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## Article

# Conceptualising Teacher Education for Inclusion: Lessons for the Professional Learning of Educators from Transnational and Cross-Sector Perspectives

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**Abstract:** Despite policy calling for enhanced inclusive practice within all schools and colleges, educators across Europe are facing increasing challenges when providing effective inclusive education for all students as a result of increased diversity within European society. This paper focuses on the development of our understanding of how to support educators' professional learning around issues of diversity and inclusion. Specifically, it aims to explore what diversity looks like across countries, sectors, and roles, what challenges and dilemmas are posed for educators, and how new approaches to professional learning can support the educators across all sectors. The exploratory study described in the paper emerged from work undertaken as part of an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project called PROMISE (Promoting Inclusion in Society through Inclusion: Professional Dilemmas in Practice). Traditional approaches to professional learning to support teachers' inclusive practice have tended to focus on discrete courses which address specific learning needs such as autism, literacy difficulties, or behavioural issues. The paper presents findings from a transnational study which indicate that the professional dilemmas facing educators are complex and unpredictable and argues, therefore, that educators require professional learning that is collaborative, interprofessional, and acknowledges that the challenges they face are multifaceted.

**Keywords:** inclusive practice; diversity; interprofessional learning; professional learning and development; teacher education



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## 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the development of our understanding of how to support educators' professional learning around issues of diversity and inclusion. Specifically, it aims to explore what diversity looks like across countries, sectors, and roles, what challenges and dilemmas are posed for educators, and how new approaches to professional learning can support educators across all sectors. The study described in the paper emerged from work undertaken as part of an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project called PROMISE (Promoting Inclusion in Society through Inclusion: Professional Dilemmas in Practice).

### 1.1. Inclusion in Context

Communities across Europe are increasingly facing growing diversity resulting from global and local migration. Demographic trends within Europe are leading to people from different backgrounds, cultures, language areas, and religions interacting with greater

frequency across society including within education. Classrooms have become more diverse in nature, and in the future this diversity is expected to increase [1]. For many, increased diversity within society can be seen to enrich local and national cultures but it can pose challenges for educators as increasingly they will work with evermore heterogeneous student cohorts where learner diversity arises from differences in age, gender, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious background, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, disability or special educational needs (SEN).

Many young people from marginalised groups are vulnerable within education systems. The inherent complexity of modern society tends to exclude many young people rather than include them resulting in an increased risk of many young people dropping out of educational provision. It is acknowledged that early school leaving and failing to opt into other forms of educational provision can have a long-term impact [2]. This impact has consequences for both the individual and society [3]. If educators are not supported to provide effective learning opportunities for all young people, this can impact both the young person's career prospects and their health and wellbeing, and often results in poverty and poor health outcomes in the long term [2]. This in turn can have a detrimental economic impact on countries and negatively impact on social cohesion within and between communities [2].

Within the European policy context, there is a clear policy direction to enhance the participation of *all* young people within educational processes for both economic and social reasons. The European Union Council [4] recommended that to ensure social mobility and inclusion, educators must be empowered to deliver high quality, inclusive education. Following this recommendation, The European Commission [5] advocated for strategic cooperation in education across Europe to ensure that all educators are prepared to work in inclusive ways in order that all young people, including those from marginalised communities, are able to succeed within educational provision.

This aspiration by European policy makers to deliver high quality inclusive education is laudable. Nevertheless, modern society is complex and constantly changing, and education systems often struggle to acknowledge this diversity and accommodate all young people. Social, emotional, and cognitive issues impact on young learners' participation in formal education making some vulnerable to labelling, marginalisation, or exclusion. This can pose challenges for educators as they seek to provide learning opportunities for all children and young people [6] and 'questions remain about how educators can be better prepared to respond to the diverse needs of learners in today's schools.' [7] (p. 4).

The study described in this paper was driven by a desire to explore educators' experiences of the complex professional challenges faced when implementing inclusive practice to enhance the social, emotional and cognitive participation of young people across all sectors of education. It was proposed that insight into the nature of these challenges would permit a more informed understanding of how to support educators in effective and sustainable ways to address these challenges. The study was underpinned by a view of the concept of educational inclusion in line with that proposed by Florian and Camedda as incorporating broader issues 'associated with migration, mobility, language, ethnicity, and intergenerational poverty' [7] (p. 4), rather than taking a specific focus on special educational needs (SEN) which tends to dominate most discussions of inclusion [8]. Adopting this understanding of inclusion requiring attention to broad societal issues, it is assumed the most effective way to address diversity and promote inclusion in all its forms is to avoid the provision of interventions specifically targeted at learners from specific groups as it has been suggested that such interventions can lead to 'repetition of exclusion' [9] and further marginalisation and stigma [10].

