CIDREE

Consortium of Institutions for Development
and Research in Education in Europe

Successful approaches to raising attainment and tackling inequity

CIDREE Yearbook 2016

Produced by Education Scotland

PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD (Extract)

The CIDREE Yearbook 2016 looks specifically at the critical area of ensuring that our education systems, schools, teachers and strategic partners work together to raise the attainment of our learners. The number of articles in the Yearbook indicates strongly that this topic is a central priority to countries across Europe. The range of innovative approaches to raising attainment highlighted in the articles demonstrates the need for new, creative thinking on national and local policies, learning and teaching. The approaches also stress the important involvement of key partners in improving learners' outcomes through dealing with many underlying issues.

The Yearbook's attention to tackling inequity adds a particular dimension to the issue of raising attainment. Raising attainment for all is vital, of course, but so too is looking closely at those groups of learners who have the potential to succeed, but who face significant challenges and may not achieve well. Attainment gaps like this which develop in this way need to be identified and closed. So our definition of equity in education within Yearbook 2016 is to ensure that learners' individual needs are met by identifying and addressing any barriers to learning through early, targeted interventions. It acknowledges that certain individuals and groups of learners need more support, carefully organised, both in and often outwith the classroom. This goes beyond ensuring equality of provision – where children and young people may have equal opportunities to access good provision, but where that provision may not ensure the most appropriate type, level and quantity of support for all learners. How do different education systems recognise and address these issues? Which policies and strategies, at national and at local levels, support schools and practitioners effectively? Which specific interventions work? How and why? I am in no doubt that the rich range of articles in Yearbook 2016 sets out successful approaches that help to answer such questions.

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Identification of the training needs of teachers in the pre-university education system
Dorina Rapti & Gerti Janaqi

The article focuses on teaching quality as a driver of improved attainment, and how professional development for teachers can contribute to this. This focus on teaching quality is taking place within the context of a curriculum reform programme, which has a strong equity dimension in that it aims to ensure that all children and young people achieve their best. The authors reflect on data drawn from a national survey of teachers, which aimed to identify their professional development needs. In doing this, the authors identify some clear recommendations for meeting these needs and therefore ensuring that the new curriculum does indeed meet the needs of all children and young people.

Read full article on Albania.

Finland
Promoting motivating assessment practices as part of equal education
Erja Vitikka, Arja-Sisko Holappa & Eija Kauppinen

The authors focus on how formative assessment helps to create a school culture which values and supports learning for all children and young people. It usefully reflects on how equality has been conceptualised and embedded within the Finnish education system. The authors highlight shifts in these understandings over time. For instance there has been a move from ensuring access to education for all children and young people to the need to ensure that opportunities for learning are more equitable – for example through the pupil welfare system or by providing extra language support for immigrants. The article also describes the deep roots of formative assessment and the broad concept of attainment within Finnish educational culture.

Read full article on Finland.

France
More Teachers Than Classes: An initiative that is changing school?
Patrick Picard

'More Teachers Than Classes' is a national initiative, launched in 2012, which involved allocating extra primary teachers within or across schools, with the aim of increasing attainment and tackling inequity for children from working-class backgrounds. The author outlines the different ways in which the initiative has been implemented, drawing on empirical work in the Rhone department, which received over 100 new teachers. The article reflects on the successes and challenges in implementing 'More Teachers Than Classes', which appears to be having a positive impact on teaching practice, collaborative working and classroom environments.

Read full article on France.

Hungary
Raising attainment and realising inclusion – a bottom-up innovation in Hungary
Márta Hunya & Mária Szabó

This contribution takes us to the micro level by describing an innovative approach to increasing equity and raising attainment in one school. The article describes how a passionate headteacher has introduced a bottom-up, local implementation of the Complex Instruction (CI) methodology into her school, in order to increase equity and raise attainment. The case study school used in the article details the socioeconomic challenges facing schools in the north-west of Hungary. The American CI methodology was complemented by local pedagogical initiatives to form the Komplex Instrukcios Program (KIP). As a result of introducing KIP, the school has seen improvements in behaviour, attainment and the number of children moving on successfully to the next stage of their learning. The authors also describe how KIP has now become a broader improvement approach within Hungary, with around 40 schools now having been trained in it.

