



Teachers' upskilling aiming at a holistic inclusivity in learning

## Specialization Three: Socio-economic Disadvantage and Inclusive Education

### Strand Two: Toolbox



Strand Two: .....	3
2.1 School level: framework for actively shaping inclusive conditions .....	3
Location analysis and resource acquisition .....	3
Strengthen cooperation with extracurricular partners .....	7
Systematically shaping parental cooperation for second level students .....	8
Developing the school / educational institution climate together .....	10
Aligning the school/education institution profile with equal opportunities.....	12
Living and communicating the educational institutions profile in day-to-day life in the .....	14
educational institution .....	14
<u>Self-Directed Activity</u> .....	15
2.2 Teaching level: recognising and breaking down barriers to learning.....	15
Strengthening relationships and social integration .....	16
<u>Self-Directed Activity:</u> .....	20
Strengthening the ability to engage in dialogue and resolve conflicts .....	20
Enabling learning - making it diverse, accessible and empowering.....	28
Strengthen self-esteem - promote emotional security in learning.....	35
Strengthening responsibility, self-regulation and autonomy.....	37
Keeping an eye on yourself: Self-care and resilience for educators .....	40
<u>Self-Directed Activity:</u> .....	41
References .....	42



## Strand Two:

This unit builds a 'toolbox' of skills, practice, and resources to help ensure inclusive education for student who are currently experiencing or who come from a community with a history of socio-economic disadvantage.

### 2.1 School level: framework for actively shaping inclusive conditions

The previous considerations from the Introduction course and Strand one of this course show that educational equity cannot be achieved in the classroom alone. It requires joint action by the entire education institution's team. It is important for educators to be able to differentiate between their own responsibilities (for example in the design of their lessons or in dealing with individual students) and the conditions that need to be created by the institution as an organization, ensuring that all educators and team members can work effectively in an inclusive way. This includes clear agreements within the team, good cooperation structures, and the targeted use of resources. The following building blocks are intended to support education institutions in actively shaping these framework conditions.

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3

#### Location analysis and resource acquisition

##### **Checklist based on the social factors index**

This checklist is designed to support your team in recording the social composition and general conditions of your campus site in a structured way. It is based on the three dimensions of the Index of Social Factors and invites you to include additional everyday observations and internal institution data.

This checklist supplements the Index of Social Factors (ISF) value with local, contextualised qualitative knowledge (lived experiences, testimonies, personal experiences and stories). The following key questions can be used for a more detailed analysis of the socio-economic conditions at the institution:

##### **ISF dimension 1: Parents' or adult students' educational attainment (cultural capital)**

- What data do we have on parents' or adult students' educational qualifications? (e.g. self-declarations at enrolment, surveys by management)



- How do we as a school / college assess the educational attainment gap amongst all the different cohorts?
- What role do the parents' or adult students' current educational qualifications play in everyday school or college life? (e.g. in parental involvement, homework supervision, communication, student's academic foundation - literacy, numeracy, critical thinking skills etc., student's academic confidence, student's knowledge (and trust) of the education system and educators).

### **ISF dimension 2: Employment status and income of parents or adult student (socio-economic status)**

- What indications of financial level/poverty levels are we aware of? (e.g. feedback on cost sharing, schoolbooks, uniforms, exam fees, events, lunch)
- Are there conspicuous clusters of applications for financial support? (e.g. SUSI, Back to School Allowance, other social funds)
- What every day experiences do educators have with students who
  - are without sufficient learning materials,
  - receive little support at home,
  - clothing / uniform / shoes looks worn, missing, ill-fitting,
  - sleepy in class (work outside of school/college hours, sleep deprivation due to a noisy environment, caring duties etc.),
  - are excluded from participation in school activities?

4

### **ISF dimension 3: Migration background and first language**

- What is the proportion of students with English as an additional language?
- How diverse are the language and cultural backgrounds of our students?
- What support services are available for multilingual students and families? (e.g. English support courses, multilingual materials, interpreting services)

### **Additional observations on the school location**

- How do we come to know the housing and living situation of the students? (e.g. cramped living conditions, residential area, accessibility of the school, International Protection



Centres/ Direct Provision, Homeless Shelters, Domestic Abuse Shelters, Mobiles homes, Caravans, Halting Sites, homelessness)

- What health or social burdens do we observe? (e.g. lack of medical care, psychological stress etc.)
- Are there any noticeable burdens due to long journeys to school / college or poor transport connections?
- What special resources does our location offer? (e.g. social facilities, clubs, youth centres, food and rest facilities, hygiene facilities, phone charging leads and ports, laptops/ computer access)

#### **Final assessment in the team**

- What challenges to equal opportunities do we see particularly clearly at our location?
- Which strengths and resources can we specifically activate?
- What next steps do we want to take as a team?

#### **Capturing and utilizing resources**

Socio-economic disadvantage is not only caused by a lack of resources among students, but also by a lack of overview and unused opportunities in the educational environment. Many educational institutions have more support services than is apparent at first glance. It is therefore important to systematically record these and make them accessible to all those involved.

Here is a suggestion for a simple structured resource survey. It should be clarified in the institution's team,

- which resources and support services are known; are they are used consistently?
- who takes responsibility for making these resources visible to students and parents?
- What are the barriers that may impede access to services and how these can be removed?

#### **Recording internal institutional resources**

- Are there internal support services such as learning support courses, social work, psychological counselling or peer mediation programs?
- What skills and additional qualifications do teachers and staff bring to the table (e.g. multilingualism, counselling training, trauma education)?



- What physical supports are on the premises that can be utilised more (e.g., washing machines, dryers, showers, quiet rooms for rest or relaxation, fridges, microwaves, kettles, phone charging stations etc.)?

### **Financial support offers**

- What financial aid is available to students (e.g. school start-up aid, support funds for excursions or additional school activities, free or subsidised meals, external support programs)?

Important note: The aim is to reach all students without placing an additional burden on teaching staff. In this way, school becomes a low-threshold information point without becoming a counselling centre in overburdened mode. It therefore makes sense to clarify the responsibility for preparing and passing on information within the team. Parent representatives, Community representatives, Past Pupil / Student group, Parent liaison from parents' association or the institution's administration team can play an important supporting role here. They could, for example, act as contact persons for other parents and potential students or provide information material in different languages.

- Who informs parents and students about these options and supports them in the application process?

### **Cooperation partners outside the school**

- Which other institutions does the school or educational institution already cooperate with (e.g. clubs, youth centres, social work, community, adult education groups, migrant organizations)?
- Which other organizations could be helpful partners?
- Are there any local businesses or companies that can avail of tax incentives for donating to the school/ institution (period products, one cup noodles/soups, phone chargers, phone credit, clothing, shoes, books, other resources like school bags, notebooks, stationary etc.)? See the Charitable Donation Scheme for details: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/charities-and-sports-bodies/charitable-donation-scheme/index.aspx>



More Details here:

<https://www.fssu.ie/primary/help/revenue-commissioners/charitable-donations-scheme/#:~:text=Schools%20who%20are%20registered%20with%20the%20Charity%20Regulator,and%20are%20not%20required%20to%20prepare%20audited%20accounts.>

### Material and logistical resources

- Is there access to free or affordable learning materials, digital devices, or internet access?
- Are there mobility offers or support for students with long or difficult journeys to school?

### Communication and information channels

- How and where are these resources made known to staff, students and parents?
- How low-threshold and multilingual is this information?

