Aligning Competence Frameworks for Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion

Conceptual Working Paper

TPL4I

ALIGNING COMPETENCE FRAMEWORKS FOR TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR INCLUSION

Conceptual Working Paper

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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PREAMBLE

In developing inclusive education systems, the crucial role of teachers and their need for professional development cannot be ignored. The work of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) on teacher professional learning (TPL) for inclusion has resulted in thematic reports and hands-on tools. These support education professionals and policy-makers to develop a wide range of TPL for inclusion opportunities. For instance, the *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* (European Agency, 2012) offered an open framework for initial teacher education competence development for policy-makers, teacher educators and pre-service teachers to work with. The Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion (TPL4I) project *Policy Self-Review Tool* (European Agency, 2019) invites policy-makers to monitor, review and discuss TPL opportunities for all education professionals in the light of diversity and inclusion.

Based on the TPL4I *Analysis of Country Policies in Europe* (European Agency, 2020), it was clear that there is still a need for competence development support in the wider field of TPL for inclusion. While some countries use the *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* in initial teacher education, other countries highlight an overall policy and legislation towards inclusive education and, in this process, integrate competences for inclusion in general TPL. In many countries, frameworks do not bridge the gaps in TPL provision. In particular, TPL for inclusion often focuses on specialist knowledge rather than a broader concept of equity. In doing so, it deprives education professionals of TPL opportunities that build upon initial knowledge and skills and the collaborative practice in which they are involved.

In response to these needs and the examples found, the Agency extended the TPL4I project to revisit the *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* to close the gaps in current TPL for inclusion policy and practice.

This conceptual working paper focuses on *Aligning Competence Frameworks for Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion*. Prepared by Lani Florian on behalf of the Agency, it presents the theoretical foundation for this process. It re-affirms and underlines the need for competence frameworks for inclusion to reflect common values and the evidence found for reflecting on inclusive pedagogy throughout a teacher's professional career. While stressing the need for commonalities, it also acknowledges the diverse steps taken and frameworks used in TPL for inclusion. Exploring this balance, the paper raises key questions that have been the focus of the extended TPL4I activities and set the direction for creating the *Profile for Inclusive Teacher Professional Learning* (European Agency, in press) as the final outcome of Phase 2 of the TPL4I project.[1]

In line with the process described, this paper aims to inspire all those who intend to develop or adjust a framework of professional goals, standards or competences, to better reflect educational inclusion in national and local examples. It reminds policy-makers, teacher educators and other TPL providers of the key questions to consider when setting

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[1] TPL4I activities included a survey for all Agency member countries and cluster group activities for a limited number of countries. All activities led to the *Profile for Inclusive Teacher Professional Learning* as the final outcome of Phase 2 of the TPL4I project. The TPL4I project web area includes more details on the project, together with all available project outputs.

goals for education professionals: what should be the essential features of a reference framework for TPL for inclusion, and how can a framework contribute to the development of inclusive schools and, ultimately, an inclusive education system?

Finally, the conceptual working paper also offers a key message to all education professionals in search for TPL for inclusion. It encourages education professionals to connect and build competences for inclusion in their personal professional development and in their collaborative work. In search for the essence of TPL for inclusion, policy and practice promoting and developing inclusive education systems must be cautious not to replace or accumulate competence frameworks for inclusion, but to value existing work and align new frameworks with what is already in place.

In its own right and independent of the TPL4I project outcome, this conceptual working paper aims to support all those involved to build TPL for inclusion into existing frameworks and the work of school teams when broadening the professional learning for inclusion target group.

The TPL4I staff team thanks Lani Florian for this conceptual working paper. Her thoughts and ideas have had and will continue to have an impact on all Agency output in the area of teacher professional learning. The Agency gratefully acknowledges her contribution to this process.

Cor Meijer

Director of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

INTRODUCTION

This conceptual working paper considers issues of teacher professional learning (TPL) to promote inclusive education across countries in Europe. It examines how they adhere to common values while maintaining fidelity to national standards that reflect distinctive approaches to professional development. In so doing, the paper aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO, 2015, p. 7). This SDG promotes a rights-based anti-discriminatory approach to education that aims to ensure its benefits are available to everyone.

As the *Education 2030 Framework for Action* states:

> Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes (ibid.).

