Emancipatory pedagogy for inclusive practices, enacting self-study as methodology

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One of the challenges for teachers in the modern world is the continuous search for pedagogy to meet diverse groups of students in inclusive schools. Developing inclusive schools sometimes creates tensions for students and teachers, but at the same time offers opportunities for new ways of learning and teaching.

We, three teacher educators, developed a course on inclusive practices for student teachers and teacher learners, and used self-study to understand and learn about the development of the course and how we improve our professional practice. Two of the team members are the authors of this chapter. The course *Working in Inclusive Practices* (WIP), is a blended course, taught through a mixture of online learning and four intensive sessions on-campus. The student group is diverse and consists of students with teaching experience and students working towards their teaching license, teachers teaching or intending to teach from pre-school to secondary school, and teachers with both international and Icelandic background.

We base the development of the course on ideas of *inclusive* and *innovation education.* Inclusive education (IE) is an ideology that builds on universal inclusion, accessibility and participation of all students in school. The attitude towards diversity is positive and all students are welcomed (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014; UNESCO, 2008, 1994). It is an educational policy that consistently develops a system that offers equitable learning opportunities built on students' resources. The accessibility to the school is not enough; all students must have the opportunity to participate in a valuable way. Inclusive schools call for teachers who have the competence and values to build on all students' resources and are ready to transform schools towards inclusive practices (Guðjónsdóttir, *et al,* 2008).

Innovation and entrepreneurial education (IEE) is about applying creativity and knowledge to meet needs or solve problems that learners identify and are important to them. The aims of IEE are to help people develop capacity for action and, critical and creative thinking through dealing with

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real-life issues (Jónsdóttir & Macdonald, 2013). We introduced IEE into the course as a creative approach that encouraged inventive ways to deal with challenges of living in the modern world, and in particular with becoming responsive teachers in an inclusive school. The core pedagogy of IEE has been defined as *emancipatory pedagogy* where learners are creative explorers and the role of the teacher is to be a facilitator rather than an instructor (Jónsdóttir & Macdonald, 2013). The fundamental process in IEE is looking for needs, finding solutions and presenting them or using in practice. That means for example that IE is a problem or a challenge and teachers and other practitioners have to figure out how to open up their thinking to find different kinds of solutions to respond to the different kinds of challenges. In IEE the roles of students and teachers are often reversed and the student can be the expert in his or her solution (Gunnarsdóttir, 2013; Jónsdóttir & Macdonald, 2013). Through the approaches and pedagogy of IEE we intended to support the student teachers develop creative teaching and learning for diverse groups of students in inclusive schools.

These approaches, IE and IEE build on social constructivism where learning happens through social interactive processes and the learning community is developed through cooperation. Through reflection and dialogue, students gain the opportunity to develop new understandings and shape their learning (Farren, 2009; O'Donahue, 2003).

Aim

The purpose of this study was to see how we could create learning conditions for inclusive practice building on students' resources. Our intention was to give students opportunities to participate in meaningful learning moments applying creativity and knowledge; solving problems they identify working in inclusive practices. The goal was to understand and learn how IEE can help teachers tackle the challenges they encounter teaching diverse groups of students in inclusive schools. Our research question was: How can we use IEE approach to create inclusive school practices?

Methods

Self-study methodology that builds on the notion of action-reflection-learning-action guided our inquiry (Bodone, Guðjónsdóttir, & Dalmau, 2004). We gathered data in spring 2013 to 2015. Sources of data include *minutes and recordings of meetings* (preparation and analytical meetings) and *professional dialogues*, e-*mail communication, tickets out of class* (TOCs) *documentation from the online program* and *students' tasks, discussions* and *projects*. To understand our practice more deeply and support our interpretation as self-study practitioners, we use the voices of our students as well as our own, as they provide the evidence for our claims (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2010). As we discussed and critically reflected on the teaching and learning data analysis began to form. Each of us looked at the data coding incidents and issues that interested us or "talked" to us. We scrutinized whether the problem solving methods of IEE were influencing students and whether we were walking the talk according to our PWT, emphasising not just telling them what to do but rather that they solve and respond to challenges of IE themselves. We further analyzed the data together, combined and expanded the emerging findings in the light of the research questions through discussions and writing.

Outcomes

Our intention was to design a course on inclusive education that builds on student resources and uses IEE approaches. In this chapter we will introduce the construction of our understanding and give a description of the learning environment we created. In our teaching we introduced various ways of designing learning environments for all students, different teaching methods and various approaches for gathering information on students. In addition we emphasized collaboration with parents, colleagues, professionals and paraprofessionals. We used variety of teaching strategies in our teaching but the main teaching method integrated from IEE, is identifying needs or problems and practicing finding and developing solutions.