Important note: When making support services visible, it is important to communicate sensitively and appreciatively to avoid stigmatization or embarrassing situations. Many students or parents are ashamed to make use of financial help or support - or are afraid of being publicly labelled as "poor" as a result. Institutions should therefore:

- Provide information in a low threshold but discreet manner (e.g. via personal conversations, protected notices in the staff room or confidential counselling sessions).
- Do not use group labels (e.g. "support group for children affected by poverty").
- Never expose or visibly highlight those affected.
- Communicate offers as a matter of course for everyone - not as "help for the poor".
- Provide as many universal supports as possible (free period products in bathrooms, kettle with tea, coffee, one cup meals, microwaves, washing machine/ dryer, phone chargers and charging ports, stationary, notebooks etc. in a visible place on offer to all students).

### Strengthen cooperation with extracurricular partners

Schools and educational institutions cannot overcome all challenges alone. Cooperation with the community, clubs, youth centres, local businesses and services, and social institutions expands the support network. Who/which organizations does your institution already cooperate with? Where is there still potential? Regular cooperation meetings or network days can consolidate the exchange.



## Systematically shaping parental cooperation for second level students

The aim is to involve all families in an appreciative manner - regardless of language, education or social status. With the transition to secondary school, parent work often changes noticeably:

- As young people begin to demand their independence and parents can withdraw.
- Many parents feel insecure because they can no longer keep up professionally (time poor) or find the school system less than transparent (untrustworthy) due to systemic barriers.
- Parents with little knowledge of the education system or little knowledge of English lose touch more quickly.
- Parents from families currently experiencing socio-economic disadvantage often do not feel welcome or responsible for school matters – this may be based on their own traumatic experiences of school and the systemic and structural barriers to education they have previously encountered in their lives.

At the same time, parents remain a decisive factor for successful educational attainment levels, especially during puberty. Appreciative, low-threshold and continuous cooperation with parents can make a difference. It helps to avoid misunderstandings, make resources visible and strengthen shared responsibility. This involves interrogating the school (and education) systems for systemic and structural barriers, identifying them, naming them, and actively working to eradicate them.

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8

What schools can do:

### **Agree on binding parental work in the team**

- What principles guide us in our communication with parents? Identifying and negotiating a process that works with parents.
- How do we create low-threshold, non-deficit-oriented access?
- Who in the team takes on which tasks - not everyone has to do everything.

### **Invite parents at an early stage - not just when there are problems**

- Welcome talks or start-up workshops at the beginning of the school year, which also address social issues such as "How do I support my child in everyday school life?". Host formal and non-formal events – coffee mornings as well as information days – learn their first names and use introduce yourself by yours to break down barriers!



- Multilingual letters to parents and simple language as standard – See National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) for guidance: [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)

### Continuous, uncomplicated communication

- Offer short, regular contact formats such as informal parent cafés (coffee mornings) or formal open consultation hours.
- Also use digital formats, e.g. messenger services (provided they comply with data protection regulations), online information evenings, photos, or short videos. Consider using WhatsApp Voice Notes for memos or information.
- Communicate success stories and positive feedback - not just problems.

### Targeting parents as resources

- Parents can contribute their experience, languages or professional perspectives (e.g. on project days, career information days, parent-child activities, making coffees and teas for informal meet ups or school events).
- Involve peer parents or parent mentors who talk to and support other parents.

### Breaking down barriers

- Organize events in terms of time and space, think outside of the box – traditional forms of involving parents don't work – what could?
- Thinking about children/sibling care/translation/interpretative services.
- For many parents schools are daunting institutions and teachers can be intimidating – create as many informal spaces as possible to break down barriers. Titles, clothes, formal badges are all little hierarchical signals that can create barriers as is the teacher / principal at the front taking at format - this doesn't work: change room layouts, create *along-side* spaces (art displays, photographs etc).
- Create fear-free meeting spaces - away from the deficit-oriented "you need to do more" towards "we work together to give your child the best chance". Or take the emphasis off their child completely – decorate the school building, plant on the grounds etc. these are all levelling partnership building acts.



### Activate cooperation with parents' associations

- Parents' associations are often under-activated or unrepresentative. Schools can specifically invite parents from minoritised groups to become active, e.g. as parent guides or contact persons for new parents. However, keep in mind not to overburden parents who may be experiencing higher levels of stress and burden than other parents.
- **Student representatives** could also build bridges to parents, e.g. through joint events.

### Developing the school / educational institution climate together

School should be a social learning and living space that enables belonging, safety and participation for everyone. A supportive educational climate is the invisible foundation for everything that happens in the environment (physical, social, and emotional). It shapes how students feel, how they learn, how they contribute and how they interact with each other and with the institutional team (educators, leadership, pastoral care staff, and administrative staff).

For students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (or from communities who have a historical legacy of socio-economic disadvantage) in particular, who often experience exclusion or devaluation outside of school/institution, it is crucial that the school / institution is as safe place as it can be - a place where they are seen, heard, and respected. The climate is shaped by everyone: students, educators, leadership/management, parents, and all staff. It does not develop on its own - it needs conscious, continual shaping. Below you will find a few thoughts on how the school climate can also be positively influenced:

A positive climate cannot be "prescribed". It must be developed together. The basis for this is honest stocktaking, e.g. through:

- Anonymous surveys of students, educators, and parents (for second level),
- Moderated team reflections,
- Feedback rounds with students (this can take the form of questionnaires, anonymous feedback loops, focus groups, arts-based methods like photograph, drawing, writing, or poetry),
- School climate workshops with all participants (again see the above suggestions for methods).



This allows us to look at questions such as: How do students experience our school climate? What and **Who** do we hear - what do we perhaps not hear? How do we deal with diversity, conflict and co-determination? What signals do we send to students experiencing challenges associated with a low socio-economic status (SES)? Do they really feel like they belong? It is important that the results are made transparent and discussed together and then used to create a roadmap or plan for improvement. It is very important that all stakeholders see that their time, voice, experiences, and suggestions were considered, heard, and **acted upon**. If there is a reason why their suggestions cannot be acted upon this must be communicated to them.

### **Develop institution-wide mission statements and agreements**

Educational institutions can work with students (and parents) to develop rules or a mission statement that is co-created and developed together - filled with life in a transparent manner.

Examples of key questions for the development process include:

- What do "respect", "diversity" or "justice" mean to us?
- What do we want for cooperation?
- What do we do if there are conflicts or boundary violations?

### **Creating opportunities for participation**

Students should have real opportunities to help shape the program, e.g.:

- in the class council,
- in student representatives,
- through project groups that actively shape the climate (e.g. anti-bullying teams, diversity groups, climate protection groups).

Parents can be invited,

- organize theme evenings on the school climate,
- to get involved as a parent sponsor,
- to participate in the design of break rooms or school events.



### Reflecting on and developing everyday practices

Even seemingly small things shape the climate:

- How do we deal with each other linguistically?
- What spaces and times are there for relaxation, encounters, or retreat?
- How do we deal with conflicts - confrontational or solution-oriented?

These questions should be reflected on regularly in the team.

### Aligning the school/education institution profile with equal opportunities

Many educational institutions have a formulated mission statement or profile. However, these often remain general or have little presence in everyday life. A profile becomes effective when it is used as a management tool - in other words, when it contains concrete objectives, measures and responsibilities that guide day-to-day activities. Especially in socially challenged contexts and environments, it is crucial to anchor educational equity and participation not as an additional task, but as a central mission in the profile. This creates orientation for the staff, reliability for students (and parents) and a basis for development and quality work.

12

What can be done at educational institution level:

### Review existing mission statements and programs

- How visible are participation, diversity and equal opportunities in our current mission statement or program?
- Where do we remain vague or unspecific?
- What successes and challenges do we perceive?

