



PROMOTING POSITIVE  
ATTITUDES AND EVIDENCE-  
BASED POLICY FOR  
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

# IE+ Training Course: Chapter V

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## Contents

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1. Introduction .....	4
2. Start with a Vision .....	4
3. Creating a culture of inclusion .....	5
4. Stakeholder involvement opportunities for an inclusive school environment.....	6
5. Inclusive learning opportunities.....	8
6. The role of school places in the inclusion process .....	12
7. Conclusions.....	13
8. Summary. ....	13
9. References.....	14



## 1. Introduction

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A school's environment can be broadly defined as its facilities, classrooms, school-based support, policies, practices and activities. Together these elements create a wider environment or atmosphere which will impact the way students, teachers, parents and other external stakeholders interact with the school itself. For a fully inclusive school, it is crucial that all aspects of the school environment support inclusion.

## 2. Start with a Vision

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A school vision is a clear statement of what a school is trying to achieve, providing a roadmap for the school's direction and a framework for offering students the best education possible (TESS-India, 2017, p.2 [96]). A common vision can unify stakeholders of a school, enabling them to work for the benefit of its students (TESS-India, 2017, p.2 [96]).

Developing a school vision is an important part of effective school leadership (TESS-India, 2017, p.2 [96]). Standing as a frame of reference, a school's vision:

- Provides a focus for all aspects of organisational life.
- Informs planning and the development of policies.
- Clarifies and prioritises the work of individuals.
- Helps to articulate shared beliefs and develop a common language, thereby securing alignment and effective communication.
- Characterises the organisation to external partners.

A school vision will reflect the unique context of each school, but will also reflect wider factors and influences, such as the context of the local community, region and country (TESS-India, 2017, p.2 [96]). It is crucial that a school's vision unites stakeholders around the school's journey towards inclusion. Including stakeholders in the development of a school's vision is the best way to ensure that they support the development of the school and achievement of its vision (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2011, p.9 [97]).

A school's vision can create an initial framework for an inclusive school environment. From this vision's statements schools can define a mission statement, which will indicate how the school aims to achieve its vision in its day-to-day operation. This mission statement can contain important information about what the school does, its students, teachers and its services as it strives to achieve its vision.



To make a school's vision a reality, efforts must also be made to ensure that a school's physical, social and cultural environments promote the full participation of all learners, helping to foster a positive and inclusive school environment for the benefit of its students, staff and stakeholders.

#### Highlights:

- A school vision is a clear statement of what a school is trying to achieve.
- A school's vision should reflect the unique context of each school.
- Including stakeholders in the development of a school's vision is the best way to ensure that they support the development of the school and achievement of its vision.

### 3. Creating a culture of inclusion

While there is no fixed definition of culture, school culture can be loosely defined as a school's shared values, attitudes, and behavioral norms (Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro, 1997, p.554 [98]). A school's culture affects the day-to-day operation of the school, how policies are developed and implemented, how problems are solved, and how stakeholders are involved in the school's activities (UNICEF, 2014, p.24) [99]

An inclusive school culture is comprised of a vast number of elements, some of which are clearly visible, and others which are hidden out of sight, similarly to the composition of an iceberg. The visible elements of a school's culture are supported by the larger array of the unseen elements, which are just as crucial to the promotion of inclusive schools.

The occurrence of bullying, which is defined as repeated unwanted, aggressive behaviour, that involves a real or perceived power imbalance, poses one of the biggest barriers that endangers the creation of an inclusive school culture. Children with intellectual disabilities, as well as children with physical, developmental, emotional, and sensory disabilities, are at an increased risk of being bullied. As a result, it is crucial that schools work to prevent bullying between students. This action can begin by incorporating the desire to create a supportive atmosphere into a school's vision and mission statements, but should also include the adoption of an effective strategy to resolve any occurrences of bullying within school, which can help to foster an inclusive school environment.



### Highlights:

- A school's culture can be loosely defined as a school's shared values, attitudes, and behavioural norms.
- The visible elements of a school's culture are supported by the larger array of the unseen elements, which are just as crucial to the promotion of inclusive schools.

