



THEMENJAHR

*Gemeinsam leben.
Miteinander lernen.*

„Living together. Learning together.“

**Best Practice- Examples
of the Thuringian Project Education 2013 under the patronage of the
German UNESCO- Commission.**

The year with the theme of “Living together. Learning together.” was opened by the Minister of Education Christoph Matschie with an inauguration ceremony in the town hall of Erfurt on March 19, 2013. The year was under the patronage of the German UNESCO Committee (registered association). It is an integral part of the UNESCO resolution of June 24, 2011 on “Strengthening Inclusive Education in Germany”. The main objective of the year was to raise the awareness of the topic of inclusion for as many Thuringians as possible and to focus on working together successfully.

As many individuals, institutions, clubs, associations and interest groups as possible were invited to discuss ways of a sustainable implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. One of the goals of the year was to focus on the intentions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to develop a common understanding of inclusive education.

At the same time it offered opportunities to present examples of active integration and inclusion. The award ‘**Stories of Diversity**’ was launched.

A variety of experiences in Thuringia show that a general attitude towards diversity as a benefit for everybody really leads to enriching insights for all.

A number of best practice examples of successful cooperation have been collected and are displayed below.

1. Tour of schools by the Thuringian Representative for Persons with Disabilities

In October 2013, the Thuringian representative of the government started a tour of schools in Thuringia aiming to get an impression of how shared learning is being put into practice at various schools of all types. It was impressive to see the commitment that teachers, educators, special needs educators and school integration assistants demonstrate to make shared learning a success. On this occasion, representatives of parents and pupils also took the opportunity to share experiences on basic questions as well as questions specific to their

schools.

The results can be summarized as follows:

- Inclusion in the education system requires the needs-oriented assignment of qualified teaching and support personnel. The creation of inclusive learning environments requires modern concepts of space; accessibility must be focused on to a higher degree. Freedom from barriers is not necessary in each school as in individual cases modern facilities can compensate for insufficient structural requirements.
- There will always be children who need special support. The qualified personnel at support centers make a vital contribution to this process. To develop inclusive educational systems, it is important to make efforts in society as a whole and to continue along these lines sustainably. Considerations regarding the support of the authorities responsible for financing schools are necessary.

2. Consultation of the Erfurt Chamber of Commerce and Industry on inclusion

On July 1, 2013, the project “Consultation of the Erfurt Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Inclusion” started. In addition to numerous other tasks, the advice of firms and people with disabilities are the most important aspects of the project. The objective is to improve the integration in working life for people with disabilities and to acquire qualified personnel for the participating firms.

Under the slogan “Inclusion up close and personal” the first networking service of the Erfurt Chamber of Commerce and Industry was held on February 10, 2014; where young people with mental disabilities and firms had the chance to get to know each other. A personal placement in a firm is of great importance in the choice of career. The networking service which was organized together with the state-wide working group “Living together – Learning together” offered young people in addition to information a platform for presenting their strengths and potential.

Further plans for the project were announced by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Among these are:

- the support of companies for the promotion of integrated training with vocational training centers,
- the support of needs-oriented career guidance including the development of a concept in cooperation with the job centers,
- consultations and competence assessments at support centers and integrative schools for young people and their parents,
- implementation of public campaigns and publicity for the training of people with disabilities,
- talks for economic advisory boards of the different regions on the topic of inclusion in companies.

3. State Vocational School “Ernst Benary Schule”, Erfurt – Active inclusion

In the school year 2013/2014 pupils with and without handicaps learned together in one class at the Ernst-Benary-School Erfurt in the vocational preparatory year. They organized

their cooperation on the basis of mutual understanding and tolerance and described their experiences.

“My attitude towards the teaching concept of “Inclusion” was skeptical. Young people with trisomy 21 were to be taught in a class of the vocational preparatory year? How can this work? The preconditions were inadequate in almost every respect – no special training or continuous professional development (even the characteristics of this medical condition were unclear to several colleagues), no teaching materials, lack of experience and the uncertainty which trainees would be in the group and whether this would work on a social level. Basically an awful lot was missing – but we had something really important – the will to try and the courage to follow an unknown path.

Now I can observe that with the support of a qualified special needs teacher the project is working out better than could ever have been anticipated. There is a high degree of acceptance and tolerance, pupils are showing emotional intelligence that neither we nor they themselves had expected to experience.”

Another teacher reports:

“Now after half a year of experience the question I ask myself is who in the class is actually benefiting from whom? My skepticism has gone, because Natascha and Michael are showing considerable progress in their motor functions and skillfulness and with some classmates positive changes can be observed in their social competences.”

4. Joint teaching at the State Regular School Münchenbernsdorf

In the daily life the regular school Münchenbernsdorf shows that inclusive action is not only possible and necessary in lessons. In alternating phases of inner and outer differentiation pupils for example with special needs learn together in the joint classes of 7 and 8. They learn together as one group whenever it is possible and when thematic and social contexts allow for it. They work in groups, do projects and experiments. A special needs educator is in constant contact with the teachers of the school. The educational content and how it is to be taught is discussed and agreed upon together.

