the school?
- Is the progress and achievements of every student tracked?



# ACTIVITY 3

## ACCOUNTS OF PRACTICE

### AIM

**To learn from the experiences of other schools that have made progress in promoting inclusion and equity.**

### PROCESS

1. Individual participants read one of the four accounts, so that a quarter of the group look at each one. It is explained that the accounts may be in contexts that are different in terms of national policies, traditions and available resources.
2. Groups are formed of participants that have read the same account. Having discussed the account, they agree on a summary of the key ideas that have emerged.
3. The groups all come together and explain the accounts they have read and the key ideas that have emerged from their discussion.
4. Consideration is given to lessons that have been learnt from this activity and their implications for their school.

### THE ACCOUNTS OF PRACTICE

These examples are intended to stimulate discussion about what schools need to do in order to address the challenges associated with inclusion and equity. As the accounts are read, it is important to remember that contexts and resources are different across the world. Therefore, the approaches used by the schools in these examples would need to be changed to fit in with different circumstances in diverse communities.

What is common to the four examples is the emphasis placed on using evidence to analyse barriers facing some learners and the importance of collective efforts to address these difficulties. This also points to the importance of leadership in moving things forward.

## ACCOUNT 1 'TALKING ABOUT INCLUSION'

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- How diverse is your school?
- What does the school do in response to differences amongst the students?
- What actions are needed to improve this situation?

Becoming more inclusive involves learning how to live with differences and, indeed, learning how to learn from differences. This account describes how, over a twelve months period, a primary school carried out a project to strengthen its teaching approaches in relation to this idea. This involved an inquiry-based approach that stimulated considerable debate. Significantly, the students themselves played a key role in what happened.

**THE CONTEXT.** The school caters for about 200 students in the age range 3-11. It has served a multicultural community for many years. Currently, there are 23 different nationalities, with 19 different languages spoken amongst the families. Ethnic diversity is not only related to children that attend the school but also to members of staff. Commenting on this, the headteacher explained,

*'Any religious or cultural thing I'm not sure about, there is always somebody I can ask.'*

The motto of the school, 'All different, all equal', reflects the commitment amongst staff to ensure that differences are valued and that everybody's background is treated with respect. This is not just a motto, however, but a deeply held philosophy throughout the school community.

A newly appointed assistant head teacher took the lead in coordinating efforts to strengthen the commitment to inclusion in the school. She began by holding a staff meeting to brief her new colleagues. Later, she repeated this briefing for administrative staff, lunchtime organisers and the team of support assistants. In this way, almost everybody was informed of what was being proposed.

**COLLECTING EVIDENCE.** Throughout the consultations that took place, the school was able to identify children whose progress was a cause for concern. Further information was gathered from parents using a questionnaire, which had to be translated for some families. Another staff meeting was devoted to discussion as to how the views of children could be gathered. This started with a consideration of existing practices in the school for listening to the voice of students. The school also carried out a survey of children's views, using questionnaires. These were translated for those children that needed it. In the early years classes, the surveys were carried out as whole-class activities.

The assistant head analysed the responses for each class and then for the whole school. Though this was time-consuming, she believed that it was really helpful in drawing attention to issues in the school that needed addressing. So much so that she decided to carry out another survey later in the year to see if there were changes in children's views about the school. She also felt that it was particularly important to capture the views of new arrivals. In addition, staff completed questionnaires that could be looked at alongside the evidence recorded at the various meetings that took place.

**GETTING FOCUSED.** At a further meeting, the staff had a chance to look at the evidence that had been collected. Understandably, everybody wanted to see how their own classes had responded, as well as compare the results with those of the rest of the school.

As a result, it was decided to allocate a two-week period for the use of various student voice activities in every class. The assistant head organised a schedule for this and also reminded the teachers who the target children were. As each teacher carried out the activities in their classes, a colleague would observe the process, looking specifically at the way individual children responded. In this way, they were able to integrate student voice activities into their day-to-day teaching and learning, something that subsequently became a part of usual practice across the school.

During this same period, senior staff and support assistants also took part in a programme of observations, focusing in particular on the involvement of the children that had been targeted. It was found necessary to adapt the observation schedules they used in order to leave more space for comments. What was most unusual was the way that all of this was concentrated into a two-week period. This led to a period of intensive debate within the school.

The idea of doing observations whilst the student voice activities were being carried out was very successful in the sense that everybody's attention was focused for this particular period of time. Staff felt that the observations helped them a lot, gave them lots of positive feelings and made them see things from different angles.

Later in the year, student focus groups were held. Led by the headteacher and the assistant head, it proved to be helpful to have someone else in the room that could take notes, whilst they were leading the conversations, so that the lead person was not distracted. Each class teacher nominated children for the focus groups, including some of the targeted children. Commenting, the assistant head said, 'We deliberately chose those children because we really wanted to give them the opportunity to express themselves'.

**IMPACT.** By the end of the school year there was strong evidence that the strategies used had led to significant changes in thinking and practice in a school that was already highly committed to finding ways of responding to student diversity. As part of this process, safety in the school became a major area of discussion, something that had not been anticipated.

There was no doubt that children thought that their school had become a happier place to be and a better environment to learn. Arguably the most important impact, however, was the way it opened up an intense period of discussion about what inclusion really means. Out of this came an even greater commitment to ensure that no child is overlooked.

Interestingly, whilst all of this was going on in the school, scores on national tests improved significantly. The head explained, 'These are our best results ever'. It seems, therefore, that efforts to strengthen inclusion had contributed to the overall improvement of learning in the school.

## ACCOUNT 2 'INVISIBLE STUDENTS'

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- Are there students who are overlooked in your school?
- What do you know about them?
- How might you find out more about their experiences in schools?

A group of six teachers in a large secondary school were invited to form a research group. They had a feeling that some young people did not feel that they belonged to the school. It seemed, too, that there might be a connection between this and a more general lack of interest in school amongst students.

With this in mind, the team decided to identify students in Year 9 who appeared to demonstrate this sense of disinterest within the recorded punishments and merits they received via the school's behaviour system.

**A SAMPLE.** Looking at what happened during the first weeks of term, the research group was surprised to find that about 25% of the students - with equal numbers of boys and girls - seemed to be 'invisible'. Even more surprising was that - contrary to expectations - these students were from across the ability range. Consequently, the team decided to investigate the experiences of these students more closely to see what this could tell them about practices within the school. With this in mind, they observed the students in class to see what their experiences of learning and interactions were. The aim was to observe the lessons 'through the eyes of the students'.

A decision was made to concentrate on 12 students, six of each sex. The teachers focused attention on four main areas: the interaction and relationship between students and teachers; the interaction of the students with the tasks set; the interaction of the students with their peers; and the general disposition of the students. The group then wrote short summaries about what they had found out.

**BECOMING FOCUSED.** Whilst there were minor differences in what was observed, the teachers were struck by how similar the experiences of the students were. In particular, they noticed that their targeted students were rarely named or approached in class. Rather, they were usually seen to work through their tasks quietly, often finishing before other students, but not then demanding attention. During whole-class question and answer sessions they were generally unassertive in their body language, half of them hardly ever raising their hands or not responding at all.

As a consequence of these 'surprises', the team decided to carry out focus group discussions with the students to find out what they had to say about their classroom experiences and the school more generally. Their hunches were that these students did not want to be noticed - that they were happy to not be the focus of attention in lessons. Once again, however, their assumptions were challenged by what the students said.



**STUDENT VIEWS.** During the focus groups, the students were asked to identify and write down a recent learning experience where they had felt involved and engaged in learning, and conversely, activities where they have not felt involved or engaged. They were then asked to expand on these, and to discuss issues around fairness and being listened to within the school. They were told that names of teachers or subjects would be removed, and that anything they said would be treated confidentially.

The students were well able to articulate what they felt worked and did not work for them. They were also acutely and sometimes painfully aware that some students got more attention than they did. Among other things, they articulated their dislike for copying out texts, and their enjoyment of activities where they could think for themselves, as long as tasks were explained and they 'felt part' of the activity.

Some students spoke passionately about their feelings of being ignored during lessons and the sense that this was unfair. For example, one girl explained how she would sometimes put her hand up to ask for advice. Seeing the teacher walking towards her, she would then be disappointed to see that an incident elsewhere in the classroom would then distract the teacher's attention.

Other students complained that, although they attended each day, working hard and always completing their homework on time, they rarely received commendations. Meanwhile they noticed that potentially disruptive students were often rewarded for what seemed like short periods of passive behaviour.

**ANALYSIS AND ACTIONS.** The observation notes and transcripts were then analysed and sections of dialogue on similar themes were grouped together. The staff group members identified any sections that jumped out at them - that made them stop and think, or that taught them something new about their students, and practices and beliefs within the school. This process was repeated several times until, finally, the extracts were organised around the following themes: learning activities, copying, group work, getting help and having tasks explained, treatment of loud and quiet students, teacher talking, and praise for 'good' and 'bad' students.

Because the experience of gathering evidence had been powerful for the team, they decided to consult the headteacher about next steps. As a result, it was decided that the findings should be presented at a meeting of the senior leadership team. At the meeting, some senior colleagues were evidently surprised and taken aback by the evidence. As a result, a whole school meeting was arranged to discuss the implications of the evidence that had been collected.

## ACCOUNT 3 ‘RETHINKING THE AGENDA’

**Consider these questions as you read this account:**

- Is evidence used in your school to analyse the experiences of those students who are a cause for concern?
- To what extent are the views of students considered?
- Are meetings of teachers held to solve problems together?

In some instances, an initial engagement with evidence can lead staff to rethink the way they formulate their research agendas. This happened at a secondary school that has approximately 40% of students from an ethnic minority background.

The head teacher decided that he wanted to investigate disaffection in the school. Seven boys had been permanently excluded during the previous year and it had been noted that a disproportionate number of these students, five in all, had been of minority heritage. With this as the focus, a staff research group led by the deputy headteacher was formed to find out more.

**THE FOCUS.** The staff group assumed that the difficulties were related to boys being part of a youth subculture within their community, and a problematic generation gap between these boys and their parents. A senior member of staff explained

*‘On the whole [the exclusions] were not for one-off incidents but rather for series of incidents that we could not find a way through to resolving successfully... Our approach first and foremost is to support the student, and permanent exclusion is very much a last resort for us’.*

He went on to explain that when issues arose with these boys, they generally had parental support for how they dealt with them, adding

*‘...it was very rare that a parent wasn’t working alongside us to try and find a successful solution’.*

The teacher added that these boys had shown signs of disaffection lower down the school. When asked if the staff had felt this might be related to ethnicity or culture, he talked about his belief that these young people’s parents were probably relatively unaware of their children’s lifestyles outside of the family home. Based on glimpses of a sub-culture, which some members of staff had gleaned from hearing informal conversations between students, they also suspected that these students came into contact with drug-related activities, organised fights and a gang culture. Regarding the comment about students’ views on the seriousness of exclusion, the one thing they all had in common was that they did think it was serious.

**USING EVIDENCE.** The staff research team identified 26 students whose behaviour had given most concern. 24 of them turned out to be boys and most were from Years 8 to 10. A behaviour database was used to carry out this analysis, although later members of the team realised they could have gone on their hunches.

The staff conducted focus group discussions for each year group, all of which were prompted by similar questions, and observed by a member of the pastoral team. In addition, some staff were interviewed about their views about exclusions and student behaviour.

In general, the students recognised that they displayed challenging behaviour in school. They felt that, whilst they often were punished because of this, the school's actions were generally fair. They did not pick out any particular teachers or subjects where they felt they were treated less fairly than other students, or where they behaved more badly. They tended to share similar views about lessons, learning, being punished and reasons for feeling disaffected regardless of their ethnicity, and none of their reasons for challenging behaviour and disaffection appeared to be related to race issues. All the students realised that exclusion was serious and that it significantly impacted on future career opportunities. They also commented that their parents would be upset and disappointed in them if they were excluded.

**RETHINKING.** The group's focus of attention changed, however, when, on closer analysis, it became evident that a common feature of these students was that they all had reading levels significantly lower than their chronological reading ages, in some cases by more than three years. In contrast, only one out of them recognised that he or she had a reading problem, and that was a Year 7 student. Clearly, this could be because these young people did not want to see themselves as having a weakness, or because they saw 'getting by' as being enough.

The deputy head explained that they had found that about 40% of all their students between Years 7 to 11 had reading levels below their chronological reading ages, with some of the gaps being 'absolutely shocking'. He added that staff were not fully aware of this figure and, similarly, they were probably not fully aware of those young people in their lessons who had weak reading and writing skills, nor the extent of their struggle. Despite some of them knowing about the low levels of literacy across the school, it was still, he explained, confronting to see the correlation between low reading ages and disaffection amongst the focus groups. Although a relatively small number of the students might have been excluded due to serious disaffection, these might have indicated a much larger number of students who were not as engaged as they could be because of literacy.