### *1.2. Traditional Approaches to Teacher Education for Inclusion*

Despite a shift in some quarters towards a more multifaceted view of inclusion, 'inclusive education' is still largely associated with providing opportunities for those with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream settings [11]. This may be why Florian et al.

found that there is a widespread belief that certain specialist ‘knowledge and skills’ are deemed ‘necessary’ to implement inclusive education though there is not agreement about what these are [12] (p. 369). If educators themselves believe this then it may make them hesitant about working with particular groups or learners until they have received specialist training. The idea that educators need more training can also enter public consciousness and become understood as the main barrier to inclusion in schools, as Done and Andrews argue has happened in England [13].

Perhaps because the additional ‘training’ needed to support inclusion is seen as specialist, courses on inclusion are sometimes ‘optional’ and can often take the form of stand-alone units in a broader programme of teacher education [14]. This further reinforces the view of inclusive practice as peripheral to other forms of practice and something that only *some* educators need be concerned with. It also sets up an expectation that the challenges of inclusion can be neatly categorised in order that an appropriate training solution can be found. It is not surprising then that educators at all career stages articulate that they do not feel prepared to deliver high quality inclusive practice [14–17].

As a result, Florian and Camedda note knowledge and understanding of how to ‘deliver high quality inclusive education and training for student teachers at all levels remains unclear and contested’ [7] (p. 6). For inexperienced educators, the challenge of providing this kind of inclusive education in a complex classroom setting can be experienced as a ‘reality shock’ [18]. Indeed, with the diverse composition of Europe accelerating, it might be suggested that to attempt to prepare student educators for the plethora of situations that they might meet as qualified educators prior to their initial qualification is unattainable and that educator preparation should focus more on *how* new educators can develop their practice to respond to the inclusion challenges they are facing in practice. For experienced educators, the shift to the idea of lifelong learning within the teaching profession has become increasingly popular. Many national policies now advocate increased in-service professional learning opportunities for experienced and qualified educators [19]. Issues arise, however, if post-qualification courses assume the same approach of addressing single issues challenges rather than acknowledgement that professional challenges faced by educators are complex and multi-faceted.

Many options for professional learning on offer for qualified educators seeking additional qualifications tend to emphasise individual knowledge and the development of skills to work with students with specific educational needs—e.g., autism, dyslexia, or behavioural issues. Alongside a global trend towards accredited professional learning for educational practitioners from higher education providers, there are also an increasing number of practice-oriented learning options available to educators through online learning.

Nevertheless, despite multiple options for continuing professional learning courses, studies note that many experienced educators continue to articulate that they too do not feel equipped to teach the diversity of learners in their classes. Various research studies note educators feeling unprepared to teach inclusively when working with pupils with disabilities or special educational needs [15,17,20]. It is noted that educators particularly feel ill equipped to work inclusively with pupils with social, emotional and behavioural issues [21]. Indeed, studies suggest that few educators believe themselves to be prepared to deal with challenging behaviour, which is of interest as such behavioural challenges are often said to cause the failure of inclusive programmes [22–24].

### 1.3. Collaborative Professional Learning

In contrast to the more traditional professional learning courses on offer, there has been an increasing interest in the affordances of collaborative learning for educators. As Lofthouse and Thomas suggest, collaboration implies working cognitively on a challenge together, piecing together ideas or creating something through joint deliberation it seems likely that collaborative professional learning offers scope to support educators at various career stages to work together to develop the values, skills and knowledge required to support *all* learners in a mainstream setting [24]. The challenges and opportunities

associated with teaching more diverse communities of learners require educators to make deliberate choices in terms of developing classroom practices. Several studies emphasise the significance to educators' learning of working collaboratively to do so [25,26].

Collaborative professional learning takes several forms, including educators working within professional learning networks or communities, engaging with other professionals in practitioner or action research cycles, and participating in lesson study. Kennedy frames models of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as potentially transmissive, malleable, or transformative; relating these to the increasing capacity for professional autonomy and teacher agency [27]. Within this categorisation, the author conceptualises forms of collaborative professional inquiry as the most transformative. She characterises these forms of inquiry as including shared identification of the professional problem, shared activity, and inquiring into one's own practice alongside finding out more about other relevant practices. Similarly, Coe et al. [28] highlights Timperley's [29] teacher knowledge building enquiry cycles and Dudley's [30] analysis of lesson study as examples of practices of collaborative professional development which focus on students' learning outcomes and can be deemed to be approaches recognised as 'what works' for effective professional learning.

A common characteristic is that collaborative professional learning provides teachers with the opportunities to engage in a critically reflective community [31] and to develop reciprocal professional learning [32] through the creation of teacher groups or networks. Some forms of one-to-one coaching share the qualities of reciprocal learning, reflecting together and shared activity. They thus offer the opportunity for educators to explore their own, as well as other, practices. Peer-coaching between educators can enable co-construction, which is achieved if the coach and coachee each make their own practices more transparent (through observation, video recording, or discussion), allowing them to be explained and challenged. This creates a foundation from which the coach and coachee can work productively together to develop new suggestions for teaching and learning [33]. Coaching can also be inter-professional and thus allow opportunities for collaborative professional learning which draw on more than one specialist knowledge-base when informing the development of practice. Lofthouse, Flanagan, and Wigley undertook collaborative action research to develop a model of inter-professional coaching between speech and language therapists and early years and primary teachers, resulting in enhanced communication-rich pedagogies better suited to the needs of multicultural classes in which the majority of pupils were learning English as an additional language [34]. As coaching in education focuses on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility [35], it can support educators' motivation and intention for developing their practices to meet the challenges of diversity.