This view reflects the international community's on-going commitment to ensuring basic education for everyone. In the European Union (EU), the 2018 Proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching noted that: '[h]igh quality and inclusive education and training, at all levels, is essential in ensuring social mobility and inclusion … and a deeper understanding of our common values' (European Commission, 2018, p. 1). The Commission recommended that teachers, school leaders and academic staff be enabled to 'promote common values and deliver inclusive education, through':

> … measures to empower teachers, school leaders and academic staff helping them convey common values, and promote active citizenship while transmitting a sense of belonging and responding to the diverse needs of learners (ibid., p. 17).

COMMON VALUES AND NATIONAL STANDARDS OF EDUCATION

There is broad international consensus that teacher quality is essential to meet the challenges of ensuring everyone has a good opportunity to learn. However, differences in how countries regulate and manage their education systems mean that common values may be enacted in distinctive ways in different countries. Education that is inclusive and equitable may be underpinned by common values, but it is enacted in different ways in part because of structural differences between national systems.

In Europe, a spirit of internationalism is intertwined with national and local historic-socio-cultural ties within countries. For example, nationally distinctive approaches to teacher education and professional development occur within a pan-European process of collaboration based on common values. The reforms supported by the Bologna Process within the [European Higher Education Area](#) (EHEA) have led to collaboration in preparing teachers through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA that aim to strengthen compatibility and quality. The process addresses an EU commitment that integrates standards in education and enhances common values that promote social inclusion and equity. This aligns with international policy imperatives that call for inclusion and equity in education for all (SDG 4).

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (European Union, 2012) delineates the EU's common values as 'respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities' (Council of the European Union, 2019). These values were re-affirmed in 2019, on the 10th anniversary of the Charter's integration within the Treaty of Lisbon (ibid.). They have been supported by the Council of the EU's strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training, the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) agenda. This aims to develop education and training systems in the Member States to:

> … ensure that all learners — including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants — complete their education …
> Education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights and the environment, as well as combat all forms of discrimination, equipping all young people to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds (Council of the European Union, 2009, p. 4).

This paper's position is that the principle of education as a human right – a universal entitlement that belongs to each and every person without discrimination – reflects a universal value that can transcend contextual differences (Florian, 2021). In taking this position, it acknowledges that the distinctive barriers imposed by structural differences in national systems can obscure commonalities. However, common challenges, such as how to prepare and support teachers to enact policies of inclusion, suggest that a focus on the

barriers imposed by differences in context has limited the development of policy and practice.

To remedy this, the paper proposes two suggestions. First, it is important to determine the implications that can be drawn from literature on teacher education for inclusion. One of these lessons warns against relying on teacher education programmes that are 'additive' rather than transformational. Accordingly, the second suggestion is to avoid developing new policies where possible, and instead link to existing frameworks for TPL which already align with the principles of inclusion.

Currently, many countries and regions have adopted policies on TPL to support teachers in addressing the diverse needs of learners in today's schools (European Agency, 2020). These policies are part of wider considerations about how teachers are prepared to work within a rights-based policy framework of inclusive education, promoted internationally as a values-based approach to education intended to combat all forms of discrimination and exclusion (UNESCO, 2018).

However, concerns remain in many countries that the policy of inclusion is difficult to implement and teachers are not sufficiently prepared and supported to work in inclusive ways. Professional development policies exist within national contexts which offer different teacher education programmes and different routes into teaching. This is important because teacher education and professional programme structures are often aligned with national qualifications that determine who can teach what to different age groups and types of learner.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM RESEARCH ON TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION

Inclusive education requires all teachers to accept responsibility for creating schools in which everyone can learn and feel they belong. Teachers play a central role in promoting participation and reducing exclusion. However, they are not always prepared in ways that encourage them to see this as part of their professional responsibility.

Over the past decade, teacher educators have increasingly begun to address this challenge through research and development projects on what has been termed 'teacher education for inclusive education'. This promotes two main approaches to addressing what teachers need to know about differences between learners: using specialist input to add content knowledge about difference and diversity to teacher education programmes; and 'infusing' specialist knowledge into existing courses.

