

Inclusive education in the arts: challenges, practices and experiences in Lithuania

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Abstract

This study **aims** to investigate how inclusive practices are implemented in art education in different types of schools and settings. The research was done during the Erasmus+ project IPA-E (Inclusive pedagogy in arts – Europe) which aim was to strengthen the inclusion in pedagogy of arts in schools, art schools and promote it in teacher training universities. Together with project partners we overviewed how inclusive arts education is developing in different partners' countries (Finland, Germany, Austria and Lithuania), and explored learning contexts and contents, and art curricula of different types of schools and universities. This article presents a theoretical literature review of inclusive arts education and emphasizes some key factors that are important within the arts education field. The focus of the research is to present the context and policy of inclusion in Lithuania in general and to overview of what is going on in inclusive arts education in Lithuania. A pilot study was also carried out to find out the attitudes and the challenges of arts teachers in implementing inclusive education in their practice.

Key words: art education, inclusive education, inclusive arts, arts integration.

Importance of inclusion in Lithuania: policy context

In 1994 Lithuania signed the UNESCO Salamanca Declaration of the Development of Special Needs Persons, and in 1995, ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Before that there was a clear segregation of traditional schools and special schools, but later the processes of integration and the development of new models of schools started. The strategic documents of the European Union and Lithuania emphasize the inclusive education that ensures the right and development for all learners to study in the environment according their needs and abilities.

In 2014, the Minister of Education and Science approved the action plan for the inclusive education in general education schools for primary and basic education programs. Thus, at the legislative level, inclusive education has begun to be implemented in Lithuanian schools. The priority of inclusive education policy is the provision of equal education opportunities for the child, taking into account the child's individuality and identity (Action plan, 2014). The National Education Strategy (2013-2022) highlights the focus on individual skills, emphasizes quality education and development of children with diverse abilities and needs, and establishes educational conditions for ethnic minority and

migrant children. It is important to *overcome the social exclusion*, ensure *pedagogical and psychological assistance* and equal opportunities for all (National Strategy for Education 2013-2022, 2013). The “Good School Concept” (2015) emphasized the role of the teacher as a facilitator for each student, and recognizes the teacher as the student's helper, in meeting individual needs and choices (Geros mokyklos koncepcija, 2015). Undoubtedly, all systemic changes in the education system must take place so that inclusive education becomes a reality.

Researchers from the Ministry of Education (2014) outline the main challenges for inclusion in Lithuania: high levels of poverty and social exclusion, since poor environments influence a child's achievements, a success in life and 30% of the rural population in Lithuania are at risk of poverty (EU EC report, 2013); 50% of students diagnosed with health disorders (Health Ministry report, 2012); high unemployment rate; high level of emigration; bilingual children; and children left by parents because of emigration. The achievement of Lithuanian students in small village schools is significantly different from the achievement of students in the bigger schools in the city. 13 % of children in kindergartens and primary schools have some special needs. Many of them have speech and other communication disorders or chronic somatic and neurological disorders (Aidukienė, 2014). Recent research shows the same problems, less or more, so it creates the preconditions for the new strategies of development of inclusive education.

Statistical research shows that in general education about 10 percent of children (of 335 thousand learners) have special educational needs (2015-2016 statistic). Most of them have mental disorders, complex disabilities, motion and physical disorders, speech disorders and other development problems. The numbers are not growing during the years, probably because some schools are not well prepared for inclusion, and there are not enough education support specialists (special educators, social educators) in general schools (National Audit Office, 2016, pp. 27).

There are the number of *special schools* in Lithuania where learning for children with special needs (autism, mental disability, emotional disorders, physical disability, deafness and blindness) is provided. Special teachers work there using specially designed school programs. The government's plan is to decrease the number of children in special schools. After a few years, some special schools will be gradually closed and pupils will have to attend secondary schools. The aim is to combine general and special education through inclusive education strategies.