#### *1.4. Professional Agency*

At the turn of the 21st century, Whitty noted the struggle between restricted and extended professionalism and an increasing marketisation within education, the introduction of competition and a stress on personalised 'commercial style' management [36] (p. 284) were leading to changes in the nature and extent of trust being placed in teachers. It might be argued in many policy contexts, this trend has increased [37,38]. Indeed, Cochran-Smith et al. propose that many policy contexts now position teachers more as objects than as agents of reform [39].

Despite recognising the isolating effects of lack of agency experienced by some teachers, Edwards highlights the importance of the relational aspect of agency [37]. Others assert the need to develop the capacity to work with others to support the wellbeing of vulnerable children [40]. This need for educators to work collaboratively with others in agentic ways would seem to be a key element of maintaining teachers in their careers; lessening the stress they experience when faced with the professional challenges and reducing the numbers of teachers leaving the profession [37].

The PROMISE project was underpinned by the notion that only through educators being able to exercise professional agency collaboratively to solve the professional dilemmas



would inclusion be enhanced within their classrooms. The project assumed the teachers who believed themselves to be successful in addressing these professional dilemmas had been able and willing to act as activist professionals [41].

### 1.5. Boundary Crossing

Many studies of this nature tend to focus on one context; a focus on one stage of the teacher career or a focus on one sector of education. It has been noted the problems that can arise when there is an artificial dichotomy between two sectors of education [17]. In contrast, the PROMISE study sought to be transnational and multisectoral. The PROMISE project sought to surface the professional dilemmas and educators' responses at all career stages and in different contexts. As such, it was assumed that to develop a deep understanding of the professional dilemmas being faced within education across Europe, data must be sought from educators at all stages of their career, across all sectors of education from pre-primary to vocational education and across a range of national contexts. We therefore use the term 'educators' rather than 'teachers' when referring to the target group of the project to acknowledge those who work in a range of educational settings including pre-primary to vocational settings. The research team were interested in the commonalities and differences in the professional dilemmas articulated by the educators across the different national and sectoral settings.

Additionally, the research team were aware that there was previous evidence that instances of boundary crossing would permit educators to achieve success in addressing their identified professional dilemmas by working with and through other people [42–44]. These boundary crossings might include instances when educators chose to cross borders of professional positions, responsibilities, and disciplinary competences as the educators considered that the professional dilemmas they were encountering could not be solved by working in isolation. It was anticipated that only through engagement with professional learning opportunities that involved learning with and through other professionals can educators be able to address the complex professional dilemmas they were facing in providing education for all.

### 1.6. Research Questions

Taking into consideration the widespread understanding that many educators across Europe do not feel prepared or equipped to provide high quality inclusive education for all students, the PROMISE project sought to surface ongoing professional dilemmas which appeared to be contributing to this sense of unpreparedness. Therefore, the first research question which the project sought to answer was:

- What professional dilemmas do (general/mainstream) educators face in their daily practice when seeking to provide learning opportunities for all?

It was proposed that analysis of these professional dilemmas would provide insight into their nature. This understanding would permit the proposal of how best to support educators as they seek to provide effective inclusive education for all. The second research question was therefore:

- What type of support might educators successfully utilise in addressing these complex professional dilemmas around inclusion?

Through an exploration of these questions, we hoped to gain greater insight into the nature of the professional challenges being faced by educators and propose how best those educators might be supported to address them. In this sense, it is an exploratory study.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Data and Methods

The project team was international and cross-sectoral in its composition. Partners were drawn from five European countries—Germany, Hungary, Slovenia, The Netherlands, UK—and seven educational institutions—Leeds Beckett University, Fontys University

of Applied Sciences, National Education Institute of Slovenia, PLATO Institute from the University of Leiden, University of Aberdeen, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest and the Seminar für Ausbildung und Fortbildung der Lehrkräfte (Gymnasium) in Tübingen, Germany. The project team typically works with those across a range of career stages in education—from student to experienced educators—and across academic and vocational settings. This diversity was important as it allowed us to access and interrogate a wide range of perspectives on what diversity means and the implementation of inclusive practice looks like ‘on the ground’. The study defined ‘professional dilemmas’ as practice-orientated challenges faced by educators which have no obvious solution.

