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inclusion. She has been invited to participate at expert groups at the Council of Europe and OECD. In the field of parental engagement, her main area of activities is related to professionals' perceptions and capacity-building needs for better collaboration. Her work is framed by her experience as a teacher, as a parents, as a school board president as well as a researcher and trainer.

Have we included everyone?

A practical tool for education

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Abstract

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines the right to the education that is right for each child as a basic child right. It means that school systems need to be accessible for all and also provide relevant activities to support the best learning of each individual child. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is the approach that can help school think their provisions over and change to an approach that ensures this basic right to the right education. In this article, I would like to share a vision of inclusive education to inspire those (re-)designing school and education in the broader sense, as well as share some practical tools for professionals and parents to make it a reality. The choice of three projects that are included was not easy, but they show our approach, and if they spark interest, me and my team are always happy to share more.

Keywords: Education for inclusion, Universal Design in Education, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, MultiInclude and digital tools.

Context

Universal Design in Education for Inclusion

A student is successfully included, in my opinion, if they can reach their full potential, become happy particle physicists, musicians or bakers depending on their desires and talents, their career choice is appreciated by the community (without any bias towards more academic paths), and they have a drive and skills for developing their skills later in life. Education policy has defined some wonderful goals, providing quality, equitable, inclusive education to everybody being one of them. We can fill whole libraries with answer to what we mean by quality, but it is not totally straightforward what we mean by inclusive. Schools call themselves inclusive if anybody with a disability can thrive there or if they are prepared to welcome newly arrived migrants. But does this same school have answers to inclusion needs of others? I believe that real inclusion in education is close to fully individualised education, and it can only become a reality if a number of factors come together in a good constellation.

Most probably many of the readers are familiar with the picture explaining the difference between equality and equity with little boys being given a number of crates to be able to watch a football match over a fence, but I've recently found a more elaborate version of it on the internet that also defines inclusion by removing the fence and making it possible for the boys to not only watch, but also join the game. It is still a dream, but even in an "inclusive" football field we also need to think of those who only want to watch the match (no compulsory participation at all activities) and those who can/want to be the referee or the coach being way more experienced than others,

so the tribune and the coach's bench is still missing. (The original meme only had the middle 3 pictures.)

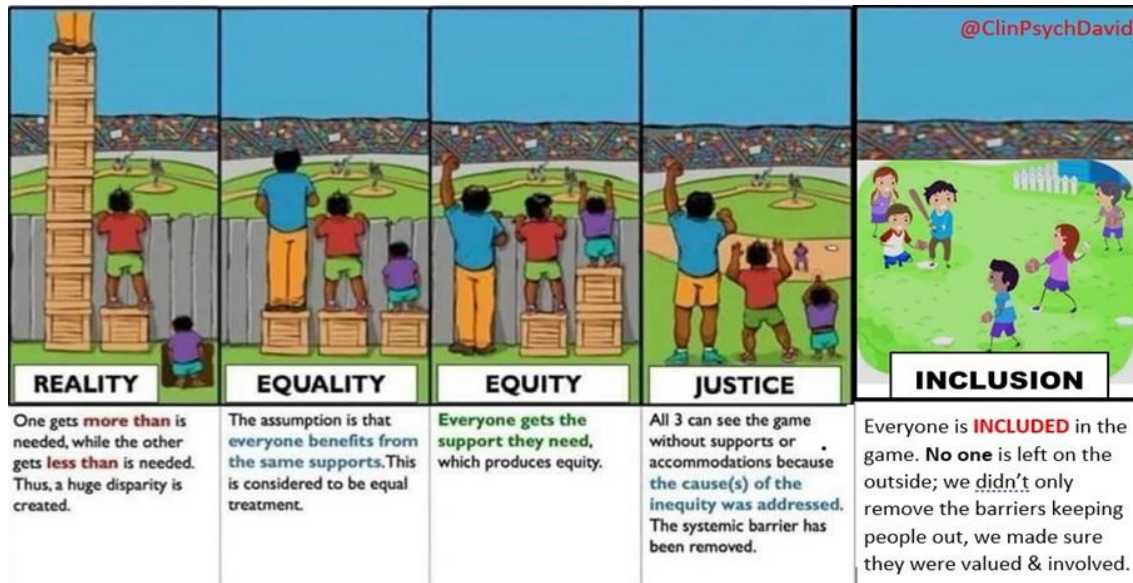


Image 1.- The picture explaining the difference between equality and equity with little boys being given a number of crates to be able to watch a football match over a fence.

