

INclusive CREativity through Educational Artmaking

Erasmus+ Programme Strategic Partnerships for School Education Action

Summary of the transnational report

The project “INclusive CREativity through Educational Artmaking” (INCREA+) aims to provide an innovative method for Inclusive Education and promotion of wellbeing supporting the development of 21st century skills through the implementation of artistic educational content and practices.

The report presents the results of two surveys that describe the point of view of teachers and professionals working in the Cultural Sector. The surveys were aimed at gathering information to better understand educators’ knowledge, opinions, expectations, wishes and the challenges they meet as concern inclusive education. Data were collected from April to June 2021 via Google Moduli.

Perspectives of teachers and Creative and Cultural Sector professionals: main points

The analysis of the responses produced by participants in the two groups highlights their potential contribution to the INCREA Project. The survey involved teachers work in schools of different order and grade thus offering a wide overview of situations; professionals in the CCS, on the other hand, are experts in different art forms.

It is first worth mentioning that the two groups are characterized by different familiarity with Inclusive education issues or expertise in means effective in art expression, both assign high relevance to inclusive education and recognize the value of referring to arts as meaningful supports to inclusive education.

Challenges to Inclusive education. All the diverse themes proposed to their attention are considered relevant for both groups, with socioeconomic and socioemotional challenges more frequently mentioned by teachers. About the same relevance is given to other potential challenges and to cultural and intrapersonal (physical, cognitive and relational) aspects. Interestingly, the attention to both giftedness and talent overcomes cultural and level of functioning and underline the attention that professionals are now giving to these aspects in their students.

Arts and their support to Inclusive practices: options and expected impact. Although with slightly different proportions, the arts participants more frequently associate with inclusive practices are music, painting, drawing, theatre, arts and crafts, and dancing with the first two more frequently mentioned by teachers and dancing more frequently mentioned by CCS.

It seems then, that participants refer to artistic expressions that could be grouped in three main forms: (a) *sensory artistic expression*, where both visual and auditory means of representation are involved (music, drawing, painting, for instance), (b) *performance artistic expressions* (dancing, theatre, for instance) but also (c) *Arts and Crafts expressions* where participants are expected to create things of beauty, possibly with a functional value.

Expected benefits from Inclusive practices. What more neatly differs between the two groups is the type of advantages they envisage for all students. The benefits teachers more frequently foresee for their students deal with social and relational aspects, networking skills, and on thinking skills; professionals from CCS, on the other hand, point more on knowledge development related to the Arts *per se*, the support to intra-individual resources and positive characteristics, and to a minor extent to active participation in the proposed activities. When explicitly orienting the attention to students with special education needs or vulnerabilities, the patterns emerging from the answers differ. The benefits teachers more frequently foresee, refer to both cognitive and relational skills while CCS underline the impact on practical activities of everyday life, on expression of emotion, on understanding and learning.

Competences and roles of professionals. Moving on the side of the adults proposing the activities, the competences they perceive as relevant in eventually conducting activities aimed at Inclusive education and Artmaking, two patterns arise that call for the relevance of diverse sets of competences.

Both groups mentioned first creativity and linguistic skills, emotional management, and social competences as relevant. Teachers underline the relevance of teamwork, organizational and learning skills, while professionals from CCS underline the role of listening skills together with competencies in the specific domain, that is in arts and experience in the dimensions of artistic expression. The role of arts specialists clearly appears in counselling and tutoring actions as proposed by CCS themselves. These results call for an integration of the two perspectives.

Educational Artmaking and 21st century challenges. The term 21st century skills refer to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that educators, school reformers, college professors, employers, and others consider critically important to success in today's world. These skills enable an individual face the challenges of the 21st century world that is globally active, digitally transforming, collaboratively moving forward, creatively progressing, seeking competent human-resource and quick in adopting changes.

The skills in the diverse lists available, can be substantially grouped under the following headings: *Learning skills* (i.e., Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, Problem solving); *Literacy Skills* (i.e., Information Literacy, Media Literacy, Technology Literacy) and *Life Skills* (i.e., Empathy, Flexibility and Adaptability, Leadership, Initiative and Self-Direction, Social and Cross-Cultural Interaction).

Although to a different degree, both groups list in their priorities some Learning skills (see Creative thinking, Critical thinking, Communication) and some Life Skills (management of emotions). While the choices made by teachers are widespread across the skills, professionals from CCS give high priorities to skills related to Literacy (Digital Literacy) and to other Learning Skills closer to their deeper personal and professional experience with artistic expression, namely self-directed learning, and time management.

Diverse patterns, then emerge, suggesting for an integrative approach that includes all the groups of 21st skills in developing a program that aims to foster them with artistic means.

Integrating teachers and Creative and Cultural Sector perspectives: suggestions for the INCREA Project

Responses from teachers and CCS participating in the survey underline the need to integrate knowledge and perspectives, both in actions aimed at the experts and in the choices guiding the development of an innovative curriculum for secondary school students but also in the analysis of changes instilled and positive and inclusive development promoted in all students from secondary school.

As regards *educational activities aimed at professionals* interested in promoting Educational Artmaking and INCREA+ goals, the analysis of the results from the survey suggests as mandatory:

- a. Developing a clear and deep understanding of theoretical and methodological choices related to inclusive education and Universal Design for Learning
- b. Developing knowledge on current and expected future challenges, on 21st century skills, and on relevance of addressing skills from the diverse domains, namely Learning, Literacy, and Life and Professional Skills.
- c. Developing knowledge on the meaning of the experience coming from diverse artistic expressions, addressed both as art reading and art making.

As regards the *topics to address* in the curriculum for students, the patterns evidenced suggest the following basic guidelines:

- d. Develop activities addressing the main challenges to inclusion and inclusive education
- e. Develop activities tapping the 21st century skills from each of the three main areas (Learning, Literacy, Life and Professional Skills)
- f. Use artistic means tapping both sensory, performance and Arts& Crafts expressions
- g. Develop activities addressing both famous artistic expressions and artmaking activity, to support a reflective approach to coded experiences and the meaning making associated with a direct involvement.

For an effective integration of perspectives, some *methodological choices* follow and are relevant for the INCREA+ project.

- h. Use multiple artistic means of representation, processing, and expression in each activity in the curriculum
- i. Actively involve participants in developing narratives related to inclusion and to the skills important for an inclusive personal growth
- j. Assess learning along the diverse themes and perspectives
- k. Include reflective questions and other tools tailored to support the meaning-making of the artistic experience or product
- l. Focus the reflective questions on the inclusion issues and the 12st skills both in terms of awareness of their relevance but also as active engagement in implementing proactive behaviours after participating in the curriculum implementation.

Addressing the challenges to inclusion by working on 21st century skills and through education art-based activities of diverse types, that is the innovative pillars of the curriculum, INCREA+ will promote wellbeing experienced as well as inclusion and a positive development of future adults.