## 4. Stakeholder involvement opportunities for an inclusive school environment

### 4.1 Identifying stakeholders

An inclusive school only develops through the joint efforts of all those working in the school or have a stake in in the school and its pupils. These stakeholders must work together to co-produce more inclusive school environments.

A school's stakeholders can be internal as well as external. Their physical proximity to the school may vary, as can their potential influence and involvement in the activities of the school (Implementing Inclusion in Schools Project, 2019, p.8 [103]). In different countries these stakeholders are named differently and are organised differently. But in most countries the stakeholders of a school broadly consist of (Implementing Inclusion in Schools Project, p.8 [103]):

- School staff. This will include the headteacher as well as teachers, special needs teachers, learning attendants, therapists, administrators, maintenance and housekeeping people.
- Parents, the advisory board of parents and the school's aid association.
- Organisations and/or public authorities that provide the funds for the school staff, the buildings and the teaching and learning material.
  - This may be split between different stakeholders and professions.
- Public authorities who decide on the curricula, guidelines for testing and acceptance criteria for degrees, certificates and diploma.
- Politicians who focus on educational issues.
- Counselling services for inclusion and integration provided by public authorities or non-profit organisations.
- Service providers for children with special needs in the region.
- Other schools in the school district.



## 4.2 How to support stakeholder involvement

To support the involvement and collaboration of all stakeholder in school development processes, schools and school leaders must:

- *Ensure that the production process allows genuine participation at all stages.*

Co-production is not just a consultation process but includes the active participation of stakeholders. From the very first stage (co-creation) until the very last one (co-assessment), the process needs to be accessible, adaptable and flexible to include and to foster the participation of all stakeholders identified above (IE+, 2019 [104]).

Stakeholders need to feel welcomed, respected, trusted, heard and needed (UNICEF, 2014 p.8 [99]). It is also important to provide opportunities for all participants to clarify their expectations, understand the complexities of the process (accomplishments as well as disappointments and drawbacks) and discuss how to improve the quality of the collaborative process (UNICEF, 2014 p.8 [99]).

- *Transparency in the development of policies and key objectives*

All discussions throughout the whole coproduction process should happen in presence of all stakeholders or be brought to the knowledge of the people who could not be present.

Collaboration must be both constructive and efficient, this is more likely to happen when all parties feel comfortable in the process, the different roles are agreed and understood, and information is provided regularly in an open and democratic way (UNICEF, 2014 p.8 [99]).

- *A more equal relationship between stakeholders*

The co-production process is essentially characterised by the equal relationship between all stakeholders involved in the coproduction. In practice, it means that each partner must have a voice in the process that is heard equally and has the same power in decision-making.

Opportunities for stakeholder participation in schools include:

- **When developing a school vision:** Inviting parents, school staff, governors, local policy makers and students from a diverse range of backgrounds, to reflect on what they want for the school and its aims. Stakeholders can participate via workshops, surveys and meetings to together create a school's vision.
- **When making changes to the school's daily timetable:** Working with school staff, including teachers, parents and students from a diverse range of backgrounds, to develop a school timetable that can suit everyone.
- **When defining learning objectives and learning activities:** Fostering cooperation between teachers and parents to together define a school or class' learning objectives and learning activities.



- **Developing a health and well-being policy:** Involving students, parents, teachers, experts and local food suppliers to together develop the aims of the policy and the activities that will ensure the implementation of the policy.

#### **Example of Co-production: Burlington Junior School, (UK) – Change Teams**

The Change Team at Burlington Junior School exists to discuss a wide range of issues to help move the school forward, taking account of the views of different stakeholders. The team consists of an experienced teacher, a newly qualified teacher (NQT), a teaching assistant, a member of the administrative staff, a governor and a small number of parents, including one who is a member of the PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) (Fiona Carnie, 2013, p.504 [105]).

The agenda is wide-ranging and covers practical issues as well as providing an opportunity for reflection and discussion about new and imaginative ways forward. Discussion topics have included (Fiona Carnie, 2013, p.504 [105]):

- How are we doing with home learning?
- What can we do to improve communication?
- Does our curriculum reflect our children’s cultural backgrounds?

### 4.3 Opportunities for involvement in your local community

Localised

Neighbourhoods and involvement in the community (the school as a community).