Read full article on Hungary.

Ireland
Raising achievement in schools in disadvantaged areas
Susan Weir

The DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools) programme is a national initiative to address the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. To begin, the author discusses the use of the terms 'achievement' and 'attainment' within the Irish context. The article places the DEIS programme within the context of previous initiatives in Ireland, which had similar aims of increasing equity. Drawing on an evaluation of the DEIS programme, which has been carried out since 2007, the author highlights the successes of the programme in improving achievement in reading performance among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The author discusses potential explanations for this and reflects on future options for building on the success of the DEIS programme to date.
Read full article on Ireland.

Kosovo
The role of mediators in the integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the education system in Kosovo
Haxhere Zylfiu & Selim Mehmeti

The article from Kosovo describes a mediation programme with the aim of ensuring that members of minority communities engage with the education system. A key equity challenge for Kosovo was to respond to concerns about participation and attainment among children and young people from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The article describes the background and implementation of the mediation programme, including how successful individuals from each community worked as mediators to support communication between children and young people, their families, schools and municipal learning departments. Drawing on data collected through the mediation programme, the authors outline key successes and challenges. While the programme has been successful in supporting reintegration with the education system, the authors conclude their article with a number of recommendations for enhancing its impact.
Read full article on Kosovo.

Luxembourg
Low-stakes student assessment for student success: A personalised learning environment in mathematics to raise attainment and tackle inequity
Amina Kafaï-Afif & Jos Bertemes

MathemaTIC is an online learning platform, which aims to support increased equity and attainment among all language communities in Luxembourg. For Luxembourg, the multilingual tradition within its education system has equity implications, and there are concerns about the attainment of children and young people from some language communities. As part of a wider digital education strategy, MathemaTIC offers digital mathematical resources in a number of languages, all tailored to the mathematics curriculum. The authors describe the background and development of MathemaTIC. Although it is still being piloted, the article also offers initial reflections on the implementation of MathemaTIC – noting enthusiasm among teachers, children and young people, as well as growing engagement with the resource. The article ends by offering a number of conclusions about the extent to which MathemaTIC is creating the conditions to raise attainment and tackle inequity in mathematics.
Read full article on Luxembourg.

Norway
The National Strategy for Language, Reading and Writing 2016-19
Margunn Mossige, Åse Kari Hansen Wagner & Elisabeth Rongved

The authors describe the development and implementation of a national strategy to increase the language and literacy skills of Norwegian children and young people. To do this, the strategy has a focus on developing the practice of education staff through online professional learning resources, face to face meetings and targeted, local professional development

opportunities. There are concerns in Norway about the attainment of specific groups of learners – including those from minority language communities, boys, high achieving learners and those who have difficulties with their language, reading or writing. The authors provide initial reflections based on the trialling of the strategy – including high engagement among education staff. The article concludes by commenting on a number of implementation issues that will be relevant to the continued development of the strategy.
Read full article on Norway.

Scotland
Closing the poverty-related attainment gap…the Scottish way
Ken McAra & Janie McManus
The article highlights developments in Scottish education to increase equity and raise attainment. The article outlines the background and development of a national programme, the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), which is focused on children and young people living in the most deprived communities in Scotland. The authors describe how the SAC is being implemented at national, local authority and school levels. The article places the SAC within its context by highlighting the prevalence of poverty within Scottish society, and the impact this has on educational attainment. The SAC is a broad and ambitious programme, which includes different funding streams and the creation of a new role – the Attainment Advisor – to work collaboratively alongside local authority staff on agreed priorities which support the SAC. The article illustrates the kinds of activities that are being taken forward by offering a number of case studies.
Read full article on Scotland.