An example was reported of when a teacher, not knowing the students very well, asked them to read in front of a class. Rather than admitting their inability to read, the student might respond with challenging behaviour or, less evidently, simply switch off. It was noted that learning outcomes tended to dip towards the end of Year 7 and during Year 8, not just because of impending adolescence and peer pressure, but also because students found reading and writing a lot harder.

As a result of this rethinking, in the following school year there was a major effort focused on ways of fostering literacy across the curriculum, particularly in years 7 and 8.

## ACCOUNT 4 'BECOMING A PROBLEM-SOLVING COMMUNITY'

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- How well does your school deal with children who present challenging behaviour?
- Do you have a behaviour policy in your school? If so, does it take account of students with challenging behaviour and are you sure that they are receiving the support they need?
- What ideas do you draw from this account, particularly regarding professional development?

The primary school is popular with families in the local area. What strikes the visitor to the school is the diversity amongst the children, some of who are disabled, as well as the way in which the idea of support for learning seems to permeate everything that goes on. During the morning assembly, for example, children with disabilities sit alongside their classmates. The head teacher recalls one particular boy who regularly used to scream out in the assembly. *'There was no way he wasn't coming in'*, she remarked.

Occasionally during the assembly, a student may make what appears to be an inappropriate noise or comment, none of which seems to disturb the rest of the children. Sometimes a member of staff may step near to a child to quieten him or her with a gentle touch on the arm, or with a whispered remark. Similarly, children are also seen occasionally prompting their neighbour to be quiet or to sit still. As the children walk quietly out of the hall in their class lines, a little girl gently nudges a youngster with Down's Syndrome in the right direction.

**PROVIDING SUPPORT.** This emphasis on child-to-child support is always there and has clearly been deeply embedded in the social pattern of the whole school. Apart from assemblies, it is evident in many other contexts, including the classrooms, the playground and the dining area. It is low key and taken for granted in such a way that it is not the job of any individual or group. Rather, it is a shared responsibility. The head teacher explains with obvious pleasure that so many parents now express pride that the children are all learning to care for others.

Of course, none of this has happened by chance. Throughout the school, adults are seen to model ways of supporting children in ways that does not create dependency, and to offer their advice when it is felt to be necessary. So, for example, on one occasion a child was advised, *'There's no need to hold his hand'*. Such advice may also be given to adults. In one classroom, where the children were getting ready for physical education, a new member of the support staff was told by the teacher, *'Let her do it herself, she's good at dressing'*.

However, this sensitive approach to support is perhaps most evident within the classrooms where, once again, it seems to be a seamless blend of responsive and light-handed adult intervention, complemented by lots of child-to-child cooperation.

**POLICIES.** Teachers explain that they emphasise clear routines in the belief that this benefits the learning of all children. In this context, staff argue that agreed lesson plans have made a useful contribution, not least in respect to the participation and learning of children whose behaviour can sometimes be challenging, who, it was reported, respond particularly well to the sense of routine that these strategies demand.



The school's behaviour policy is hardly evident during lessons. There are a small number of 'golden rules' that everybody is expected to follow. Then, the members of each class determine their own further rules. Classes also have a 'behaviour book' where notes are made of particular good or bad behaviour. Three negative entries lead to a detention, but this seems to be a very rare event.

The head teacher explained that each week they hold a 'celebration assembly' when children bring in their work to show to the whole school. She clearly takes great pleasure in the way that the majority of the children applaud what might appear to be very small steps of progress taken by some of the children. She mentions, too, that many of the parents have noted the strides taken by these children over a period of years.

**STAFF DEVELOPMENT.** In probing those within the school in order to learn more about what had facilitated the development of these policies and practices, one key theme becomes apparent. This suggests that what has happened involves what can only be described as a social process of professional learning. Stimulated by some children whose unusual and challenging behaviour demands experimentation and creativity, groups of staff seem to have developed a greater capacity to work collaboratively in order to solve problems. In this way, working in teams seems to have become a distinctive feature of the school's work. Commenting on this, the headteacher states, *'When it works well it is stunning really'*. Here one important factor relates to the management and use of time. In a busy school, with so many competing demands, time is always an issue for staff. Teachers get little time away from the children during the school day and, of course, the presence of some youngsters who need additional support adds to this pressure. Here, this has certainly been the case, not least because their unusual behaviour and difficulties of learning present considerable new challenges to the class teachers. Consequently, it was found necessary to build in weekly time for colleagues to talk about the problems they faced.

It seems, then, that through cooperative problem solving and mutual support, staff within the school have grown more confident that they can find ways of dealing with extremely challenging behaviour and, in doing so, in finding ways of overcoming difficulties in learning. The head teacher put it this way: *'It's not about complicated written down planning. It's the time to talk. Things evolve'*.

**FORMS OF LEADERSHIP.** One of the head teacher's most important role had been in fostering amongst the staff a sense of common purpose. Driven by a strong personal commitment to equal opportunities, she seems to have been remarkably successful in leading the whole school community - staff, students, and parents - in ways that have led to a commitment to educational inclusion. As a result, there is evidence of considerable agreement as to the meaning of certain key principles, particular the notion of inclusion.

As we have seen, the school also has a well thought out understanding of the purposes of support. Alongside this, there is a recognition of the potential of differences to enrich people's lives by stimulating creativity. As a result, the presence of children with extremely challenging behaviour has stimulated a process by which this school has become a problem-solving community.



# ACTIVITY 4

## CARRYING OUT COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

### AIM

**To plan and carry out a process of collaborative inquiry within school.**

### PROCESS

1. A group is formed in the school that will plan and coordinate the collaborative inquiry.
2. The group use the Collaborative Inquiry Guide provided below and its Appendix to carry out the process.
3. Following their collaborative inquiry, the group agrees on a summary of the findings and share these with others within the school.
4. The process leads to a plan of action to be implemented in the school.

## THE COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY GUIDE

This guide outlines a process for carrying out collaborative inquiry within a school. It should be used flexibly, taking account of local factors and circumstances. The process should be led by a coordination group set up within a school, taking account of ideas that emerged from the discussions of the School Review Framework.

The collaborative inquiry process involves six over-lapping steps, as follows:

**1. ANALYSING OUR CONTEXT.** In order to develop effective strategies for reaching learners who are vulnerable to marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement, there is a need to analyse contexts within the school and its community. In this way, initial ideas can be developed as to the sorts of barriers experienced by these learners and what actions might need to be taken to overcome them. This is why it is helpful to have members of the coordination group who have different perspectives on the life of the school.

### **Issues to consider:**

- Which students are missing out within our school?
- What do we know about these learners?
- Which group(s) should we focus attention on?
- What are our initial ideas about the factors that lead to their marginalisation?

**2. COLLECTING EVIDENCE.** Building on initial hunches, arrangements need to be made to collect additional evidence of various forms to deepen the analysis. Here evidence can take many forms (see the Appendix for suggestions). This is likely to start with a consideration of statistical material that is readily available within the school, such as attendance and performance data, or other home-grown evidence. This may point to individuals and groups for whom there is concern. This gives a general picture of what is happening in the school in relation to these students. The next step involves a much more specific analysis of the situation using qualitative evidence, including information provided by the students themselves. Research has found that such evidence can provide a powerful means of moving schools forward, not least because it may challenge the assumptions of staff as to why some students are vulnerable to marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement. It may also draw attention to students who are being overlooked.

### **Issues to consider:**

- What further information do we need about these students?
- How can we collect, record and analyse this information?
- Who needs to be involved?

**3. MAKING SENSE OF THE EVIDENCE.** Having collected and considered various kinds of evidence, the coordination group will need to plan ways of encouraging widespread discussion within their school community as to the issues that need to be considered. This is likely to involve placing the matter on the agendas of the senior management team, appropriate staff meetings, and student and parent groups. Some schools have also found it useful to involve representatives from their partner schools in these discussions, not least because ‘outsiders’ can helpfully ask questions and note patterns that ‘insiders’ are overlooking. In a sense, this is a way of ‘making the familiar unfamiliar’ in order to encourage deeper processes of reflection within the school community. Where this is well led, it is a means of drawing people together around a common sense of purpose.

**Issues to consider:**

- What does the evidence suggest about the experience of this group of students?
- What factors appear to be associated with their lack of progress?
- Who needs to be involved in making sense of this evidence?
- What might we do to address these factors?
- What aspects of our school need to be considered?

**4. MOVING FORWARD.** Having established areas for development, it will be necessary for the group to formulate strategies for involving the school community in moving forward. Here, the overall approach is based on the assumption that schools know more than they use and that the logical starting point for development is with a detailed analysis of existing ways of working. This allows good practices to be identified and shared, whilst, at the same time, drawing attention to ways of working that may be creating barriers to the presence, participation and learning of some students. At this point, it is helpful to remember the old adage, school improvement is technically simple but socially complex. In other words, whilst planning the actions that are needed is likely to be relatively straight forward, the challenge for the coordination group is to find ways of getting everybody involved. Inevitably, the actual strategies adopted will depend upon the nature of the areas being addressed.

**Issues to consider:**

- What actions are we proposing to improve the experience of this group of students?
- What aspects of our school do we need to change?
- Who needs to be involved in moving forward?
- What actions should we take to involve them?

**5. INVOLVING PARTNERS.** The involvement of external partners will be important as the school moves forward in relation to its plans, particularly families. In addition, there is considerable evidence that school-to-school collaboration can add value to the efforts of individual schools to develop more equitable ways of working. This shows how collaboration between schools can help reduce the polarisation of educational centres to benefit, particularly, those students who are marginalised at the edges of the system and whose performance and attitudes cause concern. There is evidence, too, that when schools seek to develop more collaborative ways of working, this can have an impact on how teachers



perceive themselves and their work. Specifically, sharing and comparing practices can lead school staff to view underachieving students in a new light. Rather than simply presenting problems that are assumed to be insurmountable, such students may be perceived as providing feedback on existing classroom and school arrangements. In this way, they may be seen as sources of understanding as to how these arrangements might be developed in ways that could be of benefit to all school members.

**Issues to consider:**

- Who do we need to involve from outside the school?
- How can we get them involved?
- In what ways can they add value to our efforts?

**6. MONITORING PROGRESS.** As the school moves forward with its plans, it is necessary for the process of implementation to be carefully and frequently monitored. Evidence gathering will also be needed in order to determine the impact in terms of the presence, participation and achievements of students. The group has a key role in coordinating this work. Senior staff must also be involved in gathering, generating and interpreting information in order to create an inquiring stance throughout the school. It is anticipated that as these activities develop, they will have a wider impact. In this way, the initial focus on groups of learners seen as being 'at risk' is likely to challenge existing practices within the schools. This locates the work firmly at the centre of a schools' overall development plans.

**Issues to consider:**

- What are the outcomes we are seeking?
- What do we expect to see happening in the process of achieving these outcomes?
- How do we monitor these actions and their impact on student presence, participation and progress?

## IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

In thinking about this kind of collaborative inquiry, it is essential to recognise that it does not provide a simple recipe for promoting inclusion and equity that can be lifted and transferred from place to place. Rather, it defines an approach to improvement that uses processes of contextual analysis in order to design strategies that fit particular circumstances. This involves an engagement with various forms of evidence, leading to the development of locally determined strategies.

What is most distinctive about the approach is that it is led from within schools. It is predictable, however, that this will lead to periods of organisational 'turbulence'. The nature of this phenomenon will vary from place to place, but in general it arises as a result of the reactions of individuals within a school to ideas and approaches that disrupt the status quo of their day-to-day lives. It is worth noting, however, that there is research evidence to suggest that without periods of turbulence, successful, long-lasting change is unlikely to occur. In this sense, turbulence can be seen as a useful indication that things are on the move. At the same time, it underlines the importance of sensitive, supportive leadership.



# APPENDIX

## METHODS FOR COLLECTING EVIDENCE IN SCHOOLS

Methods of inquiry can take many forms. When used effectively, they can help to develop a deeper understanding of the way those within a school construct meaning about their experiences. This can, in turn, stimulate experimentation and professional learning. These notes explain some possible methods that schools may find useful.

### STATISTICS

Large quantities of statistical information are usually available in schools regarding attendance, behaviour and student performance. These are an excellent starting point for a school-based investigation.