Inclusion still remains a complex and controversial issue, without continuing uncertainty about its definition, meaning and implications (Hick, Kershner, Farrell, 2009; Unesco, 2016; Alisauskiene, Milteniene, 2018).

“However, the field remains confused as to what inclusion means. In some countries, inclusion is still thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. However, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners. It presumes that the aim of inclusive education is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability. As such, it starts from the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society” (Unesco, 2016).

The concept of inclusion in Lithuania is discussed at almost all levels, with the thinking that inclusive education should be developed by everyone: children, parents, educators and politicians. S. Ališauskienė and L. Miltenienė (2018) analyzed the concept of inclusive education in international documents and in the context of Lithuanian education. They argue that in Lithuania the content of the concept of inclusive education is not fully

disclosed and can be understood and interpreted differently due to the change of concepts and terms. The implementation of inclusive education should be based on a systemic approach, starting from a concept of inclusive education and linking inclusive education policy-making, structures and systems of education and inclusive education practices (Alisauskiene, Milteniene, 2018). The research in Lithuania is mostly in several areas of inclusive education: inclusion of children with special needs, education of gifted children, and the development of intercultural competencies.

According to international trends and national strategies towards inclusive education, each area of education faces specific challenges implementing an inclusive education approach. In this study we will look at how inclusive education is reflected in the area of *arts education*.

Inclusion in Art Education

The research was done during the Erasmus+ project IPA-E (*Innclusive pedagogy in arts – Europe*) which aims to strengthen the inclusion in Art pedagogy. A key objective of this project was to develop curricula and inclusive pedagogy in collaboration with project partners. This project concentrated especially in music, dance pedagogy, drama and visual arts. The project focused on bringing inclusion to a new level in arts schools (music and visual arts) and general schools, develop arts' curricula for inclusive learners, and increase inclusive thinking at universities and initial / in-service teacher training (IPA-E, 2017). The project partners overviewed how inclusive arts education is developing in different partners' countries (Finland, Germany, Austria and Lithuania), explored learning contexts and contents, art curriculums of different types of schools and universities, and analyzed the best practices in the field of inclusion. The concept of inclusion in arts was analyzed through theoretical, philosophical and ethical dimensions (IPA-E, 2017).

Methodology

The aim of this study was to investigate how inclusive education practices are implemented in arts education in different education settings in Lithuania.

During the project, observations of schools and best practices were analyzed in the field of inclusion in the partner countries (Finland, Austria, Germany and Lithuania) and in the cooperating schools. Observations were carried out by researchers from these partner countries. The project partners held joint discussions and reflections on the specifics of inclusive education in each country, highlighting the specifics of art lessons, and were able to compare and share their insights of the specifics of countries and schools.

In Lithuania, observations were made in five cooperating schools, the environment of schools and art classes, art lessons (20 art and music lessons) and two specialized art schools were observed. Interviews were conducted with 15 art subject teachers. An unstructured form of observation and field notes was used to capture observations that are relevant to the research questions. The main questions of the research were focused to clarify the situation of inclusive arts education in Lithuania covered the following areas: what subjects could be taken into account in arts education, what opportunities should be included in general schools and art schools when working with children with special needs? How prepared are arts teachers to work in inclusive classrooms? During the interviews, teachers were asked how they organize work with a class with special needs students? What methods have they often used to work with students who have special needs, what success they have achieved, and what difficulties they have. Teachers

also commented on inclusion policies and expressed their expectations and views on inclusive education in general.

The partnerships with other European universities and international experience showed very different opportunities for inclusive education in the arts and we defined some key factors that are important working within the arts education field. A theoretical analysis, as well as observations of arts lessons and events in different schools and communities were utilized. Demonstrations, discussions and reflection with school staff and arts educators led us to understand the real situations, challenges and benefits of arts education as a specific field of learning and disclosed various discourses of inclusive art education. Theoretical literature overview helped us to understand and identify key factors of observation.