Slovenia
Improving the attainment of learners through formative assessment in Slovenian classrooms
Nataša Potočnik & Ada Holcar Brunauer
The contribution from Slovenia gives a national perspective on a multi-country formative assessment project, which was initiated through CIDREE. The project as a whole aimed to explore how formative assessment could be used to improve children and young people's attainment. The authors place this project within the context of Slovenian education, where teachers and parents appear somewhat resistant to formative assessment approaches. The article describes how teachers in Slovenia used an action research model to strengthen the links between learning, teaching and assessment. As a result of using formative assessment approaches within the project, the teachers became more aware of the individual needs of each learner and observed initial increases in motivation and engagement. They also reflected on the equity implications of their assessment practice.
Read full article on Slovenia.

Sweden
Student participation and influence in education – possibilities and challenges
Eva Alerby & Ulrika Bergmark
The article reflects on the ways that children and young people can be encouraged to participate more actively and meaningfully in their education – and sees this as an important driver for increasing equity in attainment. The authors draw on a review of mainly Swedish research about children and young people's participation and influence in school. Swedish education policy provides space and encouragement for learner participation – however there are a number of challenges in ensuring that this is realised. The article highlights a number of gaps and key themes in the research literature, for instance the need to reconsider traditional teacher-learner roles. It also highlights the impact that effective participation can have on children and young people, teachers and the whole school.
Read full article on Sweden.

Switzerland
Raising attainment with more instructional time? A partially successful strategy with undesirable side effects
Chantal Oggenfuss, Maria Cattaneo & Stefan Wolter

'Common sense' arguments suggest that increased teaching time will lead to increased attainment. The authors add nuance to this claim by analysing attainment data, drawn from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009, and data on teaching time, obtained from the Swiss cantons. This analysis shows that, although additional teaching time does have a positive relationship with increased attainment, the effect of each extra teaching hour on attainment is not the same. The analysis also shows that extra teaching time does not narrow the range or distribution of PISA scores. Therefore, increasing teaching time will not automatically lead to increased or more equitable attainment. The authors conclude by reflecting on the policy implications of their analysis – suggesting that policymakers and teachers should reflect carefully on how teaching time is used, and on the equity implications of any decisions about teaching time.

Read full article on Switzerland.

The Netherlands
Achieving equitable future-oriented education in the Netherlands
Annette Thijs & Jan Berkvens

The article from the Netherlands considers issues of equity in relation to the Dutch school system. These issues relate particularly to children and young people from ethnic and language minorities, and those from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. The authors outline specific concerns about how these children and young people are served by the system of early tracking within Dutch education. Responses to these equity concerns, discussed in the article, include the introduction of minimum academic standards in some subject areas, and curriculum change. The authors conclude their article with a number of helpful reflections on how the current policy direction in the Netherlands can best support increased equity within education.

Read full article on the Netherlands.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE ARTICLES

Introduction

The previous section highlights the varied contributions we have received for the 2016 Yearbook. Each article reflects the country's own context, challenges and priorities. Many of the articles outline strategies, policies or approaches for reducing inequity and raising attainment. In some cases, these have been in place for a number of years. In others, the focus is on the piloting and development of new approaches. Whatever their stage of development, however, the authors offer a number of valuable insights into how actions to reduce inequity and raise attainment are understood and operationalised. This section reflects on a number of key themes which have emerged from across the 13 articles.

Key themes

Recognising complexity

Efforts to reduce inequity and raise attainment are complex. The articles illustrate this in a number of ways. Firstly, they highlight the long-standing and entrenched nature of inequity. Countries have been alert to inequity within their education systems, and have been taking steps to address them, for many years. For instance, Ireland has been taking action to tackle educational disadvantage since the 1980s, and established an Educational Disadvantage Committee in 2001. Secondly, the articles highlight complexity by showing that addressing inequity requires strategies and approaches that recognise its multi-faceted nature. Many countries have multi-component strategies for addressing this complexity, although due to available space the articles tend to focus on only a subset of these wider strategies. For instance, the Hungarian article describes how social inclusion and equity is a clear national priority, and the focus of a number of different initiatives including mentoring, scholarship programmes and targeted funding. In Scotland, the Scottish Attainment Challenge similarly includes a mix of approaches, including those designed to focus on literacy, numeracy and home-school links. The importance of improving outcomes for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds is also reflected in the new Scottish framework for self-evaluation by schools.