Data was collected from a sample of educators representing this range of career stages (from student educators to those experienced in the field and from a range of sectors from elementary schools to further education colleges). To ensure educators were contributing experiences that were relevant for the study, they had to be: an educator or trainee educator, based in one of the countries of the project partners. Those working in university contexts were excluded. Educators were a range of ages and both men and women were represented. Each educator or trainee educator was asked to provide a narrative account of a professional dilemma related to inclusion from their own context. All seven partners from the above-mentioned institutions aimed to collect 10 narratives in their national contexts. As two partners did not succeed in reaching 10 narratives, the total number of narratives collected was 63.

This narrative approach was based on the work of Connelly and Clandinin on narrative inquiry which suggests that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives [45]. The study described in this paper was based on the premise that offering educators the opportunity to tell their stories would permit deeper understanding of how educators experience challenges posed by increased diversity in their classrooms. The use of narratives as a data collection tool allowed the contributors to express their dilemmas in their own words without the constraints of a standardized instrument.

Narratives were collected in a manner sensitive to the local context, and with due regard to local ethical requirements. To support the contributors in writing their narratives, guiding questions (see Appendix A) were provided as prompts whilst also allowing each educator the opportunity to contribute in ways that were meaningful to them as individuals. These questions aimed to reveal the context of the scenario (what is the context?), the nature of the issue creating tension and the educators’ emotional response to this (what is the problem and why is it a problem for me?), the nature of the dilemma (what alternatives do I need to weigh up?), and choices (what options and next steps should be considered further?).

From these narratives, each country partner then developed ‘vignettes’. Each vignette contained the same basic information such as context of the educational setting, indication of level of experience of the contributor, description of the dilemma and solutions that had been tried. The purpose of this approach was to organise the narrative material into a standard format that could be analysed by the project team.

Some narratives were only lightly edited (e.g., organised under sub-headings) to convert them into a vignette and some required translation into English (the common working language of the project team). In other countries, work with current students was difficult for logistical or ethical reasons, other approaches were taken to develop vignettes. For example, in some contexts, vignettes were created based on project members’ discussions with practitioners, usually whilst undertaking a period of formal professional learning. In all cases, care was taken to ensure that vignettes included in the data set were anonymised and not attributable to any particular institution or individual.

Not all narratives were developed into a unique vignette. As we had allowed a large degree of freedom for contributors to craft their narratives, some contributors did not articulate a dilemma related to inclusion or did not provide much detail about their context or dilemma. These narratives were not developed into vignettes. Additionally, some contributors from the same country context articulated very similar dilemmas. Therefore, some vignettes were developed that captured the dilemmas of multiple contributors. In

this exploratory study, this was a way to deal with saturation. In total, 37 vignettes were developed to form the final data set (Appendix B). The final data set still covered the range of country contexts represented in the project but we have not identified which vignettes arose from which country contexts here for reasons of anonymity.

The data collection strategy was designed to produce a dataset that was *illustrative* of the types of dilemmas faced by educators. It was important to include a range of career stages and country contexts since we anticipated that the types of dilemma faced by educators would differ by experience level and national context. However, in this paper, we do not explore the differences between these groups, nor do we explore any connection between the gender of the participant and their dilemma. This would be an interesting avenue for further work, but would require a more probabilistic sampling treatment to be robust.

## 2.2. Analysis

Thematic analysis of the vignettes was undertaken in two stages. Initially, thematic analysis was undertaken within each country to identify themes arising from both the professional dilemmas and responses to these dilemmas articulated by the contributors. In this stage, members of the project team read the vignettes from their own country context and began an inductive familiarisation process [46]. Inductive codes and themes were identified that reflected the country-level data. As the literature suggests that both student and qualified educators do not feel equipped to deal with the diversity of the cohorts within their classes, the study deliberately adopted an open approach to the nature of the professional challenges that the contributors might identify and took an analytical stance to match this by not creating deductive codes in advance.

The second stage of thematic analysis was undertaken across the data sets from each country [47]. This involved extended dialogue within the research team about each country's initial findings from the first stage of analysis to ensure enhanced understanding of contextual issues and to discuss how codes and themes had been developed for each country-level dataset. The aim here was to conduct the reviewing and finalising processes as a group to ensure that themes and codes were being understood in a qualitatively similar way across country contexts—even if the precise language used by educators differed [46]. However, this analytical process was not straightforward. It was noted by the research team that the different policy contexts, cultural differences and, at times, language issues between the different data sets from each country sometimes made analysis challenging and time consuming.

The vignettes were then grouped thematically with no distinction between contributors' stage of career or the sector in which they worked since, as noted earlier, it was not our intention to explore the differences between these characteristics. It should be noted that the assignment of the vignette to a category was made based on the predominant focus or theme of the vignette. However, during the analysis process, it quickly became apparent that, in reality, the professional dilemmas did not articulate discrete challenges but reflected the complexity inherent within the reality of teaching and learning in educational settings. When this process was concluded, it was noticeable that there was a marked similarity between the vignettes across national boundaries and sectors.