Interestingly, a content analysis of teacher education programmes in the United States found that although the programmes espoused a commitment to the values of inclusion, the content was generally 'additive'. That is, special education content knowledge was added to programmes, as opposed to programmes reflecting content that was transformational in rethinking issues of diversity and the responses to it (Pugach & Blanton, 2012). A recent study in Ireland (Hick et al., 2019) reported a similar finding. Moreover, these approaches to teacher education are evident in activities that offer stand-alone professional development sessions on difference and diversity, and/or focus on school development activities that are inclusive of all learners.

Most would agree that more knowledge about why some learners experience difficulties in learning is needed. Nevertheless, it has been argued that neither additive nor infusion approaches are sufficient to improve inclusive practice in schools if the content is decontextualised from the broader pedagogical and curriculum knowledge that teachers use in classroom teaching (Florian & Rouse, 2010).

This is especially important today because traditional responses to poor outcomes for marginalised and other vulnerable learner groups tend to focus on targeted interventions and specialist professional preparation. Yet, as Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) have pointed out, when issues of learner differences are presented as distinct content, it marginalises the issue of diversity itself within teacher education programmes. There is considerable consensus that teachers need to be well prepared to work with diverse learner groups and broad acknowledgement that teachers are not adequately prepared. Nevertheless, the different perspectives on content and how it should inform teacher education suggest a fragmented and partial literature that reflects on-going debates about the concept of inclusive education rather than a solid knowledge base (Florian, 2021).

Yet, as the recent *Global Education Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2020) on inclusion and education states, teacher education and professional development are essential in supporting inclusive and equitable education. Recently, teacher educators interested in developing a shared understanding of what it means to teach in ways that include all learners have undertaken a few projects. Some have specified or developed competences,

values and approaches to inclusion (e.g. Allan, 2011; Copfer & Specht, 2014; European Agency, 2011; Rouse & Florian, 2012).

Oyler provides a rare description of teacher education for inclusion as 'situated, moral, philosophical and political inquiry' (2006, p. xi). More recently, Naraian (2017) proposed eight guiding principles for teachers to navigate the structures of schooling to support learners from historically marginalised groups. Villegas, Ciotoli and Lucas (2017) have expanded their work on developing culturally responsive teachers in favour of inclusive teaching to affirm an approach to teacher education that places issues of diversity at its centre.

The Agency conducted a project with 25 member countries, focusing on how classroom teachers are prepared to work in inclusive settings within the initial training phase. This project, Teacher Education for Inclusion ([TE4I](#)), examined the skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values thought to be needed by those entering the teaching profession across all age ranges and subjects. The findings were synthesised in a *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* that describes the essential values and competence areas that initial education programmes should develop (European Agency, 2012).

These activities suggest that inclusive approaches to teaching should be a core element of general teacher preparation rather than a specialist topic. However, the work has tended to remain located within special education, where the topic of inclusive education originated.

The themes discussed in the literature on teacher education for inclusion are important manifestations of a reform agenda. This agenda acknowledges the many challenges associated with preparing teachers to embrace diversity and respond to differences without marginalising learners who experience difficulties in learning. However, because of the historical alignment with special education, only preparing **some** teachers to deal with difference, remove the barriers to participation and develop inclusive practices reinforces the idea that **other** teachers can rightfully claim that inclusion is not their responsibility. Yet, inclusive practice has to be the task of **all** teachers if inclusive education is to be an effective strategy for dealing with diversity.

Bringing about this cultural shift in thinking about teaching all learners is necessary work for teacher professional development. However, it cannot be done by specialists brought in to add value or content to existing programmes. The inherent bias in systems that are designed for most learners, on the grounds that something different can be available to others, pathologises linguistic, cultural, cognitive and other kinds of difference. It also disproportionately affects learners from ethnic minorities who are often more likely to be living in poverty than other learners.

The challenges of ensuring educational equity require professional development that enables teachers to teach in schools where the norm is diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture, languages spoken, disability status and so forth. While it is self-evident that this will require differentiated approaches to accommodate individual differences between learners, the ways that these approaches can also create problems need to be considered.

When responses to diversity depend on different forms of provision and different qualifications to enable teachers to work with different types of learners, it normalises the assumption in educational thinking that some learners will need something 'different

from' or 'additional to' that which is generally available to others of similar age, and alternatives are not considered. Yet, all teachers routinely encounter a wide range of learners in classrooms and there are many sources of variation within and between any learner group. If learners have anything in common, it is the fact that each and every one is unique.

