RAISING ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL LEARNERS

Quality in Inclusive Education

A synthesis of key issues across Europe

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

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Editor: Verity Donnelly, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

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Secretariat
Østre Stationsvej 33
DK-5000 Odense C Denmark
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20
secretariat@european-agency.org

Brussels Office
3 Avenue Palmerston
BE-1000 Brussels Belgium
Tel: +32 2 280 33 59
brussels.office@european-agency.org

www.european-agency.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Raising Achievement for all Learners – Quality in Inclusive Education (RA4AL) project aims to address the ways in which inclusive policy and practice can raise the achievement of all learners. This ethical imperative is a priority at European level and has been identified as a key issue for all member countries of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (the Agency). The main target group for project information is national policy makers who are in a position to ensure that inclusion becomes an integral part of all education policy making, supported by effective collaboration between education and other government departments.

The RA4AL project ran from December 2011 to November 2012, supported by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme Comenius funding. The project has drawn upon the following sources of information:

- The outcomes of the RA4AL conference planned in colllaboration with the Danish Ministry of Education and the Odense municipal authorities. The conference was held in Odense in June 2012 and was recognised as an official event under the Danish presidency of the EU. Policy makers for general, compulsory sector education and policy makers and researchers in the field of inclusive education worked collaboratively at the conference.
- Findings from a range of Agency thematic projects involving all member countries.
- Recent research, including work published by UNESCO, UNICEF and OECD.

Project findings and recommendations

The following six themes have emerged as critical in raising achievement for all learners:

1. **Collaborative policy and practice.** To engage and support all learners, but in particular those who may face disadvantage, services should be provided in local communities through close collaboration – in policy and practice – between education, health, social services and other agencies. Co-operation and networking is needed at all levels – national, local area, school and classroom – between all stakeholders, learners and families to ensure both co-ordinated responses and effective use of resources.
2. **Support for school and system leaders.** School and system leaders should receive support to ensure that they have the vision and the necessary competences to establish a positive ethos and provide appropriate leadership for inclusive practice. Planning to meet the diverse needs of all learners should become an integral part of the whole area/school development process, which should in turn bring together all current priorities in a coherent way.
3. **Inclusive accountability.** Approaches to system and school accountability should include a strong element of self and/or peer review to empower stakeholders and should ensure consistency and reinforce inclusive values and practice.
4. **Personalisation through listening to learners.** The voice of the learner is key in shaping all policy and practice. Personalisation also involves working more closely with parents and families to address any support requirements in a more holistic way.
5. **Professional development for inclusive education.** Teachers must be active agents in any system/school change and their competences should be addressed

through both initial teacher education and continuing professional development. All teachers must develop the necessary values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure the learning and full participation of all learners in every classroom.

6. **Pedagogical approaches for all**. In view of work by the Agency, further supported by recent international research, it is evident that there are pedagogical approaches that benefit all learners, for example team teaching and peer assisted learning. However, further research is needed on effective strategies to support learning and the management of heterogeneous groups in practice.

Emerging issues for future work

The outcomes of the one-year RA4AL project aim to form the basis of a longer-term project by the Agency which should consider the need to:

- Gather practical and cost-effective examples of networking and collaboration in classrooms, schools and local communities as well as at national/international levels and examine the contribution that such practices can make towards raising the achievement of all learners;
- Build on existing work on leadership to examine the specific competences needed for leadership in inclusive systems/settings;
- Conduct further work on appropriate accountability mechanisms for the education system and for schools that empower stakeholders and reflect inclusive values by measuring what is valued for all learners and providing concrete evidence of effective practice leading to more equitable achievement;
- Investigate how education systems and services are organised, taking account of the roles of key stakeholders and the need to consider the voices of learners and their families to offer a truly personalised experience;
- Undertake further work on the areas of competence needed by teachers to meet the diverse needs of all learners and investigate the best ways to achieve this in initial teacher education and on-going professional development;
- Carry out research on pedagogical approaches and strategies that go beyond teacher-led ‘differentiation’ to learner-centred, personalised classroom practice.

Rather than revisiting definitions of inclusive education or justifying a move to more inclusive approaches, policy makers, school leaders and teachers should collaborate to:

- Ensure equity – providing access to education that is not compromised by poverty, social class, gender, race or disability;
- Work efficiently – maximising outcomes in cost-effective ways;
- Achieve excellence – through a holistic education that will improve the lives of all young people.

To support this work and the actions outlined above, co-operation at European level is critical in making best use of resources.

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (the Agency) conducted a survey of member countries to establish priorities for future work. Twenty-one out of twenty-nine replies from ministerial representatives of member countries expressed the need for more information on quality education in inclusive settings as a strategy for raising achievement for all learners.

Following discussions, country representatives agreed that the Raising Achievement for all Learners project (RA4AL) should aim to explore how the presence, participation and achievement of all learners in education could be improved in a meaningful way that improves their life chances and opportunities for active citizenship.

The importance of this topic, in Europe and beyond, is reflected in recent work by UNICEF (2010) that states: '*Whether in health, in education, or in material well-being, some children will always fall behind the average. The critical question is – how far behind? Is there a point beyond which falling behind is not inevitable but policy susceptible, not unavoidable but unacceptable, not inequality but inequity?'* (p. 1)

The work of UNESCO (2009) also clearly indicates that inclusive education is a question of equity and is therefore a quality issue impacting upon all learners. Three propositions regarding inclusive education are highlighted:

- *Inclusion and quality are reciprocal;*
- *Access and quality are linked and are mutually reinforcing;*
- *Quality and equity are central to ensuring inclusive education*. (p. 8)

In more recent work, UNESCO (2012) reinforce the role played by education in creating more inclusive and just societies and state that: *'… international consensus is converging towards a view that if there is a phenomenon of exclusion in an education system, then it is not considered to be a quality system'* (p. 1).

Finally, the European Union High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) recommend that participation and inclusion should be increased in order to close the socio-economic gap, the migrant gap, the gender gap and the digital gap and create more equitable education systems.

With a view to exploring some of these critical issues, in Spring 2011, the Agency submitted an application for Raising Achievement for all Learners – Quality in Inclusive Education as a project supported under Commission LLP Comenius funding. In the Autumn 2011, the Agency was awarded the grant and the project began in December 2011 (Project number: 517771-LLP-1-2011-1-DK-COMENIUS-CAM). The one-year project running from December 2011 to November 2012 was centred around a major conference held in Odense, Denmark in June 2012.

This report sets out to synthesise the key issues and findings arising from this conference and other activities carried out during the one-year project and to collate information about how best to engage all learners and raise their achievement. This initial analysis will serve as a basis for longer-term work by the Agency, starting in 2013. This work will further explore ways to raise the achievement of all learners, which is no longer seen as a policy initiative but considered to be an ethical imperative.

PROJECT RATIONALE

In preparation for the main project activity – the RA4AL conference – a position paper was drafted and sent to all participants (see: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/ra4al). This position paper drew on Agency work and recent international research to set out a project rationale and key messages for consideration during the project. The rationale is further developed in this report in the light of the RA4AL conference inputs and discussions.

In recent work, the Agency has followed the broad definition of inclusive education set out at the 48th Session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) (2008): *'inclusive education is an on-going process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination'* (UNESCO-IBE 2008, p. 3).

Inclusive education is therefore associated with principles of equity, social justice, democracy and participation. The *Council Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Education and Training* (Council of Ministers, 2010) note that education and training systems across Europe need to ensure both equity and excellence and recognise that improving educational attainment and key competences for all are crucial, not only to economic growth and competitiveness but also to reducing poverty and fostering social inclusion.

The OECD (2012) similarly states that reducing school failure pays off for both society and individuals and can contribute to economic growth and social development. Harald Hartung from the European Commission stressed this important aspect of the project rationale. Speaking at the RA4AL conference, he drew attention to the high cost of school failure and inequity for individuals, and for society more widely.