Summarizing observations and interview, data analysis was conducted using thematic qualitative analysis following the main themes of art education expressed by McCarthy et al, (2004), and other researchers and can be applied in inclusive art education:

- Inclusive and “arts rich” environment;
- Art as a pedagogical tool (Arts as a Method);
- Arts integration;
- Learning the arts (instruction in the arts, including both arts appreciation and courses that teach creative skills (McCarthy et al, 2004, pp. 22-23);
- Teachers attitude to inclusive education and the role of the teacher.

Theoretical framework

Inclusion in arts education has been investigated in a number of research studies. As in other areas, arts education has emphasized the diversity, respect and equality of all learners, fostering values of the idea of inclusivity as well. Researchers confirmed that the involvement of arts in the lives of children supports their social, emotional, and cognitive well-being and development (Chemi & Du, 2017, pp. 5). J. Allan (2014) argues that “we need new ways of thinking about inclusive education and explore the potential of the arts for both engagement and political action” (Allan, 2014).

When implementing inclusive education policies in all schools, it is important to pay attention to the different types of schools, their goals and school cultures in general and different forms of art education which are developed in schools. Art education in general education schools, informal spaces, communities, and specialized art schools is carried out in different ways, according to program type, goals, forms of arts education and school culture.

Researchers K. F. McCarthy et al, (2004) describe four different forms of arts education and explain why they are likely to create certain benefits for children:

- An arts-rich school environment, which incorporates the arts throughout the school curriculum and/or offers students a range of extracurricular activities in the arts;
- Art used as a pedagogical tool to help students learn;
- Art integrated into non-arts courses as a means of teaching non-arts subjects;
- Direct instruction in the arts, including both arts appreciation and courses that teach creative skills (McCarthy et al, 2004, pp. 22-23).

Schools or informal institutions have different aims and objectives for the arts. This raises the question of how to respond to the general strategy and idea of inclusive education in different schools and settings.

Inclusive and “arts rich” environment

In order to create inclusive classrooms in *art education* settings it is necessary to create an *inclusive environment*, one that is supportive, safe, motivational, tolerant for all

learners, including those with different backgrounds and cultures, and different abilities, and adapted for learners with learning differences. Teachers creating an inclusive environment are able to ensure a positive emotional atmosphere, and psychological safety for every pupil, as well as tolerance, freedom, and active communication. The role of arts in the inclusive school is crucially important as the arts in schools can contribute to create an inclusive environment.

C. M. Henderson & E. Lasley (2014) listed ten areas for teachers to consider when they create an inclusive environment: *Togetherness, Diversity, Community building, Differing abilities, "Can Do" attitude, Student-centered, Shared space and time, Professional collaboration, Documenting student learning, and Families*. The "arts" can fit into each of these areas "to enhance inclusion and inclusive teachers thoughtfully incorporate the arts while planning for meeting standards, age and stage expectations, individual needs, abilities and interests, and what is culturally and socially appropriate for each child" (Henderson, Lasley, 2014, pp. 17). They state that creative inclusive classrooms value imagination and innovation. Art rich environment can benefit children by developing their growth in self-confidence and self-efficacy and providing a sense of being well integrated into the school environment (ibid).

According to K. F. McCarthy (2004), art rich environments in the school "offer a variety of opportunities for children to develop positive attitudes to the arts and also toward school and society more generally and could be particularly important for children whose learning skills and styles are not well suited to a traditional academic setting" (McCarthy et al, 2004, pp. 23). R. A. Wilson (2003) offers that teachers can increase the responsiveness of the environment by choosing materials and planning activities that provide immediate positive reinforcement (Wilson, 2003, pp. 228).

Arts as a Method

Theoretical literature recognizes the benefit of arts as a pedagogical tool that helps students learn and acquire new information, especially when they have learning difficulties. "Teachers can use creative expression and art to practice cognitive, language, social, emotional, and motor skills while integrating them into themes and relating them to content. This provides natural opportunities for children to learn through play without feeling anxious over failure" (Henderson, Lasley, 2014, pp. 7). Arts-based methods help students to be engaged in the learning process, creatively express themselves and their feelings and impacts them positively.