It is not accurate to view inclusive education as a new form of or an alternative to special education. Some approaches to inclusive education are firmly rooted in special education traditions (e.g. McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner & Algozzine, 2014) and co-exist with efforts to reform schools so that they become more inclusive (e.g. Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006). However, others explore a broader idea of what inclusion means, starting with the assumption that each learner is a unique individual. The inclusive pedagogical approach, for example, is informed by a socio-cultural understanding of learning that views diversity among learners as natural. From this stance, understanding how to respond to human difference while respecting the dignity of each learner as a unique individual within the community of the classroom is key.

In sum, inclusive approaches call for human diversity being seen as a strength, rather than a problem, and learners working together, sharing ideas and learning from their interactions with each other. In this way, individual differences between learners are not ignored. Instead, they follow Clark, Dyson and Milward's idea that inclusive education is about 'extending the scope of ordinary schools so they can include a greater diversity of children' (1995, p. v). This is represented by a shift in thinking about individual differences between learners that focuses on learning as a shared activity, avoiding the potentially negative effects of treating some learners as different. Inclusive education improves the quality of mainstream education by replacing practices that have been shown to marginalise or exacerbate the marginalisation of vulnerable learners with practices that ensure participation and achievement for everyone (Florian, Black-Hawkins & Rouse, 2017).

In today's world, with all the uncertainty about how to keep education systems functioning during a global pandemic, it is unsurprising that teachers might assume that they do not have the requisite knowledge or skills to teach all learners. The current context in which teachers are working is one of rapid change. Legislation has strengthened rights-based anti-discrimination policy and practice in many countries. In addition to changes to the role of teachers, new approaches to assessment, curriculum and teaching have involved developing new understandings about the interactive nature of learners' needs and a shift in focus from 'what is wrong with the learner?' to 'what does the learner need to support their learning?'.

Because such developments can substantially affect the professional identity as well as the roles and responsibilities of many teachers, they can be contentious and sometimes meet resistance. This has implications for supporting teachers in their professional development. To ensure a positive response to change, it is important to build on professional frameworks, rather than replace them or add new ones to those that shape teachers' professional identity. Teacher professional development that responds to the demands of inclusion and equity requires a strong foundation. This is particularly true in the current climate, where circumstances such as the COVID-19 crisis and the move to

online and hybrid models of schooling create high levels of uncertainty that exacerbate inequities in access to learning opportunities.

The traditional pattern of preparing teachers for different roles within schools, by offering different courses, qualifications and certification, is thought to result in systemic barriers to developing inclusion. Adding or infusing specialist content knowledge has proved limited in its effectiveness.

However, a recent review of developments in the science of learning has identified strategies that support teachers to promote learning in classrooms and schools (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron & Osher, 2020). As will be shown below, these developments align with inclusive approaches and offer a way to link the literature on inclusion to the literature on learning without losing what is distinctive about either.

LINKING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR INCLUSION TO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SCIENCE OF LEARNING

The challenge of inclusive education for TPL is to develop and deliver training programmes that are informed by the knowledge that when teachers are empowered to respect and respond to human differences in ways that include rather than exclude learners in what is ordinarily available in mainstream schools and classrooms, it is possible to support the learning of all learners. Yet some schools continue to exclude certain learners on the grounds that teachers do not have the requisite knowledge and skills to teach them, while teachers in other schools have been able to include learners with many different types of educational needs. This raises questions about what constitutes the 'necessary knowledge and skills' for teachers to work with **all** of the members of a classroom community **together**.

Clearly, TPL for inclusion is a complex endeavour. It requires sensitivity to differences between learners without perpetuating the stigmatising effects of marking some as different. At a fundamental level, TPL for inclusion requires shifting our gaze from 'most' and 'some' learners, to the learning of everyone together.

To this end, new insights and understanding about how people learn have been applied to schooling. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) drew six key lessons from recent work on the science of learning. They recommended that professional development for educators continually build and refine learner-centred practices. The science of learning review reflects current thinking about teachers' knowledge and skills in ways that are consistent with the findings of research on inclusive pedagogical approaches. For example, as Table 1 shows, the assumptions of inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011) can be aligned with the key lessons drawn from the science of learning review.