### Shaping development in a participatory way

An educational institution's profile that takes equal opportunities seriously does not stop at nice formulations. It becomes the starting point for lively school development that involves all those involved and initiates concrete changes. This process can be used to work together with students, parents, educators, pastoral care staff, and extracurricular partners on key issues such as

- How do we design lessons to remove barriers so that everyone can learn?
- How do we remove barriers to strengthen our school climate and cohesion?



- How do we use the Index of Social Factors (ISF) and other data for targeted control?
- What further training do we need in the team to achieve our goals?
- How do we ensure that everyone is involved in everyday educational institution's life?

School and educational institution development means not asking these questions once but shaping them as an ongoing process with regular reflection, concrete measures and shared responsibility.

### **School/educational institutional development needs strong teams**

Development does not succeed through concepts and steering groups alone, but through educators who remain capable of acting and take responsibility together. It is therefore important to systematically shape professionalisation and self-care as part of the institutional development.

This includes:

- Regular further training or continuous professional development (CPD) courses that support the team in dealing professionally with social challenges in the classroom and institution wide environment; developing attitudes that are sensitive to poverty and critical of discrimination; reaching students (and parents) in precarious life situations in an appreciative manner; strengthening the motivation and learning participation of students who withdraw or give up; further developing practices of relationship work; and classroom management that remain sustainable even under stressful conditions, and much more.
- Pooling resources and distributing responsibility across several shoulders in the team: Working on equal opportunities is diverse and complex - it involves dealing with social challenges, building collaborations, communicating with students and parents, designing lessons and school/institutional development as a whole. Not every educator can and must cover everything. It therefore makes sense to differentiate areas of responsibility within the team and distribute roles, for example: a contact person for matters concerning parental cooperation that affect everyone, a person responsible for cooperation with partners outside of school, a team for internal school training and collegial advice, a working group for school climate and participation, or experts for specific support services (e.g. social funds, funding programs).



This distribution of responsibilities ensures that the team has a broader base, that knowledge and experience are used systematically and that responsibility does not remain with individual members. It is important that the team meets regularly to connect the individual areas and work together on school/ educational institution's development.

- Structured exchange formats such as collegial case discussions or supervision to share experiences and develop solutions together.
- Mindfulness of the strain on educators and the development of an inclusive culture that enables breaks, relaxation and mutual support.

In this way, the team remains capable of learning and acting, even when everyday life is challenging - a basic prerequisite for successful school/educational institution's development.

### Living and communicating the educational institutions profile in day-to-day life in the educational institution

A good ethos is not just created once as a paper document and then filed away, but is regularly lived, reflected on, and further developed. Equal opportunities should be visibly and tangibly anchored in everyday school/college life - for students, parents, staff and external partners. Many educational institutions have mission statements or programs in which values such as equity, diversity or participation are enshrined. However, it often remains unclear how these values become tangible in everyday life, how they guide the actions of the team and how they are visibly communicated to the outside world. To ensure that the educational institution's ethos is effective and is lived and sustainably developed in everyday life, institutions should:

- regularly reflect on development within the team and making successes and progress visible, e.g. by exchanging best practice among colleagues,
- address and discuss it in class, involving students in its further development,
- communicate regularly to parents through the school website and school events and other nonformal methods, ensuring that feedback and comments are made possible and a contact person for matters relating to the institution's profile is made known,



- use as a quality assurance / management tool, i.e. targets and measures are regularly reviewed, those responsible are clearly named and successes and learning areas are systematically documented,
- regularly develop further, i.e. new challenges, experiences, and developments are used to keep the profile alive and continue to write it.

Important note: Schools and other educational institutions should proactively communicate equal opportunities as a goal but always remain mindful of how this message is received by students and parents. Language is needed that encourages, not shames, and conveys appreciation rather than pity. This means focusing on strengths and potential, not deficits, and making successes visible without exposing groups.

### Self-Directed Activity

Write a list of ways in which you create an audit for your place of work to:

1. Identify those students who need support
2. Identify external partners who could offer support to the school
3. Change your environment to maximise your existing spaces and resources in a universal manner.

Write 350 words in your learning journal and note the barriers and enablers that exist.

15

## 2.2 Teaching level: recognising and breaking down barriers to learning

Equitable teaching means supporting all students in such a way that they can make progress in their learning and experience themselves as effective, regardless of their starting conditions. Students currently experiencing (or who have come from communities that have historical legacies of) socio-economic disadvantage may need lessons that are accessible at a lower threshold, motivational and participatory due to the consistent barriers, oppressions, and levels of stress and anxiety they may experience throughout the educational journey - without exposing them or singling them out as a "disadvantaged group". This is a very difficult and delicate line to navigate because research tells us that educators and the education systems tend to underestimate the success levels and abilities of these student cohorts (Glock & Kleen, 2020).



Ensuring that student's needs are met while also checking implicit biases should go hand in hand. This is not just about subject-specific learning, but also about social and emotional development: about belonging, self-confidence, dealing with frustration, communication and relationship skills. Teaching that takes all of this into account strengthens students in the long term - both professionally and personally.

This toolbox presents concrete methods, practices, skills, and design options that educators can use in the classroom to break down barriers, encourage motivation, dismantle barriers, and enable participation. Small steps in the classroom can make a big difference if they are implemented continuously and with reflection. Use the methods and approaches presented as a starting point to further develop your own strategies, methods and experiences - together with your team and adapted to the specific circumstances of your institution.

### Strengthening relationships and social integration

Regardless of subject content, methods or grades, the following applies: learning cannot succeed without sustainable relationships.

For students who are currently experience (or come from communities with historic legacies) of socio-economically in particular, the quality of the relationship with the educator is often the decisive factor in whether they develop and maintain confidence, whether they engage or withdraw, whether they experience a sense of belonging or feel excluded.

Numerous studies show that an appreciative, reliable and caring relationship between educator and student is the most important prerequisite for engagement- especially when learners receive little support outside of school. This is confirmed by Hattie (2009), among others, who emphasizes the strong influence of educator-student relationships on learning success in his international meta-analysis, as well as Knierim, Raufelder and Wettstein (2017), who show on the basis of self-determination theory that autonomy, competence and social integration are crucial for motivation and school satisfaction, especially in the adolescent phase. Bauer (2019) adds that a resonant and appreciative relationship helps to reduce stress and facilitate access to learning content, especially for young people in challenging life situations. The students concerned need educators who convey to them: *"I see you", "I believe in and respect you," "You belong, no matter what your background is."*

At the same time, educators themselves also benefit from successful relationships with their students. Studies show that a positive teacher-student relationship not only improves the learning success of students but also strengthens the well-being and mental health of teachers. Aldrup et al. (2018) were able to prove that teachers who experience positive relationships with their students report less stress, more professional satisfaction and a higher emotional balance. Especially in the case of challenging student behaviour (or communications), a sustainable relationship has a buffering effect against emotional exhaustion. This shows that relationship work is not an additional burden, but on the contrary can reduce stress - and thus creates more confidence and joy in teaching, even in challenging contexts.

Simply being nice is not enough. Relationship work is a professional pedagogical attitude - it can be shaped, learned and trained. Relationship work can be particularly challenging for students in adolescence:

- Young people may withdraw, appear disinterested or provoke so as not to show how insecure they are.
- Students experiencing challenging circumstances or material disadvantage often experience that they "can't do anything anyway" - an attitude that can be reinforced by low expectations from adults.
- Educators are under pressure to achieve learning objectives / State exams and often perceive relationship work as an additional time commitment that they cannot afford.

However, not having time for relationships is more expensive in the long term: students who do not build a bond with the educator are more likely to disengage, drop out of the learning process more quickly, and communicate or express their frustration at the systemic barriers that may contribute to a strained classroom climate. It is therefore worth considering relationship building as an integral part of teaching - not as an add-on, but as a prerequisite for successful learning.