Many teachers in inclusive classrooms use arts-based methods driven from art therapy experiences. It is important to note, that teachers are not therapists and should not function as the therapist. Arts therapy is a "highly specialized area of therapeutic practice and healing and there are numerous degree programs in art therapy, but there are ways in which nonspecialized clinicians can infuse art therapy experiences into their practices (Colon & S. Degges-White, 2015, pp.4,5). Prepared teachers can use some arts therapy methods for educational purposes – to motivate and engage students in learning processes, to create a free, peaceful and safe environment and encourage creative expression. Arts educators "with concomitant training in art therapy can design assignments and settings where students are free to make art based on their own free-flowing ideas and engage in conversations that address the meanings in those images" (Gnezda, 2015, pp. 9).

Professional and ethical application of art therapy methods in arts education can bring many positive benefits to inclusive classes and help to create inclusive environments. *Visual arts* encompasses many forms of art making and it allows students "to creatively express themselves without the need for verbal dialogue". *Music* in education or music

therapy methods can improve physical, cognitive, psychological and social functioning. It is believed that *movement* and *dance* provide a means by which complex feelings can be processed safely and effectively. “The modern dance movement and its spontaneous and highly expressive form of movement that provided dancers with a freeing, health-promoting experience”. *Drama* includes a wide variety of activities such as storytelling, improvisation, puppetry, enactment, and role play. Drama therapy methods at school can be used to “provide a safe space in which exploration of feelings, behaviors, and thoughts may actively take place (Colon & S. Degges-White, 2015 (p. 4).

H. Gardner (1999) identified eight different types of intelligences that individuals use in the learning process with different learning styles. According to A. Devine (2016), a good teacher will be aware of exactly what the learning styles are of individuals in the class. Good teaching will involve a balance of learning styles (visual, musical, auditory, kinaesthetic, logical or other) and different art forms encompass different learning styles (Devine, p. 66).

Integrating the arts

Integration of the arts can vary from a small degree to total arts infusion throughout the curriculum. C. E. Cornett (1999) offers many ways teachers can present information and develop skills from different art disciplines and use arts as teaching tools and learning processes (Cornett, 1999). Of integrating the arts (visual art, music, dance, drama) and literature to interact with social studies, history, mathematic, languages and science can support learning about themes and concepts of disciplines and help children achieve “academic success and life satisfaction” (ibid, p. 40). Integration of arts helps students to be engaged in the learning process and certain artistic activities (art making, playing, story-telling, dancing, perform).

Integration the arts creates more possibilities for children, who are included. A. H. Robinson (2013), in her review of the research, considered the role of arts integration with students with disabilities and “disadvantaged” students. From the integration of the arts, she noted potentially positive effects – an increase in self-efficacy, self-regulating behaviors, and the use of learning strategies. Students “are more likely to experience feelings of value, improved academic motivation, and positive recognition from their academic community” (Robinson, 2013). Activities based on arts integration are often collaborative. Teachers can use different learning activities as group work or cooperative learning. For children with disabilities it is crucially important they interact with others to promote social and communication skills. Thus, the integration of the arts and the coherence of appropriate methods offer many opportunities for inclusive classrooms.

Learning the Arts

In secondary school arts curriculum focus more on the subject competences of learning different artistic disciplines such as art making, performing, appreciation and understanding of the arts. There are defined national arts curricula for 5-12 grades and individual teachers’ programs. The arts curriculum in many countries has overall aims such as to develop arts skills, learning about arts, construct artistic knowledge, develop creativity, cultural awareness, and aesthetic sensitivity. Arts disciplines helps children to develop communication skills, critical thinking, positive values, attitudes and their interest in the arts.