In recent years the extent and sophistication of such data have improved, so much so that the progress of groups and individuals can now be tracked in considerable detail, giving a much greater sense of the value that a school is adding to its students. If necessary, further relevant statistical material can be collected through questionnaire surveys of the views of students, staff members and, where relevant, parents and carers. However, of itself, statistical information on its own tells us very little. What brings such data to life is when 'insiders' start to scrutinise and ask questions together as to their significance, bringing detailed experiences and knowledge to bear on the process of interpretation. Even then, there are still limitations that need to be kept in mind. Statistics provide patterns of what exists: they tell us what things are like but give little understanding as to why things are as they are, or how they came to be like that. This is why experts in research promote the idea of using mixed methods. It is why evidence collected through qualitative approaches is needed to supplement statistical data. More specifically, qualitative research methods can help us to address 'how' and 'why' questions, in order to determine what actions need to be taken to initiate change in a school.

### QUALITATIVE METHODS

These can take many forms. When used effectively, they can help us develop a deeper understanding of the way participants within schools and classrooms construct meaning about their experiences. Possible methods include the following:

- **INTERVIEWS.** In which participation should be voluntary, are usually a key element of data collection. There are many possible approaches to conducting interviews as part of school-based inquiry. They may be guided by a set of pre-arranged questions that require almost predictable responses. On the other hand, they may take the form of a focused discussion around a set of prompting themes. Interviews may take place with individuals or in groups. Focus groups are an attractive method, especially when conducting research with students in schools, not least because it is possible to include a larger group of participants. However, there is a danger, particularly with children, that the views of particularly confident individuals may shape the contributions of others.



- **TAKING A LEARNING WALK.** Learning walks are organised visits around a school's learning areas by groups of colleagues. In some instances, students may also be involved. The walks may be pre-focused on an agreed agenda or kept open for those involved to pick out 'things they notice'. During and following the walk, colleagues are encouraged to reflect on what they have seen in a way that is intended to encourage sharing of ideas and mutual challenge. Another version of this approach involves groups of staff from partner schools in scrutinising examples of children's work in a way that encourages those involved to reconsider their working definitions of quality.

- **OBSERVATION.** This is an essential element of attempts to improve practices within a school, since research suggests that such developments are unlikely to occur without some exposure to what teaching actually looks like when it is being done differently. Observations can take different forms, depending on the nature of the improvement agenda. So, for example, they may be guided by a relatively focused set of indicators, or, at the other extreme, by a series of open questions or themes. In addition, unexpected events can reveal something of significance to the enquiry. Learning how to observe within classrooms and in a school environment is a challenge - there is always a great deal going on, and it is easy to become distracted. Sometimes it helps to make video recordings, although, again, there are advantages and limitations to this method of data recording. It is useful to be able to replay the recording in order to look at sections in more detail, and it is good for groups of colleagues to discuss a video recording. On the other hand, the video camera can only record what is within the frame and important events may be missed.

- **LISTENING TO LEARNERS.** Discussions with students are a particularly powerful stimulus for professional development. These may be guided by a set of pre-arranged questions; or, on the other hand, they may take the form of a focused discussion around a set of prompting themes. Interviews may take place with individuals, or in groups. Teachers can use the approach as part of focus discussions with small groups of students, within a whole class context, or with individual students. It can also involve students acting as researchers within their school, provided that they receive appropriate training and support.

- **SEEING THINGS DIFFERENTLY.** Beyond conventional observation and interview procedures, there is room for the use of more creative approaches in order to capture the views of others, particularly those of children. Shadowing groups of youngsters through a school day can provide adults with new and sometimes disturbing insights into what it is like to be a learner in their school. For example, in one secondary school it was surprising for staff to discover how some students go through the whole day without hearing an adult use their name. Such experiences remind us of the subtle ways in which some young people come to feel marginalised. Visual methods, too, can be a particularly powerful way of engaging children. So, for example, drawings can be useful as a stimulus for individual or focus group interviews. In a similar way, asking students to take photographs of different aspects of their school experience has proved to be particularly successful in enabling adults, and other children, to see school life through the eyes of the learner who has taken the photograph.



# FURTHER READING

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JOHNSON, D. W., & JOHNSON, R.T. (1989). *Leading the cooperative school*. Edina: Interaction Book Co.

OECD. (2012). *Equity and quality in education: Supporting disadvantaged students and schools*. Paris: OECD.

RIEHL, C.J. (2000). The principal's role in creating inclusive schools for diverse students: a review of normative, empirical, and critical literature on the practice of educational administration. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 55-81.

SCHLEICHER, A. (2015). *Schools for 21st-Century learners: Strong leaders, confident teachers, innovative approaches*. OECD Publishing: Paris.

SLEE, R. (2010). *The irregular school: Exclusion, schooling and inclusive education*. London: Routledge.



# LINKS TO RELEVANT RESOURCES

**Note:** Before introducing these resources to others it is important to ensure that they are appropriate for the particular context.

**'Inclusive education: Approaches, scope and content'**. This UNESCO video includes a helpful example of a school that has made progress in relation to inclusion:

<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/video/48th-ice-2008-approaches-scope-and-content>

**'Inclusive education'**. These videos and support materials argue that inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance and promotes a sense of belonging for all learners:

[https://www.alberta.ca/inclusive-education.aspx?fbclid=IwAR1wDha676UhfYAS-b5FNZpH\\_6iiWlcfKhcOrOfyyCYeu7Wj6B-kKdrimeE](https://www.alberta.ca/inclusive-education.aspx?fbclid=IwAR1wDha676UhfYAS-b5FNZpH_6iiWlcfKhcOrOfyyCYeu7Wj6B-kKdrimeE)

**'Young people's views on inclusive education'**. This video, made in Tanzania and Uganda, shows the benefits of listening to the views of young people:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyYGeW2nJVg>

**'The Index for Inclusion'**. This review and development framework has been used in many countries across the world to promote inclusion in schools:

<https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/Index%20English.pdf>

**'Empowerment, equity and excellence'**. This presentation addresses the theme of changing education systems in relation to inclusion and equity: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ir058B2\\_Z1A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ir058B2_Z1A)

**'Gender is like an ocean'**. This video, which chronicles the journey of a high school student as he transitions from female to male, explains how peers and teachers became allies in making classrooms more inclusive. Gender is like an ocean.

**'Inclusive School Reform: Reflection, Action Planning and Monitoring of Impact'**. A tool developed as part of the Inclusive School Communities Project: Inclusive School Reform.

**'Learning walks'**. Teachers visiting, observing & reflecting on their peer's work in another class):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUTIIOfma90&t=106s>

**'Your Schools Inclusion Quotient'**. A review instrument designed to give a sense of where a school is on their journey towards inclusion: Your Schools Inclusion Quotient.







DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

# GUIDE 2

This second guide supports teachers in developing more effective ways of engaging all students in their lessons. It addresses the following overall question:



*What forms of classroom practice will ensure that lessons are inclusive?*

The materials in the guide are intended to be used by teachers in a range of educational contexts, including earlier years and further education settings, to review their current ways of working in relation to inclusion and equity in order to determine ideas for moving forward.

Whilst the materials can be used in different ways to suit particular circumstances, a series of linked activities are recommended. These are:

**ACTIVITY 1: MAKING TEACHING AND LEARNING INCLUSIVE** - Encourages participants to think about how inclusive teaching and learning can be developed within their school.

**ACTIVITY 2: USING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING REVIEW FRAMEWORK** - Begins the process of reviewing teaching and learning in relation to inclusion and equity.

**ACTIVITY 3: ACCOUNTS OF PRACTICE** - Learning from the experiences of other schools that have made progress in promoting inclusive and equitable teaching and learning.

**ACTIVITY 4: USING COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY TO DEVELOP INCLUSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING** - A procedure for analysing and promoting inclusive practices.

All of these activities involve structured group projects that are intended to stimulate participation in discussions, sharing of experiences and efforts to find more effective ways of engaging all students in lessons.

Having taken part in these activities, participants should agree on an action plan to develop a continuing strategy so as to promote professional development within their schools. In this way, the learning of adults as well as children becomes a central element of school policy based on the principles of inclusion and equity. Suggested further readings and links to relevant resources are provided at the end of this document.

A young girl with a blue ponytail, wearing a pink shirt, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is seated in a wheelchair at a desk in a classroom. Other children and a teacher are visible in the background, working at their desks.

# ACTIVITY 1

## MAKING TEACHING AND LEARNING INCLUSIVE

### AIM

**To encourage participants to think about how inclusive teaching and learning can be developed within their school.**

### PROCESS

1. Read the discussion material 'Developing inclusive practices'.
2. Discuss the content with a partner.
3. In larger groups (fours or sixes), discuss the following issues:
  - What are the most interesting ideas in this discussion paper?
  - What do you think about the idea of teachers learning from one another?
  - How much use is made of cooperative learning approaches in your schools?
4. Present your findings to the other groups and consider the implications for future actions within schools.



### DISCUSSION MATERIAL: DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

As you read this material, please consider the following questions:

- Does your school encourage teachers to collaborate in developing their practices?
- Are teachers encouraged to innovate in order to find more effective ways of engaging all students in lessons?
- Are the views of students taken into account?

As stressed throughout the resource pack *Reaching Out to All Learners*, the starting point for the development of inclusive practices within a school is a close scrutiny of how existing approaches may be acting as barriers to the participation and learning of some members of the class. At the same time, this will identify encouraging practices that can be shared and built on. This discussion paper provides suggestions as to how to make this happen in a school.

### LEARNING FROM PRACTICES

The approaches recommended place considerable emphasis on the need to observe the classroom practices and to listen carefully to those involved. For example:

*This is a class made up of 9 year old boys from diverse backgrounds. Two students, who are sitting on an isolated table, are in constant contact with what is referred to as an inclusion facilitator. The class is making Eid treats today, with lots of discussion about values associated with prayers and traditions, including the importance of giving to the disadvantaged children at this holy time. With lots of answers and ideas around the subject, the two boys work on different, rather simplified and enlarged print worksheets with illustrations and lines, to connect related pictures to each other with the help of the inclusion facilitator. During the class discussion they are not called on to participate and their main focus remains on the worksheet they were handed.*

This experience raises many questions. The two boys in question are present in a regular classroom and, given their apparent learning difficulties, this would possibly not be the case in some countries. They also have the advantage of a large amount of individual attention of the sort for which parents in other countries have to fight.

On the other hand, their physical location at a separate table, on the side away from the other students, suggests that they remain marginalised, not least because the support teacher tends to stand between them and the rest of the class as she addresses them.

So, are these students included or not? Can we take lessons from this encounter that might inform the development of more inclusive practices in other schools? And how might the resources that are available be used more effectively?



## USING AVAILABLE RESOURCES

A feature of lessons that seem to be effective in encouraging student participation is the way available resources, particularly human resources, are used to support learning, as in this example:

*The small Asian country of Laos is said to be one of the economically poorest in the world. Certainly, this classroom has few material resources. The teacher spends the first ten minutes of the lesson talking to the children about a topic to do with nature. His presentation is illustrated by a drawing he has done which is pinned to the blackboard. Suddenly, the children move into groups of three to five and begin discussions. The teacher has set a question for them to address arising from his initial presentation. It is apparent from the speed with which all of this happens that the class are used to working in this way. What is also rather noticeable is the change in the atmosphere. The body language and facial expressions suggest that these children who had previously seemed rather passive were now much more engaged in the agenda that the teacher had planned.*

Examples such as this remind us that, within any classroom, students represent a rich source of experiences, inspiration, challenge and support, which, if utilised, can inject an enormous supply of additional energy into the tasks and activities that are set. However, all of this is dependent upon the skills of the teacher in harnessing this energy. This is, in part, a matter of attitude, depending upon a recognition that students have the capacity to contribute to one another's learning.

The use of co-operative group work in some countries has illustrated its potential for creating classroom conditions that can both maximise participation, whilst, at the same time, achieving high standards of learning for all students. Indeed, there is strong evidence to suggest that in instances where teachers are skilful at planning and managing the use of cooperative group learning activities as part of their repertoire, the result can be improved outcomes in terms of academic, social and psychological development. Such approaches have also been found to be an effective means of supporting the participation of 'exceptional students', e.g. those who are new to a class; children from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds; and those with disabilities. However, it is important to stress again the need for skill in orchestrating this type of classroom practice. Poorly managed group approaches usually result in considerable waste of time and, indeed, can present many opportunities for increased disruption.

Given the strengths of the arguments for cooperative learning, it would be reasonable to assume that the use of such approaches would be widespread. However, whilst it is common to see children sitting around tables in groups, a closer look confirms that often they are working on individualised tasks. In this sense, they may be getting the worst of both worlds. Individual work requires concentration that may be disturbed as a result of incidental group discussions encouraged by such seating arrangements.

### COOPERATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Effective group work can take a variety of forms, but the central feature is that the completion of the task necessitates the active participation of all individuals within a working group, and that one member of the group cannot succeed without the success of the others. It is essential, therefore, that group members perceive the importance of working together, respecting each other and interacting in helpful ways.

The most important aspect of cooperative working is an acceptance amongst members of a group that they can achieve their objectives only if other members achieve theirs. We can refer to this as *positive interdependence* – the idea that ‘one cannot learn without the others’.

Positive interdependence can be achieved in different ways, depending upon the nature of the set tasks, the content of the lesson and the previous experience of the students. For example:

- Students may be required to work in pairs preparing a joint statement about a topic which they will be responsible for giving to a larger group or, possibly, the whole class;
- A group of students may be involved in a task that can only be completed if separate materials that are held by individual members are pooled;
- Individual members of a group may be assigned to particular roles, e.g. chairperson, recorder, summariser, reporter;
- Each group member may be asked to complete the first draft of a task that has to be completed by the whole group; and
- A group may be told that they will be graded as a result of the aggregate performance completed by individual members.

In asking students to work cooperatively we are, in effect, introducing an additional set of objectives to be achieved. As well as trying to achieve their academic objectives, the students are required to bear in mind objectives related to their skills in working with others. This means that the complexity and demands of working collaboratively must be introduced carefully and increased in a gradual fashion. Initial difficulties can be minimised, for example, by simply asking each student to work with one familiar classmate on a relatively straight forward task. The nature of the task demands, and group size and complexity, can then be increased gradually as the students grow in competence and confidence.

### A LANGUAGE OF PRACTICE

There is strong research evidence suggesting that the best way to develop inclusive ways of working is through teachers within a school learning from one another. The message is simple: to encourage cooperation amongst students, start by strengthening cooperation amongst the staff. In this way, the aim is to ‘move knowledge around’ within a school, so that the best practices are available to all of the children.

Research points to the importance of creating a climate within which this kind of professional learning will happen. Central to the process is discussion about practice, as in the following example:

*The school serves a poor community in a city in India. Following a lesson in which the children engaged in a role play activity about families, the teachers explain how this had been planned. The previous year the head teacher had instigated occasional Saturday morning meetings to discuss their work. Around the walls of the school are beautiful posters developed during these gatherings. It was these discussions, the teachers explained, that had stimulated them to try out different approaches to teaching. However, they explained that it was not just the meetings. They had also developed the idea of what they called 'partnership teaching', whereby they occasionally have opportunities to work together in one another's classrooms. It was this, more than anything, they argued, that had stimulated their experimentation. When asked how they found time, they explained that sometimes the head teacher would take a class to release a teacher to work with a colleague. Other times, they might put two classes together, but this usually means that they have to work outside since the classrooms are too crowded.*

At the heart of processes like this, where professional learning takes place within a school, is the development of a common language with which colleagues can talk to one another and, indeed to themselves, about detailed aspects of their practice. Without such a language of practice, teachers find it difficult to experiment with new possibilities.

Much of what teachers do during the intensive encounters that occur is carried out at an intuitive level. Furthermore, there is little time to stop and think. This is why having the opportunity to see colleagues at work is so crucial to the success of attempts to develop practice. It is through shared experiences that colleagues can help one another to articulate what they currently do and define what they might like to do. It is also the means whereby space is created within which taken-for-granted assumptions about particular groups of learners can be subjected to mutual critique.

An engagement with evidence of various kinds to study teaching within a school can help in generating such a language of practice. This can, in turn, foster the development of practices that are more effective in engaging learners who are seen as hard to reach. Specifically, it can create space for rethinking by interrupting existing discourses and questioning usual ways of working.

The starting point for such processes is often with a consideration of statistical evidence regarding student progress. However, the need to dig deeper into factors that influence progress usually requires an engagement with qualitative forms of evidence. Particularly powerful techniques in this respect involve the use of mutual lesson observation, sometimes through video recordings, and evidence collected from students about teaching and learning arrangements within a school.

All of this is consistent with the idea of 'assessment for learning', an approach that involves teachers in helping their students to understand what they need to learn and how. This means providing students with opportunities to discuss their learning objectives, and to reflect and talk about their progress and next steps.

Underlying this approach is a recognition that every teaching and learning activity offers assessment opportunities, and that assessment for learning should be embedded in day-to-day classroom practice as a means of continuously assessing the progress of all members of the class in a way that informs teaching and provides feedback to improve student learning.

### CREATING INTERRUPTIONS

Under the right conditions, such evidence-based approaches provide *interruptions* that help to make the familiar unfamiliar in ways that stimulate self-questioning, creativity and action. In doing so, they can sometimes lead to a reframing of perceived problems that, in turn, draws the teacher's attention to overlooked possibilities for addressing barriers to participation and learning. In this way, differences amongst students, staff and schools become a catalyst for improvement.

The concern with the principle of equity means that there also has to be a focus on the thinking that lies behind actions and the impacts of such thinking on practices. In particular, there has to be a concern with the attitudes and assumptions that influence what teachers do, some of which may be unconscious, and how these can be modified through dialogues with others, especially with learners themselves.

A powerful approach for introducing this kind of professional learning is *lesson study*, a systematic procedure for the development of teaching that is well established in Japan and some other Asian countries. The goal of lesson study is to improve the effectiveness of the experiences that teachers provide for all of their students. The focus is on a particular lesson, which is then used as the basis for gathering evidence on the quality of experiences that students receive. These lessons are called research lessons and are used to examine the responsiveness of the students to the planned activities.



# ACTIVITY 2

## USING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING REVIEW FRAMEWORK

A recent research project in Europe, 'Reaching the hard to reach', has explored how students who are trained as researchers can contribute to such processes of professional learning.

### AIM

**To begin the process of reviewing teaching and learning in relation to inclusion and equity.**

### PROCESS

**1.** The Teaching and Learning Review Framework is introduced to participants, noting that the indicators and questions are based on international research regarding factors that are associated with teaching and learning strategies that are inclusive and equitable.

**2.** Using the following four-point rating scale, individual participants score teaching and learning in their school against the indicators, where:

**A means:** The school is doing well. There are several significant strengths, and no obvious weaknesses.

**B means:** The school is doing quite well. On balance, strengths outweigh weaknesses.

**C means:** The school is not doing very well. On balance, weaknesses outweigh strengths.

**D means:** The school is doing badly. There are no obvious strengths and several significant weaknesses.

**3.** Participants then reflect on the following questions:

- What are the strengths that our school can build on?
- What are the main challenges and how might these be addressed?
- What should the next steps be?

**4.** Finally, participants share their thoughts on this process and discuss implications for next steps.



# THE TEACHING AND LEARNING REVIEW FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Teaching is planned with all students in mind

- Do lesson activities take account of student interests and experiences?
- Are varied teaching methods used?
- Do the students understand the purposes of lesson activities?

### 2.2 Lessons encourage the participation of all students

- Are all students addressed by their name?
- Are there materials that engage the interest of the students?
- Do students feel they are able to speak during lessons?
- Are lessons culturally relevant?
- Are boys and girls encouraged to speak equitably?

### 2.3 Students are actively involved in their own learning

- Are students encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning?
- Does the classroom environment encourage independent learning?

### 2.4 Students are encouraged to support one another's learning

- Do seating arrangements encourage students to interact?
- Are students sometimes expected to work in pairs or groups?
- Do students help one another to achieve the goals of lessons?

### 2.5 Support is provided when students experience difficulties

- Do teachers watch out for students experiencing difficulties?
- Do students feel able to ask for help?

### 2.6 Classroom discipline is based on mutual respect

- Are there established rules for taking turns to speak and listen?
- Do students feel that classroom rules are fair?
- Is bullying discouraged?

### 2.7 Students feel that they have somebody to speak to when they are worried or upset

- Are the concerns of students listened to and addressed?
- Do teachers make themselves available for students to talk to them privately?

### 2.8 Assessment contributes to the achievement of all students

- Do teachers use assessment to encourage learning?
- Are students given constructive feedback on their work?
- Are students helped to revise for tests or examinations?
- Do teachers ensure that diversity is respected, even within one unified formal assessment system?



# ACTIVITY 3

## ACCOUNTS OF PRACTICE

### AIM

**To learn from the experiences of other schools that have made progress in promoting inclusive and equitable teaching and learning.**

### PROCESS

1. Individual participants read one of the four accounts, so that a quarter of the group look at each one. It is explained that the accounts may be in contexts that are different in terms of national policies and available resources.
2. Groups are formed of participants that have read the same account. Having discussed the account, they agree on a summary of the key ideas that have emerged.
3. The groups all come together and explain the accounts they have read and the key ideas that have emerged from their discussion.
4. Consideration is given to lessons that have been learnt from this activity in relation to the following questions:
  - What have we learnt from these accounts of practice?
  - What are the implications for what should happen in our school?
  - What should our next steps be?

### THE ACCOUNTS OF PRACTICE

These examples are intended to stimulate discussion about what needs to be done in order to promote the development of inclusive practices. As the accounts are read, it is important to remember that contexts and resources are different. Therefore, the approaches used by the schools in these examples would need to be changed to fit in with different circumstances within diverse communities.

What is common to the four examples is the emphasis placed on using evidence to analyse barriers facing some learners and the importance of collective efforts to address these difficulties. This also points to the importance of leadership in moving things forward.

### ACCOUNT 1

## 'TEACHERS MOVING OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONES'

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- Do teachers in your school take account of the views of students when planning lessons?
- What do you think about the lesson study approach?
- Do you get opportunities to talk about practice with your colleagues?

Three teachers in a secondary school adopted the idea of lesson study, an inquiry-based approach to professional development. In planning a joint drama lesson, they identified students within each of their classes who they saw as being particularly vulnerable. They felt that by thinking about the lesson with these individuals in mind, they might create new and different ways of facilitating the learning of all their students. So, for example, one teacher talked about a student who had an understanding of language but would not speak, even when invited. Another teacher focused on one of his students who had severe reading difficulties.

This led the teachers to discuss how they might plan the lesson differently. For example, they talked about getting the students to write on the whiteboard and getting students to rehearse verbally what they wanted to say, rather than writing arguments down.

**LISTENING TO LEARNERS.** In addition, the trio decided that they needed to work with some of their students before teaching the lessons to get an idea of how they preferred to learn. They also wanted to consider how best to plan the lesson to support the many differences amongst the students. With this in mind, they selected seven students, each from a different ethnic background, six of whom were born outside the country.

The teachers got these students together at lunchtime and asked them to rank their preferences regarding different classroom activities that can be used. As a result of these discussions, they decided that they, as teachers, would allow more space for student decision making during the lesson they were planning together.

The overall aim of the lesson that was planned was to develop confidence in and awareness of a variety of drama techniques. Each teacher taught the lesson with their colleagues watching, making changes in the light of the regular discussions that took place as they proceeded. It was noticeable that these became increasingly focused on matters of detail and, as a result, led to a greater emphasis on mutual challenge and personal reflection, as illustrated below.

**REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCE.** After one of the lessons, a conversation took place during which the teachers were heard 'thinking aloud' about their own ways of working as a result of watching their colleague teach the lesson:

**Teacher 1:** *'I thought it was noisy. I knew it was OK, but I felt a bit uncomfortable with it, as I can't imagine having the same level of noise in my class and being in control. I'm not sure I could let them go like that.'*

**Teacher 2:** 'You can tell that you (Teacher 3) have done a lot of group work with your class. You've built up that relationship of letting them work more autonomously, over time, so it's not just a one off.'

**Teacher 1:** 'I would structure my lesson more. You gave them both tasks together. You did not really go through them before the lesson started but circulated among them when they were doing their first task, drama features, to check they were OK for the second task. I'd divide it into two tasks, the first being carrying out the dramatic feature, and then the second one being the one where they reflect on what the important aspects are of each feature of drama. I would do one task, then stop them all and bring them back to me, and then I'd tell them what to do for the second task. I might be doing them a disservice, but I don't think they could cope. Or maybe I just want to feel in control.'

**Teacher 2:** 'It really surprised me how the students just got on and read their packs of information in their groups. I'm envious. What surprised me was the way you were able to give them instructions and rely on them to read through them. You have obviously been teaching them to be autonomous.'

