ICLife: Tools for inclusion

How to make life on a campus for higher education more inclusive.

Tool: Create internal support

What's in a name?

It is one thing to develop one-off inclusion programs for specific groups, including tools, support groups, events, safe spaces and so on. It is yet quite another to adapt and modify an entire university campus to create a more inclusive environment and to structurally anchor inclusion trajectories, programs, departmental vision statements and so on. In this tool we try to explain how to initiate the work to start an inclusive university.

The most important issue is that there must be a certain amount of support. The word 'amount' is very central here, because the more people in the university are aware of and positive about the development of inclusive programmes, the greater the chance of success. Therefore, starting out with the kind of one-off programs as described above, is a very good first step. This way slowly support can be gained in a less supportive or less aware university environment. Without support, there is a good chance that the work will end up on the shoulders (as always) of a few enthusiasts, with the risk that it will run aground if the efforts of these people are lost for

one reason or another (job changes, sickness and health, etc). Support and encouragement from the management are also needed in order to structurally anchor inclusive campus strategies (as the amplification of inclusive campus work) beyond the individual persons involved in its support.

An important way to create support is to give all those involved a voice in the implementation of changes. This can be done by setting up a working group right from the start in which the above questions can be answered. This working group can map out the current and desired situation and draw up an action plan (see also under point 3).

Target group

In principle the initial plan, the actual work and the developed strategy to make a university environment more inclusive is open to everyone interested, with a varying degree of interest related to function, time, tasks, specific inclusion themes, specific groups and so on. Often is can be an inspired teacher, a group of students that advocate change or even management itself which insists something should be done about inclusion. This 'something' then grows and extends itself in many directions possible. Under point 3 however, we identify potential roles and structures that may aid in approaching the rapidly fleeting nature of inclusion initiatives in more solid, long-term ones.

What's needed?

Here are some basic roles and structures which may aid in making an inclusive university a reality.

The Inclusion Manager

It is important that there is a source of inspiration for this inclusive work, someone who organizes, plans and follows up consultations and to whom one can turn with questions. The word 'manager' may at first not sound too enticing, but it does give the whole enterprise some sort of seriousness, as inclusion should indeed be a serious and fundamental matter in university life.

The inclusion manager is the connecting factor between the different parties engaged in the endeavour. The role can be taken on by a care coordinator, a pedagogical staff member, a teacher who is given the assignment, a member of the board of directors, etc....each university can decide this for itself.

She or he ensures to establish a working group (see the point immediately below) which meets at regular intervals and prepares a feasible agenda and can make a report or appoint someone.

Regular items on the agenda of meetings can be the monitoring the state of affairs, agreements and tasks and drawing up a to-do list after each meeting. Informing (as much) colleagues (as possible) about the progress of the working group is necessary to keep the theme alive and kicking. This can be done via the communication channels already used in the university or alternatively a new communication channel can be set up.
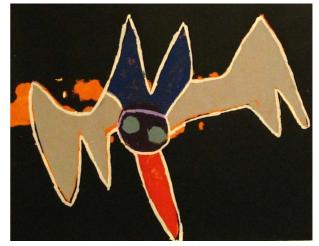
Possibilities include an online platform where all reports of the workgroup can be consulted (e.g. a SharePoint), a summary report of the working group in the weekly/monthly newsletter for colleagues, an attractive flyer with some spearheads or conclusions that can be hung up in the classroom of the lecturer, etc. Increasing the support base is not only essential for the development of an inclusive university, but also later, for its implementation.

The Inclusion Working Group

The members of the working group represent as much as possible all those involved in the different levels of the university. These are certainly already teachers who are open to inclusive education, but teachers who are critical of inclusion can also make a valuable contribution. In this way they can also think and decide together, because it is ultimately the instructors who will work with inclusive groups. Teachers from different study programmes should be represented.

A more exhaustive step-by-step plan of setting up a Working Group, including ideas for an inspiring and innovative inclusion agenda setting, may be found in the annex.

The Care coordinator

The care coordinator or other staff members involved in the guidance of persons with special educational needs are also important participants. At the start, it is good that the management is also represented. At a later stage, it may suffice for the management to be briefed each time and for the working group to be monitored remotely.

Involvement of management

It is an added value if an inclusive university is supported by the management as well as by its facility and even IT departments. Management can stimulate teachers but also other service providers on campus to work with inclusive groups and possibly also create spaces to give inclusive trajectories maximum opportunities, both content and infrastructure-wise. It is important to know what kind of commitment the

university wants and is able to take on, what mandate the working group has and what kind of engagement the university is willing to take.