On the way to becoming an inclusive school Münchenbernsdorf has gained the experience that mastering everyday life together means an enrichment for all partners. Pupils with special needs participate in shaping the life at school, enjoy breaks, celebrate together, discuss and debate like all the other pupils as well.

5. The Houses of Learning at the Otto-Lilienthal-Schule in Erfurt

At the Otto-Lilienthal-Schule in Erfurt pupils with the most different needs learn in mixed age groups in so-called houses of learning. Each house of learning has two classrooms and one multi-purpose room that is located between them. 40 pupils from grades 1 – 4, two teachers and one educator belong to each house of learning. The pupils remain a member of their house of learning during their entire time at primary school. There are stable rituals that support students during their times for learning in a prepared learning environment. Students learn according to their own speed and towards their own objectives. The learning objectives are clearly displayed in the classroom. The pupils use their learning log to document what they have learned on each day. Portfolios give a very individual and differentiated picture of the skills and proficiency of each individual pupil.

Special needs education takes place during classes in small groups. In the afternoon pupils can choose an activity depending on their interests.

Once a month all pupils from all houses of learning present their results in the assembly hall. There is a weekly parents' café.

6. The inquisitiveness of a social studies course at the Friedrich Schiller grammar school Mellingen

Dealing theoretically with the topic "People with disabilities" does not suffice for the pupils of a year 11 social studies course at the school. The members of the course want to know instead exactly "how children with special needs learn, how they master their daily routine and how they cope with their disability." First of all they organize an integrative sports day. They invite the neighbouring Maria-Martha-Schule to this competition where pupils with handicaps learn. The initial uneasiness quickly subsides after it becomes obvious very fast that – while doing gymnastics, dance, football and basketball – everybody enjoys physical activity in the same way. Pupils talked with each other during a meal together. Summing up the meeting, the pupils of the Friedrich Schiller Gymnasium Mellingen observed that people with a disability are in the same way as similar and different as they are. Only through meeting each other do people succeed in reducing fears and prejudices. Inclusion is an important topic for the whole of society.

7. Learning stations in joint lessons at the primary school Floh-Seligenthal

In addition to well-tried individualized instruction, learning stations were introduced in September 2009 for one day a week in grades 3 and 4. It is planned, prepared and attended to by three colleagues. Two classrooms and the computer cabinet can be used for it. The special needs teacher regularly participates in the team conferences. In addition to planning the teaching content she can at the same time modify differentiated instructions for the learning stations for children with special needs according to their level of proficiency. She is always familiar with the learning content. The focus is on opportunities to learn which are task-based and clear. It soon became obvious that learning stations offer a lot of scope for individualized support encouraging pupils to critically assess their way of learning and their progress. Learning stations are more than positively accepted by the pupils.

8. Class 8a at the State Regular School Ichtershausen

Inclusion is not always easy – this is what teachers and pupils alike at the State Regular School Ichtershausen now know. A boy with a handicap comes into a "normal" class, is supported by special needs teachers and in this way can be fostered and challenged. So far, so good. At the beginning difficulties occurred in the form of teasing and a lack of acceptance by classmates. Teachers had to adapt to the new situation in their lessons. Step by step, the difficulties could increasingly be resolved through numerous discussions and intensive planning. The story of Class 8a shows that it is important when working together to focus on solutions and to involve all stakeholders. Shared experiences are a basis for reducing prejudices.

9. Primary School "An der Trießnitz", Jena, Jacob Muth Award Winner

When about 15 years ago the mayor of the town of Jena approached the primary schools of the town for the first time to include pupils with special needs, the head teacher of the primary school "An der Trießnitz" in spite of his skepticism and reservation agreed with his staff to accept this challenge. At that point in time, the priority of joint lessons in Thuringia had not been regulated by law. This was the beginning of an intensive process of development at this primary school. From his current perspective the head teacher says about this process that at the school a fundamental change towards a pedagogical self-understanding has taken place. In January 2013 the primary school "An der Trießnitz" was the only Thuringian school to receive the Jacob Muth prize for inclusive schools. This was in recognition of the fact that they put inclusion into practice in an excellent way. In a way that through inclusion all children are allowed to share in quality education and to develop their individual potential.

The Federal Government Commissioner for Matters relating to Disabled Persons the German UNESCO Commission and the Bertelsmann Foundation are the project sponsors.

10. Integrative gathering point for pupils in Dingelstädt

In the framework of the Thuringian model of education "New learning culture in the communities" (<http://www.nelecom.de/>) since 2008 Dingelstädt, as a pilot community, has initiated lots of nelekom-activities to empower children and adolescents. In a current model project the pupils of the "Staatliches Gymnasium Dingelstädt" and the catholic special needs school St. Franziskus have with the support of "Villa Lampe" Heiligenstadt turned the old gymnasium of the state grammar school into a meeting point. On July 10, 2012 the integrative gathering point was inaugurated. Here children and adolescents with and without special needs meet and find lots of opportunities for activities together. The young people themselves are responsible for the organization of the integrative gathering point; they are the main actors. Special activities and events enliven the gathering and make common social experiences a reality. This happens through e.g. "Schülertreff-Café", art projects as well as rehearsals and public appearances of the school band. Through the agreed cooperation between the state grammar school and the catholic special needs center the project is sustainably anchored in the municipal educational landscape.