

Category: Peer Collaboration

Supporting pupils' learning skills



Toolkit
**Successful Learning
Practices for
All Children to Thrive**



POLICIES AND PRACTICES BASED ON SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH FOR REDUCING UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN EUROPE



Red Barnet, MHPSS Collaborative



Acknowledgments

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Introduction

This toolkit, “Successful Learning Practices for All Children to Thrive,” is a practical resource that shows how to create successful learning environments in classrooms, schools, and communities. It helps teachers and school leaders build effective learning spaces that improve basic skills, support struggling students, and develop children’s social and emotional skills. The toolkit is based on 20 case studies from 9 European countries, offering practical strategies that have worked in real schools.

These case studies come from primary and secondary schools across Europe that have successfully helped underachieving students and prevented early school leaving. The research was conducted in diverse schools across Portugal, Ireland, Finland, Denmark, Spain, Greece, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Malta. From these schools, we gathered concrete practices that improve both academic learning and social-emotional development.

The toolkit is organised around five key areas of successful learning environments:

Pedagogies

Teacher and Student Interaction

Peer Collaboration

School – Family – Community
Collaboration

Wellbeing and Support

While each tool is placed in one of these areas, many tools work across multiple areas. For instance, “Interactive Groups” not only helps students work together but also connects with the community, supports wellbeing, and improves academic results.

It’s important to understand that the most successful schools use multiple tools together. While each tool can help on its own, the best results come from working on all five areas across the whole school. We recommend looking at your school’s current strengths and areas for improvement to help you choose the most useful tools for your situation.

This toolkit is available as an online platform in seven languages: Spanish, Portuguese, English, Finnish, Maltese, Greek, and Italian. All the tools have been carefully tested and developed through dialogic co-creation with nearly 1,000 participants in the SCIREARLY project, including school staff, students, families, and community members.

Our aim is to give educators and communities the tools they need to help every child succeed in school. By sharing successful practices from different learning environments in an accessible way, we’re working to create schools where all children can thrive, regardless of their background.





Glossary

A glossary section is essential in this toolkit to provide clear definitions of key terms and concepts, ensuring that all users, including teachers, school leaders, education experts, policymakers, and community members, can fully understand and effectively implement the successful teaching and learning practices. This section helps bridge any gaps in terminology and ensures consistent understanding, making it easier to apply the evidence-based strategies and improve educational outcomes for students.

Dialogic Teaching and Learning

Dialogic teaching and learning emphasises dialogue and quality interactions as the primary means of achieving understanding, learning and development. A dialogic approach to teaching and learning aims at creating an environment where all students, teachers and other members of the community actively engage in meaningful and respectful dialogue. Here are some of the key premises:

Ensuring that everybody's voice is valued equally, and everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue. This encourages diverse perspectives and ensures that all voices are heard.

Recognising and valuing the cultural backgrounds and experiences of all students and teachers. This helps to create a more inclusive and understanding learning environment.

Dialogic interactions among students, teacher-student and within the community are oriented towards transforming the sociocultural context and create optimal conditions for learning and development.

Co-constructing meaning and understanding through dialogues between students and teachers. This collaborative process helps deepen comprehension and retention of information.



Building a sense of community and mutual support among students and teachers. This principle fosters collaboration and collective responsibility for learning.

Respecting and valuing differences among students and teachers. Dialogue should celebrate diversity and use it as a resource for learning. Encouraging critical thinking and challenging everyone to think deeply and question assumptions.

Emotional Dimension

Recognising the importance of quality relationships in learning. Successful practices create a supportive environment where students and teachers feel safe, supported and confident to express their emotions and experiences.

Authentic Learning

Ensuring that the dialogue and learning are relevant to the students' and teachers' real-life experiences and contexts. This makes the learning more meaningful and applicable.

Translanguaging

When one person speaks in one language while another person responds in another.

Reception Classes

Classes where children with another mother tongue are in specialised classes where translanguaging is used to help children learn the host country language - with the intention that the children enter mainstream education as they gain language proficiency.



