

Teacher & healthcare professional on a path to more inclusive education

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Introduction

Co-teaching is seen as a strategy where multiple educational professionals collaborate in a structured manner based on a shared vision (Fluijt, 2018). Within the Research Centre for Learning in Diversity, a pilot project examined how a teacher and a trainee care professional could complementarily co-teach in a primary school in Ghent (Lockefer & Zaman, 2024). This study showed that such collaboration was valuable but also had room for growth. As an output, the "Routeplanner" was developed, a practice-based working tool designed to structure co-teaching more effectively. This instrument supports trainee care professionals in defining their role and aims to have a lasting impact on teacher skills.

The research project which we would like to present through a posterpresentation is an intervention study on the impact of the "Routeplanner" in co-teaching between teachers and trainee care professionals (bachelor's students in social educational care work and occupational therapy). Over three months, these students worked in the classroom, where the "Routeplanner" supported them in co-teaching and action-oriented work with the class group. Through interviews with teachers and focus groups with trainee care professionals and their supervisors, the study examined how the "Routeplanner" facilitated their role as co-teachers (part 1) and whether it had a lasting impact on teacher skills for inclusive education (part 2). For the latter, a checklist was used based on five competencies for an inclusive learning environment (Vantieghem & Van de Putte, 2019).

Method

The collected data (transcripts of focus groups and interviews) were analyzed using the method of Boeije & Biejenbergh (2019) with Nvivo 14 software. Two researchers independently coded the data in three phases: open coding (identifying themes), axial coding (structuring subcategories), and selective coding (linking to research questions).

Findings from part 1 indicated that the "Routeplanner" facilitated discussions between trainee care professionals and teachers and provided a clear framework for collaboration. As a result, trainee care professionals found their role in the classroom more quickly and worked more purposefully. Compared to the pilot project, more actions were observed at the classroom level, rather than focusing on individual needs.

In part 2, teachers reported that they were able to apply more competencies due to the presence of trainee care professionals and the developed materials. Additionally, they experienced personal growth in certain aspects of their teaching practice. This growth proved to be sustainable: follow-up interviews showed that teachers continued to use the tools and adaptations introduced during the internship. Some even implemented additional Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies, highlighting the lasting impact of the "Routeplanner." However, some teachers faced obstacles such as time constraints and staff shortages, which hindered further implementation.

Results

This study underscores the potential of the "Routeplanner" as a tool for co-teaching in inclusive educational settings. It supports trainee care professionals in their role and fosters collaboration with teachers, while also contributing to teacher development and more sustainable inclusive practices. The findings highlight the need for further research on the use of the Routeplanner in specific subject areas, such as mathematics, to better understand its domain-specific impact. In addition, exploring its implementation with professionals already active in the field – rather than students in training – could provide deeper insights into its relevance and long-term applicability in real-life school contexts.