

CHAPTER 9

InCrea+ CURRICULUM: FOUNDATIONS AND CHOICES

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Project finds its inner reason in the severe worsening of educational disparities and the increase in dropout rates caused by the COVID-19 pandemic's outbreak and calls for the adoption of a more holistic approach to inclusive education. Arts teaching can effectively support a more inclusive school culture, while also promoting students' wellbeing and the development of the main 21st Century Skills.

The general goal is to provide an innovative method of inclusive education and promotion of wellbeing through the implementation of arts educational content and practices. More specifically the goals are:

- Developing learning resources, materials, educational artmaking activities and training modules to foster creativity, culture, multicultural dialogue, psychological resources and main 21st century skills in secondary education students (11 to 16 years old).
- Promoting social inclusion of secondary education students with Special Educational Needs, students from minorities or low-income families.
- Enhancing teachers' skills and competences in inclusive education.
- Providing a set of new skills and competences for the CCS.
- Fostering possible collaboration between art specialists, education experts and teachers.

Several choices directly follow from these premises.

2 THE CHOICES OF THE INCREA+ CURRICULUM

2.1 Defining inclusion

Studies in the literature provide several definitions of inclusion. Among them, it is worth mentioning the one at the basis of the Index for Inclusion (Booth and Ainscow 2002).

Inclusion can be addressed both to reduce barriers as well as to promote participation. It is, in fact, about a community that cares for its members, makes them feel welcome and is willing to adjust to fit their various needs (Marino-Francis and Worrall-Davies, 2010). And participation can be seen as an outcome (endpoint) of health and education services (Imms et al., 2016; Kennette, & Wilson, 2019).

Some of the actions identified and aimed to these twofold goals can be:

- Reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorized as 'having special educational needs'
- Learning from attempts to overcome barriers to the access and participation of students to make changes for the benefit of students more widely
- Valuing all students and staff equally
- Viewing the difference between students as resources to support learning, rather than problems to overcome
- Acknowledging the right of students to an education in their location
- Increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools
- Improving schools for staff as well as for students
- Emphasizing the role of schools in building community and developing values, as well as increasing achievement.

- Fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and communities
- Recognizing that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society.
- Restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students.

a. 2.2 The 21st century skills and the priorities

Ten core life skills laid down by the World Health Organization (WHO) are considered crucial for the 21st century:

Self-awareness: Includes recognition of self, our character, our strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. Creating self-awareness can help adolescents recognize when they are under stress or feel pressured. Self-awareness is often a prerequisite to effective communication and interpersonal relations, as well as for developing empathy with others.

Empathy: Empathy is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person. Without empathy, the communication that adolescents have with others will not amount to a two-way process. Empathy can help adolescents accept others who may be very different from them. This can improve their social interaction in classroom settings but also later in life, in situations of ethnic or cultural diversity.

Critical thinking: An ability to analyse information and experiences in an objective manner. Critical thinking can contribute by helping the adolescent to recognize and assess the factors that influence attitudes and behaviour, such as values, peer pressure and the media.

Creative thinking: A novel way of seeing or doing things that is characteristic of four components – fluency (generating new ideas), flexibility (shifting perspective easily), originality (conceiving of something new), and elaboration (building on other ideas).

Decision making: A skill that can help an adolescent deal constructively with decisions about their lives. Young adults can learn to assess the different options available to them and consider what effects these different decisions are likely to have.

Problem solving: Helps in empowering the adolescent to look at a problem objectively vis-à-vis the different options for solutions and would help them come to a solution after weighing the pros and cons of the different options available.

Interpersonal relationship skills: Help adolescents relate in positive ways with people they interact with in their everyday lives. This may entail being able to make and keep friendly relationships, of great importance to our mental and social well-being; maintaining good relations with family members and being able to end relationships constructively.

Effective communication: Means helping the adolescents express themselves, both verbally and non-verbally, in ways that are appropriate to cultures and situations. This means being able to express opinions, desires, needs and fears and includes the ability of being able to ask for advice and help in a time of need.

Coping with stress: As a life skill, this means recognizing the sources of stress in their lives, recognizing how this affects them, and acting in ways that help them control their levels of stress; learning positive coping styles and replacing passive with active coping mechanisms - this may include changing their environment or lifestyle, and learning how to relax.

Coping with emotions: Includes recognizing emotions within themselves and others, being aware of how emotions influence behaviour, and being able to respond to emotions appropriately. An important aspect of this skill is learning to manage intense emotions like anger or sadness that can have negative effects on our health if we do not respond appropriately.

Based on recent international proposals focusing on children and adolescents and the results of an InCrea+ international survey report, we will refer to these skills as grouped into 3 main categories (Trilling & Fadel, 2009):

1. *Learning skills* (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, Problem solving)
2. *Literacy Skills* (Information Literacy, Media Literacy, Technology Literacy)
3. *Life Skills* (Empathy, Flexibility and Adaptability, Leadership, Initiative and Self-Direction, Social and Cross-Cultural Interaction).

In developing the activities for the curriculum, we expect to cover these three sets of skills.

b. 2.3 The arts' domains

The various classifications of art include fine art, visual art, plastic art, performance art, applied art, and decorative art (Bernard, 2020). The curriculum will focus on the first four, namely:

- *Fine arts.* include Drawing, Painting, Printmaking, Sculpture, Calligraphy.

- *Visual arts*, include all the fine arts, in addition to new media, Photography, Environmental art, Contemporary.
- *Plastic Art*, includes artworks that are molded and not necessarily plastic objects; consists of three-dimensional works like clay, plaster, stone, metals, wood and paper (origami).
- *Performance Art*, this classification consists of an art form that refers to public performance events that occur mainly in the theatre (traditional performance art – theatre, opera, music, and ballet; Contemporary performance art – mime).