A changing tone and attitudes

The first task in the course is participating in a discussion thread on inclusive ideology and policy. Analyzing the discussion we realized that many students express their doubts about the IE policy in the beginning of the term. We read on Moodle when students introduced themselves and heard in the first on-campus sessions expressions of doubt and scepticism. A typical comment from these students was: "Inclusive education is a beautiful ideology, but it is not really possible to enact it in practice, unless we get much more money and more assistance" (Kristjana on-campus session, 2013). In a meeting we three discussed and reflected on the situation and wondered how we could work with students pre-thinking:

> Svanborg: Remember – our thinking by using IEE was to get students out of their pre-set ways of thinking about IE as an impossible ideology in practice. We are giving them tools to approach IE in a different way – sense IEE begins by helping them figure out what is in the way. They have to find out all kinds of ways to respond to the challenges they first found impossible.

> Karen: Yes, our intention is to help them out of coming up with simple solutions such as more money, more time, more assistants – instead to find creative ways to practice inclusive education, to find diverse routes to practice. Hafdís: We are acknowledging that life in itself and IE is not simple or without problems, we want them to experience that the creative methods and approaches of IEE can help them find solutions. Each time we discuss this I understand better and better and better why IEE works so well and has become such a passion for me.

As the course progressed we noticed that students were changing their discourse towards inclusive education and they started to see the potentials and opportunities it offered. Linda, who was teaching alongside her studies, said she noticed that the course changed her thinking about inclusive schools and that she started to look differently at her students. *"I started to look at each group as a whole with collective strengths and resources rather than just focusing on their individual shortcomings"* (Self-evaluation report, 2014).

By the end of the course in spring 2014 we began to hear a changing tone in student voices. This emerged in student TOCs in the fourth on-campus session:

> Today I realized the importance of my professional working theory and of different leaders in inclusive practices. I was exposed to and became open to innovations (trying out new approaches). I started to believe that it is possible to achieve inclusive practice in compulsory education. It is possible to respond to ALL needs. I found the ideas of my co-students very useful, discussing together was informing and helpful.

We reflected continuously on how we were presenting IE and how we worked with students to become resourceful teachers feeling up to working in inclusive practices.

To begin with we consulted what students said in the beginning of the course and later on how they responded in TOCs. We discussed that we wanted to empower students by experiencing creative methods and support them to develop a positive outlook on the diversity of students and people in society.

Escavating our own theories - walking the talk

After the first year we taught the course we became aware of students criticism that teaching methods in teacher eduction at the University of Iceland were uniform and often *about* versatile teaching methods but presented in lectures. We reflected on this realization and decided to focus on doing less lectures and rather teach with the methods we were presenting and chose those that we considered constructive and engaging (Preparation and reflection meeting, April, 2014). We also decided to gather data about how we managed to do so. We focused on teaching approaches and educative assessment known for working well for diverse groups of students. We did not only introduce different teaching methods, but used them in our teaching.

> The way you organized the lessons was informative, instead of letting us just read about multiform teaching strategies you used them in class. After each day we listed the strategies and it was surprising how many you used. (Haraldur)

The course is grounded in students' independence, responsibility and participation as we organize

lectures, projects, collaboration, discussions, formal assignments and educative assessment. "It has been educational to attend the sessions, work on the tasks and projects and to connect with the students in a dialogue or work" (Jóhanna, self-evaluation, 2015).

We used and expanded each other's ideas as we reflected on how to respond to students needs. In one meeting, Svanborg suggested building on students' resources and Karen proposed we could ask students to write a case beginning with 'I remember'. Hafdís took that idea further, suggesting we use the story to analyze the resources students draw on.

One way to verify that we were using versatile teaching and learning methods and help students identify them, was by letting them name all approaches and methods we used by the end of each day of on-campus sessions. The following list of teaching and learning methods used by late February 2014 was identified by students and our collation of approaches and learning environments we had practiced (left column). We then reflected on and analysed the role of students and the value of each learning situation and method to see how engaging or potentially constructive they were (right column).

Students appreciated the versatile teaching and learning methods we offered:

I have got a lot out of the discussions, they have been interesting and the multiple teaching strategies will certainly help me in my future teaching job." (Jonathan)

Teaching and learning methods – learning environment	Role of students – educational value of activities
Developing a learning community – connecting students through tasks and activities on-campus	Seeking knowledge – engaged participants, doing experiments, trying, connecting with each other, creators of knowledge.
Writing exercises (think - write) - pair share	Engaged: thinking/ writing, paired: sharing
Creative expressions in reusable materials – record own thoughts about a scenes and issues in a film. Working in groups at presenting their understanding of the film as expressive sculptures (3-d artifacts) Presenting and interpreting the artifact.	Actively working, engaged, alone and with others. Creation of knowledge and understanding.
Taking pictures of activities in lessons on-campus, using them as instruments for reflection, posted on Moodle. Telling the story of students learning – making student work visible.	Visible and active – students and their works are subjects of pictures worth displaying, are valued.
Displaying student works on-campus and on-line. Showing student work respect – an important display of learning	Students experience their work worthy
Rotating work-shops • Innovation education • Writing workshop • Identify and record students strengths and interests	Study certain strategies and immerse into the work. Study one particular strategy well (one hour study). Create own knowledge and instruments. Introduce to the whole group.
Writing space: • Jigsaw • Learn about a topic • Create a teaching tool Activity: Read, discuss, introduce. Create a tool for teaching. Collect for a "tool storage box"	Independent learners, active, collaborative.
Learning environment in on-campus sessions (messages - ethos) • Book exhibition • Line up tables for collaborative work • Things and material to work from • Examples of products/process	Experience message - atmosphere encourages function and student creativity.
Steps in the PWT process: Individual brainstorming (reflect on experience and ideas), which thinking, theories, ideas do you want to build on in your teaching?	Engaged – think, reflect, connect thoughts, ideas and theories, record: write down.