According to K. F. McCarthy et al, (2004) learning arts “can bring the experience of the arts to many children who may not otherwise experience them. Making art provides a particularly effective way to develop the personal skills that are critical to behavioural change” (McCarthy et al, 2004). Children’s participation in artistic experiences appears

to strengthen their ability to concentrate, and to engage in personal and social identity perception, which later in life may increase their confidence and ability to engage in social contexts, resulting in a curiosity-stimulating, identity-building, and intellectually challenging approach that can lead to a positive attitude toward learning and development. Understanding art and cultural experiences is conducive to the overall development, whereby body, senses, cognition, and emotions are developed together (Chemi, Du, 2017, pp. 5.6).

Gifted and talented children at general schools are considered as inclusive children as well, and it can be challenging to work with them in a general classroom. Teachers need to motivate them to develop their talents. Gifted children need to be taught by individualized program and they need a personalized learning as well. According to F. Piske (2014) “It is important that teachers prepare activities that mean challenges for gifted students and encourage these students to research about their area of interest” (Piske et al, 2014). Usually there is an opportunity for gifted children to attend the special arts schools, which are like small academies of art, and have an orientation to professional art (music, dance, visual art) learning.

Teachers attitude and the role of the teacher

The role of the teacher is a crucial component for successful inclusive education. Teachers and arts educators should have a conceptual understanding of inclusive education and develop values that reflect the ideas of inclusive education.

European agency for development in special needs education (2012) in the *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* defines four core values of inclusive education for teachers who work in the inclusive education system including: 1) *Valuing learner diversity*: Students’ differences are viewed as a resource and an asset to education; 2) *Supporting all learners*: Teachers have high expectations for all learners’ achievements; 3) *Working with others*: Collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers; and 4) *Continuing personal professional development*: Teaching is a learning activity and teachers must accept responsibility for their own lifelong learning.

The results of the research done in Lithuania showed that most teachers still lack practical skills and knowledge of subject teaching strategies when working with pupils with special needs (Alisauskas, 2010). It is still important to investigate how teachers are responding to a challenge for inclusive education policy: are arts educators prepared for inclusive education, and how are they developing their competences to use them in their practice. Teachers' attitudes depend on many factors – preparation, training on inclusive education, competencies, practical skills, values and personal attitudes. Teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education are greatly contribute to the implementation of inclusive education strategies in practice.

Finnish researcher T. Saloviita (2018) investigated teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education and noted that more critical attitudes towards inclusion were held by subject teachers rather than special-education teachers. Inclusive education may bring extra work for subject teachers, as they have more students in their classrooms. “The more critical attitudes of subject teachers towards inclusion can be understood through their perhaps greater emphasis on subject matter instead of student development” (Saloviita, 2018 pp. 9). This research also showed, that “a small majority of all teachers accepted the basic idea that children with SEN can be effectively instructed in mainstream classrooms” (ibid). According to A. Devine, (2016) it is generally recognized that mainstream teachers are not trained enough to teach children with specific learning differences and it’s

impossible to know everything. They are constantly learning, and the best teachers learn most from the children they teach” (Devine, 2016, pp. 71). Lithuanian and Finnish researchers noted, that for subject teachers „the implementation of inclusion was challenging because the ideas of individualized learning, student’s well-being, multiprofessional approach for teaching, and dialogue with parents could not be met with traditional teacher-led methods and limited special educational knowledge“ (Lakkala, Juškevičienė, 2019, pp. 49).

Results

The results of the research done in Lithuania showed general situation how an inclusive education model is applied in learning the arts, integrating the arts, how art methods and art environment can help for inclusive arts education.

During the project observations we visited a number of different types of schools to observe how the environment is artistic, creative and motivational. In Lithuania many schools have arts classes (music and art) and offer additional artistic activities. In Lithuanian schools, children can choose an extra art classes (ceramics, crafts, expressive arts, dance, choir, theater, etc) that are open for all children. Arts classes are equipped with art tools and materials, and music instruments, so that schools create art rich environments. In some schools we observed special focus on the arts with art exhibitions, lots of artwork in the classrooms, didactic material for art learning, lots of visual, creatively presented information, and flexible spaces. However, there are still many traditional school classrooms where it is hard to observe the inclusive and creative education. It was difficult to identify other factors such as psychological and emotional atmosphere, well-being, level of tolerance, but these very much depend on school culture, values and attitudes towards inclusive education.