Table 1. Inclusive pedagogy and the science of learning

Inclusive pedagogy – key assumptions (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011)	Science of learning – key lessons (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018)
Difference is ordinary	Variability in human development is the norm Learning is social, emotional and academic
Teachers are capable	Development is malleable What schools do matters
Collaboration is needed	Human relationships are essential Children actively construct knowledge based on their experiences, relationships and social contexts

Such alignment suggests that approaches to inclusion are integral rather than additional to educational practice. It is not only an effective response to learners who experience difficulties in learning, but avoids the problems associated with marking some learners as different, which can occur under some special and inclusive educational policy approaches. This is important because by only preparing **some** teachers to deal with difference and develop inclusive practices, it creates a climate in which **other** teachers claim that these things are not their responsibility.

As Agency projects such as TE4I and TPL4I have found, and as is reiterated in Agency policy recommendations, inclusive practice has to be the task of **all** teachers. To achieve this goal, more attention must be paid to the ways in which teachers are prepared and supported to work in inclusive settings.

However, as the lessons learned from the literature on teacher education for inclusion show, this attention should not take the form of another layer of competencies and training based on the assumption that teachers are insufficiently prepared and therefore deficient. This would run the risk of many teachers perceiving teacher professional development as an encumbrance rather than a support at best, or worse, the responsibility of specialists. To move forward, TPL for inclusion should be linked to existing frameworks.

LINKING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR INCLUSION TO EXISTING FRAMEWORKS

The UNESCO (2015) *Education 2030 Framework for Action* guides the implementation of SDG 4 with a 15-year vision for education. It is reinforced by the *Brussels Declaration*, an outcome of the 2018 Global Education Meeting, which defined inclusive education as:

> … the right to safe, quality education and learning throughout life … [that requires] particular attention … be given to those in vulnerable situations, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, those in remote rural areas, ethnic minorities, the poor, women and girls, migrants, refugees, and displaced persons, whether as a result of conflict or natural disasters (UNESCO, 2018, p. 2).

As can be seen by the range of people and circumstances considered to be vulnerable, inclusive education is about everyone. Accordingly, responding to issues of diversity becomes a central imperative of teaching practice rather than a secondary consideration to be dealt with separately. The concern is that in many countries, issues of diversity and difference have long been – and often still are – considered specialist knowledge. Therefore, the task of preparing teachers for inclusive education is predominately undertaken by special educators within university special education departments.

Consequently, many developments relating to inclusive education have been addressed to special educational needs audiences. Today, it is important to decouple the form and structure of professional development activities from the professional silos that define educational provisions. This will prevent them from becoming an impediment to preparing teachers to implement a principled approach to inclusive education. However, if responsibilities are to be shared and teachers are to take on new roles, then there must be changes to the way inclusion is conceptualised and a realisation that it can only be achieved if all teachers are supported in the development of all aspects of this process.

Shulman (2004) refers to the 'three apprenticeships' of professional learning. The first is the 'apprenticeship of the head', referring to the cognitive knowledge and theoretical basis of the profession. The second is the 'apprenticeship of the hand', which includes the technical and practical skills required to carry out the essential tasks of the role. Finally, the 'apprenticeship of the heart' is the ethical and moral dimensions, attitudes and beliefs that are crucial to the particular profession and its ways of working.

Rouse (2007; 2008) used Shulman's three apprenticeships to conceptualise the task of TPL for inclusion. Here the three apprenticeships would include:

Knowing about:

- Teaching strategies
- Disability and special needs
- How children learn
- What children need to learn

- Classroom organisation and management

- Where to get help when necessary

- Identifying and assessing difficulties

- Assessing and monitoring children's learning

- The legislative and policy context

Doing:

- Turning knowledge into action

- Moving beyond reflective practice

- Using evidence to improve practice

- Learning how to work with colleagues as well as children

- Becoming an 'activist' professional

- Becoming an inclusive practitioner

Believing:

- That all children are worth educating

- That all children can learn

- That teachers have the capacity to make a difference to children's lives

- That teachers can create greater opportunities for learning

- That such work is the responsibility of all teachers and not only a task for specialists.

Rouse further described these three apprenticeships as a reciprocal triangular relationship, as Figure 1 below illustrates.