Across all the analysis stages, in addition to consideration of the types of professional challenges articulated by the contributors, analysis of the support accessed by the educators to address these dilemmas was undertaken. In keeping with the multifaceted nature of the dilemmas, the responses articulated by the educators were similarly diverse indicating that educators identified the need for responses that were equally multifaceted requiring professional agency and collaboration—often interprofessional collaboration. Note was particularly taken of instances contributed by the educators where the notion of boundary crossing was enacted within educational practice to inform professional pedagogical decision making by individual practitioners [43,48].



### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Categories versus Complexity

The findings from this study indicate that educators articulate similar professional dilemmas or challenges. The vignettes were categorized under seven themes: behaviour, inclusion, didactics or pedagogy, classroom management, interprofessional working, digital learning, and psychological problems. These themes emerged in each national context and were not limited to any specific career phase or educational sector. Issues related to students' challenging behaviour, for example, were reported across all sectors of education from very young pupils to those undertaking vocational studies in their late teens.

Identifiable categories are useful as access points into the vignettes (e.g., for educators using the project website). However, in reality what the vignettes illustrate is that once ongoing professional dilemmas are articulated they reveal the complexity of the challenges and decisions that educators face. Analysis of vignettes also indicated that professional challenges experienced by educators often required collaborative working with and through other professionals. Given the complexity illustrated in the vignettes this is not surprising. Two explanatory examples of vignettes follow.

#### 3.2. From Challenging Behaviour to Inclusion Dilemmas

Example—Vignette 24:

Since the beginning of the school year a student disturbs during the English lessons by commenting (negatively) on the contributions of his classmates. In addition, he keeps shouting during the lessons: "English is the subject I hate the most". Due to his behaviour he has received a detention and/or additional homework on several occasions. During the first weeks, he completed this extra work but this didn't change his behaviour in the long run. Now, he refuses to do it and complains that he feels badly treated by me and that the girls would never be punished for a similar thing. I have the feeling that the punishment reinforced his misbehaviour.

My problem is that I don't know how to find out whether the use of punishment affects the student's behaviour in such a way that he can participate productively in the classroom. Was it just the wrong punishment? Or was it the way I communicated the punishment? Or was it the punishment itself? I lack alternatives to react to such a situation in a different way.

Dilemma: My dilemma is that I am not sure in which case a punishment helps to change the pupil's behaviour at all such that he follows the rules in class and in which cases I should find another way—without punishment.

In this exemplar vignette the immediate issue identified by an educator is of challenging behaviour, but they go on to reflect on how this might be related to the failure of inclusion within schools and colleges which is multifaceted and complex. The contributor also recognises issues with choices about curriculum—English language learning as a subject—and pedagogy, which pedagogical approach will engage all learners.

This analysis of this vignette implies that the discrete professional learning opportunities offered to educators at all stages of their career may not actually address their professional learning requirements. Providing a professional learning course on behaviour management may not actually address underpinning issues related to curriculum and pedagogy choices being made by the educator to ensure the active engagement of all students in the learning being offered within this context. Instead, it would suggest that professional learning must be constructed around an acknowledgement of the complexity of the challenges being faced by educators. It might even be suggested that this professional learning will be most effective if the learning commences with real life professional challenges which illustrate the complexity of providing inclusive education rather than starting with discrete topics such as literacy difficulties or behaviour management as is currently offered by many providers.

### 3.3. Towards Interprofessional, Collaborative Practice

#### Example—Vignette 37:

My professional problem is linked to SEN. I have had this situation with an increasing amount of pupils, but I will focus on one to highlight as an example.

I have an 8-year-old child who is still working at '40–60 months development' levels for her language. She has received Speech and Language Services intervention. She does not meet the criteria for an Education and Health Care Plan but needs support to access most of the Year 3 curriculum.

The problem is that she is frequently discharged from Speech and Language Services due to recurring missed appointments due to an unfortunate disorganised home environment. The Speech and Language Services team have sent a pack of language building resources for us to use in school with her, but do not give any training. Our school does not have the capacity for a teacher to do this, so this intervention is done by an untrained teaching assistant when it should ideally be done by a specialist trained speech and language teacher.

Dilemma: Our staff are a very committed team but budget restraints have meant we are now expected to carry out aspects of work which would originally have been done by trained specialist teachers (include dyslexic assessments, mental health counselling, speech therapist activities etc). We feel that we do not have the necessary knowledge and skills for this, nor should the responsibility be just down to the classroom teacher. Appropriate training and release time or a school-based specialist teacher (as and when required) would be great support but this has not been received.

