



CoTIC: Collaborative Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom

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HELP BOOK

2023



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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PRINCIPLES and BENEFITS



on mean?



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Definition

"Inclusive education is the process of recognizing, accepting, and supporting the individuality of each child or student, as well as the diverse needs of all children and students by activating and incorporating resources aimed at removing barriers to learning and teaching and creating opportunities for children's and students' development and participation in all aspects of community life." (Наредба за приобщаващото образование, 2017).

Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow (Booth T., M. Ainscow, 2020) identify the following characteristics of the inclusion process:

- All students and all staff should be considered equally valuable and worthwhile;
- The level of participation of all students should be encouraged through curricula and extra-curricula activities;
- The school should work towards reducing barriers to learning and participation for all pupils, not only for those with special needs, but also for those without difficulties and for gifted students as well..

We can talk about inclusive education when every learner, regardless of the difficulties they face, is learning in a mainstream school, in their own neighbourhood, and receives the quality teaching, support and assistance that is a prerequisite for learning success.

Inclusive education is a flexible system that focuses primarily on meeting the needs of all people, regardless of their individual characteristics. It focuses on the needs of each individual in the education process, regardless of background, gender, age, ethnicity or cultural differences.

Inclusive education within mainstream schools should be seen from the perspective that the focus should be on supporting those learners who are at risk of learning difficulties, and/or learning failures, of social isolation, or likely to be marginalised. are at risk of poor socialisation, at risk of learning difficulties, and / or learning failures, e.t.c. or likely to be marginalised.

A hallmark of inclusive education is providing quality learning opportunities to each and every student who is unique and this uniqueness is due to their individual characteristics. This makes the learner different from others. With this characteristic in mind, teachers should

adapt the curriculum, using strategies, techniques and approaches that best meet the specific needs of the individual student.

Inclusive education and more specifically inclusive schools provide equal opportunities for all, provide support and help those who need it most.

Main aims

Inclusive education is education that focuses on the learner as a person. One of its main aims is to adapt to the needs of each individual student, which in turn provides the opportunity to tackle the learning material. This requires flexibility in the learning model. As mentioned more than once no two children are the same. It is this understanding that underpins the development and implementation of individual learning programmes. A comprehensive programme is developed from kindergarten through high school, and even post-secondary education is provided with a service that develops a plan to assist in adapting educational material if the student has a desire to continue his/her education. Modernizing education by applying ICT-based and non-ICT-based tools is a way to improve the quality of learning for all students, including students with disabilities.

It is a misconception that inclusive education is only aimed at supporting learners with disabilities. It should also offer and provide developmental support to accelerate learners with a particular interest in another sphere.

In democratic societies, developing democratic thinking in the adolescent generation is a priority goal (an important goal of the NPE 1992). By implementing inclusive education, all learners are given the opportunity to learn and, regardless of disability, are guided, taking into account their skills, towards occupations that enable them to be independent and lead a dignified independent life.

The teacher is not left alone to deal with the challenges in the classroom, but works in a team including specialists, therapists and other professionals. Parents also have a place in the work of the school and are involved to actively participate in their child's education and school life.

One of the values of inclusive education is tolerance and acceptance of difference in people. Pupils are sensitised to the problems of their classmates with disabilities and support them. A teacher in an inclusive school has to continuously improve his/her competences by

participating in various trainings, seminars, qualification courses in order to respond adequately to the needs of the classroom.

Objectives

The challenges for education are great, but not insurmountable. In 2020, the European Commission identified four turning points for reducing educational underachievement.

- Monitoring (involves tracking student progress and taking targeted action);
- prevention (in particular for at-risk groups);
- early intervention (for students who are struggling);
- remediation (for those who are already underperforming and need more specific support).

The modern teacher is familiar with the value system of inclusive education. His task is to know children and their individual characteristics and differences well. It is important for the teacher to be able to guide the learning process by not allowing differences to interfere with the learning process. A teacher in an inclusive school has the task not only to work with the children, but to communicate and cooperate with all those involved in the process (the pupils, their parents, their colleagues, non-teaching staff).

Benefits

As already mentioned, inclusive education is based on providing quality education for all, with children with disabilities or difficulties receiving equal opportunities with their peers. An inclusive school is one that provides aids and supports children to participate fully in the learning process, in extra-curricular activities and in society.

- Inclusive education respects differences and individualities, placing the child at the heart of a pedagogical model that is accepted and valued by all;
- The child is understood and supported by classmates and the teacher. The school environment is tolerant and supportive;
- Children's abilities are respected and they are provided with conditions for development;

- Education in cooperation and empathy among children is highlighted as an important rule;
- Regardless of difficulties or disabilities, the child participates in the learning process on an equal basis with other children;
- It has been proven that children learn best when information is presented by their peers. The inclusion of higher-achieving students in the learning process of their classmates with difficulties is evidence of the application of the principles of inclusive education;
- Inclusive education does not mean burdening students with knowledge, it means preparing everyone to fully enter the big school called Life;
- Children build meaningful friendships.

Principles of inclusive education

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) is undoubtedly the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education. It endorsed the idea of inclusive education, which was to become a major influence in subsequent years.

According to the Salamanca Statement (p.8-9):

- ✓ every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
- ✓ every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs,
- ✓ education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,
- ✓ those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs,
- ✓ regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.

Role of the teacher

Classroom teachers are the main resource to achieve the goal of creating an inclusive educational process in a general education institution (Ainscow, Miles, 2008).