All of this led on to a consideration of the different teaching styles used by the members of the trio:

**Teacher 1:** 'I think (teacher 3) has got a very calm style. It rubs off on the students. I watched how she circulated round the class. That calm style wouldn't work with my group, or is that the way I've moulded them? They're a lot lower ability and it takes a lot of energy to get them to put pen to paper. There are a lot of behaviour issues too. I feel shattered at the end. If I was calmer, perhaps they would mellow? I would be nervous about my students being able to be so independent. You didn't quite tell them everything they needed to do. My students couldn't do that, or maybe it's about my expectations of my student? It's partly to do with who the students are, but it's also to do with expectations.'

**RETHINKING.** The conversation went on to consider ways of mobilising hidden strengths amongst the students:

**Teacher 2:** 'I also liked the way you chose leaders for each of the groups. You chose people who you knew would be confident to lead the groups.'

**Teacher 1:** 'We don't draw on their strengths enough. Take for example Student Y, he is low in everything, but he is an athlete for the city team. Student X is very involved in the cadets, perhaps he would be good at leading this activity. Just because he is not very good in speaking, doesn't mean we can't draw from their strengths in other areas.'

**Teacher 2:** 'I don't really know what makes them tick, what groups or clubs they belong to, what gets them going. We've got to show that they are good at something and draw on their strengths.'

By the end of the process, the three teachers all commented that they had been challenged to rethink their lesson planning and facilitation. Through this, they realised that the new approaches had given them opportunities to learn outside of what they referred to as their 'comfort zones' and, in doing so, move beyond their expectations about the capabilities of their students.

### ACCOUNT 2 'CHALLENGING EXPECTATIONS'

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- Which students are a matter of concern in your school?
- What areas of their progress is a matter of concern?
- How might you find out more about the experiences of these learners?

In this primary school, assessment records showed that a significant proportion of children were struggling with writing, as compared to their progress in mathematics. Despite what some of the teachers had anticipated, a focus on boys alone was clearly unjustified, given that boys were also some of the highest performers, and that many girls were barely outperforming the lowest performing boys.

**COLLECTING EVIDENCE.** Evidence about this matter was generated by a staff research group who interviewed a small number of children while they were writing, some of whom pointed to their feelings of fear of failure. Members of the group were fascinated by the insights gained and wondered how widespread these feelings about writing were amongst all the students.

With this in mind, the teachers decided to devise a questionnaire, which was completed by all children in years five and six, with support assistants scribing for some children. The staff research group members were surprised and intrigued by the factors that children identified as barriers to good writing and began to consider how their own practices might be changed to alleviate some of these issues.

**WIDENING THE DISCUSSION.** It was decided that this was a moment to engage other staff in the school. So, the group decided to use the evidence from the interviews and questionnaires, alongside examples of children's writing, to inform the planning of a teacher professional development day.

The emphasis throughout this day was on teachers interpreting the evidence from 'their' children and how they might respond in terms of their own practice. The meeting generated a lot of debate, with many teachers giving examples of how they intended to try new ideas in relation to the insights gained. Support assistants were involved in these discussions, providing valuable and specific insights from their one-to-one work with students.

Elements of 'fun' during the day – for instance, trying out a drama activity linked to writing a story – also helped to remind staff of the continuing good relationships within the school and encouraged discussion about their priorities in the face of many challenges. Even so, follow-up interviews with some teachers revealed how they struggled to see ways of changing their practice within the constraints of the school's policy. Indeed, only later, after visiting inspectors had judged the quality of teaching in the school to be strong, did teachers start to trust their own judgement again in determining how they might develop their practice.

**FOLLOW-UP.** Significantly, two years later a number of the teachers were still using the evidence from the questionnaire to inform continuing developments. Trials of different approaches to encouraging writing also took place, with a continuing emphasis on checking things out with the children concerned.



## ACCOUNT 3 'FOCUSING ON DETAILS'

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- How do you engage students in your class who experience difficulties in concentrating?
- Do you get opportunities to talk to colleagues about your classroom practices?
- Do students surprise you sometimes?

During the initial phase of a reading lesson in this primary school, the children were sitting on a carpet in a circle, each holding their reading book. In her lesson introduction, the teacher discussed the idea of the 'main characters' in a story. She used questions to draw out the children's existing knowledge, e.g. 'What do we call the person who writes a book?'

**WORKING IN PAIRS.** The children were then asked to work in pairs, talking about the main characters in their own books. The teacher moved round the circle of children indicating who each child should partner. She then explained that eventually each person would be required to talk about what their partner had said. One boy, Jose, was to work with her.

After a few moments of this activity, it became evident that quite a few members of the class remained uncertain as to what was required. Consequently, the teacher stopped the class and gave further clarification of the task. The children then talked in their pairs for about five minutes.

**MAKING CONNECTIONS.** Eventually, the class members were asked to finish talking to their partner, and then each person took it in turn to report to the class. After listening to each child's summary, the teacher wrote certain words on the board. Occasionally, she questioned them to elicit suitable vocabulary, e.g. 'Would you like him?'; 'Why not?' Many of the questions seemed to be aimed at making connections with children's day-to-day experiences, deepening their thinking and, at the same time, extending their vocabulary, e.g. 'Getting expelled - what does that mean?' Despite the fact that this phase of the lesson took some time and involved a lot of listening, the children remained engaged. Indeed, towards the end of the process the teacher congratulated all the children on their concentration. She then got them to read the words she had listed choral fashion.

The class were told that they now had to return to their tables and carry out a writing task about what would happen if their character visited the school. As they moved to their places, one girl, clearly feeling very involved in what had been discussed, asked if this was really going to happen!

The children were seated at five tables, apparently grouped on the basis of their reading attainment. As they began work, the teacher distributed various worksheets. Then, she moved to certain tables helping individuals to get started. After a while, she stopped the class and asked them to listen to one boy reading his text aloud, so as to help him to determine where the full stops should be located.

**TEACHERS LEARNING TOGETHER.** Afterwards, the teacher talked to one of her less experienced colleagues who had observed the lesson. They talked, for example, about the care the teacher seemed to take with language and her use of questioning to probe the children's own understandings. They also discussed her use of paired discussion. Apparently, the children are familiar with this approach since it had been used in previous lessons. Both teachers were impressed by the concentration of the students and their ability to express themselves.

The younger teacher mentioned about the way her colleague had chosen to work with Jose. Apparently, this had been by chance, although she had steered him to the front of the class, so as to 'keep a close eye on him'. It seems that Jose can be disruptive sometimes. They talked about different tactics for keeping an eye on potentially difficult students.

**SURPRISES.** Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the discussion concerned ways of catering for differences within the class. The teacher referred to an experience early on in her career that had influenced her thinking. She commented, *'All children have things in them to surprise us... they can all surprise us'*.

The two colleagues recalled different ways in which this lesson had allowed opportunities for 'surprises', whilst, at the same time, offering individuals varied degrees of support in order that they could participate. They recalled, for example, the way in which some children were encouraged to respond by the use of carefully judged questions. They also commented on how the teacher had quietly offered different levels of support once the children began the writing task. So, for example, she immediately moved to give further oral instructions to those she assumed would need them. She also gave additional written prompt sheets to some children, but in a way that did not draw attention to their need for further support. In these ways, all the children took part in a common lesson, within which they shared a similar agenda, but in a way that attempted to respond to their particular needs.

The two teachers felt that their discussions had helped them both to reflect in detail on aspects of their own thinking and practice. In this sense, the experience demonstrated the value of having an opportunity to observe practice and quality time to participate in detailed discussion of their shared experience.

## ACCOUNT 4 'COORDINATING SUPPORT FOR LEARNING'

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- Do all students in your school have somebody to talk to when they experience difficulties, violence or bullying?
- Have you got monitoring systems that enable you to mobilise support when it is needed?
- Does this account point to things in your school that might need reviewing?

Located in a large public housing estate on the outskirts of a city, the school has some 900 students in the age range 11 to 16. The issue of poverty has an enormous impact on its work.

The school faces a particular problem of student mobility. For example, of the 160 students who graduated last summer, only 100 of these had started in the school. Meanwhile, over the previous five years, 227 students had been part of the cohort at one time or another.

There is also a more hidden form of mobility, with students moving between the homes of different parents, or other members of their families. Poor health is said to be a pervasive influence on attendance and progress in ways that those in the school believe is not understood in wider circles.

The school's strategy for fostering inclusion has two interconnected elements. These are: *progress monitoring and support for learning*.

**MONITORING PROGRESS.** The monitoring strategy involves a complex weave of many different tactics, all of which are intended to help staff and students to focus on the progress of individual students. Here, the head teacher is very clear that 'we have to know what is going on!'

In various ways, up-to-date information on attendance, effort and progress is used to motivate, to celebrate success, and, of course, to identify barriers to progress. Here, the analysis of evidence is the means by which appropriate use can be made of the student support teams that have been introduced. At the same time, it is important to note that there is pressure on all of the students to achieve good results.

Teachers receive regular spreadsheets that summarise the progress of every student. These are discussed with individuals, particularly those that are in any sense a cause for concern, and individual targets are set.

Each member of the senior management team is responsible for monitoring one subject department. In addition, the senior staff take on a wider monitoring role around the school. This means that teachers have considerable direct support in dealing with disruptive incidents in their classes.

**SUPPORT FOR LEARNING.** The visitor to the school is struck by the preoccupation with providing students with support for their learning. Unusual here is the way that those within the school are able to articulate the purposes of support and their sensitivity to the possible dangers. Also, impressive is the way in which staff of different status work together in order to provide a support strategy that feels 'joined up'. As a result, support seems to be readily available, as and when it is needed by anyone in the school.

The inclusive philosophy of the school has led it to take on wider responsibilities as a resource centre for students with physical impairments, some of whom use wheelchairs, and other students who are categorized as having severe learning difficulties. This means that even more adult support is available. What is interesting here, however, is that since all of these students spend most of their time in the mainstream classes, the support that is provided is available to others who may need it.

Throughout the school, amongst students and staff, there is a noticeable and taken-for-granted acceptance of the right of those with disabilities to be in the school. Indeed, their presence is seen as having a positive influence.

The overall rationale for providing support to students in the school is explained in terms of the objective of 'unsupported access'. That is to say, support is only provided when it is necessary and is removed as soon as possible. As one teacher commented, *'If you don't need it, it is taken away'*.

The importance of ethos. In many ways, the organizational structures at the school are quite traditional. What is strikingly different, however, is the nature of the working relationships that cut horizontally across these rather hierarchical systems. One of the deputy head teachers explained this in terms of what she saw as the ethos that permeates each person's work, whatever their status. She commented:

*'Members of staff are much closer to students here than in other schools. It is a much more holistic approach.'*

She recalled that when she first arrived at the school, this struck her as 'earth shatteringly remarkable', particularly the high expectations staff have for the students. A young teacher talked of the support she had received, noting that 'everything you learn, you learn from those around you'. A head of department explained how changes in attitudes and expectations had been paralleled by significant developments in classroom practices. He commented:

*'To be honest, a lot of my early teaching was child-minding. Now we are all focused on improving achievement and there is a growing ethos of the school as a centre of learning. Our real strength, however, is the teamwork amongst all the staff.'*

It is significant that discussions in the school often seem to return to the theme of collaboration. As a result, the many pressures under which the school has to work seem to have been turned to advantage.



# ACTIVITY 4

## USING COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY TO DEVELOP INCLUSIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

### AIM

**To introduce a procedure for analysing and promoting inclusive teaching and learning.**

### PROCESS

The instructions presented here are to guide a process of collaborative inquiry aimed at making classroom practices more inclusive. The approach should be used flexibly, taking account of local factors and circumstances. It is assumed that the process will be led by a coordination group set up within a school.

### A LANGUAGE OF PRACTICE

These suggestions are based on evidence from international research regarding strategies for fostering forms of teaching that are effective in engaging all members of a class. This suggests that developments of practice, particularly amongst more experienced teachers, are unlikely to occur without some exposure to what teaching actually looks like when it is being done differently, and exposure to someone who can help teachers understand the difference between what they are doing and what they aspire to do.

At the heart of the processes in schools where changes in practice do occur is the development of a common language of practice with which colleagues can talk to one another and, indeed, to themselves about detailed aspects of their practice. Without such a language, teachers find it difficult to experiment with new possibilities. This is why having the opportunity to see colleagues at work is so crucial to the success of attempts to develop practice. It is through shared experiences that colleagues can help one another to articulate what they currently do and define what they might like to do. It is also the means whereby taken-for-granted assumptions about particular groups of students can be subjected to mutual critique.



### LESSON STUDY

This raises questions about how best to introduce such an approach to professional development. Here a powerful approach is that of lesson study, a systematic procedure for the development of teaching that is well established in Japan and some other Asian countries.

