

University program for People with Intellectual Disabilities at the University of Iceland



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January 2010



Overview

- Program background
 - Grundtvig project
- The University program;
 - Organization and goals
 - curriculum
 - What do the students say about the education?
 - Where are we now?



Program background – Grundtvig project - Empowerment and disability: Informal learning through self advocacy and life history

- Involved; British Open University, the University of Gent (B), the University of Iceland and Trinity College Dublin (IE).
- The project was based on cooperation between people with intellectual disabilities and university researchers who have worked with them in inclusive lifehistory research.
- The aim was to develop learning content and curriculum for experiential learners like the self-advocates themselves. It also searched for ways of recognising the mainly informal educational and related achievements of people with intellectual disabilities .
- This meant developing self-advocates and finding a place for people with intellectual disability in further and higher education in Europe, including opportunities to teach and take up learning experiences that can be accredited.



Organization and focus

- A semi professional program within the division of social education
- Inclusive education – the diplomastudents are not in a special education – they are studying with other students, in the same courses at the univesity
- Organized as a research based developmental project
- Two years, 30 ECTS each year.
- Started 1. of October 2007
- 23 students
- Follows the same vision, structure and emhpasis as other programs within the division
- The first group gratueded in last June



Aims

- Enable our students to graduate with the knowledge, skills and values that will let them take their place confidently in various jobs within the field of social and leisure educators
- Seek to ensure a diploma of value which will strengthened the students possibility for employment within the field of social pedogogy
- Ensure best practices in supporting people with disability towards full membership in society
- Give each student the possibility to have an individual studium based on his or her strengths, interests and chosen workfield



Aims

Give the students a possibility to choose a work - related focus:

- Preschool
- Different school settings
- Libraries
- Within leisure and sport
- Self advocacy - informing disabled people about their rights and responsibilities
- Training workshops for staff about how best to support disabled people



Inclusive education – The mentor system

- The mentor system was developed for supporting the diplomastudents in the courses and in the praxis. The goal was that each student can have individual support from a fellow student.
- The mentor system: Students within the division of social pedogogy and other divisions like the teachers and preschool teachers division can choose a university elective course – a mentor course - which is tied to the diploma program.
- The students taking the mentor course meet once a week and participate in seminars and get consultation from their teachers.
- Our mentors take same elective courses as the diploma students and some of them take part of their praxis in this study.
- The role of a mentor is to support the student with meeting his/hers set goals.



The curriculum

1. semester Fall 2007 Academic methods (10e) Praxis I (5e)	2. semester Spring 2008 Disability studies (10e) Praxis II (5e)
3. semester Fall 2008 Electives (5e) Praxis III (10e)	4. semester Spring 2009 Electives (5e) Praxis IV (10e)

Disability studies

- Diploma students and students in social pedagogy study together
- Share the contents of the course
- Evaluation: inclusive research



Inclusive research

Small work groups

Examples of projects

- Friendship in preschools
- Employment and disability
- What do we have in common?



Inclusive research

- The students introduced their projects at the end of the course
- They used different methods – some used drawings and others presented orally





Electives (10 e)

- There are two elective courses in the curriculum, in the courses students can choose different courses:
 - Icelandic: childrens litterature
 - Icelandic: folk lore and the art of story telling
 - Etic and disability
 - Alternative communication
 - Writing skills
 - Homemaking
 - Art
 - Nature – working with wood
 - Drama
 - Using computer at work
 - Health and well being



Research based education

- Evaluation with an outsider's perspective
- Our action research data
- Was based on interviews (group and individual) with the students, mentors, teachers, parents.



Findings - Students

- In the beginning some of the students were nervous about the cooperation with other students at the university.
- In the end of the study all of the diploma students agreed that the cooperation and work with other students at the university was one of the greatest values of the study.

Findings - students

- Data indicates that students are very positive in their views towards the program
- The students feel valued, respected and included by their fellow students at the university
- They feel empowered as a individual and better prepared to enter the workforce
- Data indicates that students feel that they aquaired new knowledge and learnt new skills





First findings - students

- Some of the students pointed out that they would like to take more courses and that the education was too short
- Some of the students would like to continue at the university
- Two of the students talked about negative attitudes from the university teachers



University teachers

- The data indicates that they are very positive about the opportunity to collaborate in the project.
- They feel they have grown as teachers and deepen their understanding of different learning needs and inclusive education.
- Some mentioned that their course had more value for all students.
- Most mentioned that it was beneficial to get background information about the interest of the students and their chosen focus in the diploma program.
- Most thought that our policy of not giving out individual diagnostic information about learning status strengthened the learning possibilities for the students.

Where are we now?

- The first group graduated in June
- They received a diploma with a supplement stating the learning outcomes of their coursework and specification in their field practise







Where are we now?

- A new group started 1. October 2009
- All courses are inclusive.
- We are strengthening our support system and the mentor system.
- The program is still experimental program with support from the life-long learning center – not fully integrated as a program at the university.

Final thoughts



- It has been a privilege to have the opportunity to develop and carry out this educational program with our fantastic students and our staff. We have learnt a lot and grown as professionals.
- We have learnt that our students have not been challenged enough in the past and it poses a question about the opportunities and demands made within the school system.