OECD (2007) point out that the highest performing education systems are those that combine quality with equity. They add that equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion). Recent literature (e.g. Ainscow et al., 2011) suggests that, rather than making teaching and learning responsive to diversity, access to educational opportunities depends too often on the learner's ability to conform. Learners seen as different are marginalised or excluded, increasing social and educational inequalities.

Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) note that *'greater equality, as well as improving the well-being of the whole population, is also the key to national standards of achievement …'.* They stress that, if a country wants higher average levels of educational achievement among its children *'it must address the underlying inequality which creates a steeper social gradient in educational achievement'* (pp. 29–30).

Confronting the idea that including all learners may somehow be detrimental to high achievement, the OECD (2011) shows that the improvement of the lowest performing students does not have to be at expense of higher performers. The findings of the UNESCO report *Learning Divides* (Willms, 2006) also provide evidence that strong school performance and equity can go hand in hand and that countries that have the highest levels of performance tend to be those that are successful raising the achievement of all learners.

UNICEF (2010) has introduced a common measure of 'bottom-end inequality' to assess the performance of countries according to the standard achieved by the best-performing countries. This work suggests that there is a level below which falling behind is not inevitable.

Farrell and colleagues (2007) researched the question of how inclusion in education impacts on the achievements of learners with and without SEN. They found a small body of research to suggest that placing learners with SEN in mainstream schools has no major adverse consequences for all children's academic achievement, behaviour and attitudes. A systematic review of the literature commissioned by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Initiative (EPPI) (Kalambouka et al., 2005) also found that, in general, there are no adverse effects on learners without SEN when learners with special needs are included in mainstream schools.

Following a study of the relationship between achievement and inclusion, Black-Hawkins and colleagues (2007) conclude that: *'combining inclusion with high levels of achievement is not only possible but essential if all children are to have the opportunity to participate fully in education'* (p. 45).

A presentation from Norway in the RA4AL conference exhibition outlined the benefits of inclusion for learners without disabilities. These included increased appreciation and acceptance of individual differences and diversity, respect for all people, preparation for adult life in an inclusive society and opportunities to master activities by practicing and teaching others. Such effects are also documented in recent research, for example Bennett and Gallagher (2012).

The positive impact of inclusive placements on learners with disabilities is noted by research such as MacArthur et al. (2005) and de Graaf et al. (2011). This includes improved social relationships and networks, peer role models, increased achievement, higher expectations, increased collaboration among school staff and improved integration of families into the community.

Lindsay (2007) acknowledges that a major driver for inclusive education has been the concern that children's rights are compromised by special education that segregates them from typically developing peers and the mainstream curriculum and educational practices. Finding little research evidence on inclusive education however, he notes: *'It is important to recognize that research evidence is only one factor in policy formulation. … Values provide a second pillar along with research evidence that might reasonably be considered to support policies concerning the education of children and young people with disabilities and SEN. Hence both evidence for differential effectiveness of processes and outcomes, and compliance with the values and aspirations of society are factors in policy development, including the determination of children's rights.'* (p. 2)

The Agency Director, Cor Meijer, speaking at the conference 'Inclusive Education: A way to promote social cohesion' in Madrid in 2010 put forward a similar argument – that although there is an expectation of clear evidence of the effectiveness of inclusive education for all learners, this is not widely available. Due to the lack of clarity around the terminology, the complexity of the issues involved and also the difficulties in applying 'scientific' methodology, research into this area is often not conclusive. However, Meijer continues: *'… the relevance and necessity of social cohesion as well as inclusive education are purely normative issues. And we should keep them there!'*

Despite positive developments in many Agency member countries, there is still a lack of clarity about the meaning of *inclusive education* and consequently what action should be taken to increase the capacity of education systems and schools to meet the needs of all

learners. Transplanting 'special education' thinking and practice into mainstream contexts is not the way forward – there is a need to challenge many assumptions about the way education systems and schools currently work. West-Burnham and Coates (2005) suggests that these include:

- *The knowledge base and professional practice of teachers*
- *The principles underpinning school design and organisation*
- *The role of pupils and students*
- *The nature of the curriculum*
- *The criteria for effectiveness* (p. 98).

Taking account of the above findings and the framework provided by both the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) (2006), there should no longer be a need to revisit definitions of inclusive education or justify a move to more inclusive approaches. All educational development and school improvement policy and practice must have equity and inclusion at its centre, tackling the many assumptions that are made about 'difference' and, in particular, disability.

As the rapporteur, Bengt Persson stated at the RA4AL conference, more – and more robust – research is now needed at the system level to support the move from the 'why' to the 'how' of inclusive education.

In the following sections, the issues raised by Agency country representatives and themes covered by recent Agency work and research literature will be examined in the light of the RA4AL project conference findings.

Who are the learners?

The project is explicit about the focus on 'all learners' – any idea that education is not for everyone and that some learners will always be destined to fail must be challenged.

In project discussions, participants highlighted that learners from groups known to be vulnerable to under-achievement were of particular concern. The *Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a Strategic Framework for European Co-operation in Education and Training* (ET 2020) states: *'Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants – complete their education … equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds.'* (p. 7)

While learners with special educational needs and disabilities and migrants may be particularly at risk of under-achievement, Agency country representatives and conference participants also mentioned: learners from lower socio-economic groups, those looked after by the authorities or living in difficult circumstances, e.g. victims of abuse or violence, Roma and travellers, learners who do not regularly attend school, learners who have caring responsibilities and learners who may be more able and talented.

The RA4AL position paper raised the following questions: How should a focus on the needs of learners who may be vulnerable to under-achievement and marginalisation be managed in the context of inclusion, without the use of potentially limiting 'labels'? How can outcomes for such learners best be monitored/evaluated to ensure that their needs are being met?

While the idea of learners at risk of or vulnerable to under-achievement aims to avoid the use of categories and possible stereotyping, further consideration must be given to these

questions to ensure that policy responses and subsequent monitoring and evaluation take account of individual circumstances.

RA4AL project aims and outputs

The RA4AL project, as a scoping activity, set out to identify the issues that need to be explored and strategies at the policy level that appear to be successful in raising achievement for all learners in inclusive settings. The main target group for project information and outcomes is national policy makers who are in a position to ensure that inclusion becomes an integral part of all education policy making and that the necessary collaboration between education and other government departments is further developed.

In the early stages of the project, representatives from Agency member countries discussed the meaning of *raising achievement* and *quality*, the expectations in terms of which learners should be considered and ways to identify both quality and raised achievement.

In order to supplement these discussions, a review was carried out of past Agency work and key research and a position paper was drafted to set out the rationale for the project and emerging issues. The project conference, held in Odense, Denmark, in June 2012 (see below) gave participants the opportunity to consider a range of policy and practice and exchange views on key issues. The project outputs therefore include: the Agency RA4AL position paper, the RA4AL Conference Report and this RA4AL full project report.

RA4AL project activities

The RA4AL project has drawn upon:

1 – Findings and results from a range of thematic project work conducted by the Agency and involving all member countries. A number of recent Agency projects have covered topics likely to impact upon efforts to raise the achievement of all learners and this work has also been supplemented by recent research, including work published by international organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and OECD.

2 – The outcomes of the RA4AL conference held in Odense, Denmark in June 2012. (See below)

Review of Agency work and recent literature

This review focused on recent Agency thematic project work including: *Inclusive Education and Classroom Practice in Secondary Education* (2005); *Multicultural Diversity and Special Needs Education* (2009); *Assessment in Inclusive Settings* (2009); the *Development of a set of Indicators – for Inclusive Education in Europe* (2009), *Early Childhood Intervention – Progress and Developments* 2005–2010 (2010); *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education* (2009 and 2011); *Participation in Inclusive Education – a framework for developing indicators* (2011); *Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education* (2011) and *Teacher Education for Inclusion across Europe* (2011). More information on these projects can be found at: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects

Within a one-year project with limited time and resources, the review of wider research literature has necessarily been limited but it was considered important to provide an overview of relevant work from academic sources and international organisations. This further supported Agency findings, clarified the project rationale and informed conference discussions about key issues for future work.