The goal of lesson study is to improve the effectiveness of the experiences that teachers provide for all of their students. The core activity involves collaborative research on a shared area of focus that is generated through discussion. The content of this focus is the planned lesson, which is then used as the basis of gathering data on the quality of experience that students receive. These lessons are called research lessons and are used to examine the responsiveness of the students to the planned activities.

Members of the group work together to design the lesson plan, which is then implemented by each teacher in turn. Observations and post-lesson meetings are arranged to facilitate the improvement of the research lesson between each trial. It should be noted here that the main focus is on the lesson and the responses of class members, not the teacher.

The collection of evidence is a key factor in lesson study. Where possible, this may involve the use of video recording. Emphasis is also placed on listening to the views of students in a way that tends to introduce a critical edge to the discussions that take place.

### PROCEDURES

The suggestions made in these notes are based on the experience of using lesson study in many schools, in different parts of the world. However, it is important that they are used flexibly, and adapted to fit the traditions and circumstances of particular contexts.

It has been found useful to hold an initial workshop to introduce these guidelines for setting up lesson study groups. Then, over a period of a few weeks, the teachers involved follow a version of the following step-by-step procedure:

- 1.** Teachers form trios, usually made up of colleagues with varied experience. They work together to trial and evaluate the idea of lesson study as a means of strengthening teaching and learning in relation to themes that are seen to be relevant, e.g. learner engagement; responding to diversity; encouraging independent learning.
- 2.** The trio chooses and plans one lesson that they will each teach. The aim of this research lesson will be to put together best available expertise with the aim of engaging all class members.
- 3.** As each member of staff teaches the lesson, their two colleagues observe the process, focusing specifically on the way students respond. If possible, the lesson should also be recorded on video, and a sample of students interviewed to determine their reactions and the extent of their learning.

4. After each research lesson, the trio reflect on what has happened, using their notes, the views of students and the video recording to analyse processes and outcomes. They then make adjustments to the lesson plan before it is taught by the next member of the trio.
5. Once the lesson has been taught by each member of the trio, a short report is prepared, summarising the findings of the process and recommendations for future practice.

At the end of the lesson study period, a further staff meeting may be held at which each trio presents the findings of their research and the conclusions they have reached. The whole group go on to consider implications for policy and practice with their school.

## SOME ISSUES TO CONSIDER

**PLANNING THE RESEARCH LESSON.** The *learning goals* are the backbone of a lesson and provide the 'reason' for teaching and for observing the lesson. Teams usually begin by selecting a subject, concept, theme or topic in the course they want to study. Many teachers are drawn to topics that are particularly difficult for students to learn, or for teachers to teach. Others select a topic that comes later in the term, so they have enough time to plan and design the lesson. Still, others focus on topics that are new to the curriculum, or that are especially important in building students' understanding.

Learning goals should be stated in terms of what students will *understand* and what they will be *able to do* as a result of the lesson. Goals specify desired forms of student learning, thinking, engagement, and behaviour. Whatever the teachers decide to do in the class will be considered in the light of these goals.

During the planning stage, team members usually begin by sharing how they have taught or would teach the lesson, discussing and debating the merits of different types of class activities, assignments, exercises and so forth. To keep the focus on student learning, though, teachers also pool their knowledge of how students in the past have learned or struggled to learn the topic at hand. Once past experiences and personal approaches are on the table, the team can begin to design a research lesson that will help students achieve the chosen learning goal.

Throughout the process, teachers practice what has been called *cognitive empathy*. This involves looking at the subject matter from the student's point of view, working to understand how students learn. When planning the lesson, teachers predict how students will perceive, interpret and construe the subject matter and the lesson activities. Lesson plans are designed in a way that anticipates student responses in terms of learning, thinking and engagement.

**COLLECTING EVIDENCE.** In preparation for teaching the lesson, teams should think about how to collect evidence that will help them determine the extent to which the learning goals are achieved. Teams may wish to develop an *observation protocol* based on their predictions of student responses and decide what types of evidence will be collected from students.

Before the actual class period, it may be helpful to inform students about the research lesson and the observers that will be in the classroom. Prior to the lesson, the observers are introduced to the class, explaining that the overall aim is to find ways to improve their learning.

Traditional classroom observations tend to focus on what the teacher does during the class period. However, observations of research lessons *focus on students and what they do in response to the teaching*.

**ANALYSING EVIDENCE.** The analysis phase addresses three questions:

- In what ways did students accomplish the lesson goals?
- How could the lesson be improved?
- What did we learn from this experience?

After the lesson is taught, while it is still fresh in everybody's minds, the group should meet to discuss and analyse what happened. Participants offer their observations, interpretations and comments on the lesson. The purpose is to analyse and evaluate the lesson thoroughly in terms of student learning, thinking and engagement.

To prepare for this post-lesson session, it helps to identify someone to take careful notes and to collect the additional data from lesson observers. Japanese teachers refer to these post-lesson sessions as a 'colloquium,' during which the lesson study teacher, group members and, where appropriate, outside observers discuss the research lesson. The person who taught the lesson is usually given the opportunity to speak first, followed by lesson study group members and other observers. The discussion should focus on the lesson (not the teacher) and on analysing what, how and why students learned, or did not learn, from the experience.







# FURTHER READING

AINSCOW, M., DYSON, A., GOLDRICK, S. AND WEST, M. (2016). Using collaborative inquiry to foster equity within school systems: opportunities and barriers. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 27(1), 7-23.

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FLORIAN, L., BLACK-HAWKINS, K., AND ROUSE, M. (2016). *Achievement and Inclusion in Schools* (2nd Ed). London, Routledge.

LEWIS, C., PERRY, R., & MURATA, A. (2006). How should research contribute to instructional improvement? The case of lesson study. *Educational Researcher*, 35(3), 3–14.

SKYHAR, C. (2021). Teacher-directed action research as a mediating tool for professional learning in rural contexts. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 31(1), 12-29.





# LINKS TO RELEVANT RESOURCES

**Note:** Before introducing these resources to others it is important to ensure that they are appropriate for the particular context.

**Lesson Study: A handbook.** This is a guide on how to use Lesson Study to develop and refine teaching and learning:

<https://lessonstudy.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/new-handbook-revisedMay14.pdf>

**Assessment for Learning.** This introductory guide explains how teachers should provide students with opportunities to reflect and talk about their learning, progress and next steps.

[https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/3094/assessment\\_for\\_learning.pdf](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/3094/assessment_for_learning.pdf)

**'Reaching the Hard to Reach'.** These professional development materials focus on teacher/student dialogue as a strategy for promoting inclusive classrooms (available in five languages):

<https://reachingthehardtoreach.eu>

**'Teachers Helping Teachers'.** A 30-Minute team problem-solving process:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sl8\\_aQGjzvl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sl8_aQGjzvl)

**'Developing Inclusive Education'.** This video looks at how inclusive practices are being developed in South Africa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=828QHy53JFQ>

**'School Wide Culturally Response practices'.** Educators invest in a shared approach:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlnwmVBMfd0>

**'Embedding culture in teaching and learning'.** Embedding culture in practice for kindergarten teaching and learning: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJ\\_Ra8MnFe8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJ_Ra8MnFe8)

**'Learning in classes'.** Examples of inclusive practices:

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL10g2YT\\_In2hmTkac8YDMkCeFUcrPxOu6](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL10g2YT_In2hmTkac8YDMkCeFUcrPxOu6)

**'Dealing with bullying'.**

<https://en.unesco.org/news/what-you-need-know-about-school-violence-and-bullying>





WORKING WITH PARTNERS

# GUIDE 3

This third guide encourages schools and other centres of education to collaborate with families, other schools and representatives of the wider community. It assumes that partnerships such as this can strengthen a school's capacity to respond to learner diversity. The materials address the following question:



*How can schools engage families, partner schools and the wider community in their efforts to become inclusive and equitable?*

The aim is to orientate and support schools in reviewing and developing their relationships with external partners. Whilst the exact approach to this will need to be developed in relation to particular contexts, a set of procedures are recommended through the following activities:

These are:

- **ACTIVITY 1: Schools collaborating with partners** - Exploring the role of external partners in supporting the efforts of schools to promote inclusion and equity.
- **ACTIVITY 2: Using the partnership review framework** - Beginning the process of reviewing the school's work with external partners.
- **ACTIVITY 3: Accounts of practice** - Learning from the ways in which other schools have cooperated with external partners
- **ACTIVITY 4: Using collaborative inquiry to promote partnerships** – Developing school priorities for engaging external partners.

All of these activities involve structured group activities that are intended to stimulate participation in discussions, sharing of experiences and efforts to work closely with external partners.

Having taken part in these activities, participants should agree on an action plan for developing a strategy for promoting external partnerships. In this way, the school can become a centre of coordinated community action for strengthening inclusive and equitable educational provision in their local area. Suggested further readings and links to relevant resources are provided at the end of this document.





# ACTIVITY 1

## SCHOOLS COLLABORATING WITH PARTNERS

### AIM

**To explore the role of external partners in supporting the efforts of schools to promote inclusion and equity.**

### PROCESS

1. Read the discussion material 'Schools reaching out to partners'.
2. Discuss the content with a partner.
3. In larger groups (fours or sixes), discuss the following issues:
  - What are the most interesting ideas in this paper?
  - What do you think about the idea of schools cooperating with external partners?
  - How well does your school cooperate with external partners?
4. Present your findings to the other groups and consider the implications for future actions within schools.



### DISCUSSION MATERIAL: SCHOOLS REACHING OUT TO PARTNERS

As you read this material, please consider the following questions:

- How well does your school collaborate with external partners?
- Is your school a member of any partnerships or networks?
- What are the challenges and how might these be overcome?

*'.... closing the gap in outcomes between those from more and less advantaged backgrounds will only happen when what happens to children outside as well as inside schools changes.'*

**AINSCOW, DYSON, GOLDRICK & WEST (2012).**

The overall approach presented in Guides 1 and 2 is based on the idea of those within schools collecting and engaging with various forms of evidence in order to stimulate moves to create more inclusive ways of working. The research summarised in those guides provides encouraging evidence of the potential of this approach. However, it also throws light on some of the difficulties in putting such thinking into practice. This points the limitations of within-school strategies, suggesting that these should be complemented with efforts to encourage greater cooperation with families, other schools and community partners. Such collaborative partnerships should be characterised by mutual respect and understanding, as well as clear and friendly communication between those involved.

### INVOLVING FAMILIES

Family involvement is particularly crucial. In some countries, parents and education authorities already cooperate closely in developing community-based programmes for certain groups of learners, such as those who are excluded because of their gender, social status or impairments. A logical next step is for these parents to become involved in supporting inclusion and equity in schools.

Where parents lack the confidence and skills to participate in such developments, it might be necessary to strengthen capacity through support networks. This could include the creation of parent groups, supporting them in developing new ways to work with their children, or building the advocacy skills of parents to negotiate with schools and authorities. Here, it is worth adding that there is evidence that the views of families, including children themselves, can be helpful in bringing new thinking to the efforts of schools to develop more inclusive ways of working.

All of this means changing how families and communities work, and enriching what they offer to children. In this respect, there are many encouraging examples of what can happen when what schools do is aligned in a coherent strategy with the efforts of other local players – such as employers, community groups, universities and public services. This does not necessarily mean schools doing more, but it does imply partnerships beyond the school, where these linkages multiply the impacts of each other's efforts.

## SCHOOLS WORKING TOGETHER

There is considerable research evidence suggesting that school-to-school collaboration can strengthen improvement processes by adding to the range of expertise made available. These studies also indicate that collaboration between schools has an enormous potential for fostering their capacity to respond to learner diversity. More specifically, they show how such partnerships can sometimes help to reduce the polarisation of schools, to the particular benefit of those students who seem marginalised at the edges of the system, and whose progress and attitudes cause concern.

There is evidence, too, that partnerships can strengthen the capacity of individual schools to respond to learner diversity. When schools seek to develop more collaborative ways of working, this can have an impact on how teachers perceive themselves and their work. Specifically, comparisons of practices in different schools can 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.

However, developing collaborative partnerships between schools is not a straightforward process. Too often, it can just lead to meetings without any significant action. There is also concern that those schools that could most benefit from involvement are less likely to get involved.

Research points to certain conditions that are necessary in order to make school-to-school collaboration effective. In summary, these are as follows:

- The development of positive and respectful relationships amongst pairs or groups of schools, in some instances across the borders of local authorities;
- The presence of incentives that encourage key stakeholders to explore the possibility that collaboration will be in their own interests;
- Senior staff in schools who are willing and skilled enough to drive collaboration forward towards collective responsibility, whilst coping with the inevitable uncertainties and turbulence; and
- The creation of common improvement agendas that are seen to be relevant to a wide range of stakeholders.