How can we succeed in consciously building these relationships despite systemic and structural external pressures, limited time, and sometimes difficult starting situations? Below you will find concrete starting points that can also be implemented in the demanding day - and which are not only helpful for students currently experiencing (or come from a community who have historically



experienced) socio-economic disadvantage but also strengthen learning and cooperation in the entire class.

### Creating visibility and an individual approach

- Greet your students consciously and personally at the start of the lesson.
- Use their correct and chosen names regularly.
- Show interest in how your students are doing, either by asking them directly (*"How are you today?"*) or by using a "mood barometer" (e.g. thumbs up/medium/down) as a ritualized introduction.
- Address students' interests, strengths or contributions in a targeted manner.
- Show that you are aware of everyone, not just the loud or high-performing ones.
- Practice active listening by asking questions and summarizing briefly:

*"So, you mean...?"*

*"What I'm hearing is..."*

*"Am I correct in understanding that to mean ...?"*

### Use relationship-building teaching methods

- Regularly incorporate team exercises.
- Speed rounds in which students talk about a topic in 1-2 minutes, either on the subject matter (e.g. repetition of what they have learned so far) or on personal questions, e.g. favourite subjects, weekend experiences... Such formats help to lower inhibitions and enable encounters.
- Use cooperative forms of learning that encourage students to support each other.
- Mentoring or buddy programs in the classroom in which utilises the strengths of students in supporting and scaffolding the learning of others – ensure that each student gets the opportunity to lead and scaffold in their area of strength.
- Consciously plan *"I see you"* moments by giving individual small pieces of feedback - this can be verbal or non-verbal (e.g. a brief nod, smile).



- Also enable mutual appreciation by asking for feedback on positive characteristics or contributions of students, for example at the end of group work or regularly by means of a quick sticky note survey.

### Enabling and making visible a sense of achievement

- Design tasks in such a way that everyone can experience success, self-efficacy and motivation, even if they only manage small steps.
- Give appreciative, concrete feedback, if possible, also on progress, not just on results.
- Celebrate joint successes, e.g. through presentations, exhibitions or closing rituals that honour the learning process.

### Enabling participation

- Involve your students in decisions about content, methods or forms of work - for example through voting or open suggestions for topics.
- Use formats such as the class council to address issues that affect cooperation and class culture.
- Encourage your students to contribute their own ideas and perspectives, e.g. through project ideas, feedback rounds or joint target agreements. Show them that their opinion counts.

### Dealing with relationship breakdowns and conflicts professionally

- Respond to disruptions or boundary violations consistently, but without exposing or devaluing them. Make a clear distinction between behaviour and person.
- In the event of conflicts, try to talk to them as equals, even outside lesson times. Signal: *"I'll stay in touch - we'll find a way."*
- Remain reliably approachable, even if students refuse or avoid you. Don't give up too quickly but show them with small signs: *"I'm still here when you're ready."*
- See all behaviour as communication – especially disruptive or emotive behaviour. Ask yourself, *"What is this behaviour communicating to me? What is the student saying to themselves and to me in this moment? What barriers could be causing this communication style?"*



To help you develop your own relationship building in a targeted way, here are some reflection questions to help you consciously question your attitude and actions in the classroom:

- Which students do I really see - and who do I perhaps unconsciously overlook?
- How do I ensure that everyone is included in the classroom?
- When do I consciously take time for relationships, even when the pressure is on?
- Where do I need support in the team in order to remain capable of acting in challenging relationships?

In addition, use collegial case discussions to reflect on difficult relationship constellations, share tried and tested methods and successful relationship experiences within the team and encourage each other to keep at it, even when it is difficult. Take communication challenges to your colleagues of professional community of practice without sharing private or reveal details (identities).

#### Self-Directed Activity:

How can the concept of 'Edu-carer' that was discussed in the introduction course help with the development of relationships with your students. What concerns would you have about becoming an 'edu-carer'? What are the barriers and enablers in your practice?

Write 250 words in your learning journal.

20

### Strengthening the ability to engage in dialogue and resolve conflicts

In addition to an individual approach and appreciation, the ability to hold open dialogues about difficult social issues is also part of relationship-oriented teaching. The topic of social disadvantage is often associated with shame, invisibility, and taboos. Many students experience - or fear - stigmatization when talking about poverty or educational disadvantage. At the same time, insecurities or derogatory comments can arise in class, e.g.: "Why should we even discuss this?", "It's their own fault if they do not achieve anything.", "I find the topic annoying - it doesn't affect me anyway." These moments are valuable learning opportunities if they are well supported pedagogically. Teachers can create spaces for dialogue that enable critical thinking in which different perspectives become visible without exposing those affected.



It is important to moderate and safeguard dialogues pedagogically so that they are not hurtful, overwhelming, or exclusionary. Here are a few suggestions for methods and teacher support for dialog processes:

### **Establish rules for discussion - protect dialogical spaces and provide orientation**

Discussion rules help to create a protected framework for sensitive discussions. They should not be seen as an instrument of control, but as an invitation to help shape a space for dialogue in which everyone can participate safely and respectfully. They signal, *everyone is allowed to speak openly here* - but no one is exposed or devalued especially for students who are themselves affected by social disadvantage or who identify emotionally with the topic.

Clearly agreed rules of discussion convey a sense of security. They create reliability and commitment and make it clear that fair and reliable rules apply to everyone in this room. Even when critical comments are made, they help to de-escalate and steer conversations without prematurely devaluing or suppressing content. Finally, discussion rules also promote responsibility for successful cooperation - not only in dialogue, but in everyday school life as a whole. Possible discussion rules (for selection or joint development):

- We listen to each other talk.
- We discuss the point not the person.
- No personal attacks or devaluations.
- The experiences of others are not judged or trivialized.
- It's okay to ask questions - but not to expose others.
- Nobody has to talk about private matters - sharing is voluntary.
- If something becomes stressful or unpleasant: Requesting a break is allowed.
- Everyone can make a mistake here – it is the intent that matters. If someone makes a mistake with language, we teach the correct language and terminology and move on.
- When we know better we do better.

You can, for example, display the rules visibly in the classroom and have everyone sign it as a class contract.

### Using dialogue formats to give everyone a say

- **Class council:** a regular, structured discussion format in which pupils discuss issues relating to class life, e.g. rules, conflicts or joint projects. It strengthens democratic competence, responsibility and participation - everyone can make suggestions, listen, discuss and co-decide.
- **"Fishbowl discussions":** some pupils (e.g. 4 - 5) sit in an inner circle of chairs ("aquarium") and discuss a topic. The rest of the class observes in the outer circle. Anyone who wants to participate, make comments or raise questions can take a seat in the inner circle (by swapping seats or temporarily sitting on a free chair provided for this purpose). This format enables structured, respectful discussions in which many people can have their say without it becoming chaotic.

### Promoting a change of perspective and empathy

Putting oneself in the shoes of others is one of the most effective ways of making social disadvantage emotionally tangible without the students concerned having to reveal the reality of their lives or expose themselves. For such exercises to be appreciative and not shameful, it is crucial to ensure fictitious scenarios, protected spaces and voluntary participation.

- **Change of perspective with everyday scenarios:** Instead of talking about abstract inequalities, students can put themselves in concrete everyday situations, e.g. with short text prompts or oral scenarios:
  - Imagine being asked every school week why you're not on the school trip. What does that do to you?
  - You have no desk at home, no peace and quiet - and your teacher writes: 'Homework incomplete - this counts as a partial grade'. How does that feel?
  - You haven't eaten since yesterday because the money for the food comes in tomorrow. You are hungry, cold, and tired – how do you think you would feel to do Physical Exercises (P.E.) / sports lessons or take a test?
  - You have your period but there are no period products in your home. You miss classes and exams until your period is over. This is one in every four weeks. How can you explain this to your teacher or management?