Students have always been diverse, but in the digital age diversity is wider than before. We also need to take it into consideration that the goal of education is being redefined. The world needs less and less obedient, uniform people – their jobs are the ones to be taken over by robots. We need people with diverse skills and mindsets, but this is not the only change from the original goal of mass education. In most education systems in the past century the focus has shifted from providing basic knowledge and skills for everyone and higher-level academic content to a much smaller group to starting already with information heavy academic knowledge, with no consensus what counts as basic skills anymore, but aiming for some kind of average in both, giving little room for individual talents or interests. We even less need to assimilate people to an organisation's requirements. Inclusion

efforts need to aim for preserving diversity of skills, knowledge and mindsets.

What our goal is in an UDL-based education

The most important argument against home-schooling and unschooling is that these children will not have the opportunity to learn living in a diverse community. Most families have a circle of friends who are not very different from them, so this is true to a certain extent. But those sending their children to school are rarely or never confronted with this goal of education. Professionals need to have families on board to understand that while academic skills can be developed later, even at home by the computer, the learning outcomes of working together with very different people are extremely valuable. And this is just one element why parents and families need to be involved and empowered to understand inclusion for success.

The Future of Jobs Reports by the World Economic Forum regularly publish the list of skills and competences that are necessary for the workforce now and in the years to come, and they are very far from the skills and competences developed in schools. The past 2.5 years clearly shown that critical thinking (especially at being able to differentiate between fact and opinion that teachers are worse at than the general population³²) and resilience are probably the most important skills for today.

³² *Protopstaltis, A., Salamon, E. (2022). A whole school approach for sustainable development, with a particular focus on the role and competences of school leaders to support the implementation of it. ESHA, Utrecht, the Netherlands.*

Top 10 skills of 2025



Image 2.- Top 10 skills of 2025

(Source: World Economic Forum)

We can also set the goals that are considered to support inclusion, like reducing early school leaving or having a certain percentage of people in tertiary education as the European Union has done, but at the end of the day we need to educate people who do not lose their appetite for and joy of learning. Thus, inclusive education must start early. Any intervention, programme or project in early childhood education or primary school that protects and further boosts the joy of learning, a phenomenon in every child before they start formal education, should be celebrated as an inclusive attempt. (This also includes parental empowerment programmes as parents have the largest impact on learning outcomes until age 11-12, regardless the education level of parents.³³) Strong foundations in basic skills and self-esteem in this period of life also protects children in later school life, even if higher levels are not as inclusive.

³³ **Goodall, J. (2017) *Narrowing the achievement gap: Parental engagement with children's learning*, Routledge, London and New York.**

Main systemic challenges

Education inflation is another phenomenon that may prevent inclusion. In many countries in Europe and beyond there is a still growing body of academic content that children need to show their knowledge of before they can focus on their personal pathways. In a really inclusive system students need to be offered a high level of flexibility also in requirements and they need to be protected from failure in areas they have little to no affiliation for. You can find examples of this among our case studies.

I think by now a number of teachers, school leaders, but also other people have imagined me to be a lunatic. How can this happen in a school with large classes? The answer is in redefining the role of teachers and make them forget the idea of teaching anything. They need to become learning facilitators. Being trained originally a teacher, I also had to jump my own shadow. My 'aha' moment and turning point was when I had to do training for a group with 5 different languages that I didn't know (each group had one English-speaker). I really needed to change my mindset, but I realised very quickly that I see when they were stuck and needed support.

The last factor I want to mention here is the need for collaboration between formal, informal and non-formal education. An open school policy is imperative to achieve real inclusion. There will always be students whose needs cannot be catered for without opening up the school and reaching out to other educators for support be it an NGO, another school, a local business or parents/grandparents. This cannot happen without a certain level of autonomy in school leadership. In an ideal situation this is offered by school policy and leaders are

supported in this role also by training, but our recent research shows that very often this can be achieved even in overcentralised, less flexible systems if you have the right professionals in place.

For some readers it may seem like a utopia. On the one hand we need to make all possible efforts to make it a reality for the goal mentioned in the first paragraph: SDG4, providing quality, inclusive education. On the other hand, the case studies we have collected and ask members of the Learning Community to share with us show that this actually becoming a reality in more and more places, so we mustn't rule it out as a utopia. It is possible.

MultInclude – let's make a diagnosis and define strategic goals

Developing local school inclusion strategies largely depend on the mindset and competences of school professionals, and also on a leadership vision. But first and foremost, there is a need for a diagnosis to explore where the school is, and what areas need further development. As part of MultInclude (an Erasmus+ project funded by the European Union), we developed a diagnostic tool, a scoring matrix (with Vienna Children's University taking the lead) that school can use for this purpose. It was piloted in over 60 schools across Europe supporting schools to evaluate their inclusion strategies and practices along the lines of various dimensions. The website also provides a collection and analysis of practices for inspiration to support schools in improving their inclusiveness.