In an inclusive school, the teacher not only teaches, but provides the necessary support to each of the students. Following the principles of inclusive education and its goals, the teacher must have a good knowledge of the specific needs of each student, the difficulties some of the children face and the knowledge and skills to provide the necessary support. Where there is a child with a disability in the class, the teacher should see them not as a problem to be dealt with but as a person who has the right to develop according to their potential. In the context of inclusive education, communication between teachers and parents is crucial, because it is clear that for a child to be successful, the parent needs to be well informed about the child's academic achievements and difficulties, as well as about school life and their child's participation in it. Inclusive education pays attention not only to the quality of teaching, but also to the abilities and skills of each pupil and contributes to their development.

Effective communication between the teacher and parents is possible when both are aware that they have a common goal - good upbringing and education of children, which can only be achieved with all their efforts.

1. To do this, the teacher must show parents that he loves children as they are, with all the pros and cons, and, like parents, is concerned about their fate.

2. Trust your parenting abilities. Psychologically, parents are ready to support all the demands, works and commitments of the educational institution. Even those parents who do not have pedagogical education and higher education very often relate to raising children with deep understanding and responsibility.

3. Pedagogical tact, inadmissibility of careless interference in family life. No matter what the family is, what the parents are, the teacher must always be tactful, benevolent. He must keep all knowledge about the family in strict confidence and use it for the purpose of helping the child as well as the parents in their upbringing.

4. An active attitude in solving educational problems, relying on the positive qualities of the child, on the strengths of the family's education, focusing on the successful development of the individual.

When communicating with parents, the teacher should structure the conversation in such a way that the parents are sure that they are dealing with a professional who loves and knows

how to teach and educate children. Therefore, when preparing for a conversation with parents, the teacher should think carefully (Minikar,ru)

Teachers are the most important factor for a successful inclusion situation (Rouse, 2008) if the teacher would look at the student as an opportunity to become a more professional teacher by solving the student's problems. The teacher must have an "open mind", flexibility and a high tolerance for the different and changes in the usual work are required. Teachers should to remember that the self-realization of each student in the classroom is his responsibility, that you don't have to wait for someone to tell you how and what to do with each student, but you have to find out for yourself. The teacher should learn different teaching strategies and know how to use them effectively, should be able to adapt materials, change working methods, develop programs to help for each student, must work as a team with school staff and parents to provide the most appropriate environment for students. It is important for the teacher to consider all participants in the learning process as equal partners, listen to other professionals, students with special needs, their peers and respect them point of view, showing compromises and trying new situations.

Challenges and solutions

In inclusive education, the emphasis is not on the diagnosis and on what a student cannot do, but on finding out his/her individual potencies, and how they can be used for achieving results and quality of learning (Bērziņa, 2005). It is the understanding that the most successful scenario is when a student is supported by all adults who may have a role to play in the educational process: teachers, parents, doctors, social workers, psychologists, etc., clearly defining the tasks each of them has to deal with for supporting child's development (Skola visiem, 2002)

In order to achieve the aims of inclusive education all aspects of education should be inclusive: the education policy, the education system, the education institutions, and the education process. According to Ainscow and Miles (2009) this means that

- the idea of promoting inclusive education is highlighted in important educational documents;
- inclusive practices in educational institutions are supported by all leaders at all levels;

- inclusion is considered a general principle that guides the policy and practice of all education;
- the attendance, participation and achievement of all students are monitored;
- adequate additional support is provided for students in need and all necessary resources (material, financial, human) are made available;
- all parties involved in education perceive the diversity positively.

The introduction of the principles of inclusive education, which are at the heart of European education policy, are at different stages in different countries, including the partner countries of this project. This is a long and demanding process. And, of course, none of those involved can say that it is going easily and smoothly.

There are many challenges that mainstream teachers face and need to deal with in order to meet the demands of inclusive education and be effective and competent for the sake of their students.

If we try to summarize these challenges, they would look something like this:

- persuading parents - in cases where the teacher has noticed a problem that the child needs extra support. It is understood that it is not easy for a parent to accept that the difficulties a child is experiencing at school are due to 'a problem' and are not temporary and will be 'outgrown'. Teachers are often accused by parents of having a "special" attitude towards the child and not appreciating his efforts. Parents refuse to have the child tested to identify any deficits and to receive additional support. In some countries (such as Portugal) the child is referred for testing by the school, but in most countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Latvia) such testing can only be initiated by the parent.
- Insufficient knowledge of the specific needs of students with SEN - The mainstream teacher does not have the necessary theoretical knowledge about the characteristics and peculiarities of different diagnoses, how they affect learning skills and how they should be addressed. This makes the teacher's work with these children very difficult and reduces its effectiveness.
- Some teachers with long teaching experience and established ways of working find it difficult to break out of old practices and adopt new approaches aimed at inclusion of students with SEN. "I have worked successfully for so many years, I have

literated/taught so many children, and the fact that a child doesn't have a result is because the child cannot learn, not because I am not teaching properly."