- In a group session, everyone talks about the class graduation party. You know your family can't afford it. What's going through your mind?
- **Role plays:** Role plays can help to make social inequalities visible and tangible, to promote empathy, options for action and class solidarity. It is important to use fictitious case studies, e.g.:
  - Sam, 15, lives with his mother and two siblings. They barely have enough money for the weekly shop. At school, the subject of 'career guidance' is being discussed...
  - Leyla, 16, lives with her family in a cramped apartment with no place to retreat to. She has a presentation due at school, for which the students are supposed to design a poster and get the materials themselves. Leyla doesn't bring a poster - the teacher says: 'You should have prepared better. How might that feel for Leyla?'

Identify the roles explicitly as "not personal": "You are playing a character. Nobody is supposed to portray themselves here."

Reflect together after the role play:

- *"What was difficult about the situation?"*
- *"What could the school have done? "*
- *"How could classmates have reacted?"*
- **Raise questions for reflection, e.g.:**
  - *"Where do people experience exclusion in our society - and what does that look like in concrete terms?"*
  - *"What does it mean if someone never talks about themselves - because they are afraid of being shamed?"*
  - *"What can we do as a class to make everyone feel seen and recognized - even without having to say anything?"*

Anonymous feedback is also an option here - e.g. via slips of paper, digital tools or writing prompts in the learning journal. This allows students to express themselves without revealing themselves.

### **Promoting tolerance of ambiguity - living with uncertainty and enduring contradictions**

In class dialogues - especially on topics such as social inequality - different realities of life, opinions and emotional reactions come together. Many young people and adults look for quick answers to complex questions: Who is right? Who is to blame? Who belongs - and who doesn't? This tendency to dichotomize - i.e. to divide into black/white or friend/foe - can be increasingly observed and is often fuelled by polarizing social debates or social media.

This makes it all the more important to promote tolerance of ambiguity in the classroom - in other words, the ability to tolerate contradictions, uncertainties and ambiguities without making hasty judgments or devaluing. This competence is fundamental to a democratic, open society - and can be trained. What this can mean in concrete terms: Not everything has to be evaluated immediately. You can listen to something and leave it for the time being - instead of immediately categorizing it as "right" or "wrong". Several points of view can exist side by side without one devaluing the other. Doubts, questions or irritations are not a sign of weakness, but important learning impulses.

Reflection can be stimulated by asking specific questions, for example:

- *"What would be a different perspective on this?"*
- *"What could be the reasons why someone feels or thinks this way?"*
- *"Is there anything else in between - or just yes/no?"*

### **Thinking, feeling, speaking, acting - consciously learning to differentiate**

Especially in emotional discussions, the levels of thoughts, feelings and actions often become blurred. Students (especially young adolescents) tend to react spontaneously - a thought is expressed directly, a feeling is immediately defended. But for respectful interaction, it is helpful to learn to distinguish between these levels and to pause before speaking or acting. This can mean:

- Questioning thoughts before expressing them: "Is that really the case? Where did I get this idea from?"
- Perceiving feelings without immediately translating them into words or actions: "What is making me angry right now - and what does that have to do with me?"



- Asking yourself what a statement says about you - not just about others: "Why does this upset me?"

This ability for self-reflection and impulse control is central to social maturity - and can help to avoid making hasty judgments or hurting others, especially when it comes to sensitive issues such as exclusion, poverty or inequality.

One possible way to introduce the method is to ask: "**What do I think - what do I feel - what do I say - what do I do?**" The conscious differentiation of these four levels can initially be practiced using example situations and later applied to real conflict situations. This strengthens reflection and self-determined action.

### **Sensitively accompany conflicts - show attitude, enable solutions**

Conflicts in the classroom are unavoidable - especially when social inequality, disadvantage or controversial attitudes are openly addressed. The aim is not to prevent all differences of opinion, but to promote a culture of respectful interaction with diversity. Conflicts can even be productive learning opportunities - if they are well managed pedagogically and not carried out at the expense of individuals. Educators need to adopt a clear yet de-escalating attitude: those who listen respectfully protect - those who devalue cross the line. This is not about moral judgment, but about a shared commitment in the conversation.

Here are a few ideas on how you can manage conflicts wisely:

- **Ask calmly instead of confronting:** The way in which the educator reacts will largely determine the further course of events. In addition, the way you deal with conflicts can serve as a model for students in the future. If students make derogatory comments or repeat prejudices, a first strategy is to ask questions openly and with interest instead of immediately correcting them. The aim is to first understand the statement and make it visible together before classifying it:
  - *"Can you explain that in more detail?"*
  - *"What do you mean exactly?"*
  - *"How do you imagine someone who is affected by this feels?"*

Such questions can initially irritate the students but often make them think at the same time - and allow them to change their perspective without losing face. The dynamics of the conversation are



slowed down and open up space for reflection and self-correction processes. By remaining calm, present and appreciative in such moments, you as a teacher show attitude without lecturing and signal that all voices are heard, but not all attitudes remain unchallenged. In this way, you create space for development - without exclusion.

- **Draw clear boundaries - without exposing yourself:** If statements are discriminatory, hurtful or generalizing, a clear and calm intervention is needed, for example:
  - *"Stop - we pay attention to respectful language here."*
  - *"This statement marginalizes others - we don't want that in our classroom."*
  - *"Reminder: We have agreed that no one will be devalued."*

Such signals not only protect those affected but also establish reliability for everyone. It is important that such signals are not instructive or punitive, so that they are effective without being escalating.

- **Promote constructive conflict resolution:** It is particularly valuable to provide students with options for expressing their own feelings and needs without attacking the other person. This strengthens conflict competence and self-efficacy - especially for those who often feel voiceless.

It is helpful to have the students name their feelings: *"I find it hurtful when..."*, *"It affects me because..."*...

They should also formulate their expectations: *"I would like us to..."*, *"It is important to me that..."*

Finally, joint solutions can be developed, e.g. they can work out (in small groups) suggestions for class rules, discussion rituals or how to deal with differences of opinion. Such formulations and strategies can also be practiced explicitly - for example in role plays or with sentence starters as an aid to reflection.

- **Embed sanctions - the same applies here: attitude instead of threat:** even if the focus is on dialogue, repeated violations of boundaries need consequences. It is important to frame these not as a punishment, but as an acceptance of responsibility.

Didactic notes:

- Communicate transparently which rules apply to language and interaction - and why.

- Refer to clear, known procedures in the classroom or in the school building, this can also include discussions with the guidance counsellor, or intervention through social work, etc.
- Strengthen understanding: Consequences protect the community and enable development - they do not mean exclusion.

Example wording: *"You don't have to adopt an opinion. But it is our common task to protect the dignity of everyone here. If we repeatedly fail to do that, we have to think together about how to deal with it."*

Conclusion: Conflicts do not have to be exclusively a disruptive factor in the classroom - they can also be used as an opportunity for social learning. Educators who intervene with calm, clarity and respect not only provide protection for those affected but also strengthen democratic and inclusive cooperation in the classroom.