#### Highlights:

- School stakeholders must work together to co-produce more inclusive school environments.
- Co-production is not just a consultation process, but it includes the active participation of stakeholders.
- Collaboration must be both constructive and efficient.
- The co-production process is essentially characterised by the equal relationship between all stakeholders involved.

## 5. Inclusive learning opportunities

Schools provide important learning environments in which students, as well as staff, can flourish. It is important to ensure that school learning programmes and curricula are



flexible to the learning needs of all students, enabling them to learn as well as demonstrate their acquisition of knowledge and skills. The education and continued training of teachers is also an important feature of the inclusion process. For schools to be fully inclusive, teachers must be provided with the knowledge, skills and tools that they need to be able to support the learning needs of all learners in the classroom through both initial and ongoing training.

### 5.1 Developing a learning programme for all

An important component of an inclusive school environment is the inclusivity of the learning opportunities it offers. Inclusive school learning programmes, or curricula, should emphasise the strength, as well as accommodate the needs of learners and aim to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. The principles of inclusion can be embedded in the learning frameworks on a number of different levels, from a national level, through to academic programmes and modules, down to individual teaching sessions (Anne Hughes, 2016, p.2 [106]).

**Localisation – Revision of learning programmes/curriculum in schools – how you can change the topics children are taught.**  
Reference to UDL in Chapter II.

### 5.2 Teacher training for inclusion

For all learners to be fully included in the education system, it is paramount to have adequate teacher education and training. This training must be in-line with the core values of inclusive education, to ensure that staff have the knowledge, skills and attitude to deal with diversity and inclusion (Essi Kesälahti and Sai Väyrynen, 2013, p.76 [107]).

The core values of inclusive education include (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2011, p.10 [97]):

- Valuing learner diversity: difference is considered a resource and an asset to education;
- Supporting all learners: teachers have high expectations on all learners' achievements;
- Working with others: collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers;
- Personal professional development: teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their lifelong learning.

Investment into the adequate education and training for teachers and staff to ensure the understanding of Inclusive Education and Special Educational Needs of needed (EASPD, 2015, p.12 [29]). Providing the tools and knowledge to enable teachers to



meet the needs of all learners, regardless of their special education needs, should be included in teacher training curriculums from the very start of teacher training programmes.

Initial teacher training courses should:

- **Integrate training content on inclusive education across the entire teacher training course**
- **Promote inclusive attitudes and values**

If teachers are to support inclusive education, they must believe in the values that they embody. As a result, teacher training should provide student teachers with opportunities to critically discuss and reflect on their own attitudes and concepts of disability to overcome segregating attitudes (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2011, p.32 [97]).

- **Include practical training placements in inclusive schools and settings**

Quality inclusive school placements enable teachers to see inclusive education in reality and bridge the gap between theory and practice, helping them to develop the skills necessary to meet diverse needs in the classroom (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2011, p.32 [97]).

- **Incorporate inclusion into standard teacher competences**

Competences are the skills and knowledge that enable a teacher to be successful. A teacher's competences enable them to confidently take responsibility for all learners in their classes and need their learning needs, including those with a disability (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2011, p.66). By incorporating inclusive competences into the profile of teachers, national and regional authorities can provide a clear and consistent statement of what teachers are expected to know and to do as well as ensure that teachers have the skills and knowledge that enable them to successfully implement inclusion (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2011, p.45 [97]).

Initial teacher training, which prioritises equipping teachers with the tools and knowledge to be able to meet the diverse needs of learners can create the foundation for a flourishing inclusive education system. As more and more learners are educated in inclusive setting, the number of students entering the teaching profession with direct and positive experience of inclusion should increase. These experiences should positively impact student teacher's understanding, attitudes and values towards inclusion as well as the number of role models and mentors available to students and new teachers (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2011, p.65[97]).

- **Continual professional development for teachers**



Continued training not only ensures that teachers remain able to support the needs of their students, but also provides teachers with the opportunity for ongoing professional development.

This professional development can help teachers to better respond to new challenges (such as curriculum changes or digitalisation) and acquire new competences and skills to support inclusive education. Ongoing training opportunities can also help teachers to feel supported in their role and can reinforce the status of teachers as professionals, helping teachers to feel more valued, which in turn can support the retention of teachers in the profession (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2015, p.42 [108]).