- The development of an IEP is a challenge for the mainstream teachers, as they don't have the necessary experience and skills and find it difficult to sift out the learning content, appropriate to the abilities of the student with SEN, adapt the learning material and integrate it adequately into the learning process.
- One of the most serious challenges for the mainstream teacher comes from the fact that it is very difficult during a lesson to allocate balanced time to work with mainstream students and the student(s) with SEN, who requires no less (and often more) attention. Of course, the mainstream teacher's focus is on mainstream pupils and it is often the case that the SEN child is neglected. The curricula themselves are not tailored to the presence of SEN pupils in mainstream classes and the development and implementation of IEP cannot compensate for this.
- Lack of sufficient training courses to familiarize mainstream teachers with the principles of inclusive education, appropriate methods and approaches when working in mixed classes (where there are students with SEN), as well as to provide guidance on how the teacher can encourage and support the participation of students with SEN during the lessons, but also in the extracurricular activities of the class and the school.
- The heavy workload of teachers, the large amount of paperwork associated with their work as teachers in a mainstream classroom, is often a cause of demotivation in terms of accepting their responsibilities towards the SEN students in the class. Of course, there are differences in school organisation in different countries, but still in most places there are no assistant teachers to support the work of the main teacher, and the commitments of the mainstream and SEN teachers are not well stacked. It is not uncommon for the mainstream teacher to rely on the SEN teacher to do all the work necessary for the SEN child to acquire the knowledge and skills needed. At the same time, the SEN teacher does not have enough time (nor the necessary knowledge in all subjects) to meet these expectations.

What teachers can do (hints and advices)

Resources needed to organize support for students with special needs needs and promotion of inclusive practice, are human resources, material, financial resources, access to information and knowledge. However, even the availability of resources does not matter much if there are negatives involved people's attitude, students with special needs and other students are not ready to be together, those involved in the inclusion process are not educated, they have other priorities, the working system of the educational institution is not flexible, there is no trained staff, at large for distances there is no transport, no equipment and materials, no finance, no country unified support work systems. (Ainscow, Miles, 2009)

The main approach is to address the issues of building a support system at three levels: government, teacher and student level, which means - support for education for the institution, support for teachers, support for students. (Education White paper 6, 2001; Mitchell,2010, Ras, 2008;)

Many classroom teachers have many question marks in their minds about inclusive education. They feel anxiety, they are afraid because it is a process they do not know. Since the education they receive is limited in terms of special education, they do not consider themselves sufficient. They are afraid that other students will react negatively to the inclusion student. They try to gain knowledge by looking at their experienced colleagues and researching them. "Am I good enough?", "Will I be able to provide classroom management?", "How can I make positive interaction between other students and the inclusive student?", "Can I add something to the student?" and many more questions are on their minds.

First of all, teachers need to know the Principles of Inclusion:

- Individuals in need of special education have the right to receive education in the same institution as their peers.
- Inclusion is an integral part of special and general education.
- Services are planned according to educational needs, not inadequacy.
- The decision-making process takes place according to the family-school-educational diagnosis process.
- Early inclusion is essential.

- Individual differences are essential in inclusion.
- It is essential to make use of the sensory residue.
- Volunteering, love, patience and effort are required.
- Education should be given with all diverse pupils, students and teachers and in natural settings.
- Education aims to make the individual a part of the society.

What should classroom teachers pay attention to in inclusive education?

- First of all, the sufficient and insufficient points of the inclusion student should be determined. Paying attention to individual differences is more important for students with special education needs than in normal education. Otherwise, the student may feel inadequate and incompatible, and this may negatively affect the student's psychology.
- Having groups with more than one disability in same classroom is a serious challenge for the teacher; he needs to know methods, approaches and strategies how to differentiate among students. Only in this case the diversity in the classroom could enrich everybody.
- Providing students with personal and social skills is a higher priority than academic success.
- It is necessary to interact with other people and experts related to the student's education and not hesitate to get consultation.
- Students should be encouraged and supported where they are inadequate.
- The pride and enthusiasm of the student should not be broken. The teacher should be careful about the words he will say.
- Teacher should be included in the development, implementation, follow-up and evaluation processes of the programme followed in mainstreaming

- The education process of the student who receives mainstreaming may require more effort than other students. At this point, the teacher's interest in the included student may be more than the in other students, provided that it is balanced.
- Normally developing students in the class should be informed about the situation before the inclusion student is faced with a hurtful situation. Precautions should be taken to prevent the student from encountering a negative attitude from his classmates.
- Communicate with the parents of the mainstreaming student and, if any, with the instructors of the institutions where the student receives special education or rehabilitation.

What teacher should do?

- To use opportunities for training - many institutions offer courses that cover the basic principles of inclusive education, the characteristics of the most common disorders and difficulties, and methods for working with each of them.
- To participate actively in the work of the support teams in the school, where they can receive assistance and support from a SEN teacher, psychologist, speech therapist, both for advice related to the behaviour of a SEN student and for adapting learning material, teaching approaches, documentation, etc.
- To get to know the student with SEN, his/her family, the difficulties he/she faces at school and at home; to take into account his/her abilities and skills at the moment - this would help in developing the IEP, adapting the learning material, selecting the teaching methods and assessing the possibilities for the inclusion of the student in the work of the class.
- When working with students with SEN, the teacher should put the student's socialisation and inclusion at the forefront and then focus on his/her academic achievement.
- The right approach when talking to parents of children with SEN is crucial - demonstrating concern and responsibility for the child is far more effective than constantly pointing out problems and deficits. The emphasis should always be on achievement; no matter how small they are in comparison to the achievements of other students in the class.

- It is a good idea for the teacher to inform the other students and their parents about the presence of a child with SEN in the class, about the peculiarities of his/her behaviour (if any) - this will help to understand the child's difficulties and create a tolerant and supportive environment where the student with SEN feels relaxed and accepted. This is a major step on the road to inclusion.

In conclusion, it is of utmost importance that teachers are aware of the principles of inclusive education, the philosophy and the idea behind it, that they are aware of the need to implement it as an integral part of society. This would lead to an increase in the teacher's motivation to enrich their pedagogical arsenal with new methods and approaches and the formation of a positive attitude towards the process itself.