Supporting pupils' learning skills



Overview:

This tool emphasises the importance of supporting pupils' individual and collaborative learning skills while learning various subject-specific academic contents. Practicing these skills individually and together with other pupils with diverse backgrounds is essential, because their learning requires intentional guidance from a teacher, and a lot of intentional practicing, reflection, and feedback. Main goals are to support pupils in learning to regulate their own learning as well as regulate learning together with their peers.

Supporting includes a variety of different activities initiated by the teacher. It is important to discuss with pupils about the importance of individual and collaborative learning skills and their focuses (emotions, cognitions, behaviours). It is essential to emphasise, how important it is to focus attention, and plan and monitor learning both alone and together with others. The teacher can provide support by discussing about the learning goals, by monitoring the progress, by encouraging students to talk about the strategies and progress in learning together with others, evaluating the learning outcomes, and by providing constant feedback of the development of the individual and collaborative learning skills in the classroom.

The rationale behind this educational tool is that these skills are essential in learning new knowledge and skills, and they are needed throughout the educational path from early years to all further phases in the educational path and working life. The mastery of individual and collaborative learning skills has been shown to be associated with pupils' school engagement, progress in studies, academic achievements, self-efficacy in studying, and well-being. The target group is pupils aged 7-11 years, but this can be also applied with 3-18 years depending on the specific context, curriculum, skills levels and goals. Key stakeholders are teachers and guardians as well as principals who are responsible for supporting pupils' learning and have opportunities to contribute to their education.



Implementation Steps:

Preparation:

Curriculum as a starting point: It is essential that teachers take the curriculum of the school as a starting point for defining the learning goals, contents, teaching methods and assessment for the lesson. It is important to define the pupils' learning goals both for the subject in question and for learning to learn skills (defining goals, planning the progress, choosing the strategies, monitoring the progress, and evaluating the outcomes).

Detailed lesson plan: It is important to create a lesson plan and define the various phases of the lesson. Special attention should be paid both on learning of subject-specific contents and especially on supporting learning of individual and collaborative learning skills. Scaffolding of learning in terms of these both as well as use of teaching methods and pedagogical practices should be planned carefully.

Pupils' individual needs: It is essential to consider the pupils of the classroom, and what kind of individual needs they have regarding learning. It is important to think about the concepts to be used in the classroom and be prepared to explain the details of the individual and collaborative learning skills for the pupils in a variety of concrete ways.

Implementation:

Support for individual and collaborative learning skills: Pay attention to support the use and development of pupils' learning skills during the lesson. Favour work to be done in pairs, provide instructions and schedules for pair work, encourage students to negotiate and plan their work jointly, encourage collaborative problem solving, provide all necessary materials and equipment for pupils, and scaffold and monitor the progress of pupils' joint work.

Engagement strategies: Encourage the students to negotiate first with their peers, ponder alternative approaches if necessary, intervene only if some challenges emerge between the pupils

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Continuous monitoring: Teachers should monitor the effectiveness of this practice through constant interactions and regular evaluations together with pupils.

Encouragement: It is essential that teachers are enthusiastic and motivated about the work that pupils are doing, show their interest and commitment for pupils, provide help if needed, and are engaged in supporting pupils' learning together with their peers.





Examples and Case Studies:

This tool derives from two case studies in Finnish multicultural schools. The tool is aligned with the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014), which emphasises the learning of transversal competencies throughout the educational path on a general level. The power of this has also been shown recently in the latest PISA results (2022), in which the Finnish pupils scored high in creative thinking. Teachers themselves have pedagogical freedom and responsibility to develop the concrete pedagogical practices and tools, that they use in their own classrooms and progress towards the intended goals. The schools have been operating in their surroundings successfully almost 25 years despite the growing diversity and versatile support needs of the students and families. The reasons behind the success are the persistent and visionary educational work done in the schools since the beginning, collaborative and shared leadership in schools, commitment for the best of every child and the tailoring of the curriculum to the pupils' learning needs. Some examples drawn by the case study are:

Supportive materials for the pupils' collaborative work: Teachers explained the phases of the work to be done during the lesson for the pupils, provided general schedule for the work, and provided assignment handouts that included the tasks to be completed in pairs. Teachers utilised informative pictures to demonstrate the various phases of the work, activities (e.g. negotiations, asking questions, taking turns, working peacefully, walking inside the school) and equipment (e.g. colouring pens, pencils, erasers) in them. The materials included support for learning of the individual and collaborative learning skills (defining goals, negotiating and choosing strategies, monitoring the progress, evaluating the outcomes). The assignment handouts were distributed to the students, so they can follow the course of the lesson activities.