An array of training opportunities are available for the continual professional development of teachers. These opportunities include:

- Specialised, ad-hoc training courses, available through higher education invitations, NGOs, specialised organisations, charities or projects.
- These courses could vary from full-time course, which run over a number of days or weeks which can be completed by teachers during school holidays, in non-working days or during working days specifically allocated to training activities.
- Postgraduate Specialisation courses.
- Masters and doctoral studies.
- Distance learning or e-courses.
- Job shadowing or mobility opportunities (such as those provided by the Erasmus+ programme).

Ensuring that teachers are appropriately equipped to meet the learning needs of all students starts with initial teacher training courses. Teacher development is a continuous process however, and to ensure that teachers continue to be able to overcome new challenges, acquire new competences and skills to support inclusive education and feel valued in their role as professionals, ongoing teacher training is needed.

#### Highlights:

- It is important to ensure that school learning programmes and curricula are flexible to the learning needs of all students, enabling them to learn as well as demonstrate their acquisition of knowledge and skills.
- Teacher training must be in-line with the core values of inclusive education, to ensure that staff have the knowledge, skills and attitude to deal with diversity and inclusion.
- Continuing professional development can help teachers to better respond to new challenges and acquire new competences and skills to support inclusive education.



## 6. The role of school places in the inclusion process

For a student to be able to fully participate in a school's culture and social activities a school must be accessible to all, including those with an intellectual disability. The social and learning activities of a school extend outside the classroom into all areas of the school site. The playground, school dining hall or the library, must promote the inclusion and full social participation of all learners in the school community, enabling them to contribute to the school's culture and social activities.

To ensure that all school spaces are inclusive to all learners, including those with an intellectual disability schools need to consider making certain adjustments:

### *Easy to read signs*

Important information, such as signs or notices should be made available in plain language or easy to read text throughout the school to ensure that all children are able to understand them. It is also important that key school documents, including the school's vision and mission statements are available and easy to read.

### *Visual environment*

Bright colours and complex patterns can overstimulate some students. Walls painted with neutral or pastel colours are more soothing while brighter colours can be introduced through display boards. Colour can also be used as a visual aid, such as in marking routes and using contrasting colours or layers of colour to define spaces or objects, such as step edges (New Zealand Ministry of Education, p.1 [109]).

### *Quiet spaces*

Quieter spaces with seating should also be provided for all students. While these spaces should not be exclusionary, they should be quiet enough to allow children to rest and allow their sensory system to calm down.

### **Case study:**

In 2013 a study carried out by Georgia State University investigated the impact participation in extracurricular activities had on the social competence (their ability to handle social interactions effectively) of 7-12-year-old children with a learning or a mild-to-moderate intellectual disability (Bianca A. Brooks, 2013, p.33 [110]).

The study found that more time spent participating in unstructured activities, such as free play in the playground, was related to higher rating of social competence. Greater participation in unstructured activities was found to have a particularly strong effect on children with intellectual disabilities, and their participation in unstructured activities had a greater impact on them than their peers who did not have a disability (Bianca A. Brooks, 2013, p.33 [110])

Find out more about how to make learning environments more inclusive in Chapter VI of this training course.



### Highlights:

- The social and learning activities of a school extend outside the classroom into all areas of the school site.
- Every aspect and area of a school must promote the inclusion and full social participation of all learners in the school community, enabling them to contribute to the school's culture and social activities.

## 7 Conclusions

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For a fully inclusive school, it is crucial that all aspects of the school environment support inclusion. In this chapter we explored how a school's vision, culture, cooperation with stakeholders and surrounding community, learning programme, teacher training opportunities and social activities can contribute to an inclusive school environment which enables the full participation of all learners.

## 8 Summary

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- A school's environment can be broadly defined as its facilities, classrooms, school-based support, policies, practices and activities. Together these elements create a wider environment or atmosphere to either support or discourage inclusion.
- A school's vision can create an initial framework for an inclusive school environment. This must be followed by an inclusive school culture and a school environment which supports the active participation of its stakeholders and the inclusion of all learners in every aspect of school life.
- To be successful, inclusive education requires the appropriate initial and ongoing training of teachers, to ensure that they are able to meet the needs of their students and feel valued in their role as a professional.



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