Underpinning this dilemma are difficulties of inclusion (one of the thematic categories). This vignette was written by a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENDCo) in an English primary school. The SENDCo recognises the need to better support a child who has delayed speech, language and communication development, and who by the age of 8 is experiencing difficulty accessing the curriculum, impeding her achievement, progress and potentially her motivation and self-esteem. Although the SENDCo is an experienced teacher and is qualified in special educational needs support she recognises that she has neither the expertise nor capacity to provide appropriate individualised support in class. Referring the child to Speech and Language Therapists has only had limited impact due to missed appointments, and so a 'work around' has been put in place of providing resources but no substantial professional training to use them effectively. The vignette also provides insights into family circumstances impacting on the child's ability to access support. The vignette does not, however, indicate a problem of school attendance.

The dilemma outlined in the vignette is significant, and indicates that this is not a unique case, but is illustrative of a disconnect at a systemic level. It also hints at the unsustainability of the situation. Expert allied professionals are not being effectively deployed. Speech and Language Therapists have not been able to work with the child despite providing appointments. Teachers cannot prioritise speech, language, and communication development as part of their inclusive pedagogy, resulting in a less qualified member of staff being allocated to a task which would be most appropriately carried out by a more expert practitioner. The training that the contributor believes would be valuable has not been made available and the opportunities for professional development at the time it is most needed have not been realised.

Analysis of this vignette provides a means to reframe this as an argument for interprofessional collaborative professional development. It exemplifies the potential for reframing professional learning opportunities by taking account of the complexities of typical inclusion challenges. For example, speech and language therapists might have been better deployed to work with the teacher and teaching assistant to develop an understanding of and skills for communication-rich pedagogies, perhaps using a specialist coaching model. While the trigger and focus for this work might have been the child described in the

vignette the outcome could have been the development of more holistic inclusive practices that could have been sustained beyond the duration of that school year.

#### 4. Discussion

The study outlined in this paper was a collaborative project involving partners from five different countries. Although agreement was reached on the methods of data gathering, it is inevitable that small differences occurred during the sampling, resulting in minor differences in the descriptions of the gathered narratives and vignettes. However, since the study aimed at gaining an overview of the nature of professional concerns for educators in different countries, these small differences in the descriptions did not change the overall impression on the concerns that were gathered. Analysis was not undertaken to discover differences between countries, age, or educational sector. It might be viewed as an omission that we did not dive into this, but it was considered justified by our finding that the concerns of teachers are so alike, notwithstanding their differences in contexts.

This paper addressed two research questions: (1) What professional dilemmas do (general/mainstream) educators face in their daily practice when seeking to provide learning opportunities for all? and (2) What type of support might educators successfully utilise in addressing these complex professional dilemmas around inclusion?

With regards to the first research question findings from the PROMISE project indicate that professional dilemmas being faced by educators are broadly similar at all stages of their career, across sectors and European nations. A key finding from the project is that these professional dilemmas are complex and multifaceted, requiring educators to exert their professional agency to seek solutions which are often beyond the boundaries of their own profession. It has been highlighted that many educators do not feel equipped to provide an effective high-quality inclusive education for all students in their care [8,14]. Questions remain as to how to effectively prepare educators to provide this high-quality inclusive education [7]. The findings from the PROMISE study suggest reasons why this might be occurring.

Regarding the second research question: from our findings, we propose that traditional approaches to provision of professional learning opportunities may not be effective in supporting either student or experienced educators as they seek to provide effective inclusive education. Specifically, the traditional discrete courses designed to prepare generalist teachers to work inclusively in mainstream settings do not prepare those student teachers to work inclusively with the diversity of cohorts in their classrooms but instead the main focus is on the deficits and how the teacher must deal with this difference or challenge [14]. This results in the student teachers focusing on the deficits within these pupils rather than consideration of how these deficits may be overcome by provision of learning opportunities that do not further marginalise or stigmatise these pupils [12,16]. This is exemplified by Aas who found that engaging in collaborative lesson study in the context of inclusive and adapted education allowed teachers working in a Norwegian elementary school to develop in three key ways [48]. They took extended responsibility for more aspects of student learning and development, changed their perspectives from an individual towards a social view of learning and reframed students from passive recipients towards active participants.

Darling-Hammond and Richardson recommend “sustained, job-embedded, collaborative teacher learning strategies” are what is needed [49] (p. 3). The approach proposed based on the findings from this project aligns with that definition and encourages educators to consider the professional challenges they are facing not as discrete problems but as opportunities to think more fundamentally about their practice. The findings from this study indicate that the professional challenges being articulated by the contributors notionally on the topic of ‘inclusion’ were wide and complex. We argue that the responses to such complex professional challenges must acknowledge this complexity. Therefore, new ways of thinking about professional learning are required if educators are to be effectively

prepared and supported to be inclusive in their practice. We have outlined here a different approach that might be taken.

An effective approach for professional learning should not take a deficit view of the knowledge and skills of the educators when they articulate the professional challenges they are experiencing. Rather, it should be acknowledged that professional challenges are inevitable, they are complex and it is the nature of their complexity which provides their resistance to simple solutions. Only through collaborative and, at times, interprofessional working can these professional challenges be addressed [27,28,30–32]. Our findings suggest that the professional challenges being articulated by educators across national boundaries and sectors within the project were seen to be similar enough that some collaborative working could be fruitful.