Monitoring: Teachers constantly monitored pupils' pair work and its progress. If there were challenges in the pupils' progress in the tasks, concentration, or some other issue, teachers intervened and clarified the issues. This was always done in a way, that the pupils primarily tried to find the solution to the challenge with their peer.

Support and encouragement: Teachers were motivated and committed, and showed their constant interest and enthusiasm on pupils' progress in the work with the peers. These issues were reflected together with the pupils.



Benefits:

Focusing on enhancing pupils' individual and collaborative learning skills is likely to enhance their learning, academic achievement, well-being and school engagement. Teachers emphasised that learning of these skills are essential in pupils' current and further development, and key to focus on in a multicultural and diverse school contexts.

Tips for Success:

Encourage teachers to share their thoughts and materials regarding supporting students in individual and collaborative learning skills.

Encourage teachers to discuss the challenges of supporting learning of individual and collaborative learning skills in multicultural classrooms, and how they have solved them.

Involve guardians in discussions about the importance of supporting learning of individual and collaborative learning skills. Tell how learning of these skills is outlined in the curriculum and tell about their importance for pupils' further learning and development in the educational path. Brainstorm together, how you can support pupil learning of these skills together.

Additional Resources:

You can find additional resources to support implementation and further learning here:

https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/perusopetuksen_opetussuunnitelman_perusteet_2014.pdf

<https://www.oph.fi/en/statistics-and-publications/publications/new-national-core-curriculum-basic-education-focus-school>

Below is a practical example of a lesson plan, which demonstrates how to intertwine the tool described above in the context of Environmental Studies.



Lesson's plan title	Environmental Education: Identifying domestic animals
Target group	Pupils aged 7-8 years, with varying levels of understanding of the local language, various mother tongues, various socio-economic and im-migrant backgrounds.
Aim	To learn to identify domestic animals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To practice orientating with the photographs inside the school To learn to work collaboratively with a peer: plan joint work, enact the work, share duties, share responsibilities, complete the tasks collaboratively, reflect on learning with the peer and the teacher
Lesson Plan Objectives	To motivate pupils in learning to identify animals together with their peers, foster enthusiasm through playful learning, enhance individual and collaborative learning skills, maintain interest in environmental studies.
Duration	1 lesson (75 minutes)
Topics (e.g.)	Environmental Studies
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiarise yourself carefully with the curriculum. Define the learning goals for the subject and for the individual and collaborative learning skills. Consider the individual support needs of the pupils in your class-room.
Required Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructions for the pupils' pair work: phases and schedules, supportive pictures to emphasise the key work phases for the pupils Assignment handout for pupils pair work Photographs of the different places and detailed locations in school Photographs of the (domestic) animals

Lesson's plan title	Environmental Education: Identifying domestic animals
Learning Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivate pupils on learning to identify the (domestic) animals and to orientation Discuss explicitly the learning goals of the lesson with the pupils, tell especially why it is important to learn individual and collabora-tive learning skills, listen to pupils' perspectives Provide instructions for the work to be done in pairs: phases of the work, schedules, details of the handout assignment; explain how the orientation inside the school works and how pupils can find and identify the animals Allow pupils to choose their pairs for the work; or assign the pairs in advance if this is reasonable Monitor the progress of pupils' work in pairs, be available to help them all the time Discuss the progress of work with the pupils, evaluate the out-comes of the work and reaching the learning goals in pairs; ac-knowledge their good work and its completion
Additional Reading	If applicable

Conclusion:

This tool offers a model for supporting pupils' learning of individual and collaborative learning skills in multicultural and diverse classrooms. The tool emphasises the importance of intertwining the learning of individual and collaborative learning skills with the subject-specific lessons, and using engaging teaching methods to reach the learning goals. It emphasises pupils' active role in their own learning and together with their peers as well as teachers' important role in supporting and scaffolding pupils' learning. Educators are encouraged to adapt this tool to their own teaching by taking into account the requirements of the local curriculum and individual needs of their pupils in their own classroom.



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