### **When conflicts go beyond words: Action strategies for assaultive behaviour**

Not all conflicts in the classroom are verbal. For students currently experiencing (or who come from communities which have historically experienced) socio-economic disadvantage, power relations can also manifest themselves in hurtful actions: A notebook is hidden, material is destroyed, property is mocked, or a school bag is knocked over. Such incidents are not just "pranks" or thoughtless reactions - they are part of a behaviour that systematically devalues, shames or intimidates. Here are some suggestions on what you can and should do as an educator in such situations:

- **Stop - immediate message of protection:** If an incident becomes visible, a clear, calm but unmistakable reaction is necessary: *"Stop. The line ends here - this is no longer fun."*

The message should be: **I see what is happening here - and I take it seriously.** The immediate reaction alone signals that boundary violations will not be tolerated - regardless of whether the person concerned speaks up.

- **Provide targeted support for affected students:** After the incident, an empathetic, calm conversation with the person affected is key. Show them that they are not alone - for example:

*"I saw what happened. It did happen. It was wrong. I can imagine that feels very hurtful."*

*"You were right not to fight back - it wasn't your fault."*

*"If that happens to you again, please come to me - we'll sort it out together."*

Avoid blanket phrases such as "You just need to get along better" - this can anchor the blame on the victim.

- **Weigh up the consequences carefully:** Depending on the severity of the incident, there needs to be a comprehensible consequence for the person who caused it - in the sense of responsibility, not punishment, for example:
  - Reflection discussion with clear confrontation: *"What exactly did you do? What do you think it feels like?"*
  - Depending on the behaviour: Agree to make amends (e.g. get new material, apologize - voluntarily, not forced).
  - Involvement of parents, school management or social work - especially in the case of repeated assaults.
- **Include the social group:** Especially in the case of group dynamics (e.g. when several people remain silent, laugh along or do not intervene), a subsequent class reflection is useful: What makes a good class community? Where does exclusion begin - even on a small scale? How can we protect each other? What is bystander effect?

It is important to **focus on prevention to avoid long-term intervention**. Regular inputs to promote empathy, self-control and moral courage help in such situations:

- Classroom discussions about respectful behaviour - not only after incidents.
- Visible signs in the classroom ("Here we speak positively" / "No one is laughed at").
- Recurring feedback rounds on mood and class experience.
- Clearly communicated emergency structure: *"If you observe something that is not okay, you can always give me a note or stay after the lesson."*

### Enabling learning - making it diverse, accessible and empowering

Inclusive education doesn't just mean welcoming all student into the classroom - it also means designing learning processes in such a way that everyone can participate i.e., identifying and dismantling systemic and structural barriers. Students currently experiencing or who come from a community which has historical legacies from socio-economic disadvantage in particular show



that it is not a lack of motivation or ability that stands in the way, but structural barriers that make it difficult for them to access learning - a lack of resources, negative learning experiences, low self-efficacy from stress, or the feeling of not belonging.

Educators can make the decisive difference here - not by "doing more work", but by making conscious, reflective decisions in everyday teaching. It is about creating learning spaces that are prepared for diversity, enable connection, encourage participation and at the same time avoid excessive demands. It is about making potential visible, strengthening the joy of learning and encouraging young people and adult learners in their self-efficacy.

The following considerations revolve around approaches to how lessons can be designed in such a way that they are accessible, motivating and development-promoting - for everyone. The focus here is on simple but effective levers: differentiation, everyday language, participation, a sense of achievement, collegial cooperation - and an eye for how support services can be integrated in a way that conserves resources and avoids stigmatization.

### **Making learning access low-threshold and connectable**

29

Not everyone has the same prior experience and resources - but everyone wants to learn from or respond to traditional teaching practices. Educators can facilitate access to learning by:

- Co-create the lessons, assessments, and ways of learning. For example,
  - “At the end of this month we will should know how to build a webpage. Let’s brainstorm together the different ways in which we could come to know how to do that, formulate a plan together, and then put it in action. We will know if we can do it (assessment) by building a website in an area you are passionate about by the end of the month.”
- Take up examples and topics relevant to everyday life that touch on the students' lives.
- Pay attention to technical language, explain it and link it to everyday language.
- Create multi-modal approaches, e.g. through visualizations, practical exercises and oral explanations.
- Use sparing or bundled work materials so as not to overwhelm students with a flood of material.



### Targeted promotion of internal motivation and self-efficacy noting external barriers

Many students with a low SES (Socio-Economic Status) come to the classroom with a history of negative learning experiences: they have often experienced that they receive little support, bumping up against systemic and structural barriers which are not identified, or that their efforts seem to "get them nowhere". Such experiences can lead to doubts about their own abilities, learned helplessness or even inner withdrawal. The consequences are often visible: low confidence, avoidance or hesitation of participation, quick resignation in the event of (perceived) failure.

Educators can interrupt this cycle by consciously designing their feedback, task formats and learning support - and thus enable a process of strengthening and reactivating learning motivation and self-efficacy.

- **Enable a targeted sense of achievement:** Anyone who has experienced failure over a long period of time - or has been repeatedly confronted with a focus on their shortcomings - needs the experience: "I can do something - and it will be seen." That's why it's important to design tasks in such a way that everyone can access them - for example, through
  - achievable intermediate steps that make it clear that learning is a process;
  - differentiated task formats in which students can work according to their abilities;
  - a culture of error that treats mistakes as learning opportunities, not as failures.

Even small successes can have a big impact - if they are made possible and recognized systematically rather than by chance.

- **Make goals transparent and step-by-step:** Many young people and adult learners - especially those who have had difficult educational experiences - do not know exactly what is expected of them or how they can get there. Unclear tasks or abstract competence goals can quickly become overwhelming. It helps to make goals concrete, clear and visually comprehensible:
  - What exactly is the goal today?
  - What do I need to achieve this?
  - How do I notice that I am making progress?

An "I know what I'm working towards" can significantly increase motivation and engagement - especially if there are multiple and feasible ways to get there.

- **Make learning progress visible:** When students can understand what they have learned, achieved or improved, they gain confidence in their own ability to learn. This is particularly important for young people and adult learners with an insecure learning or educational self-image. Especially at secondary school level, where lessons are highly fragmented and characterized by constant subject changes, the connection between individual learning content can easily be lost for students. This creates the impression of "pieces of material without a connection", which makes it difficult to feel a sense of purpose, overview and control - and thus reduces motivation to learn. Educators can specifically counteract this by making regularity and coherence in the learning process visible - for example through
  - Learning journals or reflection sheets in which learners record what they have understood or practiced, what was difficult and what worked better;
  - Portfolio work in which students consciously collect, compare and further develop work results - ideally with self-reflection;
  - Regular summaries, outlooks and topic overviews that emphasize the "red thread" during the material and provide orientation;
  - formative feedback from educators and peers that provides concrete, resource-oriented and process-oriented feedback - not only on the result, but also on development: *"You have developed two new strategies yourself today - that's an important step."*
  - Acknowledgement of barriers.

All of this helps students to experience their own learning as a meaningful and manageable process - and not as a series of requirements. These are the moments when the feeling arises: "I'm making progress, I can do this and I'm getting better."

- **Strengthening self-efficacy - focusing on resources:** Many students - especially those who have repeatedly been confronted with failure due to systemic or structural barriers, pressure to perform or social attributions - doubt their ability to influence their learning. Instead of being motivated to deal with challenges, they withdraw, avoid effort or see academic success as something that "others succeed at". Such an attitude is often not an expression of a lack of willpower, but the result of past experiences of unacknowledged (and often unknown) system and structural barriers, that undermine self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy means: "I can do something that makes a difference." This feeling is not created through praise alone - but through authentic experiences of influence and design: "I tried something.", "I kept at it.", "I can see that it works."