In the interviews arts teachers emphasized that the arts rich environment has a positive effect and motivates students. A wide selection of art tools and materials allows students to reveal their interests and creativity. However, not all schools are equipped with facilities and materials enough. Teachers work with special needs students in an individualized program but for teachers this can often be challenging in large classrooms. There are not enough teaching assistants in schools who can help students with special needs in artistic activities. Some schools offer opportunities for extracurricular artistic activities, which also include students with special needs. The opportunity to learn additional arts for these students is very important in integrating them into the school and interacting with other students.

The research shows that art methods are powerful and reflect the goals of inclusive education and can be applied for developing skills, to foster academic achievements of students and contribute to their well-being at schools. Teachers agreed that creative attitudes and integrating the artistic methods and practices in education can develop different abilities of learners, help to raise their motivation, and make attractive and meaningful processes of learning. They said, would like to learn more about specific art methods designed for children with special needs.

Discussions with teachers show that general education teachers not often integrate arts in the curriculum, due to many reasons, such as lack to confidence in their artistic skills and knowledge of art educational methods, and of not enough time for preparation and realization in the classroom. They recognize the importance of the arts but lack specific knowledge and experience. Arts integration activities often are project based when teachers can work in teams and collaborate with each other or they have specific topics that include several disciplines. Teachers noted, that integration of arts may be better

realized in long lasting projects and working with professionals. As an example was noted the national “Creative partnerships” project, where number of Lithuanian schools have participated. Teachers learned how integration of art could be conducted and increased their abilities to create engaging and effective learning processes and foster students’ engagement in learning, helping them see learning as meaningful and valuable. It was recognized “the significant impact on behaviour of socially excluded children” and emotional wellbeing of pupils and teachers at school. Teachers who participated in this project worked together with artists and developed artistic and creative attitude. Teachers and learners increased their creative competences through collaboration, imagination, inquiry and resilience (Creative partnerships Lithuania, 2016). In every classroom the teachers meet students with different abilities. Students with special needs are integrated in the classroom and teachers work with them by utilizing individualized programs. Interview with art teachers showed, that teachers do not have enough support or assistance and it is difficult for them to lead the classroom or create special conditions and environment for them. Art teachers understand the principles of inclusion, but do not have enough knowledge of special education. They apply methods and curricula of differentiation, but it can be a challenge for teachers when a few “difficult” pupils have a specific behavior problems or disability. Teachers need special time, additional help and specific knowledge of disabilities such as developmental, physical, or intellectual disability.

Specific situation with inclusion is at the specialized arts schools which are profiled for learning a music, visual art, dance, etc. They are mostly attended by talented and high motivated children, however, children with special needs may not always be able to access them. Nowadays arts schools can offer their service for wider audiences and understand that artistic education must be accessible to all, even to people with different disabilities. But there is a question, are all arts schools so open and ready to include students with diverse abilities and needs, social or cultural background?

During the observations and interviews with teachers who work in specialized arts schools (music and visual arts) some problems were identified. Teachers or art professionals who work in higher artistic levels and teaching may need to challenge themselves to adapt the artistic programs for every, not so talented, or children with special needs. On the other hand, there are some gifted students with specific disabilities (visually impaired students, deafness, students with different physical disability) who may be very talented and motivated. Art professionals do not have enough preparation and experience to work with specific cases.

Our discussions with arts teachers in Lithuania showed, that many of them recognize the importance of inclusive education, but teachers find it difficult to work with a variety of students and not everyone would like to have "uncomfortable" students in the classroom, especially with intellectual or behavioral disorders. However, there is the need for a better understanding of arts teacher attitude towards inclusion and more research needs to be done. Our discussions and reflections revealed that arts teachers understand the basic principles of inclusion in general, but do not have enough preparation in special education. Arts teachers apply methods and curricula of differentiation, but it is always a challenge when teacher have few “difficult” pupils with a specific behavior problems or disability. They need special time, additional help and specific knowledge of disabilities such as developmental, physical, or intellectual disability. Teachers say that it is always challenging, sometimes because of the big group. They need assistance or special help for students and sometimes they need special help from other professionals.