A focus on quality teaching

Across many of the articles, there is a key focus on teachers as enablers of increased attainment and equity, including teaching quality and pedagogy. This theme takes different forms across countries. In France, for instance, it involves the provision of extra teaching staff. In Albania, the quality of teaching is clearly central to supporting developments in the curriculum – the country wants to see flexible and skilled teachers who can take on a greater role in facilitating learning. The development of Norway's strategy for languages, reading and writing also has an explicit focus on increasing the skills and competencies of teachers through the use of new professional development kits and online technology. The Norwegian article also highlights the importance of active understanding and reflection on the knowledge base that underpins the new professional development kits.

Meeting the needs of all

Many of the articles reflected on the ways in which approaches which meet the needs of diverse children and young people are an important means of increasing equity. This is a challenge for teachers in today's increasingly heterogeneous classrooms. The articles suggest that there is no single approach to doing this well, however there are some approaches which may be useful starting points. A number of the articles – in particular those from Slovenia and Finland – reflect on the ways in which formative assessment approaches can be a particularly successful tool in promoting success for all children and young people. The Slovenian article illustrates how teachers involved in a formative assessment project are reflecting on attainment and equity in their practice, and how formative assessment could have an impact on these. In Finland, formative assessment approaches are broadly conceived as supporting and guiding

children and young people, and taking their individual needs (e.g. language background) as an important starting point. The successful introduction of the KIP methodology in Hungary also reflects a focus on quality teaching approaches which motivate and meet the needs of all children and young people in diverse classrooms.

Balancing ambitious goals with realism
Related to the point above, the articles highlight that addressing complex issues such as inequity takes time. As the article from Luxembourg suggests – educational decision-makers need to strike a balance between the short time frame which defines the political agenda and the longer time period required to create, effectively use and integrate new approaches into schools. The Hungarian article also illustrates well that the successful implementation of change takes time, with new activity building on the successful completion of previous steps – within the context of a coherent approach to raise attainment and increase equity.

Implementation and evaluation issues
The articles also make the point that successful implementation of new approaches is key. For instance, the Irish article highlights that the DEIS Programme was particularly concerned with effective implementation due to concerns that previous initiatives had not been well-implemented. The Scottish article illustrates that an approach which takes account of local innovation, and is responsive to context, within the framework of a national programme, has been central to the development of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The article from Kosovo also focuses on the need to adjust successful examples of mediation from elsewhere in Europe to the specific context of Kosovo. The Norwegian focus on a thorough trialling phase for the new strategy for language, reading and writing also displays a keen concern for implementation issues.

A number of articles also highlight issues connected with evaluating the impact of initiatives to raise attainment and tackle inequity. This is related to the points discussed earlier, regarding complexity and the need for pragmatism around achievability and timescales. The issue of evaluation has a number of components. The first of these is the need to use existing evidence from evaluation to support learning over time. This includes evidence from previous evaluation studies, if available, to inform the design and planning of new initiatives, as in Scotland, Ireland and Norway. A second evaluation issue is the importance of having a well-planned evaluation in place for any new programmes or initiatives. This can comprise a clear vision for the programme. As the article from Luxembourg illustrates particularly well, complex programmes can benefit from having a well-founded 'theory of change' setting out how activities will lead to anticipated outcomes. This can then help to focus and direct evaluation activity. Developing a theory of change can draw on professional experience and also on any insights from existing evidence – as mentioned above. Such theories of change can also be used to visually illustrate links to other programmes or initiatives which will interact with the new programme in real world territory. This approach has been useful in planning the evaluation of the Scottish Attainment Challenge within Education Scotland.

Conclusion

Conceptual understanding and reflection about equity issues is important. At the same time, practical, real-world examples of how equity is understood, developed and enacted in different contexts offer a rich opportunity to reflect on the complexities of raising attainment and increasing equity in European education systems. This Yearbook provides a valuable opportunity for such reflection among policy makers, researchers and practitioners across Europe and beyond.

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