The questionnaire for the matrix consists of 163 items was developed along the lines of the following 7 dimensions and 4 domains:

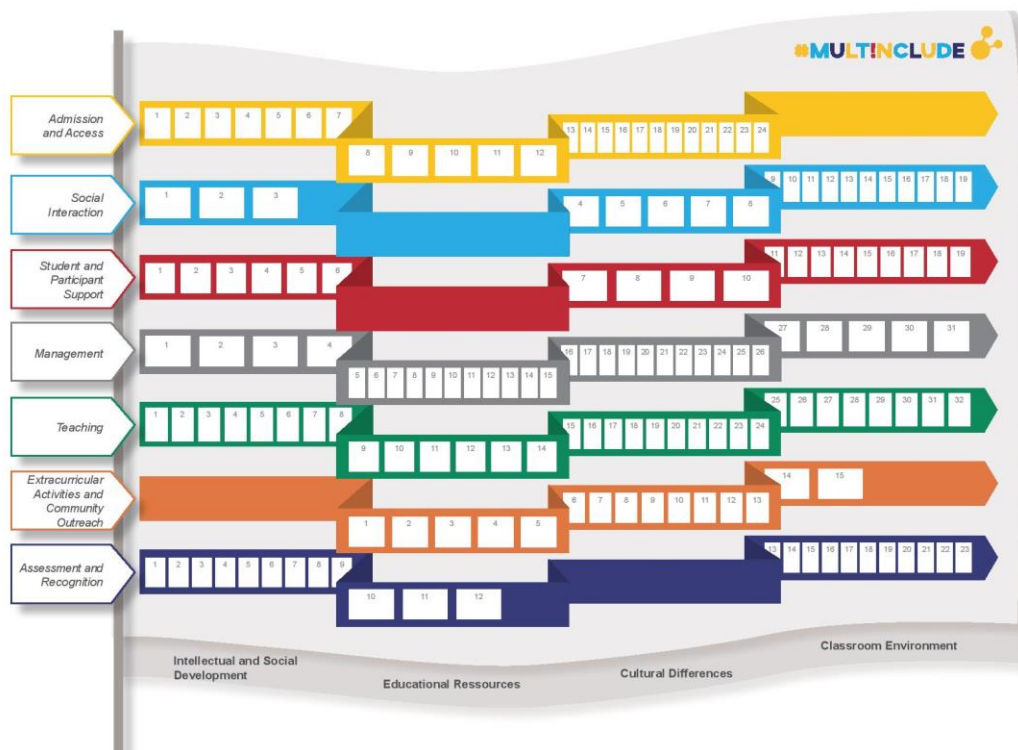


Image 3.- The questionnaire for the matrix.

By using this matrix, your school or a group of teachers from the school can explore the areas the school is currently scoring low, decide how important the given area is for your school. It is a snapshot that can then be used as a starting point for developing or improving internal strategies and processes as well as to decide on action for improvement. For example, if a school identifies a need to update their management or teaching practices in the domain of catering for cultural differences, they can develop a plan for that.

The MultInclude scoring matrix has proven to be useful tool for even the most inclusive schools to evaluate and subsequently improve their institutional inclusion strategies. There are always new challenges and

also room for further improvement. As the tool has been designed to cover a very wide range of inclusion aspects, it leads to more systemic thinking in areas that have been covered by inclusion practice, but not yet by strategy. You can use the English version after registering in the MultInclude learning community, but it can also be used on paper, using the downloadable resources available in this link of **MultInclude34**

Praise for MultInclude and the Scoring Matrix:

“I love it when complex concepts are translated into hands-on processes. And so, I'm a big fan of the MultInclude project's tool for self-assessing inclusion within schools.” – Mari Varsányi, teacher, trainer and consultant specialising on Intercultural and Inclusive Education, the Netherlands.

Tools for advocates

Having a diagnosis and a vision on where a school would like to go is a necessary starting point, but schools as well as other educators, like parents and/or non-formal education providers, need to convince decision makers about the real need for introducing new strategies.

We have identified some core elements of open schooling provisions. The first and most important element is that policy and school needs to embrace the idea and understand that it is the best possibility to provide for individual learning needs of all students. There is no school in the world that can afford to provide everything alone, but schools must collaborate with each other and other educators. Access – the

³⁴ <https://multinclude.eu/activities/impact/inclusion-matrix-toolkit/>

physical, legal and financial provisions are also key. Accessibility for disabled children is the first thing that comes to your mind. At the same time, the lack of money cannot prevent anybody from having access to the right education, but similarly, all educators should have free entry to the school and children need to be free to leave the school for education activities outside of the school building.

In the PHERECLOS project (financed by Horizon2020) a very unique set of policy recommendations were developed, focusing on promoting open schooling, so far the best approach to providing each student what they need in education with the renewed school in the centre. The recommendations highlight 5 main messages and give advice to international and national governmental bodies as well as local education stakeholder on necessary policy change.