Teacher preparation and training on inclusive education may help teachers acquire competencies and affect the positive attitudes of the teachers. Although initial teacher

education programs include courses of special education and inclusive education, teachers who start their practice, often encounter a variety of children and situations in their practical work where theoretical knowledge is not enough. They need continual training in special education, multicultural education, social education, psychology, case analysis and other specific areas. Arts teachers noted that they would like training sessions that would be practice-oriented and responsive to the subject area and trainings focused on teaching strategies, methods and techniques in specific art disciplines.

Discussion

International and national education documents provide guidelines for inclusive education for all countries to transform educational systems, but the implementation of inclusive education at local levels may vary from country to country and from school to school. However, in “almost every country is still a challenge to achieve the perfect inclusion of all learners and ensuring that each individual has an equal and personalized opportunity for educational progress” (Unesco, 2017). Lithuania, like other European countries, has undertaken to develop and implement an inclusive education system according to inclusive education policies. It is reflected in Strategic documents outlining school changes, but primarily involves changes in attitudes of the society and especially of participants of the educational settings.

Inclusion in *art education* has been discussed in different contexts internationally, but it still needs wider research and discussion within specific art disciplines, in different art education settings and practices. Theoretical investigations and observations on how inclusive practices are implemented in art education clarified some problem areas and highlighted good practices that promote a belief in successful arts education.

During the Erasmus+ project IPA-E (2017-2019) we identified some key concepts that should be discussed broadly in arts education: *#Equity* – that the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance; *#Values* – that schools and teachers will constantly develop the core values of inclusive education; *#Attitude* – that students, teachers, parents and community will develop a positive attitude towards inclusive education; *#Appreciation* – that promotes the appreciation of every learner and his/her difference and *#Diversity* – recognition of differences which may relate to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, class, and immigration status. All these concepts can be discussed in arts education at different levels: building the pedagogical and administrative guidelines for art education, developing arts curricula and improving arts teachers training.

Examples of good practice reveal the benefits of arts for all children through art rich environments and different forms of arts education: artistic methods that serve for better inclusion or arts used as a pedagogical tool to help students to learn; arts integration (project based learning, integration of arts throughout the curriculum); art studies developing artistic competences, practical and creative skills, and arts appreciation. In arts education the focus of each learner abilities and their individual needs and expectations directly point to the personalized learning and educational attention needed for every child.

Results of the research done in Lithuania showed the importance to develop arts teachers' conceptual understanding of inclusive education and develop values that reflect the ideas of inclusive education. Discussions and interview with our art teachers made us to look critically at the educational processes and curriculum in Lithuania. Some schools in Lithuania are not yet sufficiently prepared to accept diverse children and it is challenging to ensure the equal opportunities for all children for many reasons. One of the reasons is teachers' lack of knowledge of inclusive education and practical experience. Often

administrative staff, teachers and parents do not want pupils with differences (e.g. disabilities, other special needs) to study in their classes, as they may affect class and school achievement in general. Thus, children with special needs may suffer discrimination and exclusion.

This pilot research helps to better understand the general situation of inclusive art education in Lithuania, challenges and attitudes of arts teachers while teaching in inclusive classes. Further research will be conducted with a wider audience to analyze specific cases and opportunities for inclusive arts education.

Initial and continual teacher training give an opportunity to create strong beliefs and a positive approach to inclusive education in the arts and promote creative and new ways of teaching and working with others. Thus, it is necessary to continue to promote the ideas and conceptual understanding of inclusive education that can help to form positive attitudes and encourage all participants of the educational process (teachers, parents, administration) to find new ways to strengthen inclusive education culture of our schools and in the field of arts education.

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