Through its work on the COTIC project and the materials developed, the international team hopes to contribute to the full and effective inclusion of children with learning difficulties.

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COLLABORATIVE TEACHING

MODELS and STRATEGIES



INTRODUCTION

Collaborative or cooperative teaching is a pedagogical approach where two or more teachers and/or other specialists work with the same students together to involve several perspectives and viewpoints in the process of transmitting and mediating the knowledge. Working together with other educators is an important feature of effective early childhood education and care. A collaborative approach, where professionals work together to support young children's learning and development and work with their families, delivers better outcomes for everyone. A collaborative approach offers educators an opportunity to learn from and support each other, and importantly, share their daily workload.

Working collaboratively is not about giving up your unique strengths and qualities. It is rather about an attitude of collegiality where the team benefits from the skills and abilities that each individual brings to the team. This way of working means that, when we cooperate, our professional practices are enhanced beyond what we offer individually. Our capacity to work collaboratively makes us more able to focus on the competencies and skills of children and build relationships with their families to deliver high-quality programs.

Collaboration is a wonderful teaching tool. Teachers have the opportunity to assess and differentiate instruction for students more readily and they can learn new teaching techniques from one another to expand their teaching repertoire. Cooperative teaching experiences also provide mutual support and assistance for planning and implementing lessons, assessing students' progress, sharing professional concerns, and addressing pupil's learning needs. Most importantly, teaming allows more opportunities for pupils to understand and connect with content thereby maximizing individual learning potential.

At its best, collaborative teaching allows pupils and the class to benefit from the healthy exchange of ideas in a setting defined by mutual respect and a shared interest in a topic. At its worst, collaborative teaching can create a fragmented or even hostile environment in which instructors undermine each other and compromise the academic ideal of a learning community and civil discourse. Thus, it is crucial to fully understand not only the importance of this approach but also to be aware of the key features that are important to pay attention to in order to maximize the benefits and prevent the possible risks before introducing it into the school environment.

Key features of collaboration at schools

Collaborative teaching, sometimes called cooperative teaching, tandem teaching or team teaching, involves educators working in tandem to lead, instruct and mentor groups of students. Collaboration most often occurs among professionals from various disciplines including core subjects, special education, elective courses, library science, or guidance programmes. On some occasions, teachers from the same department or grade level may team-teach to target multiple levels of learning or provide a greater variety of supervised activities for students to practice skills. Collaboration can be implemented across all instructional levels and subject areas.

There have been many studies and research on the topic of collaborative teaching, but the **five fundamental features** determined by Brownell, Yeager, Rennells, and Riley (1997) seem very accurate: 1) A shared vision for student learning and teaching, 2) Common commitment to collaboration, 3) Communities of care, 4) Frequent, extended, positive interactions between school faculty and leaders, and 5) Administrative leadership and power sharing.

Collective inquiry is at the heart of teacher collaboration because it brings teachers together as learners, with a shared goal of improving learner outcomes. In professional learning communities, all teachers contribute as equals, seeking to understand and respond to what is happening for their learners. The focus is on problem-solving together, drawing conclusions from both research and student aiming at positive changes in educational process.

Before trying to introduce a new approach into educational process, it is important to understand the reason and necessity to invest the significant amount of energy that it requires. Here are some of the most visible **benefits** the involved parties can enjoy in case of a successful process **of collaborative teaching**:

- Learners benefit from collaborative teaching because teachers take collective responsibility for the progress of all learners. Teachers who know how to collaborate effectively model skills of collaboration to their learners.
- Collaborative teaching environments provide opportunities for teachers to learn from and with each other on an ongoing basis. Teachers can observe other teachers in action, engage in professional conversations about the impact of different approaches, and get feedback on their own teaching.

- Collaborative teaching teams focus on each other's strengths, support each other's professional growth, debate ideas, and solve problems together. This creates synergy, allowing teams to achieve more than they would if teachers work independently.

Teacher collaboration, when practiced with a focus on instructional strategies, curriculum, and assessment particularly, has benefits for both teachers and students. Results are even more promising when the collaboration is extensive and perceived by teachers as helpful.

There have been many studies on the impact of collaborative teaching on both teachers and students, as well as the school environment. It is worth mentioning one of them, i.e. the study "*Teacher collaboration in instructional teams and student achievement*" described by Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom (2015). The research examined teacher collaboration practices in 336 Miami-Dade Public Schools between 2010 and 2012 and involved over 9,000 teachers. Results of this study suggest that teacher collaboration has positive effects on teachers and their students. Nearly all teachers (90%) report that their collaboration was helpful. Besides, these results suggest that schools with "*instructional teams engaged in better collaboration also have higher achievement gains in math and reading*". Another interesting conclusion is that "*teachers benefit from the quality of collaboration within their school even if they do not contribute to the collaboration themselves*". Teachers' rate of improvement increases more rapidly if they work in a school with higher-quality collaboration than they would if they worked in a school with lower-quality collaboration. Teacher collaboration has strong and positive effects on student achievement.

It is also important to mention the aspect of leadership, which is a key element when considering successful collaboration because teacher collaboration requires leaders who can cultivate the capacity to collaborate about instruction, curriculum, students, and assessments; they create and support instructional teams to maintain engagement in high-quality collaboration and serve as advocates of teacher collaboration.