RA4AL project conference

The RA4AL project conference was planned by the Agency in collaboration with the Danish Ministry of Education and the Odense Municipal authorities. The conference was held in Odense, Denmark, on 13th–15th June 2012 and was recognised as an official event under the Danish Presidency of the EU. The conference involved three groups of experts, nominated by the Ministries of Education in Agency member countries:

- Policy makers for general, compulsory sector education;
- Policy makers for inclusive education;
- Researchers in the field of inclusive education.

The involvement of these key stakeholder groups was considered essential to provide a wide range of expertise and to raise awareness of mainstream policy makers about inclusive education. The collaboration between these groups was also designed to maximise the impact of key messages from the conference on all policy and practice in education and to support consistency with other key policy areas. These three stakeholder groups worked together during the conference to explore ways of moving on from the 'what' and 'why' of inclusive education to how quality education can raise the achievement of all learners in inclusive settings. The conference participants shared views and practical experiences through the exhibition, inputs, seminars and informal networking and discussion. They also worked with the Agency project team following the conference to comment on materials, provide further inputs and references and agree key messages to be disseminated at national and European levels.

Overall, the conference aimed to:

- Explore initiatives and approaches that appear to be successful in improving the quality of education in inclusive settings;
- Identify some factors that support the raising achievement of all learners to improve life chances and provide better opportunities for full participation in society;
- Raise awareness of the benefits of European co-operation among policy makers and researchers.

A full report of the conference proceedings is available at: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/ra4al/conference

Drawing on the RA4AL position paper, materials presented at the conference exhibition, and inputs, seminars and discussions held at the conference, the following themes have been identified:

1. **Collaborative policy and practice.** To engage and support all learners, but in particular those who may face disadvantage, services should be provided in local communities through close collaboration – in policy and practice – between education, health, social services and other agencies. Co-operation and networking is needed at all levels – national, local area, school and classroom – between all stakeholders, learners and families to ensure both co-ordinated responses and effective use of resources.
2. **Support for school and system leaders.** School and system leaders should receive support to ensure that they have the vision and the necessary competences to establish a positive ethos and provide appropriate leadership for inclusive practice. Planning to meet the diverse needs of all learners should become an integral part of the whole area/school development process, which should in turn bring together all current priorities in a coherent way.
3. **Inclusive accountability.** Approaches to system and school accountability should include a strong element of self and/or peer review to empower stakeholders and should ensure consistency and reinforce inclusive values and practice.
4. **Personalisation through listening to learners.** The voice of the learner is key in shaping all policy and practice. Personalisation also involves working more closely with parents and families to address any support requirements in a more holistic way.
5. **Professional development for inclusive education.** Teachers must be active agents in any system/school change and their competences should be addressed through both initial teacher education and continuing professional development. All teachers must develop the necessary values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure the learning and full participation of all learners in every classroom.
6. **Pedagogical approaches for all**. In view of work by the Agency, further supported by recent international research, it is evident that there are pedagogical approaches that benefit all learners, for example team teaching and peer assisted learning. However, further research is needed on effective strategies to support learning and the management of heterogeneous groups in practice.

The conference inputs and discussions clarified the project rationale – that inclusive education is the means to raise achievement for all learners. Following a discussion of some key challenges for RA4AL, the above themes will be explored in more detail taking account of Agency work and recent research as well as the conference presentations and seminars, which can be downloaded from: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/ra4al/conference

THE CHALLENGE OF RAISING ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL LEARNERS

Dyson and colleagues (2004) state that 'solutions' that lead to initiatives that are simply overlaid or bolted on to an inherently unfair system will inevitably fail. Perry and Francis (2010) similarly found that, despite the development of various positive interventions, the literature shows doubt as to whether the 'grafting' of interventions onto a fundamentally unequal education system can significantly address inequality. Although policy makers are intent on closing the gap in educational achievement, recent strategies aiming to achieve this, either by raising aspirations or diversifying the market, are significantly flawed.

Hanushek (2004) shows that increases in funding for schools have, with few exceptions, had little impact on educational outcomes over many decades: *'The aggregate picture is consistent with a variety of other studies indicating that resources alone have not yielded any systematic returns in terms of student performance. The character of reform efforts can largely be described as "same operations with greater intensity".'* (p. 12)

Reform does not always require additional funding. Resources can be used in different ways to benefit all learners, for example through improved staff ratios in the classroom, increased teacher competence through professional development and flexible use of counselling and mentoring, recognising that all learners may need additional support and guidance at some time in their school careers.

At the RA4AL conference, Christine Antorini, Minister for Children and Education in Denmark noted that approximately 30% of the education budget in Denmark was being spent on learners identified as having special educational needs – yet little was known about the impact of this expenditure. The need to invest in teacher education as a means of reducing money spent on 'specialist' services and improve the quality of education for all learners has been recognised.

In early project discussions, some Agency representatives noted the importance of wider, social achievements as well as academic goals, and expressed concern over a focus on standards that appears to conflict with inclusive principles.

Valencia et al. (2001), working in the USA note that standards-based school reform is 'structurally misdirected' as *'it treats the symptoms of schools failure (e.g. poor achievement) rather than the cause (i.e. inferior schools)'* (p. 3).

Ainscow et al. (2006) point out that the conflict between inclusion and the standards agenda is due to a narrow view of attainment. They say: *'The need for a plural, tolerant, inclusive education system sometimes sits uneasily with policy that foregrounds the benefits of choice, selection and the comparison of schools on the basis of their pupils' attainment'* (p. 296).

In recent years, market-based reforms have been introduced in many countries. This is widely seen in the literature to work against closing the social class gap due to the ability of the middle classes to optimise their opportunities for choice. Whelan (2009) doubts the value of choice and competition as drivers of improvement as they divide the system into units that are too small to innovate and often increase academic, ethnic and social stratification.

Clarke (2010) also discusses the choice-equity dilemma. He points out that the principle of choice moves decisions from the collective to the individual and makes it harder to sustain collective relationships and practices of equity. The literature reviewed by Perry and Francis (op. cit.) documents increasing segregation in many education systems, driven by a market in which the wealthy enjoy better financial and social capital. This clearly works against the narrowing of the social class gap for attainment.

Further contradictions have been identified by Rix and Paige-Smith (2011) which include:

- *Requirements to reflect on practices, when values are key to inclusive practice, and*
- *An embedded tradition focusing upon the individual when learning and development are collective processes* (p. 38).

These challenges are not new. As early as 1996, the report of the International Commission on Education for the twenty-first century for UNESCO, *Learning: the Treasure Within* identified seven tensions in countries' education systems – including the tension between competition and equality of opportunity and the need to balance competition that provides motivation and incentives with co-operation that promotes equity and social justice for all.

So, the need to find ways to overcome these challenges continues in the quest to develop high quality, responsive provision for all learners. Leadbeater and Wong (2010) express this in the following statement: *'Disaffection with school, evident in high dropout rates and exam failure, suggests there is a pent-up demand for a different kind of school experience – an experience that is more engaging, rewarding and relevant to the skills people will need in the century to come.'* (p. 3)

A common language for inclusive education

Although the project rationale set out on page 7 above suggests that it may be time to move on from discussion about definitions, the need for a common language to use when talking about inclusive education has been a recurring topic throughout project activities. It was raised by Agency representatives in initial project discussions and was also mentioned in RA4AL conference inputs and debates. In particular, country representatives stressed the need to move from the language of disability and disadvantage to the language of learning. In this section, past Agency work will be used to examine some of the key issues around the language of inclusive education.

The project rationale and framework document for the Inclusive Education in Action project (2010) states that there is no agreed interpretation of terms such as handicap, special need or disability and that country differences are linked to administrative, financial and procedural regulations, rather than reflecting variations in the incidence and the types of special educational needs.

Education systems in countries have evolved over time, within very specific contexts and are highly individual (Meijer, 1999, 2003) – any examination of inclusive education and 'current' practice in any country therefore needs to be considered within the context of wider educational reforms occurring in that country.