Educators can do a lot to strengthen this attitude. This is not about heroic rhetoric, but about a realistic, resource-oriented feedback culture that also makes small steps visible - and allows young people and adult learners to experience themselves as competent and effective. Specifically, educators can provide support by:

- specifically point out what students can already do, even if these are supposedly "small" skills, e.g. *"You researched in your own language and then shared the information with others - great!"*
- Create spaces of responsibility in the classroom, e.g. when choosing work steps, in cooperative tasks or in independent phases. Those who are allowed to participate in decision-making experience that "My decisions carry weight."
- **Emphasize development and progress instead of fixing the result** - for example by using phrases such as: *"You have improved a lot compared to last week", "That was more structured today than last time - well done."*
- also include extracurricular strengths, e.g. manual skills, family involvement, language skills, media skills or social responsibility in the peer environment. This makes it clear: "My skills are valuable."
- If your rubric or marking scheme does not reflect the ways in which they successfully learn then adapt your rubric / marking scheme.

If students have these experiences repeatedly, their inner attitudes can change: "I can't do this anyway" gradually becomes "I can grow - and I can influence it." Students experiencing disadvantage in particular need such experiences. They show that the learning environment can be a place where development is possible - regardless of the starting conditions or barriers.

Conclusion: Engagement and self-efficacy are not "personal characteristics" that are absent or present - they arise through experience and persist through an acknowledgement and dismantling of systemic and structural barriers. Educators can actively facilitate these experiences. Especially for those students who doubt themselves or do not see themselves as "capable of learning", this

is a pedagogically significant contribution - and an important step towards greater educational equality.

### **Enable differentiation and individual learning paths**

Different learning prerequisites require different approaches. Educators can implement differentiation in the classroom by:

- Co-creating curriculum / lessons / assessments
- Offer open task formats that allow different approaches.
- Create options, e.g. in the choice of topic or form of presentation.
- Use peer tutoring and cooperative learning formats to support learners mutually.
- Define individual learning goals together with the students.

### **Strengthen participation and co-design in the classroom**

Those who are allowed to help shape things feel responsible and a sense of belonging. Educators can promote participation by:

- Involving students in the choice of topics and methods.
- Using regular participation formats such as the class council.
- Planning projects in which students can contribute their experiences and perspectives.

### **Consider learning conditions beyond the classroom**

Not everyone has the same learning conditions at home. While some have a quiet workplace, support or sufficient digital equipment at home, others lack exactly that. Some take on responsibility for siblings, children, parent's care needs, work alongside their education, or do not have a stable daily rhythm. Educators cannot fully compensate for such differences - but they can help to make learning barriers visible and to make their requirements realistic, supportive and relieving.

Educators can provide support by:

- Design homework/assignments in such a way that it can be completed with realistic means and time resources - even for students with little support at home or technical limitations.



- Consciously use learning time (remedial lessons, subject lessons, individual learning time) to enable quiet retreat, questioning and structure.
- Address learning strategies, self-organization and time management specifically in lessons - e.g. through small tools, planning aids or routines while acknowledging barriers and restraints.
- Encourage students to access extracurricular learning spaces - e.g. library, school social work, supervised learning spaces.

### Reflection and collegial exchange on lesson development

Even if teaching is often experienced as an individual task, successful, equitable teaching develops particularly where educators look together, exchange ideas and learn from each other. No one must (or can) do everything alone - but everyone can provide impetus and benefit from collegial knowledge.

What you can do as an individual educator:

- Seek out targeted discussions with colleagues to share experiences, challenges and successful practices in dealing with diversity and disadvantage. Short door-to-door conversations can also provide valuable impetus.
- Encourage peer observation, for example on a specific question: *"How do you deal with very different performance levels in introductory texts?"*, *"I would like to know whether my task is really open enough - would you like to take a look?"*
- Form small exchange formats within the teaching staff, e.g. on methods, differentiating materials or on questions such as: *"How do you manage to give feedback that encourages?"*, *"How do you avoid support being perceived as embarrassing?"*
- Use short reflection routines for yourself or in tandem with colleagues, e.g.:
  - What worked well for less confident students today?
  - Who was heard - who remained silent?
  - Have I opened up opportunities today or unintentionally narrowed them?

Even small impulses in the classroom can make a big difference - especially when it comes to such a sensitive topic as educational equality. Nobody needs perfect solutions. What counts is the willingness to keep looking to identify barriers and ways to dismantle those barriers, to question professional practice - and to learn from each other.



### Dealing sensitively with shame and stigmatization in the classroom

Good intentions can fail if offers of support seem shameful. Teachers should make sure that:

- Support services are designed to be open to all without visibly singling out groups.
- Language and feedback should be chosen in a way that encourages rather than shames.
- Disadvantage is not addressed to highlight deficits, but to break down barriers and strengthen resources.

### Strengthen self-esteem - promote emotional security in learning

Many students with low SES backgrounds doubt themselves - not only in terms of their performance, but also in terms of their personal value. They more often experience themselves as "not good enough", compare themselves with others, receive less encouragement and are more affected by negative labelling. Educators can break this cycle - not through praise alone, but through the targeted promotion of self-esteem: the conscious perception of one's own strengths, efforts and developmental steps.

**Self-esteem is more than self-esteem** - it describes the active inner process of experiencing oneself as valuable and capable, regardless of external successes. Unlike self-praise, it is not about exaggeration, but about realistic recognition of one's own resources. Students who experience themselves as "different", "not fitting in" or "not performing well" are in particular need of such spaces of empowerment. Socio-economically disadvantaged students are often confronted with the following barriers in this context (Baumeister et al., 2003; Harter, 1999):

- Comparisons with peers who have more or appear more successful
- Lack of positive feedback - at home, among friends or in class
- Internalized stereotypes
- Lack of recognition of barriers they face
- Feelings of shame when they "fall behind" or feel "different"

These challenges not only make learning more difficult, but also social participation. Self-esteem can be an important counterpart here.

What educators can do in concrete terms to contribute to better self-esteem among students:

- **Enable everyday affirmations:** Have your students regularly write down what they appreciate about themselves - e.g. after a lesson, week or unit: "Today I managed ... / made an effort with ... / helped someone else with ..." This form of self-appreciation is particularly effective when it is low-threshold and without pressure to perform. It can also be used well in the context of subject lessons.
- **Encourage reflection on strengths:** Provide targeted space for questions such as "What am I particularly good at?", "What am I proud of?", "What would a friend appreciate about me?" These questions help you to become aware of your own potential - an important step towards self-efficacy.
- **Create a gratitude diary or "pride diary":** Encourage students to use a small notebook or digital tool in which they regularly make notes: What am I grateful for today, what did I achieve that was important to me, what positive thing did someone else do today? This not only strengthens their self-image but also helps them to focus on the positive in their interactions with others.
- **Establish recognition circles:** Use short rituals at the end of a lesson or week in which students give appreciative feedback - for example through short rounds such as: "I have seen that ... has made a special effort in ...", Make sure that this is voluntary, low-threshold and sensitive - e.g. also anonymously via cards that are read out. This exercise not only strengthens the students' observation and feedback skills but also promotes their interest in each other and helps them to focus on the positive qualities of their classmates.
- **Consciously distribute roles and responsibilities:** Give students space to showcase their talents: as group leaders, technical supervisors, during presentations, etc. - regardless of grades. Visibility strengthens the feeling: "I can contribute something - and it will be seen."
- **Name the barriers in the education with your students:** Create an awareness amongst all students of the systemic and structural barriers that exist to certain types of students in the education system. Work together to identify and name them and how they impact on student's experiences and feelings about themselves as learners.

In short, self-esteem is not a side issue, but a pedagogical key to inclusion and motivation! Especially those students who experience less social recognition benefit from this. Educators can



achieve a lot with small but targeted impulses - not as psychological therapy, but as an expression of appreciation in everyday learning.