Barriers to collaboration and how to overcome them

There is the assumption that putting collaboration into place is relatively easy: one just needs to put individuals together and say, "Work together". However, that also seems to be not the case. Friend (2000) points out that teachers, themselves, remark on "*how difficult*

collaboration is, how little attention was paid to collaboration in their professional preparation, and how few staff development opportunities are offered related to it". Teachers need specific training and practice in knowing "how to work, communicate, and collaborate with other adults" (McCormick, Noonan, Ogata, & Heck, 2001, p. 130). Teachers may not have learned this, because the most common practice for teachers is to work in relative isolation (McManus & Kauffman, 1991), and they are used to making decisions alone (Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995). Those who have attempted to institute more collaborative practices have found that formulating and maintaining these teaching approaches are difficult to put into place (Niles & Marcellino, 2004). Others have found that specific training and monitoring are needed, or it just doesn't happen (Schumm, Vaughn, Haager, McDowell, Rothlein, & Saumell, 1995).

An important aspect which should be considered is teachers' leadership and teamwork skills because leadership and teamwork have a direct impact on the ability for an organization to carry out its mission.

Leadership is needed to make sure every team member is going in the same direction and working towards the same goal. Good leadership provides a clear vision for the team, provides a strategy for achieving the vision, motivates team members to use their talents, challenges the team to be innovative and enhance their skills, and monitors progress and directs the team to keep them on track.

Teamwork is highly challenging competence. The work itself may prove a challenge as members juggle competing assignments and personal commitments. The work may also be compromised if team members are expected to conform and pressured to go along with a procedure, plan, or product that they themselves have not developed. Groupthink, or the tendency to accept the group's ideas and actions despite individual concerns, can also compromise the process and reduce efficiency. Personalities and competition can play a role in a team's failure to produce relevant outcomes.

In their *Essentials of business communication*, Thill and Bovee (2002) provide a valuable list of actions to be considered when setting up a team. Here are some suggestions:

- Select team members wisely.
- Select a responsible leader.
- Promote cooperation.

- Clarify goals.
- Elicit commitment.
- Clarify responsibilities.
- Encourage prompt action.
- Apply technology.
- Ensure technological compatibility.
- Provide prompt feedback.

Group dynamics involve the interactions and processes of a team and influence the degree to which members feel a part of the goal and mission. A team with a strong identity can prove to be a powerful force, but it requires time and commitment. A team that exerts too much control over individual members can run the risk of reducing creative interactions and encourage tunnel vision. A team that exerts too little control, with attention to process and areas of specific responsibility, may not be productive. The balance between motivation and encouragement, and control and influence, is challenging as team members represent diverse viewpoints and approaches to the problem.

Individuals that typically work alone or tend to be introverts may need additional encouragement to participate. Extroverts may need to be encouraged to listen to others and not dominate the conversation. Teamwork involves teams and work; thus group dynamics play an integral role in their function and production.

To ensure the progress and successful implementation of collaborative teaching, all the involved parties should fully understand the importance of changing the focus from individual to collective effort. The team members involved in the respective collaboration should regularly discuss the methods that would promote mentoring, support, and dialogue. This may be enhanced by setting a schedule of regular meetings, informal conversations, or filling questionnaires occasionally to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to share their opinions, and express their doubts, concerns, and ideas for improvement.

Guidelines for collaborative teaching

It is evident from the previous text that collaboration requires individuals interact and communicate with each other on an ongoing, everyday basis, they share information as well as responsibility. The cooperation at school is a fundamental key to the inclusion of students with special education needs (SEN) therefore we need to follow certain guidelines and be in concord with this principle providing we want to build a successful inclusive school which supports all pupils with their various special needs.

Let us explore some essential keys (Welch, 2011) to successful school cooperation and thus to efficient tandem/team teaching.

The whole educational team (no matter whether it only involves tandem teachers or tandem teachers and school SENCO and other school counsellors) has to share a **common goal**. In our case, the goal is to support pupils at risk of learning difficulties at the beginning of their education career and thus prevent the development of such difficulties or minimize their effect.

The team teaching requires **interdependence and equality**, i.e., all participating teachers share the responsibility for meeting their defined goals. That does not mean they have the same knowledge and/or level of education. The diversity of the tandem and/or the educational team is their strength. Specific input of all the members of the team is accepted. The members know the requested skills, knowledge, and experience of each member. Thus, they accept their perspectives, resources, and opinions. Members of the team encourage each other to do their work. An example of such interdependence in our COTIC project could be as follows. School special educators, school psychologist and other school counsellors may understand the process of learning from cognitive perspective. They may contribute with the explanation why a pupil fails some school subjects and/or particular activities which may be affected by weak perception, specific forms of memory, which is deficient, poor attention span, etc. The main class teacher knows the principles of learning, adequate teaching materials (including textbooks, worksheets, etc.). The main class teachers are also aware of the dynamics of their classes, which may affect the planning of lessons. A tandem teacher who assists children with SEN should be an expert on specific individual activities which support such pupils. The tandem teachers should know how to help children to focus, to internalize vocabulary, etc. They should be also able to predict what planned activities may be too complicated for their

target group and thus discuss various adaptations of such activities with the main teacher (our COTIC worksheets are the resource for such adjustments).