The Agency report *Teacher Education for Inclusion across Europe* (2011) outlines some recent developments including the use of terms such as *heterogeneity* and *diversity,* but points out that a change in terminology does not always reflect a change in thinking or practice. Furthermore, it is essential that the underpinning ideology associated with any terms used is widely understood. If the language used continues to promote the separateness or difference of diverse groups within society, policy is also likely to be in the form of 'added' measures needed to change original policies that were not inclusive.

One of the recommendations in the report relates specifically to this issue: Reform must include clarification of the language that is used when referring to inclusion and diversity. The report states that work should focus on building a consensus around appropriate language and developing a clear rationale for its use and that there should be:

- *A move away from the categorisation and labelling of children and young people that could encourage education and provision that is 'separate' from the mainstream for learners from the most vulnerable groups;*
- *Policy reform that supports all teachers and key professionals to develop a clear understanding of the underpinning premises associated with and the implications of using different terminology;*
- *A view of learners as having individual, multiple and changing identities. Teachers must be equipped to meet the diverse needs present in Europe's classrooms with confidence* (p. 75).

This issue also has an impact on any consideration of data collection. In the Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education project (MIPIE) (2011) experts agreed that European level data should only be collected in line with agreed definitions of key terms and parameters. The report on Participation in Inclusive Education (2011) also states that many issues of national definitions, identification and approaches to difference make any interpretation of such data problematic.

Project terminology

In the RA4AL project, the need to clarify the meaning of the following specific terms was raised by Agency country representatives in early project planning meetings: *quality*, *raising* and *achievement*. The working definitions used in the project are set out below.

The definition of *quality* set out in the RA4AL position paper, which is closely aligned to the project rationale is as follows:

> *'Quality must be seen in light of how societies define the purpose of education. In most, two principal objectives are at stake: the first is to ensure the cognitive development of learners. The second emphasizes the role of education in nurturing the creative and emotional growth of learners and in helping them to acquire values and attitudes for responsible citizenship. Finally, quality must pass the test of equity: an education system characterized by discrimination against any particular group is not fulfilling its mission.'* (UNESCO, 2004 Foreword)

Regarding the term *achievement*, Wallace (2010) uses the term to mean *'the outcome of effort, learning, perseverance, self-belief and encouragement. It involves the individual experiencing challenge, making discoveries and reaping the rewards, either intrinsic or extrinsic of effort and application.'* (p. 6) This broad definition can be contrasted to *attainment*, which is usually used to refer to learners attaining grades or levels on more formal, standardised assessments or examinations. Consideration must also be given to the fact that valued achievements or attainments may vary between countries and cultures.

Closely related and relevant to the RA4AL project is the definition of *under-achievement*. Under-achievement is often seen as a discrepancy between an assessment or test result and actual performance – or the difference between potential and achievement/outcomes. However, it has been suggested that, while the complex interactions between societal and environmental factors that may disadvantage learners must be considered, the capacity – and resilience – of all learners must be raised and any low attainment addressed by recognising the talents and strengths of each individual and improving the quality of education.

Finally, the term *raising*, in the context of the project, refers to increasing or improving the attainment and/or achievement of individuals and groups. How such increases are

measured will depend on the area(s) in which the learner(s) are felt to be under-achieving – but it is clear that closing the gap between high and lower achievers does not mean lowering standards – but maintaining high expectations for everyone.

Following the discussion of ‘who are the learners?’ above, it can be seen that it is possible for any learner to under-achieve and therefore, that a wide range of responses to under-achievement will be needed at the systemic, area, group and individual levels to ensure that the education system becomes more effective at overcoming the ‘risk factors’ and at raising achievement for all learners.

RAISING ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL LEARNERS – PROJECT FINDINGS

This section of the report will provide some analysis of the themes introduced in the RA4AL position paper and further developed during the RA4AL conference inputs, seminars and discussions. These themes will be investigated in more detail, drawing on the project activities and with reference to Agency thematic projects and further research.

1. Collaborative policy and practice

> *'Collective capacity generates the emotional commitment and the technical expertise that no amount of individual capacity working alone can come close to matching.'* (Fullan, 2011: xiii)

Focusing on issues of inequity, Ainscow and colleagues (2008) suggest that, as well as paying attention to internal improvement, schools should also respond in increasingly joined-up ways, to inequities at local/area level. They suggest that: *'... where local professionals and wider stakeholders are unable or unwilling to venture beyond their individual institutions or "service silos", the possibility of tackling the link between social background, education and life chances is seriously undermined'* (p. 25). However, they stress that, in order to develop extended collaboration with shared priorities and values and shared strategic approaches an analysis of the local situation and understanding of local contexts and 'holistic' government is needed, with space for local innovation.

An example of such practice was provided in the RA4AL conference exhibition by Sweden, where there is a commitment to self-governing municipalities with an emphasis on equal opportunities for all learners and Action Plans to meet specific needs as soon as they arise.

At the conference, the seminar from Scotland also highlighted that, although gaps still exist between children from more advantaged homes and those experiencing some disadvantage, there has been improvement, brought about by a focus on early years, the curriculum for excellence and a focus on school leaders and quality of teaching. The need for a culture of 'responsible autonomy' and greater collaboration between all stakeholders was stressed.

Within the research on collaboration, there is work more specifically showing the value of networks. According to Caldwell (2009): *'A network is an association – formal or informal, temporary or permanent, mandatory or voluntary – between individuals, organisations, agencies, institutions or other enterprises, through which participants share knowledge, address issues of common concern, pool resources or achieve other purposes of mutual benefit'* (p. 6).

Caldwell, referring to the work of van Aalst (2003) suggests there are three types of networks that may operate alone or in combination:

- *A 'community of practice', which involves the relatively informal sharing of knowledge within a network of professionals;*
- *A 'networked organisation', which involves a more or less formal relationship between autonomous organisations with the intention of adding value to each;*
- *A 'virtual community', which may take many forms, the common element being the medium of ICT* (pp. 36–37).

Johansson (2003) highlighted the case for networks in educational reform saying: *'Too much educational practice in OECD countries is characterised by isolation: schools from parents and the community and from each other; teachers and learners in isolated classrooms'* (p. 149).

Research is widely available to support the value of collaboration with parents regarding their children's education. Jeynes' (2005) meta-analysis found that parental involvement is associated with higher achievement outcomes, with parental expectations having the largest impact. Ferguson (2008) suggests that when schools pursue the beliefs and practices that embrace and include diversity and difference, there is a tendency to broaden the view of 'parent involvement' to 'family-school linkages' that involve a *'mutuality of interaction and collaboration that commits both home and school to each other'* (p. 117).

In a programme entitled Achievement for All in UK (England)[1], structured conversations with parents were introduced, using a framework for developing an open, on-going dialogue with parents about their child's learning. Training was given to key teachers who knew the pupil well, had regular contact with them and were able to influence their provision.

Research by Wilkin et al. (2008) concludes that linking social care professionals and extended schools is a successful way of integrating services, to provide a holistic response and shift entrenched working practices, increasing willingness to engage in joint initiatives. Soan (2012) outlines some factors that enable successful multi-professional working:

- *Sufficient time, effort and resources for regular meetings;*
- *Accessibility of specialist trained professionals to support universal services (preferably working out of and within local schools and the community);*
- *Communication by specialists with parents and professionals;*
- *Appointment of a personal keyworker or coordinator to share and disseminate information and to act as single point of contact;*
- *Clear and more uniform referral approach* (p. 94).

The research suggests that barriers may be created by different professional beliefs and practices; different pay scales/conditions of work; separate funding streams; lack of joint professional development; high staff turnover and too large a working area.

The topic of collaborative working has also been addressed in a number of recent Agency projects. Multicultural Diversity and Special Needs Education (2009) highlights the need for families to be involved as partners and for co-operation between services and sectors at all levels. Later work on Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education (2011) sets out the need for close work with parents and the community and specifically, coherent interdisciplinary services, noting that these should:

- *Demonstrate good working relationships and effective communication across and between different sectors/services and schools in the community. They should enable information to be shared and appropriate and timely support provided to address additional needs (such as therapies for medical needs, mental health support, etc.);*

[1] see: http://www.afa3as.org.uk/programme

- *Work closely with parents and learners to strengthen links between the family, school and the interdisciplinary team; and*
- *Work with schools to involve all stakeholders, including local special schools/settings in their support networks and seek innovative ways to share expertise* (p. 18).