*"Those who experience themselves as valuable develop the courage to learn."*

(Kristin Neff, 2011)

### Strengthening responsibility, self-regulation and autonomy

Students with a low socio-economic status (SES) often experience structural restrictions, low expectations or little opportunity to exert influence in education. This makes it all the more important to create targeted spaces in the classroom in which they can take responsibility, reflect on decisions and act independently. These skills - responsibility, self-regulation and autonomy - are central pillars for engagement, motivation, learning development and personal development.

#### **Taking responsibility - consciously combining action and impact**

Responsibility means the willingness to make one's own decisions and to reflect on their consequences. It includes accountability, planning and shared responsibility in a social context (Zimmerman, 2002). All students benefit when they experience: "What I do has meaning - for me and others."

A strong sense of responsibility not only promotes academic success (Lerner, 2004), but also social participation and decision-making skills - for example in dealing with time management, conflicts or teamwork. When students experience responsibility, they develop a greater awareness of their actions and of the community (Dweck, 2006). However, educators and leadership must always acknowledge the impacts of material deprivation and socio-economic disadvantage in terms of the impact they have on an individual's student's control and autonomy. Asking a student to be responsible for the learning of the class or group, as well as their own learning when events outside the learning environment are affecting their own engagement, participation, attendance, and ability to contribute is unfair and makes the systemic and structural barriers the individual's fault. This can re-enforce feelings of failure and in turn effect attendance, engagement, and contribution in a negative way. Educators must provide opportunities to develop a strong sense of responsibility with the capacity or bandwidth available to the individual student to take it on.



## Self-regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to control one's own behaviour, thoughts and feelings regarding goals - i.e. to set goals, reflect on progress, realign oneself in the event of failure and persevere (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2008). This ability is particularly essential for student with a low SES who often suffer from everyday stresses: it helps them to overcome frustration, build stamina and try out new learning strategies. Again, as above, educators and leadership must acknowledge the burden on a student with low SES that effects their ability to self-regulate.

**Important note: It is highly important to understand that self-regulation is extremely hard to do if you are hungry, tired, stressed, in fight or flight mode, dealing with trauma etc. Look back to the introduction course and familiarise yourself with the *Maslow before Bloom* argument. If a student's most basic physical and emotional needs are not met then they are physically and emotionally incapable of self-regulation in ways that we expect of any other student. Self-regulation is a very complex interplay between internal and external demands and the advice offered here is merely a short and simple introduction with the warning that educators should explore trauma informed education methods and theories to inform themselves better.**

Supporting self-regulation:

- targeted learning through planning skills,
- emotional stability in challenging situations,
- reflective decisions based on their own experiences (Zimmerman, 2008),
- acknowledgment and consideration of external factors that may contribute to stress, anxiety, and mental health issues which can interrupt and prevent the ability to self-regulate.

## Enable autonomy - promote self-determined learning

Autonomy means experiencing yourself as a self-determined person - in other words, being allowed to make your own decisions, help shape and learn without excessive control or paternalism. This experience is particularly important for students in difficult circumstances, as it shows them: "I have an influence on my learning path." Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) identifies autonomy, social integration and competence as central basic psychological needs that are essential for motivation and well-being. If these needs are met, commitment increases - if they are blocked, the joy of learning and self-confidence decrease.



Autonomy in the classroom does not mean being allowed to choose everything. Rather, it is about being able to co-decide in meaningful areas, such as forms of work, choice of topics or objectives. This strengthens intrinsic motivation and responsibility for learning.

Didactic strategies to promote autonomy are:

- Set SMART goals: Teachers support students in formulating realistic and concrete goals (e.g. "I will learn vocabulary for 20 minutes every day this week."). This creates clarity and personal responsibility.
- Make learning progress visible: Reflection journals, checklists or weekly plans help learners to evaluate their actions and document progress.
- Delegate responsibility: Class tasks (time management, group leadership, etc.) give students the chance to take responsibility and experience self-efficacy.
- Establish reflection rounds: The topic is discussed in short exchange rounds: What went well? What have I learned? What would I like to change? Such phases strengthen self-awareness and promote autonomy.
- Live a culture of failure: Formats such as a "learning curve of the week" or an "error message board" promote a positive attitude towards failure - an important contribution to resilient learning (Dweck, 2006).

## Conclusion

Taking responsibility, self-regulation, and autonomy are not qualities that students have to have - they are developed through relationships, trust, targeted stimulation and practice. For young people and adult learners experiencing or coming from communities that have historically experienced socio-economic disadvantage, it is important to gain experience in everyday school life that opens up scope for action and enables development – if they are physically and emotionally ready and able to do so. Educators play a key role here: they can create spaces in which young people can grow, shape and learn through their attitude, structure and didactic impulses. However, it must always be acknowledged that external pressures and barriers will always have an impact on whether a student has the capacity to take more responsibility and self-regulate. If a student is displaying a deficit in these areas, then educators and leadership must investigate the external causes and identify what the educational institution can do to mitigate them when they are in the learning environment in order to set the student up for success.



## Keeping an eye on yourself: Self-care and resilience for educators

Educators who work in communities who experience socio-economic disadvantage, or the legacies of socio-economic disadvantage do more than just impart knowledge. They accompany young people and adult learners in challenging life situations, are caught between individual demands and structural limits - and often bear a great deal of emotional responsibility. In order for them to work in a committed, professional and healthy manner in the long term, they also need to take a conscious look at their own stress levels, their own well-being, and their own resources.

**Self-care is not a minor matter, but the basis of educational effectiveness.** Those who take good care of themselves are also better able to be there for others. This means not only paying attention to symptoms of exhaustion, but also actively creating conditions that promote occupational health and resilience.

### Reflection and exchange as a resource

Many teachers experience situations in which they reach their limits - be it due to challenging students, difficult conversations with parents or structural inequalities. In such moments, it helps not to have to bear these experiences alone: Sharing experiences with colleagues, e.g. in team meetings, reflection groups or supervision, can provide relief, broaden perspectives and offer emotional support. Short joint check-ins with colleagues ("What was challenging today - and what was good?") also strengthen team spirit and normalize talking about stress.

### Enabling further development - realistic and strength-oriented

Professional growth does not come about through the demand for perfection, but through continuous, realistic further development. Less experienced teachers often come under pressure to "do everything right" pedagogically - especially in sensitive contexts such as poverty or exclusion. However, it is important **not to be too hard on yourself**: Inclusive work is a process, not a finished concept.

Set yourself **realistic goals**, recognize what works - and allow yourself to remain open to mistakes and learning steps. Research on self-compassion (e.g. Neff, 2011) shows: Those who treat themselves with forbearance remain more motivated, more resilient and more effective in their interactions with others.

### Further training as part of professional self-care

Further training is not an "additional task" or a "luxury offer", but an integral part of pedagogical quality assurance - especially in challenging pedagogical fields. Targeted training on topics such as differentiation, trauma sensitivity, social-emotional learning or diversity not only strengthens professional skills, but also the feeling of being able to act. It is precisely this feeling that is crucial for one's own mental health.

At the same time, it is important to **shape your own development in such a way that it remains compatible with your personal resilience** - not everything has to succeed immediately, and pedagogical professionalism develops step by step.

#### Self-Directed Activity:

Consider what happens when educators, leadership, boards of management, policy makers, and society at large treat educational attainment gaps, student behaviours (particularly if they are considered negative, disruptive, or deviating from the norm) and communications that are atypical as individual behaviours that are the fault of (and can be controlled by) the individual student instead of as a result of very real and oppressive systemic and structural barriers both in the education system and society.

Write a 300-word reflection on this – using real life examples, from your practice, personal experience, or that you may have seen or read in the media.

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