The previous characteristic is tightly linked to the next feature of the collaborative teaching, which is **interactive exchange of resources**. This category involves information resources, human resources, financial resources, physical resources, and technological resources. Sometimes even parents of pupils with SEN are involved in the cooperation. It is always crucial to realize what teaching aids and/or other materials the school needs (e.g., self-regulation tools for children with hyperactivity, special chairs and other seating instruments for children with motor difficulties can be very useful). Another useful resource may be a small room for individual work which can be sometimes used by the pupils and their tandem teachers as leaving the class and working individually for some time can be the only option how to make a pupil focused and finalize their work. The members of the team need to be aware of all such resources, which is only possible when they discuss them. Maybe even make a list of useful resources and how and where to approach them can be helpful. Obviously, the COTIC worksheets are exactly such information resource which can be applied during lessons to support children with SEN. The tandem teachers just need to plan a lesson together and agree on materials that can be used for individual kids.

The other inevitable characteristic of teamwork involves **efficient communication skills**. The members of the team do not only exchange resources but also information – on pupils, on teaching aims, on teaching strategies, on current atmosphere in a class, on current state of pupils with SEN, their needs, their development and/or any changes in their study results, etc. The lead teacher must inform the back-up teacher on his/her intentions within a lesson. All educators involved in a lesson need to understand what the pupils should achieve, what they should learn. Only under such conditions can we modify the learning materials and teaching approaches and/or teaching aids to be more appropriate to children with SEN. Discussions among team members can be characterized by four key features (Welch, 2011). We sometimes need to clarify what we talk about, i.e., we have to ask open-ended questions and try to elaborate the topic to make sure everything is clear to all of us, and all team members comprehend the plans and/or the topic in a similar way. As we clarify the information, we need to attend the whole conversation, i.e., be mentally present, show interest, be involved. This can be manifested by keeping an eye contact, nodding one's head, avoiding any other activities at the time of the discussion. Thus, the speaker is assured that the listeners actively participate in the discussion. The third feature of efficient communication is paraphrasing. In

other words, the listener uses his/her own words to say what (s)he has just heard. They rephrase the information which helps the speaker understand that (s)he has been clear enough to the listeners. The listeners confirm they have really received the information which was meant by the speaker. Eventually, the discussion needs to be summarized – everyone needs to know what has been decided and/or agreed on. When we plan work with pupils with special needs, the team members should know who is going to do certain activities, what needs to be done, when it is due, why we need it. The responsibilities need to be divided among team members in a way they join and follow each other. When we summarize the discussion outcomes at the end of our talk, we make sure the information has been delivered to most of the participants.

Effective communication is often needed when the team **solves various problems**, which is another key characteristic of teamwork. The work with children with SEN may be exhausting, demanding, time-consuming, not often highly appreciated by the others. This may cause even more problems than standard school situations. Furthermore, the more people at one spot, the more problems we can expect, which is quite common phenomenon at schools. Problem-solving skills often lead to gaining control over the problem situation. This requires a lot of interactions with others. Mutual support of team members is very important. The first step of problem solving is to identify the problem. We need to know what the problem is, where it comes from. We should differentiate what our responsibilities are and what problems we are in charge of. On the contrary, we have to realize what we sometimes just need to accept and/or we need to request the problem solution from somebody else (e.g., from a school headmaster). Once we describe the problem in a plain language which all the team members understand, we need to discuss possible solutions. It sometimes takes time; we sometimes need to brainstorm what all possible results could be and only after a thorough discussion in the team we can make an action plan (i.e., who, what, when, why, where will take certain steps to attempt to overcome the problem). The plan often needs to be implemented as soon as possible. The school dynamics are so fast and changeable that we need to react quickly and be ready to solve problems most of the time we deal with pupils and other people. On the other hand, we must not be impulsive and implement solutions without analysing the problem and discussing with the other team members. It is worth taking time to think about the background of the problem and about most effective solutions, which we can implement. The lead teacher and the back-up teacher are in their class most of the time. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary to involve other team members (e.g., SENCO, school psychologist, school

counsellor) into the problem-solving process as they may contribute with ideas and suggestions which cannot be elaborated by the teachers who are too overwhelmed by the problem situation. Thus, listening and discussion about the problem may take some time and it is worth looking at the situation from a distance for a while. However, the implementation of the plan needs to come as soon as possible. Whenever we take some steps to solve the problem, we also have to evaluate the impact of our solution after some time it has been implemented. There are many situations that cannot be changed within a minute (the solution takes time) – e.g., problem behaviour of certain pupils is a result of a continuous interactions with their environment, it often starts with small signals which the educators may not notice and/or they do not consider them as the beginning of some bigger problems. Once the behaviour is an issue to solve, we need to change our approaches to a pupil, sometimes even to the whole class, we need to implement certain rules, we need to support the pupil (and the class) for some time before we can notice that the behaviour has changed.

Forms of collaborative teaching

There are several options what the collaborative teaching may look like (Wilson & Blednick, 2011). When we talk about inclusion of a child with special educational needs who requires extra support during a lesson, a rather typical form of tandem teaching will be **assistance**. In other words, the lead teacher works with most of a class while the back-



up teacher helps one or more children with special needs who either need more time to complete a task, or they need extra space to work on a task, or they work on a parallel task which copies the principles of the tasks given to the other pupils, but it is modified for the pupils with special needs. This is also the case of our worksheets when we expect the whole class will work on a common topic but the pupils with special needs will use separate worksheets which will help them to understand and practise the topic in accordance with their abilities and needs.