It is also helpful to have external support provided by credible consultants/advisers (from the local authority or elsewhere) who have the confidence to learn alongside their school-based partners, exploring and developing new roles and relationships where necessary.

### AREA-BASED PARTNERSHIPS

Cooperation to promote inclusion and equity can be encouraged through initiatives within local areas that involve a wide range of partners in working together in a coordinated manner. Schools are often the key to these partnerships and may sometimes be their principal drivers. However, this is not simply about schools enlisting other agencies and organisations in support of their improvement agendas. Rather, area-based partnerships are aimed at improving a wide range of outcomes for children and young people, including but not restricted to educational outcomes – much less, narrowly-conceived attainment outcomes. This reminds us that health and wellbeing, personal and social development, thriving in the early years and positive employment outcomes are all as important as how well children do in respect to the academic curriculum of schooling.

None of this implies a down-grading of the importance of achievements in school, but from a recognition that all outcomes for children and young people are inter-related. Furthermore, the factors which promote or inhibit one outcome are very likely to be the factors which promote or inhibit outcomes as a whole. The focus of such initiatives is the population of the area, rather than only on students in one particular school, and they may be led by non-educational organisations, such as community associations or voluntary organisations. Moreover, they have to be seen as being long-term, thinking in terms of a ten-year time horizon, and committed to acting strategically, basing their actions on a deep analysis of the local area's underlying challenges and possibilities.

### COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Emerging in poor urban neighbourhoods in the USA and other countries, there is a range of initiatives that link schools and other agencies in this form of area-based action. The idea of what is known as 'collective impact' is particularly significant in these developments. In other words, the complex challenges that beset schools in common with all public services in the context of diversity, inequality, disadvantage and vulnerability are seen as demanding multi-strand responses at the local level.

Accounts of area-based approaches in low-income countries can be found on the website of the Enabling Education Network (<https://www.eenet.org.uk/what-we-do/>). Working with limited financial resources, these examples illustrate how community representatives can work together in providing educational opportunities for their children and young people. Leadership for such initiatives may come from family action groups or voluntary organisations. Schools themselves may also have a role in coordinating these collaborative efforts.

These developments reflect similar thinking to the highly acclaimed *Harlem Children's Zone* in the USA. This project involves efforts to improve outcomes for children and young people in a disadvantaged area in New York through an approach that is characterised as being 'doubly holistic'. That is to say, the initiative seeks to develop coordinated efforts to tackle the factors that disadvantage children and enhance the factors which support them, across all aspects of their lives, and across their lifespans, from conception through adulthood.

The Harlem project has been described by researchers as *'arguably the most ambitious social experiment to alleviate poverty of our time'*. Another American programme, *StriveTogether*, acts as a central backbone organisation for sites using similar ideas that are locally tailored across the United States. These initiatives are guided by indicators that span young people's lives 'from cradle to career', with progress determined using evidence at all stages of development.

## LOCAL COORDINATION

It must be remembered that policy is made at all levels of an education system, not least at the school and classroom levels. Moving to more inclusive ways of working therefore requires changes across an education system. These span from shifts in policy-makers' values and ways of thinking, enabling them to provide a vision shaping a culture of inclusion, to significant changes in the work of teachers. Bringing the principles of equity and inclusion into education policy also requires engaging other sectors, such as health, social welfare and child protection services.

A culture of inclusion in education requires a shared set of assumptions and beliefs amongst policy-makers and senior staff at the national, district and school level that value differences, believe in collaboration, and are committed to offering educational opportunities to all students. However, changing the cultural norms that exist within an education system is difficult to achieve, particularly within a context that is faced with so many competing pressures and where practitioners tend to work alone in addressing the problems they face. Therefore, leaders at all levels, including those in civil society and other sectors, have to be prepared to analyse their own situations, identify local barriers and facilitators, plan an appropriate development process, and provide leadership for inclusive practices and effective strategies for monitoring equity in education.

Local coordination is needed in order to encourage such forms of collaboration. Indeed, four of the most successful national education systems – Singapore, Estonia, Finland, and Ontario – each has a coherent 'middle tier', regardless of their differing extents of school autonomy or devolution of decision-making. In particular, they all have district level structures that offer a consistent view that, to maintain equity as well as excellence, there needs to be an authoritative co-ordinating influence with local accountability.

## IMPLICATIONS

Developments such as these have implications for the various key stakeholders within education systems. In particular, teachers, especially those in senior positions, have to see themselves as having a wider responsibility for all children and young people in their local area, not just those that attend their own schools. They also have to support one another to develop patterns of working that enable them to have the generosity and flexibility to cooperate with other schools and their wider communities. It means, too, that those who administer school systems have to adjust their priorities and ways of working in response to improvement efforts that are led from within schools and their local communities.



# ACTIVITY 2

## USING THE PARTNERSHIP REVIEW FRAMEWORK

### AIM

**To begin the process of reviewing the school's work with external partners.**

### PROCESS

1. The Partnership Review Framework is introduced to participants, noting that the indicators and questions are based on international research regarding factors that are associated with teaching and learning strategies that are inclusive and equitable.
2. Using the following four-point rating scale, individual participants score the extent of their school's involvement with external partners against the indicators, where:  
**A means:** The school is doing well. There are several significant strengths, and no obvious weaknesses.  
**B means:** The school is doing quite well. On balance, strengths outweigh weaknesses.  
**C means:** The school is not doing very well. On balance, weaknesses outweigh strengths.  
**D means:** The school is doing badly. There are no obvious strengths and several significant weaknesses.
3. Participants then reflect on the following questions:
  - What are the partnerships that our school can build on?
  - What are the main challenges in working with external partners and how might these be addressed?
  - What should the next steps be?
4. Finally, participants share their thoughts on this process and discuss implications for next steps.



## THE PARTNERSHIP REVIEW FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 The school is organised in ways that enable staff to engage with external partners

- Is there flexibility in the way the school day is organised so that staff members have time to link with partners outside the school day?
- Do senior members of staff see part of their role as making links with external partners?

### 3.2 Teachers involve family members in supporting the learning of their children

- Are family members encouraged to come into school to support learning and social activities?
- Are parents/carers involved in their child's learning activities at home?
- Are meetings held where teachers and parents discuss their child's progress?
- Are these relationships culturally responsive?

### 3.3 Regular information is provided to families regarding the progress of their children

- Do families receive progress reports on their children?
- Are families contacted when their child makes some significant contribution in the school?
- Does the school publish newsletters or use other ways to keep families in touch with interesting developments?

### 3.4 The school is a member of networks and partnerships

- Is the school an active member of any school networks or partnerships?
- Do senior staff take a role in coordinating any school networks or partnerships?

### 3.5 Teachers have occasional opportunities to visit partner schools in order to share practices

- Are visits to other schools encouraged and organised?
- Does the school encourage teachers from other schools to visit?

### 3.6 Senior staff support their colleagues in their partner schools in reviewing policies and practices

- Is the headteacher and other senior members of staff involved in peer review processes with colleagues in other schools?
- Is the school willing to provide support when another school faces difficulties?

### 3.7 The school works closely with other agencies that are involved with children and their families

- Are staff from the health, social welfare and child protection services involved in the work of the school?
- Does the school have links with voluntary organisations, including family support groups?

### 3.8 The school has strong links with local community organisations

- Does the school have links with local businesses, voluntary associations and higher education institutions, and indigenous communities?
- Does the school use the media to promote its work?



# ACTIVITY 3

## ACCOUNTS OF PRACTICE

### AIM

**To learn from the ways in which other schools have cooperated with external partners.**

### PROCESS

1. Individual participants read one of the four accounts, so that a quarter of the group look at each one. It is explained that the accounts may be in contexts that are different in terms of national policies and available resources.
2. Groups are formed of participants who have read the same account. Having discussed the account, they agree a summary of the key ideas that have emerged.
3. The groups all come together and explain the accounts they have read and the key ideas that have emerged from their discussion.
4. Consideration is given to lessons that have been learnt from this activity in relation to the following questions:
  - What have we learnt from these accounts of practice?
  - What are the implications for what should happen in our school?
  - What should our next steps be?

### THE ACCOUNTS OF PRACTICE

These examples are intended to stimulate discussion about what needs to be done in order to involve partners in the promotion of educational inclusion and equity. As the accounts are read, it is important to remember that contexts and resources are different. Therefore, the approaches used in these examples may need to be changed to fit in with different circumstances in diverse communities.

What is common to the four examples is the emphasis placed on using evidence to analyse barriers facing some learners and the importance of collective efforts to address these difficulties. This also points to the importance of coordination and leadership in moving things forward.

## ACCOUNT 1 'CROSSING BOUNDARIES'

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- Is your school a safe place for all of the children?
- Are difficulties of behaviour in your school addressed quickly and effectively?
- Are there strategies referred to in this account for involving families that you might try?

The word 'boundaries' frequently comes up during a visit to this primary school, which serves a diverse, multi-cultural community. First of all, the visitor notes the metal fence with pointed spikes that stakes out the physical boundaries of the school, whilst at the same time discouraging would be intruders. Then, there is much talk of the cultural boundaries children cross each day as they move between contexts that are influenced by different traditions, religions and languages. There is also a sense of boundaries created by the well-articulated rules and procedures that dictate the ways in which staff and children go about their business.

The account is particularly interesting in that not so long ago the behaviour of students in the school was a major problem. Nowadays, things are much improved.

**RESPONDING TO DIVERSITY.** The school takes particular steps to support children and families as they move between different cultures. On first arrival in the nursery, many of the children have limited language and this has to be a priority, leading to what is often rapid progress. Staff are also sensitive to the fact that some of the children attend additional lessons at the local Mosque in the late afternoon. Considerable efforts have been made to ensure parental support for the school's efforts to foster a more cooperative working atmosphere. The head explains that she tried to convince parents that it was necessary to 'break the cycle of violence'.

There was also a period when some parents, particularly some of the fathers, would come into school to be abusive to the head teacher and other members of staff. Sometimes, the head used what she referred to as 'veiled threats', for example: *'I've told them that I would exclude their child if things don't improve'*.

In fact, the head is opposed to the exclusion of students, although at times she has been forced to use this approach, not least in order to attract support from outside the school. Gradually, however, the views of parents have become much more positive, as is reflected by their involvement in morning assemblies and support for other school events. Here, the family literacy programme that the school introduced has proved to be particularly successful.

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**TENSIONS.** At the same time, tensions between home and school do still exist. For example, one teacher comments that a lot of the children are related and sometimes they bring family disputes with them into school. Differences in expectations also surface on some occasions. The head explains:

*'For example, some mothers will dress the boys and leave the girls to dress themselves.'*

One teacher, talking about her class of eleven-year olds, notes:

*'Every single boy here smokes. They steal cigarettes from home.'*

Nevertheless, the visitor is struck by the quiet atmosphere, and the sense of calm and order around the school. Senior staff explain how they have worked with the parents to foster this atmosphere. One explained, *'We tell them, you have to model the behaviour you want from the children'*.

**LEADERSHIP.** So then, what is it that has led to these striking improvements? In particular, what forms of leadership practice have been used? It seems that there have been two over-lapping phases of development, each emphasising rather different approaches.

During the first of these two phases, much of the leadership seemed to have been centred around the head teacher herself. More recently, there has been evidence of a different approach, one that is characterised by a much greater emphasis on forms of shared and distributed leadership.

The headteacher seems to be particularly sensitive to the challenges faced by her colleagues. She notes that *'there is too much pressure on everybody'*. Having said that, she appears to have been successful in developing a sense of common purpose and a commitment to mutual support. Here, there is little evidence of any distinction between the roles of teaching and non-teaching staff. One support assistant commented: *'We're all involved in everything'*.

**PROMOTING INCLUSION.** The move towards more participatory forms of leadership has taken place alongside the emergence of a well worked out strategy for promoting inclusion. At the heart of this strategy is an emphasis on monitoring the effectiveness of current arrangements for teaching and learning.

Initially, this monitoring was largely the responsibility of the head teacher. Gradually, however, this has become a shared responsibility, with members of staff using various forms of information gathering, such as peer observation and questionnaire surveys of student opinion, in order to monitor the situation in the school. Through these processes, areas of concern are determined and these are defined as priorities within the school's development plan. Efforts are also made to involve family members in this process.

The processes of internal monitoring are mirrored by a preoccupation to locate external possibilities for opportunities to further staff development. However, the head is careful to ensure that the staff engages only in projects that relate to stated priorities.

## ACCOUNT 2

### 'SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY DURING A TIME OF CRISIS'

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- What lessons do you draw from this account?
- In what ways has your school worked with the community during the pandemic?
- What have been the challenges and how were these addressed?