This was not a surprise, and goes hand in hand with our former experience. The learning environment for the in-between sessions on-line consisted of discussion threads about the topics in

focus, the readings, presentations, different tasks or assignments.

The emerging role of innovation education for inclusive practice

As we have reflected on and look back on these three terms of running the course we have gradually realized how well the thinking and approaches of IEE align with the IE ideology. IEE was initially an experiment we wanted to try in the course as it seemed to offer a creative approach in teaching that built on believing in student resources and encourage their competence to act on any challenge. We have seen how it works for our students to realise their own resources and strengths and how they have realized how the methods and approaches of IEE can be used to benefit their own teaching. Different students expressed how IEE had engaged their thinking about needs in society and how it is possible to find solutions to different problems:

> *I understood IEE as education that was in itself an example of sustainability education and how to enhance student action competence and this was indeed directly related to the issues of the course. (Anna, distance student, self-evaluation report, 2014)*

Hafdís pointed out at the end of one term: "We have been passionate about using these approaches, bu have they been influential? When I looked at students assignments I realise that getting to know IEE pushed students creative thinking." Þórunn one of our students described in her self-evaluation report that the first reading in the course about IEE had huge impact on her:

> *I realize now that this article exited me so that I have since been very eager to get to know the other reading materials and willing to do the activities and projects in the course. When I read it, it opened up floodgates of ideas about my own teaching and I became very exited about how the course would progress.*

Karen expressed in one of our last meeting of a term: I can see how IEE helped in-service teachers to see potentials and the value of using the core process in their own teaching." One student described this:

> *I realized how the IEE ideology speaks to issues in education and can be used in any subject, the literacy discussions, deaf education and then how we can expand our teaching to include all students. After the IEE work I wrote in my journal: I want to examine whether I can use this with my student group to find out if they can influence more how we work in our school and come up with possible solutions. (Skúlína, self-evaluation report, 2015)*

Svanborg pointed out: "Statements from different students helps us understand better the value of IEE for inclusive education - even though we initially recognized its potential for this course it has become more and more clear as we gather data and use self-study to reflect and discuss our findings."

Inga a young teacher in a rural town describes: "I have connected well with the IEE thinking. I am a creative teacher and I can see how IEE approaches can help with different things in inclusive education." She explains in her self-evaluation report how IEE is about thinking of problems as challenges and developing solutions that can meet the needs behind them.

> *It was an inspiration in my practice to read and learn about IEE as I have had the opportunity to try out in my teaching the IEE approaches and other methods I have learned about in this course.*

She furthermore expressed a view similar to other students by the end of the course that it had strengthened her "thinking out of the box", to stand by her conviction as a professional to use creativity in teaching and keep her teaching lively and engaging.

As we each read through the PWT assignments by the end of the course and students' self-evaluation reports, we reflected on how rewarding we found reading their reports was. We could see how each of them had grown and developed and how the different tasks, activities and processes had helped them step-by step along the way (reflective e-mails, 2015). One of the strong threads we discovered throughout the course (as expressed by students) was the power and potential IEE offered for inclusive education. In autumn 2015 we discussed and analysed what it was about IEE that speaks to IE and helps to enact the policy in practice. At the core of IEE (and we have seen work with our students) is the *emancipatory pedagogy* that aims to give students the power (empowerment) to design their own learning and professional theories, helping them to be or become creative and

resourceful teachers. IEE builds on fundamental processes that suit every culture and adapts to the challenges that each student in any situation finds interesting or worthwhile. IEE offers processes and thinking, to identify needs, practice finding solutions and enact them, and believing that creative solutions can always be found both individually and not least collectively.

Conclusions

Our findings show that initially students met the presentation of IEE with some suspicion but as the course progressed and they got to know it better and tried out the approaches and tasks they realized the properties and the pedagogy it offered. In many ways it helped them tackle the challenges they encounter in inclusive school, and they managed to expand their thinking about practice and try out new ways. By doing self-study we realized that we had been working with powerful instruments that were neither simple nor easy but had an impact on students in the graduate course. We recognize that IEE is not an obvious choice in inclusive education, perhaps because of the connotations of the words (innovation and entrepreneurial) that imply business studies and may overshadow the empowering pedagogy at its core. It is our challenge to show that it is possible expand the use of this pedagogy. However, the IEE approaches and the opportunities offered, empowered our students to take steps to strengthen their competence as resourceful and responsive teachers. Through our self-study as teacher educators in inclusive education we were able to make visible the enacted pedagogy in the course that helped us to be the teachers we want to be and it helped us to be aware of when and how our ways of working supported the ideology of inclusive education. An empowering or emancipatory pedagogy is what we want our students to experience and practice themselves in inclusive education.

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