Another rather frequent form of tandem teaching can be **alternative teaching**. This means that the tandem shares responsibilities for the topic of the lesson and each tandem member prepares certain parts of the lesson. They have to have a detailed lesson plan and each tandem member teaches some parts of the lesson while the other member works

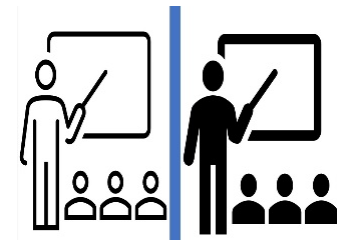


as the assistant at that moment. In other words, both members repeatedly alter their roles, maybe several times during the lesson. The inevitable prerequisite of such organisation of the tandem teaching means that the tandem members trust each other, know each other's teaching approaches, and understand what the other member intends when (s)he introduces his/her part of the lesson.

Another form of the tandem teaching which requires intense cooperation and mutual trust and knowledge of each other is called **duet**. This means that the tandem members teach together. They share the topic and they both talk to the class. They follow each other but there are no exact moments when one teacher takes the main role and the other the assistant role. They both seem like lead teachers.

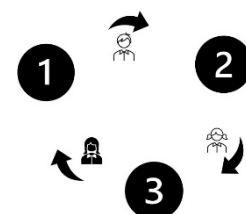


Somehow similar to duet, but different in some aspects, is **parallel teaching**. This means that each tandem teacher works with one part of the class, and they teach the same topic but with a small group of pupils not the whole class. Under such conditions each tandem member can differentiate among pupils more frequently



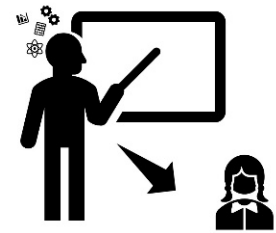
and the individual approach to pupils with special needs is achievable more easily. The important question when planning the parallel teaching in two small groups is the structure of the groups. The skills and abilities of each group can be either homogenous or heterogenous. When the groups are homogenous, the pupils in one group are more advanced while the pupils in the other group need more support. The teaching can be thus adjusted to all pupils who work in similar speed and often need similar stimuli. The other option is that pupils in each group are both more advanced and also less advanced (i.e., heterogenous groups). This means that some pupils work more independently and/or need extra tasks while the others work more slowly and need more support. Under such circumstances it is much easier to pay attention to individual pupils while the others work on their tasks – sometimes the more advanced pupils work separately, and the teacher works with the less advanced, but they can also function vice versa. The pupils with special needs can even work on the worksheets such as our project materials.

Similar to parallel teaching can also be **station teaching**. The difference is that each tandem teacher works at one place in the classroom and (s)he is responsible for some parts of the lesson work.



The pupils work at one station and when they finish their work, they move to another station. There may be more stations than teachers and thus each tandem teacher can be in charge of more than one station. Another option is that each tandem teacher oversees one station and there is another one or two station where pupils work independently. Under such circumstances the tandem teachers can also easily implement work with extra worksheets for children with special needs. As they work with smaller groups of pupils and they focus on smaller part of the lesson, it is easier to individualize the work.

The last option of tandem teaching we would like to mention is **lead and back-up teaching**. This is a typical situation when the teacher assistant (i.e., the back-up teacher) is not familiar with the topic of the lesson or the whole subject. The assistant is only responsible for the pupils with special needs, but the lead teacher manages the whole



lesson. This teacher also has to give precise instructions to the back-up teacher as (s)he can only work with the pupils when (s)he knows what exactly is expected from him/her. The lead teacher prepares the plan for the back-up teacher, including the worksheet which can be used with the pupils with special needs who work with the teacher assistant. It is also sometimes crucial to plan together what the back-up teacher will do with the pupil(s) when they go to work to a separate room if this is needed. This organisation of the tandem teaching means that the lead teacher is fully responsible for the whole teaching plan and also for the work of the back-up teacher and his/her work with pupils with special needs. Both, the back-up teacher and the pupils depend on the lead teacher plans and decisions.

Responsibilities and activities of a lead teacher and a back-up teacher

In our project, the model of tandem teaching will often involve a lead teacher and a back-up teacher (sometimes also called teacher assistant). It does not have to mean that the roles of the tandem members are definitely given. They may alter the roles in accordance with a lesson plan, their competences, current situation in a class or other circumstances. However, the support of children with special needs will often require individual assistance – i.e., the lead teacher will work with most of a class while the back-up teacher will work with one or more pupils who manifest special needs and require extra support and slightly different type of schoolwork and/or different work speed.

Such teaching arrangement needs high level of compatibility between the tandem members. They have to trust each other – i.e., be sure the other member follows each other’s intentions. They have to volunteer each other – i.e., they have to recognize when the partner needs some help with pupils. It is sometimes crucial to estimate from the situation in the class what additional activities with pupils are needed. The teaching situation is often so dynamic that there is no time to discuss what to do next. The tandem members have to know each other, their plans, they have to anticipate some of their necessary actions, and cooperate.

The back-up teacher (no matter whether this is still the same person, or the tandem teachers alternate) has to divide his/her attention between the lead teacher and pupils. (S)he has to evaluate the impact of learning on pupils when the lead teacher works with them (Smith, 2002). Whenever necessary, the back-up teacher needs to be available to the pupils with special needs to help them keep on the education track with their peers.

Let us summarize what **the lead teacher’s work** usually involves (Smith, 2002):

- (S)he decides on the lesson plan and chooses the list of activities planned during a lesson.
- (S)he gives instructions to the back-up teacher, (s)he has to express clearly what kind of help will be needed during a particular lesson.
- (S)he prepares the resources and/or gives hints to the back-up teacher what materials need to be prepared (e.g., our project worksheets will be useful at some points during the lesson).
- (S)he is responsible for organizing the lesson and managing the class.
- (S)he is responsible for evaluation of pupils and giving feedback to the pupils.
- (S)he also evaluates their own teaching and the division of tandem roles – the self-reflection of the lesson should lead to further adjustments and changes in the plan of next lessons in the class.