The COVID-19 pandemic has led many schools to strengthen their involvement with families and communities. This account explains what happened in a school that serves an urban community with high levels of economic disadvantage.

**RESPONDING TO CRISIS.** The school has 900 students from ages 2 through to 18. As the country went into lockdown, the staff began planning their response to the crisis. This led the school to take a lead in co-ordinating a multi-agency response across the local community.

During the lockdown months, students continued their education online at home. At the primary level (ages 4-11) there was a 98% work completion rate, dropping slightly to 85% at the secondary level (ages 11-18). Senior staff put this down to the strong inclusive school culture and organisation-wide expectations.

The obvious barrier was a lack of home internet access or a computer amongst some of the families. In those cases where home ICT problems prevailed, students were invited into school to complete their online work individually.

**THE SUPPORT SYSTEM.** The school has been committed to inclusion since its inception. Forming strong relationships with both students and parents is therefore at the core of the school's culture. This usually involves regular contact with students' families and the COVID-19 response naturally included this.

Every family received at least one contact per week from their class teacher at the nursery and primary levels, or from a familiar member of the secondary staff further up the school. For the most vulnerable parents, this increased to a daily check-in phone call or home visit.

The expectation that students must submit daily work created another point of contact between the school and the families. If a student failed to submit any work on a given day, this triggered a call to make sure that everything was okay and to offer further support if required.



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**SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNITY.** In preparation for the lockdown, the school convened different organisations across the local area for a virtual meeting on how best to support the local community during the crisis. This included charities, churches, local government representatives, schools and youth groups, all of whom completed a survey sent out to highlight the most vulnerable groups of people and where support would be most needed. From this, three working groups were established: food and essentials, mental health and well-being, and financial information and advice.

The food and essentials group response had both a school focus and a community focus. Just over one third of student usually receive a free school lunch because of the low-income of their families. During the lockdown period, this service continued, including during the holiday periods.

Fortunately, the school has its own on-site catering facilities and is in charge of providing its own meals to students. This enabled the school to extend its free meal provision beyond its student and family population.

The school caterers produced 400 meals for families every day. This included food for eligible families of three other local schools, as well as 25 vulnerable elderly people who have been asked by the government to self-isolate for 12 weeks. Those who could, picked up their free meals outside the school on a Monday and a Thursday. In addition, a team of staff delivered food to 50 local families who could not get to school due to transport issues, self-isolation or vulnerability.

**OTHER FORMS OF SUPPORT.** The mental health and well-being group created a support pack containing a wide range of activities, videos and blogs suggesting strategies for supporting mental health. The pack also contained the details of where to seek professional help.

The financial information and advice group compiled information on personal and business financial support and this was made available on the community website. The school anticipated that families would require advice on how to access the government's economic relief support due to a high number of job losses as a result of COVID-19.

## ACCOUNT 3

### ‘PROMOTING INCLUSION AND EQUITY ON A HOUSING ESTATE’

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- What lessons do you draw from this account?
- In what ways might you cooperate with community organisations in your local area?
- What are the challenges and how might these be addressed?

Sometimes schools work with local community organisations in order to address the challenges involved in promoting educational inclusion and equity. In this example, the impetus came from an association that provides low-rent housing in a small inner-city estate.

In recent years, the town in which the estate lies has benefitted from economic growth. However, the estate is largely isolated from this. It has a poor reputation, remains characterised by poor outcomes for young people, and residents often lack the necessary skills and income to access the area’s new opportunities. Around 50 per cent of residents are first-generation immigrant families who can easily find themselves socially isolated and who have little knowledge of how to access services.

**GOALS.** One of the central goals of the housing association’s initiative was to achieve long-term reductions in child poverty on the estate. In line with this, the association brought together a range of local authority services, and voluntary and community services to work on increasing:

- The number of residents of all ages in employment, education and training;
- Help available to parents through informal support networks, training courses, and by strengthening intra-family relations; and
- Early intervention and prevention with the estate’s youngest children aged 0-5.

The initiative faced particular challenges in trying to connect to children’s school experiences. There are no schools located on the estate and the local school system is highly competitive. As a result, schools have tended to focus intensively, and in isolation, on their internal improvement at the expense of partnership activity.

**READY FOR SCHOOL.** Children from the estate attend a range of local schools. This means that school staff are only aware of a small proportion of the local student population. As a result, teachers may not recognise that their students are facing potential barriers to learning which relate to the estate’s context, or appreciate that parents might have little knowledge of the school system, or of a school’s expectations about how parents should support their children’s learning. The housing association therefore set out to create a formal mechanism for engaging with local schools, linking them to services that could help to address these issues.

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The housing association identified one local primary school which has about 20 children from the estate in its annual intake. It used the shared goal of promoting school readiness as the basis for developing a three-way partnership between the primary school, the housing association, and a local community centre that provides support for families with younger children. As a result, additional funding was secured to employ a part-time teacher to work on what was called a 'ready for school' project.

This project is designed to provide children and parents with support before they start at the primary school (once they know they have a place), and in the first year at school. In particular, it aims to:

- Help children from the estate make a successful transition to the primary school, and support their learning and well-being during the reception year;
- Support parents to better support their children's learning;
- Reduce wider barriers to family well-being and ensure families can access and take up services; and
- Strengthen school/home/community links.

Pre-school, the teacher's role is to work with the families to identify what is needed to support each child's learning and prepare them for transition – linking them to children's centre activities, and developing one-to-one and group learning sessions as needed.

The housing association also has parent advisers who work alongside the teacher to help link parents to services on the estate, which range from support with financial management and accessing employment, to informal networking and parent support. Once children start school, the teacher's role is to work closely with the primary school's reception staff to help them settle in school and support their learning, and to provide an active link between school, home and the wider community.

**IMPLICATIONS.** This example suggests that in places where the school system is fragmented, and links between schools, families and communities are weak, organisations from outside the school system might be best placed to bridge these gaps. In this example, it was a housing association with strong family and community ties which became the catalyst, securing the support of schools.

## ACCOUNT 4 'SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL COOPERATION'

Consider these questions as you read this account:

- What lessons do you draw from this account?
- Does your school have links with other schools?
- If so, what has been the impact?

A network of primary schools has worked in partnership with a local university education department to bring teachers and researchers together. The schools follow a model of collaborative inquiry similar to the one recommended in this resource pack, drawing on teachers' professional knowledge and wider research knowledge, to explore new ways of supporting learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Overall, the aim is to improve the learning opportunities, experiences and outcomes of all children, and particularly those experiencing barriers to learning.

Each school determines its own focus for research, starting by identifying issues that are causing concern or are puzzling in some way. They then follow a structured research programme where the teachers and university researchers collect and share evidence, both about the school's practices, so that they can develop a rich, deep understanding of what is happening to learners in school, and from wider research. This evidence is then used to stimulate new thinking and professional learning about current practices, and to identify strategies for responding to the research findings.

**LEARNING FROM DIFFERENCES.** The schools have used exchange visits to generate evidence regarding their agreed focus on developing more inclusive practices. The aim of these visits is to look specifically at relative strengths and weaknesses within schools in the network, using differences to stimulate new thinking.

The most successful visits were usually characterised by a sense of mutual learning amongst hosts and visitors. It was noticeable, too, that the focus for these visits often took some time to identify and clarify. Indeed, the preliminary negotiations that took place were in themselves a key aspect of the process.

**AN EXAMPLE.** During one such visit, the visiting teachers were each invited to observe two children. A simple observation framework, designed by the staff research group in the host school, focused on children's interactions with peers and teachers.

The children to be observed were chosen by the class teacher, who was the deputy head of the school. They were nominated on the basis that they were the children he knew least about in his class. In addition to observations, the visiting teachers were asked to interview these children. Again, a loose structure was devised, but the main emphasis was on the visiting teachers following up things that they had seen during observations.

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Afterwards, one of the visiting teachers said that the day had been ‘absolutely fascinating...’ She added: *‘There is no way in your own school you could do this’.*

This seemed to be borne out by some of the imagery used by students about their teacher during the interviews that day. For example, one commented: *‘He’s like a piranha looking round the class. He knows when I’m not listening’.* And, another student remarked: *‘He could be a really good teacher if he could explain, but he gets too frustrated.’* The joking response by the class teacher to such statements was: *‘I want to go home! I’ve had enough now!’*

**ADDRESSING CHALLENGES.** The personal nature of these observations, and the teacher’s willingness to listen to this feedback with colleagues from his own and another school present, illustrate the extent of the challenge that was sometimes involved in this sort of collaboration. Indeed, such visits were not ‘cosy’, nor did they always result in a rosy glow.

The key factor, however, seemed to be that of mutual challenge within a relationship that was respectful and supportive. In this particular example, the teacher’s seniority and the fact that he had volunteered for this degree of scrutiny may have been factors in creating a climate within which he felt able to enter into such a challenging dialogue with colleagues from another school.

Many other themes were raised during the conversation as a direct result of the observations and conversations the teachers had with students. Some of these focused on matters of fine detail regarding practices that have implications for the extent to which class members participate in lesson activities.





# ACTIVITY 4

## COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

### AIM

**To develop school priorities for involving external partners.**

### PROCESS

1. Teachers (and, where available, support staff) work in small groups to consider ways in which external partners are involved in the life of the school. Questions for discussion are:
  - Who do we involve from outside the school?
  - Who could make more contributions to our efforts for improving the presence, participation, well-being and achievement of all our students?
2. The groups carry out a Diamond Nine activity. This interactive group-based activity is a way of encouraging participants to think more deeply about the engagement of community partners.
3. Groups are given up to 15 cards with words, such as:-
  - Families
  - Other schools
  - Health workers
  - Social services
  - Places of worship
  - Businesses
  - Universities
  - Youth workers
  - Psychologists
  - Arts groups
  - Sports organisations

## GUIDE 3 - WORKING WITH PARTNERS

There are two blank cards that the groups may choose to use in order to add other partners.

4. One member of each group agrees to chair the discussion. The groups are asked to choose nine cards and put them in the shape of a diamond (see diagram), placing at the top the one they believe to be most important and at the bottom the one they think is least important.



5. After the activity, the group discuss what they have learnt and what actions the school needs to take. Their ideas are shared with the other groups in order to agree next steps for collaborating with external partners.

6 Following this process of review, it will be necessary to develop a strategy for moving forward with respect to the priority actions that have emerged. Ideally, this should be led by an implementation group headed by a senior member staff and involving a diverse range of participants.

Further reading







# FURTHER READING

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[https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/family\\_action.pdf](https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/family_action.pdf)

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<https://www.strivetogether.org/what-we-do/theory-of-action>

WHITEHURST, G. J. & CROFT, M. (2010). *The Harlem Children's Zone, promise neighbourhoods, and the broader, bolder approach to education*. Washington: The Brookings Institution.





# LINKS TO RELEVANT RESOURCES

**Note:** Before introducing these resources to others it is important to ensure that they are appropriate for the particular context.

**'The UNESCO Open File on Inclusive Education'**. An introduction for policy-makers and managers who have an important role to play in bringing about the change needed to make inclusive education a reality: <https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/132164e.pdf>

**'Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland'**. Takes a place-based approach to improving outcomes for children, young people and their communities: Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland

**'The Harlem Children's Zone'**. Attempts to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty, with on-the-ground, all-around programming that builds up opportunities for children and families to thrive in school and work: <https://hcz.org>

**'Strive Together'**. A network of communities in the USA that work and evolve together to advance equity so local success stories can become the reality for every child: <https://www.strivetgether.org>

**'Give Your Child the Best Start'**. This guide provides helpful advice for parents to help them work together with educators to advocate for quality education provision for early childhood development: Give your child the best start: Laying the foundation for quality learning

**'Students as researchers'**. Youth participatory action research: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJ5dHttlwRU>

**'School-community partnership'**. Example of schools in Australia connecting with Indigenous communities from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander roots: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjUkyufiSw8>


'Youth-led peacebuilding in Kenya'. A youth initiative for peace: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvsNeKlbbss>



# NOTES

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes, starting below the 'NOTES' header and extending across the width of the page.





# REACHING OUT TO ALL LEARNERS: a resource pack for supporting inclusion and equity in education

The Reaching Out to All Learners resource materials tackle the practicalities of addressing these challenges in schools and other education centres, including early years and further education provision. More specifically, the materials focus on three strategic questions:

- How can schools be developed in order to respond positively to student diversity?
- How can classroom practices be developed that will ensure that lessons are inclusive?
- How can practitioners engage families, partner schools and the wider community in their efforts to become inclusive and equitable?



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