Agency work on Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) in 2005 identified five key elements: availability, proximity, affordability, interdisciplinary work and diversity and co-ordination. These five key elements are interconnected and cannot be considered in isolation from each other. More recent work on the same topic (2010) recommended the need for:

- Legislation and policy to support ECI;
- The development of the role of key professionals;
- An ECI coordinator or key worker between services;
- Improved coordination across and within sectors – health, social services, education with the family at the centre;
- Further work on linking policy initiatives, developing quality standards, increasing public spending and investment and qualifications for staff.

It is evident that collaboration plays a key role in raising achievement – within classrooms and schools but also extending into local communities with a key role for national and international networks to exchange ideas and enhance developing policy and practice.

The RA4AL project work similarly indicates that collaboration and networking are a common element running through all other project themes. Much of the research reviewed for the project also shows the value of collaboration in transforming schools and the education system more widely. Groves (2008) stressed the importance of social capital in school regeneration with *'the school and its community becoming mutual providers of resources, expertise, employment and learning experiences, each to the other'* (p. 17).

In summary, the table below sets out the many facets of collaborative working that have been mentioned in the project and could be investigated across multiple themes, at different levels of the system.

Classroom	Collaborative assessment and active learning/involvement in decision making, creative learner groupings, peer support (between learners), team teaching
School	Peer to peer teacher support and development, co-operation with support staff and specialists, collaborative leadership involving/empowering all staff.
Local community	Involvement in education by parents, local community, school as a 'hub' for health services, social services and voluntary organisations, networks of local schools, links with other educational institutions, employers, school/area leaders, teachers, researchers.
National/international links	Inter-agency and departmental collaboration (for policy, planning, service provision, training, funding) at national level. Leadership and professional development networks and research networks at national, European and international levels.

2. Support for school and system leaders

> *'School leaders should value diversity among staff as well as learners, encourage collegiality and support innovation.'* (European Agency, 2011a, p. 16)

Work by Pont and colleagues (2008) notes that effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling. Their work across 22 countries identified four main policy levers to improve school practice:

- (Re)define school leadership responsibilities;
- Distribute school leadership;
- Develop skills for effective school leadership;
- Make school leadership an attractive profession.

Fink (2008) suggests that a system's renewal demands a significant paradigm shift away from top down leadership towards a broader conception of distributed leadership that requires leaders to connect more than control, demonstrate more than decide, engage more than coerce and trust more than monitor.

Many other researchers have highlighted the critical role of school leaders and there is wide agreement on the key dimensions of leadership, including: setting out values and vision, providing instructional leadership, promoting teacher learning and development, improving the curriculum, managing resources and building collaboration both within and beyond the school, in particular supporting the development of other schools and leaders to improve the entire system (see Leithwood and Levin, 2005; Day et al., 2006; McKinsey, 2007; Robinson, 2007, and Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009).

Huber and colleagues (2010) studied international approaches to leadership development and concluded that there is still a need for a clearer conception of competences for school leadership and a need to look further at the impact of school leaders on school quality and the improvement process. The key message from a best evidence synthesis in New Zealand (Robinson et al., 2009) is that the closer educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students.

Many recent studies show that collaborative approaches and networking with other schools/professionals are an effective way to provide support and development opportunities for leaders and Carter and Paterson (2006) in particular, emphasise the role of networks in enhancing professional practice and developing leadership capacity. Hargreaves (2011) suggests that all underperforming schools should have a leading school that works with them in either a formal grouping or in a more informal partnership and that schools should take greater responsibility for neighbouring schools in order to build capacity for continuous improvement at the local level.

However, McKinsey and Company (2010) state that, despite research suggesting that collective capacity is a greater driver of performance than individual capacity, the development of the collective capacity of leadership teams, rather than the individual capacity of leaders, is still limited.

At the European level, a Comenius network Leadership in Education project has published a European Synopsis and Framework of Reference identifying domains of school leadership and modules for development[2]. A further EU project 'Leadership for the

[2] www.leadership-in-education.eu

Improvement of Student Achievement' (LISA) brought together 7 countries to answer the core question: What contribution do leadership styles, attitudes and practices of school principals make towards the improvement and effectiveness of a school?

Recent Agency work emphasises that, while educational expertise is necessary for effective leadership, the ability to build relationships is also essential to develop collaboration with internal and external stakeholders. *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education* (2011) states that school leaders should communicate effectively with the local community and inter-disciplinary support services to *'ensure a holistic and co-ordinated approach to learners and their families that recognises the importance of meeting broader needs to enhance learning'* (p. 17).

In earlier Agency work, Watkins (2009) notes that the role of school leaders is paramount, as they have ultimate responsibility for developing inclusive assessment practice which plays a crucial role in helping – or hindering inclusive practice.

Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education – Recommendations for Policy Makers (2009) notes the need for an organisational culture and ethos that promotes inclusion and is guided by leaders with a vision for inclusion that includes clear thinking regarding school development, accountability and responsibility for meeting a diverse range of needs.

Finally, the Agency *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (2012) suggests that professional development opportunities for school leaders should be guided by principles for inclusive education linked to the core values presented in the Profile. It stresses that school leaders' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion are critical in determining how far the organisational culture within schools is aligned with the core values outlined.

Leadership to narrow the gap

Martin and colleagues (2009) studied leadership to 'narrow the gap' and found that measuring impact, particularly longer-term impact, was something that leaders found challenging. In particular, they had difficulty evidencing the qualitative impacts on pupils and stressed the importance of trusting professional judgments in this respect.

Rigg (2012) looked at leadership to close the gap for groups of pupils in primary education (5–11 years) and found that the following leadership behaviours, among others, were effective:

- Commitment to meeting the learning needs of all learners;
- Taking oversight of performance data while working with a collaborative team and monitoring outcomes for vulnerable learners;
- Demonstrating high expectations of staff accountable for pupil performance and empowering them to try different strategies to meet pupils' learning needs;
- Creating an ethos that encourages learning and reflection and adopting an outward-facing perspective to engage with partners, e.g. parents.

Chapman et al. (2011) focused specifically on leadership that promotes achievement for learners with SEN/disability and suggested that the presence of a diverse student population can, under the right organisational conditions, stimulate collaborative arrangements and encourage innovative ways of teaching hard to reach groups. The study identified the following organisational conditions associated with the success of schools in supporting the achievement of all their students, including those who are seen to have SEN and/or disabilities:

- An emphasis on staff working together to adapt lessons and respond to individual needs;
- Structures and systems in place to support the learning of individual learners and to support staff who are also able to tap into wider sources of support;
- The commitment of senior staff to teamwork and collaborative problem solving, with difficulties seen as a stimulus for continual school improvement.

Further work is needed, however, on effective, practical approaches to leadership and ways of 'measuring' leadership performance.

3. Inclusive accountability

> *'Accountability measures that impact upon teachers' work should reflect the importance of wider achievements that are more closely aligned to inclusive principles'* (European Agency, 2011d, p. 76).

In the current climate, the development of appropriate accountability mechanisms and ways to measure valued achievement and monitor equity present many challenges. Despite the drive for hard data, Fullan (2011) cautions that: *'statistics are a wonderful servant but an appalling master'* (p. 127) and Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) stress the need to place responsibility before accountability. They suggest that accountability should *'serve as a conscience through sampling'* and that an assault should be conducted *'on the excesses of tested standardization that deny diversity and destroy creativity'* (p. 109). At the RA4AL conference, however, conference rapporteur Bengt Persson warned against the danger of *'false quantification of soft values'.*

In order to move towards greater equity in education, a variety of performance indicators are needed, suited to the local situation and focusing on input and resources, process and output/outcomes. While information (including data) should be used to target support and track the success of inclusive policy and practice, care is needed that accountability systems do not inadvertently cause inappropriate changes.