Furthermore, here are usual responsibilities and actions of **the back-up teacher** (Smith, 2002):

- (S)he assists individual pupils with their work.
- (S)he supports individual pupils to keep their attention on a task.

- (S)he encourages shy and uncertain pupils to start and/or continue their work.
- (S)he explains core vocabulary and/or phrases to pupils with special need when they lack such knowledge, otherwise they cannot continue learning; they will get lost.
- (S)he helps pupils with special needs to work with their extra resources and materials.
- (S)he ensures the pupils have understood instructions.
- (S)he supports pupils with special needs when they lose their concentration, when they are distracted, when they need help to continue their work. If (s)he was not there, the pupils would not finish their work, they would not learn efficiently during a lesson.
- (S)he reminds pupils of important teaching points made earlier during the lesson.
- (S)he questions and prompts the pupils to keep them focused and on a track.
- (S)he helps with the evaluation of the pupils, especially those (s)he has been working with during the lesson. It is also very important to make pupils with special needs aware of their successes and achievements. Even though they often lack behind the rest of the class, they have to realize what they have managed to do. This is one of the significant ways to keep them motivated.
- (S)he sometimes takes a small group of pupils or an individual outside the classroom and works with them separately to give them time and space to concentrate and work in accordance with their learning speed. (S)he sometimes even leaves the class with such pupils for other than learning purposes, e.g., the pupils need to recover from a demanding and frustrating situation in a class and/or they need to refresh their energy to continue learning.
- (S)he helps to prepare resources for teaching according to the lead teacher instructions, including various ICT devices, visual and practical learning aids, measuring instruments, etc.
- (S)he helps to keep the classroom structured and tidy (i.e., all the study material, furniture and other learning tools and instruments are at their places when the pupils can find them and use them when they need them; all the things have their place where to be put).

- (S)he observes the class and generates suggestions and ideas for further planning and cooperation with the lead teacher.

As we can see – even though the back-up teacher is not responsible for the main teaching plan of a lesson, his/her role in the class is irreplaceable. Both tandem members need to be in balance and their work requires a variety of dynamic activities.

Conclusions

A collaborative approach to teaching is a pedagogical method where professionals (such as lead teachers, back-up teachers, SENCO, other school counsellors) work together to support children's learning process. The main benefit of such collegiality is the possibility to use all the various skills and abilities that each individual brings to the team. A collaborative approach offers educators an opportunity to learn from and support each other, and importantly, share their daily workload, while pupils and the class can benefit from the healthy exchange of ideas in a setting defined by mutual respect and a shared interest in a topic.

It is not always easy to organize and implement high-quality collaborative teaching because many teachers are used to making decisions alone. This approach requires both strong leadership and teamwork skills as described above.

In order to establish an educational environment favorable for collaborative teaching, it is important to focus on the following aspects: 1) a common goal (in the case of the project COTIC, it is supporting pupils at risk of learning difficulties at the beginning of their education career); 2) interdependence and equality of all the participating teachers/ experts because they all share the responsibility for meeting their defined goals; 3) interactive exchange of resources; 4) efficient communication skills; 5) ability to solve various problems because the work with children with SEN may be exhausting, demanding, time-consuming, not often highly appreciated by the others

There are different forms of collaborative teaching, and it is crucial to understand the specifics of each of them to choose the most suitable one for each individual situation. The forms described in this paper are the following: assistance, alternative teaching, duet, parallel teaching, station teaching, as well as lead and back-up teaching. In the project COTIC, the model of tandem teaching will often involve a lead teacher and a back-up teacher (sometimes

also called teacher assistant), therefore this form of teaching has been described in more detail in the last segment of this paper.

Thus, it can be seen that collaborative work in education fosters trusting and open learning, which is particularly important in relation to children with SEN. It requires additional knowledge and skills that our project is focusing on, but the results can be rewarding and beneficial to all the parties involved in the educational process.

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CoTIC: Collaborative Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom

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COTIC WORKSHEETS



Co-funded by
the European Union

The worksheets you will find in the next pages have been developed by the CTW-teams, that were formed in all partner countries. Each team consists of at least three primary school teachers, one SEN teacher and a psychologist or a pedagogical counsellor.

The objective of the CTW (Colaborative Teaching Workshops) was to develop a set of worksheets on the main school subjects (First Language, Mathematics, Science, and English as a Foreign language), based on the 2nd grade curricula. Each Worksheet has 5 exercises with steadily increasing difficulty, very well visualised, and adapted for the needs of pupils with learning difficulties.

The worksheets are not extra work. They substitute the work pupils cannot do now due to their learning difficulties. While the other pupils in the class work on tasks from a workbook and/or a textbook, the pupils with SEN should use the worksheets with an equal topic but adjusted to their needs. We hope that thanks to more intense practice accommodated to their needs they will once reach similar level of knowledge and skills as their classmates. The aim of the worksheets is to prevent failures and find ways how to overcome or decrease the learning difficulties.

Developed worksheets are included in this Help Book.

They are divided in four sections:

Section 1: Mathematics

Section 2: Science

Section 3: English as a foreign language

Section 4: National language*

*Worksheets for Teaching the National Language (10 per language) are not included in the English version of the Help Book. Here you can find the list of topics they cover. The National Language Worksheets you can find in the national versions of the Help Book in the respective language (Bulgarian, Czech, Italian, Latvian, Maltese, Portuguese and Turkish).