Rather than focus on discrete ‘hypothetical’ educational problems, we suggest that professional learning should take, as its starting point, real-life complex, professional challenges. If the starting point for a learning opportunity is an authentic professional dilemma being experienced by an educator, then their professional learning would be automatically adapting to the changes in their own context—providing a more sustainable and authentic approach to professional learning provision. Educators should be supported to collaboratively discover responses to these challenges—involving other professionals when appropriate—and trusted to use their professional agency to implement the most appropriate response for their situation [50,51].

This new approach to professional learning would require providers of both pre- and in-service teacher education to adopt roles as *facilitators* rather than *providers* of professional learning. For teacher educators, this might be a difficult new role since they will need to encourage (student) teachers to search for their own solutions rather than offering ready-made ones. It might help teacher educators to grow in this role if they start to work with this approach themselves in finding solutions for issues they encounter in their own practice. This approach would address the ongoing problem faced by teacher educators that it is impossible to prepare student teachers for the many different challenges they might encounter over a 40-year career in education. Rather, it would offer educators a strategy which encourages them to search for their own solutions to their dilemmas with the assistance of colleagues rather than applying ready-made solutions that may not be applicable to their individual context. The benefits of this new approach will be a more sustainable approach to professional learning that would continue to adapt as society continues to evolve.

## 5. Conclusions

Research indicates that European society is expected to continue to diversify with the attendant challenges that this brings for educators seeking to provide effective and inclusive education for all students. Inclusive practice is contextual and complex [1]. Professional learning provision that aims to support educators to be more effective in their inclusive practice must be based on this understanding.

As such, this study would indicate that a new approach to professional learning for inclusion should be adopted. This approach must take as its starting point the complex professional dilemmas that educators articulate rather than viewing them as discrete issues that can be addressed separately. The learning that will arise from this approach will be non-judgemental, collaborative, and interprofessional where much of the agency for the focus of the learning is undertaken by the educators themselves. This could result in a new role for many providers of teacher education as they adopt the role of facilitators rather than providers of professional learning. Nevertheless, this new approach will provide the sector with a more sustainable and effective approach to teacher education that will be adaptable to both the future professional learning requirements of all educators and future societal change.

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## Appendix A

Procedure for data gathering:

1. Each partner (or country) will ask 10 teachers to participate
2. In order to be able to compare our findings, we also need some background information on the teachers and on the context they work in. It might be of help to use a format.

### *Suggestion for a small format for data-gathering*

- a. *I am . . . .*
  - i. *student teacher*
  - ii. *teacher*
- b. *I have \_\_\_\_ years of experience in teaching (insert the amount of years)*
- c. *I teach in*
  - i. *primary education*
  - ii. *secondary education*
  - iii. *vocational education*
- d. *The average age of pupils/students I teach is:*
- e. *When I teach . . . .*
  - i. *I am the only teacher with this group*
  - ii. *I do have a classroom-assistant*
  - iii. *I do have colleague teachers as a backup*
- f. *Describe in some sentences (max 200 words) 'a professional problem in your everyday work as a teacher concerning pupils/students'. This should be a problem that you find difficult to handle. the following prompts may be helpful as you write your response:*
  - *What is the context in which the professional dilemma took place?*
  - *What was the problem that you were experiencing as a professional?*
  - *Why was this a problem in your context?*
  - *What alternatives did I need to weigh up as I considered this professional dilemma?*
  - *What options were available to me as I sought to address this professional dilemma?*
  - *What options might have been helpful that were not available to me?*
  - *What next steps did I take?*



### Appendix B

	Vignette Topic	Themes	Dilemmas/Questions	Summary
1	Following the advice	Classroom management Behaviour	Conformity to rules vs. own belief; focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere	How to cope with an offensive, restless, counterproductive pupil?
2	Lies in the classroom	Psychological problems	Share a secret to solve the problem vs. keep it as promised	Classmates tell their teacher secretly that a group of pupils abuse alcohol
3	New student	Psychological problems	Focus on an individual vs. focus on the group	A pupil with severe emotional and behaviour problems
4	Adjustments for students with special needs	Interprofessionalism	Rely on rumours, opinions vs. rely only on proven facts	Teachers' resistance to change, didactical approaches for children with SEN
5	Eating disorder	Inclusion Psychological problems	Give realistic feedback vs. try to improve self-confidence of pupil	Dealing with a student with eating disorder
6	A disturbing student	Behaviour	Focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere; how to improve pedagogical competences	Dealing with rude student behaviour
7	School rules	Classroom management	Conformity to rules vs. own belief	School rules are not clear or are not suitable
8	Student behaviour towards teacher	Behaviour	Focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere; how to improve pedagogical competences	Pupils show rude behaviour towards teacher
9	Beginning teacher facing experienced colleagues	Interprofessionalism	Consensus with colleagues vs. Isolation	Student teacher feels isolated amongst experienced colleagues
10	Establishing a learning climate in class	Didactics	Focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere; how to improve pedagogical competences	Pupils are not working in class
11	Self-confidence of pupils	Behaviour	Give realistic feedback vs. try to improve self-confidence of pupil	Pupils are not self-confident
12	Distance education for pupils in special education	ICT Inclusion	Focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere; how to improve pedagogical competences	Distance education for pupils in special education
13	Self-harm of student	Psychological problems	How to improve pedagogical competences	Serious psychological problems and potential self-harm issues
14	Subject for new English Learners	Didactics	How to improve pedagogical competences	Teaching Economics (complex concepts) to new English learners
15	Low socio-economic status	Behaviour	How to improve pedagogical competences	How to motivate children to learn?