An example from the Netherlands presented at the RA4AL Conference noted that the present system of diagnosing and referring learners considered to have special educational needs strongly reinforced 'referring behaviour', while the achievements of schools who retained and met the needs of such learners were largely ignored. The Netherlands has now introduced legislation to change the reinforcement contingencies and support a model that enables teachers to effectively manage individual differences.

Alexander (2008) makes an important distinction between measures and indicators. These two are not synonymous, as indicators signal that something is happening and, although they may be amenable to measurement, they may also require other kinds of evaluation and possibly a higher degree of inference. Measures are, however, tied to quantity.

In June 2012, Eurostat published the outcomes of an enquiry into quantitative data collection for special needs education, carried out as a response to the Council Conclusions of May 2007, which identified the need for data collection linked to an SNE indicator. The findings were that, while there may be possibilities for longer-term developments, countries agreed that the most reliable information currently available is that linked to national definitions of SEN, focusing on rates of placements in segregated provision. Such data is currently collected by the Agency.

The need for qualitative as well as quantitative data, frequently discussed in the literature is explored further in the Agency reports: *Development of a set of indicators – for inclusive education in Europe* (2009) and *Mapping the Implementation of Policy for Inclusive Education* (MIPIE, 2011). The MIPIE report, in calling for data relating to resource allocation, suggests that such data could be supplemented with qualitative school level information relating to:

- Accountability systems considering the enabling effect of policies and practices;
- Resources allocated for staff development and parental and learner involvement;
- Guidelines for promoting best inclusive practices.

Country experts in the MIPIE project stated that there was a need for qualitative information in addition to quantitative data, to address the complex issues and questions related to inclusive education and to identify key factors supporting inclusive practice at different levels of their education systems. The development of a shared framework of quantitative and qualitative benchmarks linked to core issues for inclusive education will, however, require an understanding of the differences in countries' education systems. There is a need to clarify the purpose of education – in many countries, a mix of aims with inconsistent underlying principles leads to incoherent policies and different entitlements.

The *Development of a set of indicators – for inclusive education in Europe* (2009) points out the need to monitor indicators not only related to outcomes, but also regarding input, resources and process. The report suggests that legislation on education should fully address the issues of monitoring and accountability for all educational institutions/students and sets out the following requirements linked to key areas of policy conditions:

- Established rules for systems to monitor the effectiveness of provision (such as self-evaluation, inspection, provision mapping);
- Established rules for systems to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning support;
- Established rules for systems to monitor levels of participation (enrolment, completion rates, drop-out and exclusion rates) for different groups of pupils/students.

In considering raising achievement for all learners, it is important to remember that, as Watkins (2007) points out, accountability for learner progress is not just a matter for class teachers, but for the whole school and also regional and national level policy makers.

Empowering schools

Hargreaves (2011) argues that a balance is needed between approaches to external accountability and the capacity for professional accountability within schools that stresses the role of formative assessment and self-evaluation.

Hargreaves discusses the development of systems of accountability in high performing systems, which recognize this balance and include:

- A mixed economy of tests (internal/external) but with a gradual move to moderated teacher assessment (which can support personalised learning, teacher professionalism and, through external moderation, can encourage the transfer of curriculum innovation between schools);
- Target setting – with a move to 'bottom-up' school-owned targets, informed by individual learner-level data, to drive up performance;

- A school performance summary – with a move to contextual value-added reporting combined with the school profile to give a clear picture of progress;
- Review/inspection – with a move to shorter inspections with minimal observation, informed by self-evaluation, small teams and a short, sharp report with clear recommendations for improvement.

In work on school evaluation for the OECD, Faubert (2009) put forward a number of such arrangements that could be adopted including: peer reviews, self-assessments and the involvement of a more diverse set of evaluators (e.g. experts, critical friends, parents). The report also notes the need for better articulation between school evaluation and other components of the school system's evaluation framework and better alignment between evaluations led by different agencies to strengthen the coherence of the evaluation system.

According to Gilbert (2012), school-led accountability requires:

- Increasing teacher and school ownership of accountability as a support for their professionalism and learners' learning;
- Ensuring that school evaluation is dynamic and inclusive, involving learners, parents, staff, school managers and the community to improve practice;
- Establishing a culture of professional reflection, enquiry and learning within and across schools to increase teachers' aspirations and further develop practice;
- Embedding collaboration within and across schools as a means of improving practice and using school networks to develop capacity and ensure all schools are engaged;
- Focusing inspection to give greater support to school-led accountability.

Gilbert adds that this, in turn will need a shift in mindset and culture to see accountability as professionally owned rather than externally imposed.

At the RA4AL conference, Lithuania presented a new evaluation strategy that places the emphasis on school self-review and peer-review. In this approach, the focus is on five areas of school development – school culture, teaching and learning, achievements, support for learners and school management. Learners' and parents' views are taken into account and the external evaluation is seen as supportive – to help schools to look at their own systems and performance. Information from the review and external evaluation is used to identify areas for development and build capacity for improvement to make schools welcoming and attractive for all learners.

It can be seen that the role of accountability in shaping a more inclusive education system has been widely researched. However, as conference rapporteur Bengt Persson pointed out at the RA4AL conference, some comparability of systems would be beneficial in order to improve the possibilities for mutual learning. A potential role of work within RA4AL may be to further examine the impact of developing accountability systems that take account of recent research and focus on how to measure what is valued for all learners (processes as well as outcomes) and provide concrete evidence of effective inclusive practice leading to more equitable achievement.

4. Personalisation through listening to learners

> *'All pupils are involved in and have opportunities to influence their own assessment and the development, implementation and evaluation of their own learning targets and plans.'* (European Agency, Cyprus Recommendations on Inclusive Assessment, 2009)

Personalised learning is a European Union policy aim. Strategic Objective 3 of the strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training (ET 2020): Promoting equity, social cohesion and citizenship states: *'Education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants – complete their education, including, where appropriate, through second-chance education and the provision of more personalised learning.'*

In the Agency RA4AL position paper, a distinction is made between personalisation and individualisation. Sebba (2010) suggests that an emphasis on participation and involvement in decision making is the key to distinguishing between the two and concludes that the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) offers a clear values base to develop cultures in which pupils are trusted, listened to and given responsibility for learning and decision making.

The process of differentiation may also be associated with individualisation and personalisation and seen as a way to meet more specific individual or group needs. However, it often remains teacher-centred rather than learner-led. Nind (2005) notes that differentiation can be valuable in supporting the learning of everyone when it is used in an *'elastic and creative'* way and not as a *'simplistic linear'* means of sorting pupils into more or less able (p. 4).

Self-evaluation and assessment for learning are at the heart of personalised learning: learners must become more engaged in thinking about what they want to learn and how and become co-investors in their own education. A system that allows learners to progress towards common goals, but through different routes, using different styles of learning and assessment, should be more inclusive and raise achievement of all learners.

For this to happen, consideration should be given to improving the organisation of 'spaces' for learning and providing more opportunities for learners to discover talents in a range of areas beyond academic learning. With regard to the curriculum, Davis and Sumara (2010) state that it should be *'more a path laid while walking than a preselected route'* (p. 488) and suggest that *'a curriculum must not only allow for participation, but also be organized around participation'* (p. 493). Bielby and colleagues (2012) suggest that in addition to positive teaching approaches, supportive relationships and high quality advice and guidance, the curriculum and qualification needs of all learners must be considered, especially for those who are at risk of not participating in education, employment or training.

It must be stressed that a move towards greater personalisation can support high expectations and the achievement of high standards. However, the more extreme practices of 'norm-based' systems such as those identified by the OECD (2007a) in the paper *No more failures: Ten steps to equity in education* may be a source of conflict. This would include practices such as tracking, streaming, selection and grade retention or class repetition. A clearer focus on personalisation would also recognise the need for more flexible systems of assessment, rather than trying to 'drive up' standards through testing

and would adhere to a view of standards that recognises excellence in all areas of learning rather than focusing more narrowly on traditional, academic subjects.