The curriculum will involve activities addressing both famous artistic expressions and artmaking activity, thus supporting a reflective approach to coded experiences and the meaning making associated with a direct involvement.

c. 2.4 The Universal Design for Learning principles

In accordance with CAST's (2018) definition of the approach, three general principles guide the implementation of UDL. Multiple Means of Engagement: it is necessary to provide multiple options for engagement; some students might be attracted to novelty, while others might prefer a predictable routine and structure.

In a UDL classroom, teachers break large assignments into components so that students can receive formative feedback to minimize or correct errors; provide frequent opportunities for assessment and feedback during a semester; offer choices of content and tools to provide diverse learners with the opportunity to engage in learning that is most meaningful and motivating to them.

Multiple Means of Representation Students may diverge in the ways they perceive and comprehend the information that is presented; some learners may have with sensory disabilities or preferences (e.g., blindness or deafness), others may present learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia), language or cultural differences. It is essential to provide options for the representation of content.

In a UDL classroom, materials are accessible for all types of learners. Students have many options for reading, including print, digital. Videos have captions, and there are transcripts for audio.

Multiple Means of Action Expression Most likely, different students in the classroom will differ in the ways they can navigate a learning environment and experience and express what they know. Providing diverse options for action and expression is essential and will activate neurological strategic networks with positive impact on learning.

In a traditional classroom, there may be only one way for a student to complete an assignment. With UDL, there are multiple options. Some students may be able to create a podcast or a video to show what they know. They may even be allowed to draw a comic strip.

The UDL principles are supposed to be used in this flexible and dynamic way, supporting each learner with the appropriate strategies for him/her to find his/her way and co-create his/her learning (Kennette, & Wilson, 2019).

In line with suggestions from the literature, during a workshop on cooperative learning, InCrea+ project partners underlined the following views as central for the project:

- Inclusion as a process where equal access and opportunities are given to everybody within a certain group without obstacles or prejudices, considering individual needs, abilities, skills and particularities
- Inclusive Education as a process where education is accessible to all and provides equal opportunities, celebrating and utilising differences to achieve optimal learning outcomes for all.
- arts in inclusive education provide a universal language of expression of personal, social skills and feelings, allowing for the participation of and engagement with everyone without fear of mistakes and judgement
- Arts to improve abilities, achieve empowerment, and utilise your uniqueness.

Following literature and the above-mentioned elements, INCREA+ training and curriculum will adopt the ones that are expected to significantly support actions contrasting the most impacting challenges to inclusion considered in the survey, namely: cultural, socio-economic, social, intraindividual (physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural), giftedness and talent.

3 THE CURRICULUM

3.1 The structure

The curriculum develops along three steps, each including 13 activities (Table 1).

The six challenges to inclusion will be addressed in each of the steps, addressing at the same time more significant 21st century skills included in the specific set, through the four main diverse types of artistic expressions (with examples of both art reading and artmaking)

Table 1. Basic structure of InCREA+ Curriculum

The Six challenges to Inclusion	21 st century skills Set A Through 4 artistic expressions	21 st century skills Set B Through 4 artistic expressions	21 st century skills Set C Through 4 artistic expressions
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➤			
➤			
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UDL is the guiding principle for each activity developed within the curriculum.

3.2 Good practices in the development of the curriculum

In developing the curriculum, we will consider the existing Good Practices across Europe. We will also choose the ones that matched the foundations and the goals of the INCREA+ project or manipulate them to have them fit the criteria set described in section 2 of this chapter.

In developing the activities at least, the following aspects will be addressed as shown in the template that follows (Table 2).

Table 2. Template for the description of basic information in curriculum activities

TITLE	
GOAL	(The Challenge to inclusion that is addressed with the activity)
ART DOMAIN	
DURATION	(In minutes)
STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS	
MATERIALS & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	
LEARNING ASSESSMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the goal been achieved or not? To what extent? • How are inclusion and participation supported? • How 21st skills are promoted?
SOURCE	(If any)

Specific expertise needs or stories of participants may well lead to introducing additional aspects in activities development.

3.3 Learning Indices

As stated in the project, the curriculum will promote a series of diverse and highly impacting benefits.

Short-term benefits:

- ❖ Development of 21st Century Skills in students
- ❖ Increased inclusion of disadvantaged students into participants' schools
- ❖ Establishment of teachers and CCS professionals trained in artistic inclusive practices
- ❖ Fostering creativity, culture, multiculturalism and wellbeing through teaching tools, materials and educational resources.

Long-term Benefits:

- ❖ Diffusion of arts education practices at European level.
- ❖ Improvement of learning environment conditions and scholastic achievement for all students.
- ❖ Decrease of dropouts from disadvantaged groups.
- ❖ Stronger collaboration between CCS and schools.

To describe the changes instilled, both qualitative and quantitative tools will be considered and proposed to students before and after participating in the curriculum (Table 3). Reflective questions during the activities will guide the learning.

Table 3. Components of learning assessment

DIMENSION	TOOL	start	end	<i>student version</i>	<i>trainer version</i>
Inclusion Participation	<i>Self-reported experience of inclusion and participation</i> <i>Direct measures of increase in participation</i>	x	x	x	x
21st skills	<i>Subjective experience and increase</i>	x	x	x	x
Arts	<i>Increased Interests & knowledge</i>	x	x	x	x

As proposed, both participants and professionals conducting the activity will be involved in analysing the changes and promotion of inclusion, skills' development and active participation.

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