	Vignette Topic	Themes	Dilemmas/Questions	Summary
16	Impatient pupil	Behaviour Inclusion	How to improve pedagogical knowledge; give realistic feedback vs. try to improve self-confidence of pupil	How to get a pupil to understand that he is not the only pupil with needs in the class?
17	Support assistant	Inclusion	How to improve interprofessional competences	How to deploy a new member of staff who is not a trained teacher to support the pupils' learning?
18	Speech problem, no participation	Inclusion	How to improve pedagogical competences; give realistic feedback vs. try to improve self-confidence of pupil	Support student to learn English as a second language and to speak during lesson.
19	Wallet disappeared	Behaviour	Personally involved vs. personally distanced	Thief in the classroom that involves thinking about the ethical boundaries of interventions and issues of parent-teacher communication
20	Motivation to learn	Inclusion	How to improve pedagogical competences	Classroom management issue where the teacher learns from experience and shifts towards a learner-centred model of teaching
21	Aggressive behaviour in primary school	Psychological problems	How to improve interprofessional competences; how to improve pedagogical competences	Anger management issue with students and how to solve it, what kind of professional collaboration would have been needed
22	Head scarf in PE lesson	Inclusion	Rely on rumours, opinions vs. rely only on proofed facts; focus on an individual vs. focus on the group	Pupil comes late and leaves early because father should not see her without head scarf
23	Pupils do not participate	Classroom relationship management	Focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere; how to improve pedagogical competences	No collaboration, loud class, unstructured lesson
24	Rude behaviour of one pupil	Classroom relationship management	Focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere; how to improve pedagogical competences	Pupil demonstrates during lesson that he hates the subject
25	Severe hearing impairment	Inclusion	Focus on an individual vs. focus on the group	Classroom management/didactics in a class with a child with severe hearing loss
26	No experience with inclusive pedagogy	Inclusion	Focus on an individual vs. focus on the group; how to improve pedagogical competences	Classroom management with 3 pupils with severe behavioural problems

	Vignette Topic	Themes	Dilemmas/Questions	Summary
27	Weak self-assessment of performance	Behaviour	How to improve pedagogical competences; give realistic feedback vs. try to improve self-confidence of pupil	Large differences between self-assessment and teacher's assessment of performance cause problems
28	Technology policy and practice	Didactics ICT	Focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere; ICT in the classroom supports learning vs. reduces learning	Get the possibility to use mobile devices for learning in class although they are banned
29	Appropriate use of technology	Classroom relationships management ICT	Share a secret to solve the problem vs. keep it as promised; how to improve pedagogical competences	Anonymous offensive comment on padlet
30	Unexplained absence	Psychological problems Interprofessionalism	How to improve pedagogical competences	Student suddenly absent from classes
31	IT resources and diversity	Inclusion ICT	Focus on an individual vs. focus on the group; ICT in the classroom supports learning vs. reduces learning	Curriculum design for diverse learners with resource constraints
32	Moving to online learning	Inclusion ICT	Focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere; ICT in the classroom supports learning vs. reduces learning; focus on an individual vs. focus on the group	Building and supporting an online learning community
33	Interprofessional team for support of students	Interprofessionalism	Focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere; ICT in the classroom supports learning vs. reduces learning; focus on an individual vs. focus on the group	How much prevention/intervention effort is needed
34	Cooperation of childcare center and school	Interprofessionalism	Focus on the problem vs. on good atmosphere; How to improve interprofessional competences	Improve learning environment for children with lower socioeconomic-economic background
35	Prevention of organised crime	Interprofessionalism	Consensus with colleagues vs. Isolation; How to improve interprofessional competences	How to build up a school prevention team?
36	Prevention agreement	Interprofessionalism	How to improve our interprofessional competences	Multiprofessional initiative, to see to it that children in a municipality grow up optimally
37	Language difficulty	Inclusion Interprofessionalism	Focus on an individual vs. focus on the group; How to improve interprofessional competences; How to improve pedagogical competences	How to support children with severe language difficulties

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