According to Leadbeater (2005) many of the basic building blocks of traditional education such as the school, the year group, the class, the lesson, and the teacher standing in front of a class of thirty children, have become obstacles to personalised learning. He suggests that schools must make more flexible use of all the resources available for learning – teachers, parents, assistants, peers, employers as well as technology, time and buildings.

Hargreaves (2006) draws parallels between education and business and stresses the need for a move from mass production to mass customisation together with innovation to meet client needs. In order to achieve this, he suggests that personalised learning is developed by clustering nine key inter-related areas into four 'deeps': deep learning, supported by assessment for learning, student voice and learning to learn; deep support through mentoring and coaching, advice and guidance; deep experience through new technologies and curriculum and deep leadership through design and organisation and workforce reform – all crucial in personalising learning and transforming schools.

Many inputs at the RA4AL conference addressed the issue of personalisation. At the seminar presented by Norway, the flexible pathways in upper secondary education were outlined, along with the important elements of counselling and support and ways of ensuring the full involvement of learners and their parents. These all aim to reduce school drop-out and again involve teacher development and close collaboration between services.

The School Effectiveness Framework, presented by UK (Wales) includes 6 elements: working with others, leadership, networks of professional practice, intervention and support, improvement and accountability and curriculum and teaching. This approach has been taken forward by the development of an Inclusion Quality Mark that supports the active involvement of schools and places learners at the centre of all developments.

Presenters from Germany at the RA4AL conference provided an example of an inclusive school that has moved away from traditional approaches. Sophie Scholl School is organised in mixed age groups (with age being seen as an aspect of diversity) and works flexibly involving learners in all aspects of planning. High levels of collaboration are evident between learners, staff and parents.

Inputs by the Agency project team at the conference also highlighted the importance of the key competences agenda in developing wider skills and preparing learners for the 21st century – and the need to consider whether to develop 'schooling for consumerism' or 'education for life'. Their conference inputs stressed that teachers must take responsibility for all learners and provide them with 'equal encouragement' to ensure their full involvement and participation.

In earlier Agency work, many projects have referred to the importance of a curriculum for all and the need for learners and families to take an increasingly active role in decision-making. *Assessment in Inclusive Settings: Key Issues for Policy and Practice* (2007) stresses that the overall goal of inclusive assessment is that *'all assessment policies and procedures should support and enhance the successful inclusion and participation of all pupils vulnerable to exclusion, including those with SEN'* (p. 47).

These ideas are summarised in the publications *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education*, which set out principles for policy (2009a) and for practice (2011a). These reports recommend developing personalised learning approaches for all learners (2009) and set out the following principles that are of particular relevance: responding to learners' voices and active participation of learners (2011). The *report ICTs in Education*

for People with Disabilities by the Agency and UNESCO (2011) also highlights the importance of ICT in supporting access to the curriculum and personalised learning.

In summary, Claxton (2012) sets out the necessity of personalisation, listening to learners and following their interests: *'Many want to make a living by doing useful and sophisticated things with their hands and feet rather than their pens and keyboards: school has to have meaning and value for the budding plumbers, guitarists, footballers and hairdressers too. And the narrow, disembodied view of intelligence makes that parity of esteem hard to achieve.'* (p. 6)

5. Professional development for inclusive education

> *'In their initial and continuing education, teachers should be equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding that will give them the confidence to deal effectively with a range of learner needs*.' (European Agency, 2011a, p. 15)

Recent Agency work on the Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I) asserts that teacher education is a key leverage point for the wider systemic change needed for inclusive education more generally. Recognising this key role, the project identified a framework of core values and areas of competence that would prepare all teachers to work in inclusive education and reinforce the critical message that inclusive education is an approach for all learners, not just for particular groups with specific needs. The areas of competence needed by teachers who are likely to be successful in raising the achievement of all learners are:

***'Valuing Learner Diversity** – learner difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education. The areas of competence within this core value relate to: conceptions of inclusive education and the teacher's view of learner difference.*

***Supporting All Learners** – teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements. The areas of competence within this core value relate to: promoting the academic, practical, social and emotional learning of all learners and effective teaching approaches in heterogeneous classes.*

***Working With Others** – collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers. The areas of competence within this core value relate to: working with parents and families and working with a range of other educational professionals.*

***Personal Professional Development** – teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their lifelong learning. The areas of competence within this core value relate to: teachers as reflective practitioners and initial teacher education as a foundation for on-going professional learning and development.'* (European Agency, 2012, p. 7)

In order to achieve greater equity and more inclusive practice, all stakeholders in education must recognise that all learners have a right to make decisions and the ability to become contributing members of society – a view strongly supported by the UNCRPD. Learners, in particular those with disabilities, may be seen as in need of remediation or care and, despite good intentions, practice may reinforce dependence and helplessness.

Changes to teacher education and the development of school leaders are needed to overcome the idea that learners from certain groups will inevitably be low achievers. A categorical approach should be replaced by a quality education for all that will build in support – and resilience – for all those at risk of under-achievement.

A mindset is needed that sees learners as being at different stages in their learning and development – from novice to expert – rather than considering achievement in relation to the 'norm' and differentiating on the basis of judgments about what learners cannot do compared to others of similar age.

Alton-Lee (2003) synthesises a range of evidence to outline ten inter-related characteristics of quality teaching for diverse students. These are:

- Quality teaching is focused on raising student achievement (including social outcomes), and facilitates high standards of student outcomes for diverse learners;
- Pedagogical practices enable classes and other learning groupings to work as caring, inclusive, and cohesive learning communities;
- Effective links are created between school cultural contexts and other cultural contexts in which students are socialised to facilitate learning;
- Quality teaching is responsive to student learning processes;
- Opportunity to learn is effective and sufficient;
- Multiple task contexts support learning cycles;
- Curriculum goals, resources including ICT usage, task design and teaching are effectively aligned;
- Pedagogy scaffolds and provides appropriate feedback on students' task engagement;
- Pedagogy promotes learning orientations, student self-regulation, metacognitive strategies and thoughtful student discourse;
- Teachers and students engage constructively in goal-oriented assessment.

A presentation prepared by the team from Slovenia stressed the need for effective general teaching strategies that are relevant for all learners and in particular, the need for content in teacher education that would help teachers confront their own views and prejudices. They also pointed out the need to change the assumption that the most effective learning takes place in homogenous groups.

Finally, all project activities, in agreement with the TE4I report and the research presented above, suggest the need for further research on the use of areas of competence to prepare all teachers to value diversity among learners and provide a quality education for all young people.

6. Pedagogical approaches for all

> *'Education systems need to move away from more traditional pedagogies and adopt more learner-centred approaches which recognize that each individual has an ability to learn and a specific way of learning.'* (WHO, *World Report on Disability*, 2011, p. 220)

Recent work on inclusive pedagogy by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) notes that *'inclusive practice, the things that people do to give meaning to the concept of inclusion, is not well-articulated.'* They note that extending what is ordinarily available to all learners is a complex pedagogical task that requires a shift from an approach that works for most learners (with something additional to or different from for some) to an approach that involves *'the development of a rich learning community characterized by learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for everyone'.* (p. 814)

They explore three assumptions about the requirements for inclusive pedagogy: a shift in focus from 'additional needs' to learning for all; rejection of deterministic beliefs about ability and ways of working with and through other adults that respect the dignity of learners as full members of the classroom community.

In their analysis of what teachers do, Florian and Black-Hawkins suggest that an inclusive pedagogical approach includes:

- Opportunities for learner choice on how, where, when and with whom they learn and teachers who trust learners' decisions;
- Teachers who create options and consult learners about how they can provide help;
- Collaboration between adults to share ideas about teaching and learning.

Rose and O'Neill (2009) researched classroom support for inclusion and concluded that while the deployment of adults in a supportive role may be a critical factor for promoting inclusive schooling, there is a need for further research into models of effective provision.