Cooperation with other partners

If your university does not have the necessary expertise to provide an inclusive approach, you can call on external partners. External partners can be involved in, among other things:

- Coaching the care coordinator, a working group or a team during one or more steps of the road;
- Care coordinators coach and support the implementation of the trajectory, tailored to their own university;
- Training teachers in inclusive working methods and giving them tools to work with;
- Sharing expertise on communication with and for the target group of people with intellectual disabilities:
- Connecting with the internship, translating training competencies to the possible work floor (e.g. job coaches)
- Supporting the inclusive student during the first lessons, in drawing up a study plan (e.g. study coordinators).
- Making adjustments and tools for the inclusive student.
- Find an internship, make contact with the internship, prepare the internship with the student and supervise the internship.

Budget

The budget entirely depends on the structural investments management wants to ensure which will then allow for several initiatives developed by members of the working group to be implemented step by step in an agreement by all involved partners (also external ones).

Who gets what out of it?

Staff and management at a campus of higher education: involvement with PID, their lives, experiences and narratives on a daily basis as a 'normalization' of inclusion.

- Regular students at a campus of higher education: learning with and from PID's vision, narratives and life experiences as well as learning what inclusive life really entails.
- People with intellectual disabilities: interaction with other students and opportunities to participate in higher education by sharing their experiences and by learning to put those experiences into perspective.
- Community organisations: creative co-operation within an educational environment; further advocacy for PID within the community and at local or wider policy aided by the university's scientific networks.

Annex: How to start an Inclusive Working Group?

Initiating the working group

The initiator (later potentially Inclusion Manager) will have to start by inviting and addressing potential working group members. This can also be done in various ways. Here are some possibilities:

- The initiator creates a text that can be distributed to all teachers. This can be done in an e-mail message or in the form of a small flyer. It is better to opt for a short,

inspiring text than for a detailed explanation. Make sure you mention all important information: date of meeting, start and end time, place of meeting, purpose of the meeting, the expected engagement: can people come and listen or do you already expect a longer engagement? It is also important to arouse interest: this can be done by means of an inspiring quote, a question line, a title from a newspaper report, ...

- The initiator addresses people she or he suspects to be interested in inclusion.
- The initiator addresses a few people whom she or he explicitly want to invite to the working group. Later, the group can then to be extended into a fully-fledged working group. The important thing here is to get started.
- The initiator or the management uses a formally existing consultation or information moment to briefly explain the purpose of the inclusive working group, to make a call for participation, ...
- The initiator sends an invitation to the managers of each department (or training group, ...) to explain the initiative and to make one or more teachers in the department aware of the working group.

What does this working group do?

The working group looks at how inclusion can take shape in the university. This can be done in several steps. It also looks at how support can be increased and how and when several colleagues can be involved. The working group is the linchpin between the policy and the work floor. This means that good communication is necessary.

Possible tasks of the working group

Here is a list of possible tasks, depending on the current situation within your university, these will be more or less relevant.

- Mapping out the current situation, both at the organizational level and in terms of existing competencies among the university staff.
- To examine to what extent inclusion is in line with the mission, the vision and the values of the university and/or in what way a link can be made.
- Explore the concerns of the university staff, e.g. by means of focus groups.
- Find out whether there is already a disability policy, how it is organized, how the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities can be linked or embedded to it.
- Assessing the expectations of teachers in terms of training, support, ...
- To find out what the desired situation is. Do you immediately go for a fully inclusive policy; do you first start a pilot project; do you define a target group; who should be involved?
- Consider how the communication with all parties involved will be carried out and by whom? (internal communication with teachers and other university staff, communication with regular course members, external communication about an inclusive university etc.).
- Create a broader base of support by keeping colleagues informed of the activities and results of the working group, by sharing good practices, by involving them and by asking for feedback on sub-steps.
- Setting goals and priorities and drawing up a work plan.
- Making inclusion visible without stigmatizing. This can be done in the context of diversity by means of photo material, films or quotes.
- Preparing and following up on the different phases of inclusive higher education.
- Keeping the commitment of those involved in the process in balance, both of the members of the working group and of the teachers who work with an inclusive course member. In this way, instructors who already supervise an inclusive course participant should perhaps not be assigned several students with special support needs at the same time. This can have a negative impact on the capacity of the instructor.

- If it turns out that external expertise is needed: finding out which possible external partners are available in the vicinity of the school to cooperate with (e.g. the Department of Supported Employment, organizations with expertise in training the target group, training centre to train teachers).
- Monitoring and evaluating inclusive higher education, where the working group meets several times a year to set out lines, to refine the vision or to extend the implementation of an inclusive university to other target groups and to other courses.

Planning

The working group has a clear division of tasks and planning. The coordination of the above tasks will mainly be done by the inclusion manager. It is also possible for one or more members of the working group to take responsibility for a sub-task. E.g. organising training, reporting, processing data from the focus discussions,...