Knowing, Doing and Believing

Knowing (Head)

Doing (Hand)   **Believing (Heart)**
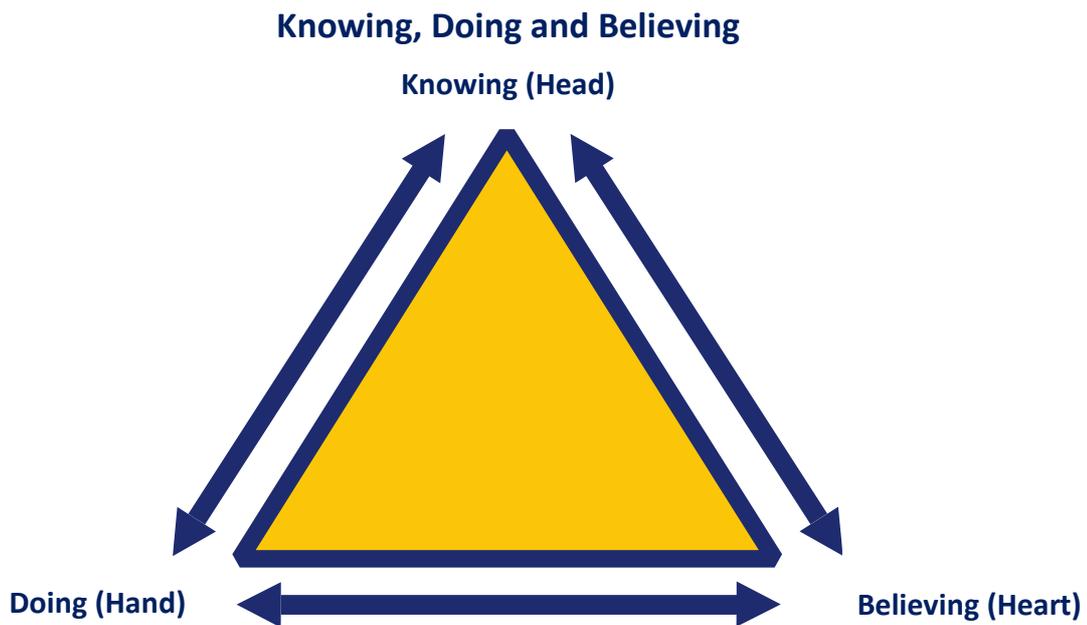
Figure 1. Reciprocal relationships of the 'apprenticeships' of professional learning for inclusion

In this illustration, the relationships between knowing (the head), doing (the hand) and believing (the heart) are seen as interactive. The arrows show how each apprenticeship influences the others.

For example, Rouse (2008) argued that teachers are more likely to engage in inclusive practices if they have positive attitudes and believe that all children can learn. Equally, teachers are more likely to believe all children can learn if they have the necessary pedagogical skills to turn knowledge about inclusion into practice. Having only one of these elements in place is insufficient. For example, a commitment to social justice is necessary but is insufficient if other elements, such as knowledge about individual differences, are ignored.

The fundamental question is: what kind of professional development framework can support all teachers to develop the knowledge, beliefs and practices that facilitate inclusion?

CONCLUSION

All teachers need to be well prepared and appropriately supported throughout their careers if they are to succeed in developing and sustaining inclusive practice to meet the increasingly diverse needs of learners in schools. Recognising this necessitates an approach to TPL that builds on existing national frameworks within the pan-European and international move towards greater social and educational inclusion.

TPL for inclusion can be strengthened by specifying the essential features of a framework for professional learning that is designed to support educational inclusion. Such a framework could draw from the *Profile of Inclusive Teachers* developed as part of the Agency's TE4I project (European Agency, 2012). This might usefully be followed by considering how the framework's essential features (e.g. core values) match what teachers are already doing (e.g. the standards or competences they are expected to meet under existing policy frameworks).

Such an approach would have the added benefit of a strong link to underpinning policies that are important to teacher identity. It would also enable the essential features of TPL for inclusion to be incorporated into what schools are already required to do, as well as into on-going activities. For example, school development plans often include professional development activities. Specifying links between policy and practice that align with the principles and values of inclusion allow countries to identify points of convergence between this and other frameworks.

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