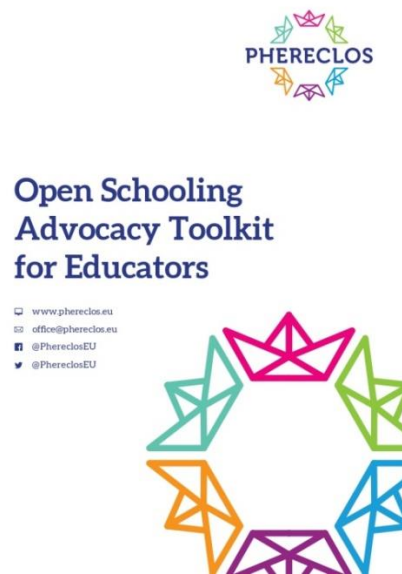


Image 4.- Cover of the publication PHERECLOS-Toolkit FINAL

This set of policy recommendations is accompanied by an advocacy toolkit for educators taking the form of an adventure book. Depending on the role of the reader in education, the education environment, their level of experience and some other factors, they are guided to create their own toolkit that helps them to plan and execute the necessary advocacy work. This book in itself is a good example of Universal Design in Education. When we were writing it, we realised that there is no traditional way of designing it to cater for diverse needs, so we had to move out of our comfort zone to design something that is close to universal without being general.

Digitalisation: the welcome and feared beast

Digital tools are among the best available means of universal design in learning, making individualisation a reality. Research has also confirmed that for the children of today online and offline presence means a continuum, not two separate fields of life. Online tools, and especially social media provide the platform for getting together, for organising social life, for expressing views and debating them, for widening their horizon and learning about the world around them. Many games, not explicitly designed for education has offered a plethora of learning opportunities (and actually lead to a new methodology in education called gamification that often has nothing to do with games, but implements methods that incentivise children in individualised ways to make an effort in studying).

However, the leading adult approach of risk prevention online is based on a number of fears. Most people are afraid of their children being bullied online, but they don't consider two things. Online bullying – a phenomenon mostly happening among children is (nearly) always an

extension of offline bullying behaviour, and often a sign of the bully being bullied. And sadly, we also need to understand that child-to-child bullying is not the most prevalent. Children are most often bullied (offline) by teachers with trusted adults from the family and circle of friends being the second. Another major concern is about pornographic content, but that has been on the table for decades, probably centuries. Children always found ways to access such content, without adult presence, if forbidden. A third area of concern is being exposed to violence. In this field research is not conclusive, but the balance is dipped towards research results showing that violent content is rarely a trigger for violent behaviour. At the same time, violent games often play the role of a punchbag.

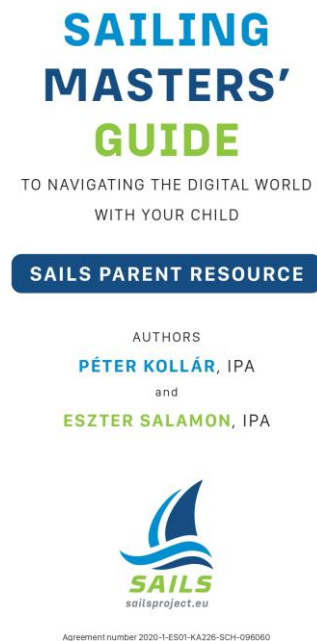


Image 5.- Cover of the publication "Sailing Master's Guide"

Some recently published research has proven that exposure to online risks has a lot of advantages. They underline that the only way to learn sailing safe online is to actually do it, and the more children use

digital tools and social media the more confident and resilient they become. It is also clear that while regular users know when and from whom to ask for help, the adults around them, especially teachers, are not always prepared for the job.

My colleagues, Luca László, Péter Kollár and I developed tools for school leaders and parents to support the implementation of a risk mitigation approach in digitalisation by supporting the adults around the child to exercise their duties and responsibilities in ensuring the rights of children as well as in supporting their learning in the digital age.

References

The resource for parents (or anybody else directly supporting the child's learning) can be downloaded from here:

<https://library.parenthelp.eu/sailing-masters-guide-to-navigating-the-digital-world-with-your-child-the-sails-parent-resource/>

The resource for school leaders can be found here:

<https://library.parenthelp.eu/captains-handbook-sails-resource-for-school-leaders/>

MultInclude

<https://multinclude.eu/activities/impact/inclusion-matrix-toolkit/>

#Inclusion

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/hashtag/?keywords=inclusion&highlightedUpdateUrns=urn%3Ali%3Aactivity%3A6706169587131547648>

PHERECLOS project - Recommendations

<https://library.parenthelp.eu/phereclos-open-schooling-policy-recommendations/>

Toolkit PHERECLOS

<https://library.parenthelp.eu/phereclos-open-schooling-advocacy-toolkit-for-educators/>