Higgins et al. (2011) analysed many of the strategies generally used to improve learning for all and provide information on the impact, strength of evidence and costs of different strategies. They found that effective feedback, meta-cognition and self-regulation strategies, peer assisted learning and early intervention were among the most effective. Hattie (2009) also concluded that feedback was a key influence on student learning. He identified other factors including the quality and quantity of instruction, disposition, class environment, level of challenge, peer tutoring, parent involvement, cognitive ability and home factors.

At the RA4AL conference, the lack of rigorous, high-quality research was highlighted by researchers from Denmark, who presented the interim outcomes of a study looking, in particular, at the effects of various pedagogical interventions (e.g. peer assisted learning, co-teaching, student self-monitoring). It is hoped that the information to be published in their final report will support teachers and school leaders to make evidence-informed decisions about pedagogical approaches that will provide quality experiences for all learners.

The conference seminar presented by Ireland focused on team teaching as a way to raise achievement in secondary education. Teachers reported that using such approaches made them feel less isolated and they welcomed opportunities for feedback from and reflection with colleagues. They felt able to increase co-operative learning opportunities for learners who were also positive about such approaches. Ó Murchú (2011) in further work, examines the possibilities offered by team teaching to reposition learners previously withdrawn from classrooms and 'reframe' special classes.

The Literacy Strategy presented by Malta at the conference aims to increase the skills of teachers as an integral part of the school development process. Again, the importance of collegial planning and collaboration, self-reflection, evaluation and pedagogical leadership were stressed as key features in the move to quality education for all.

On a similar theme, a team from Iceland are undertaking research into professional learning communities and 'leadership for learning', examining views of teaching and learning and their integration into everyday school practice.

Christine Antorini, Minister for Children and Education in Denmark, speaking at the conference, described a recent change in Denmark to a system that provides support to meet a range of learner needs through different ways of organising learning, grouping pupils or using extra support staff within a flexible framework. In a similar way, the conference seminar presented by Finland outlined the recent introduction of 3 levels of

support – the first of which aims to improve what is usually available in class to provide quality teaching for all. The emphasis is on pedagogical assessment and support through for example, co-operation between teachers, guidance and counselling, the use of flexible groups and regular monitoring.

Recent Agency work is also relevant. The *Teacher Education for Inclusion* (TE4I) project report (2011) and *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (2012) state that teachers need to see themselves as lifelong learners and develop skills in research and use of research findings. Inter-personal skills and an understanding of the nature of collaboration are also essential to work with others, including professionals and parents who contribute to a full understanding of each learner. In short, teachers need to move from being 'private' to 'collective' practitioners and see themselves as contributing to the complementary skills of the whole school community. Alexander (2010) asks: '*How can children learn to think for themselves if their teachers are expected merely to do as they are told?'* (p. 496)

The Agency work on TE4I concludes that good practice in teaching is essentially the same for all learners – but requires innovative thinking to meet the challenges presented by learner diversity. However, a key finding from both the RA4AL conference and recent Agency work is that further research is needed to secure agreement on 'quality' pedagogical practice in inclusive settings.

EMERGING ISSUES FOR FUTURE WORK

The outcomes of the one-year RA4AL project aim to form the basis of a longer-term project by the Agency. With this in mind, this report draws on recent Agency projects and wider research and the preparation, inputs and discussions held during the RA4AL conference to identify some key issues to be considered for future work. The six points below closely relate to the six areas identified during the RA4AL project and outlined in this report: collaboration; leadership; accountability; personalisation; professional development and inclusive pedagogy.

The key issues to be considered for further work at the European level include the need to:

- Gather practical and cost-effective examples of networking and collaboration in classrooms, schools and local communities as well as at national/international levels and examine the contribution that such practices can make towards raising the achievement of all learners;
- Build on existing work on leadership to examine the specific competences needed for leadership in inclusive systems/settings;
- Conduct further work on appropriate accountability mechanisms for the education system and for schools that empower stakeholders and reflect inclusive values by measuring what is valued for all learners and providing concrete evidence of effective practice leading to more equitable achievement;
- Investigate how education systems and services are organised, taking account of the roles of key stakeholders and the need to consider the voices of learners and their families to offer a truly personalised experience;
- Undertake further work on the areas of competence needed by teachers to meet the diverse needs of all learners and investigate the best ways to achieve this in initial teacher education and on-going professional development;
- Carry out research on pedagogical approaches and strategies that go beyond teacher-led ‘differentiation’ to learner-centred, personalised classroom practice.

It is interesting to note the high level of consistency between these points and the findings of Agency projects from 2003 to the present that were summarised in the Key Principles publications in 2009 and 2011. These publications can be found at: http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/key-principles

Kendall et al. (2008) identified the need for a stronger evidence base, noting the shortage of longitudinal, robust research on narrowing the gap for vulnerable groups that expressly linked outcomes with practice and effectiveness. This confirms the view of many project participants who also stressed the need to maximise scarce resources by collaborating at European level to explore the above key areas. Such work is needed in order to build knowledge and understanding about inclusive education and in particular, the factors that enable learners who have experienced disadvantage to develop resilience and achieve well.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This report has outlined key issues and concerns from policy makers, from the RA4AL project conference and from previous Agency projects and recent academic research.

The importance of collaboration has been recognised in previous Agency work, for example in the Agency report Early Childhood Intervention – Progress and Developments 2005–2010. This report recognises the need to respect the rights and the needs of children and their families through *'family focused and responsive services that work for families and involve parents at every level of planning and developing ECI services …'* (p. 37).

In further support of a more coherent and holistic approach to services, the Agency report on Teacher Education for Inclusion (2011) notes that *'… an increasingly inclusive education system is likely to represent a more effective use of resources than short term initiatives designed to "close gaps" or support certain marginalised groups'* (p. 77).

While policy and practice designed to address equity issues remains at the margins rather than at the centre of mainstream education, little progress is likely to be made. Equity also requires action beyond the education system to address barriers to in learner's life circumstances. As Fink (2008) observes: *'Education is more than preparing students to make a living, although that is important. It is also about preparing them to make a life'* (p. 2).

Rather than revisiting definitions of inclusive education or justifying a move to more inclusive approaches, policy makers, school leaders and teachers should commit to key values, get to know learners and identify the barriers that they experience to learning and participation, addressing the three Es, described by West-Burnham and Coates (2005):

- Equity – the dominant imperative in most democratic societies to ensure that access to education is not compromised by poverty, social class, gender, race or disability;
- Efficiency – the pressure to maximize outcomes (however defined) while minimising costs;
- Excellence – the extent to which an education system is perceived to be achieving high standards of performance.

The value of co-operation between countries and the importance of learning from existing policy and practice in this area has been recognised by the agreement of European Member States to maintain the Agency as their platform for exchange and sharing knowledge and good practice in the field of inclusive education. The need for more research is highlighted throughout this report and co-operation at European level is critical in making best use of resources.

The crucial role of such co-operation was further emphasised at the close of the RA4AL conference in Odense when Henrik Poulsen, from Odense Municipality quoted Lars Qvortrup (Aalborg University) saying *'Knowledge is the only thing that increases when shared*.'

By sharing knowledge at all levels of the system, inclusive learning communities can be developed, strengthened by partnership and collaboration between all key stakeholders to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to develop their learning capacity and raise their levels of achievement.

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Raising Achievement for all learners is a priority at European level as set out in the Education and Training 2020 Framework (ET 2020) and the high cost of school failure is increasingly being recognised. Raising the achievement of all learners is not a policy initiative but an ethical imperative that will best be achieved by providing quality education in inclusive settings.

The Raising Achievement for all Learners project set out to identify the issues that need to be explored and strategies at the policy level that appear to be successful in raising the achievement of all learners.

This report provides a synthesis of all activities carried out during the one year project – including desktop research covering past work by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education and the project conference held in Odense, Denmark in June 2012.

It discusses some of the challenges of raising achievement for all learners and presents information on emerging project themes including: collaborative policy and practice; support for school and system leaders; inclusive accountability; personalisation through listening to learners; professional development for inclusive education and pedagogical approaches for all. Drawing on all sources of project information, the report finally identifies key issues for future work.

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