

SLOVAKIA [2] - 2012

INTEGRATED THEMATIC INTEGRATION-ITI

A. BASIC INFORMATION

Country:	Slovakia
Title of initiative:	[SK] <i>Integrované tematické vyučovanie - ITV</i> [EN] Integrated thematic instruction - ITI
Coordinator/ Organization:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Slovak National Institute for Education (guarantor of evaluation of the pilot project) • The Susan Kovalikovej Association (ASK): Education for the 21st Century in Slovakia
Key competences addressed:	<p>The initiative addresses all the key competences listed in the 2006 European Parliament's Recommendation <i>on key competences for lifelong learning</i>, particularly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social and civic competences • the transversal skills of creativity, critical thinking and problem solving.
Type of initiative and channels used for implementation (e.g. curriculum reform introduced through legislation etc.)	The initiative was implemented as a pilot project over a period of 9 years. Pedagogical research has proven that the initiative has been successful.
Partners:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State and municipal school departments at various levels • Schools at local and regional level • Higher education institutions • Methodology and Pedagogy Centre (an institution responsible for in-service teachers' education and training) • The Children of Slovakia Foundation
Scope: (student/teacher/school level; local/regional/national)	The initiative reaches students and teachers at all levels
Learning context: (formal or non-formal)	Formal, parts of the programme also apply to informal learning

School education level/s: (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary) All school education levels, with an emphasis on primary education

Target groups: Students and teachers

Time frame: (start and end date) ITI started in 1992, mainly as a “bottom-up” initiative, with teaching staff beginning to exchange experiences and class observations (internal school reform). The initiative was subject to an official pilot project evaluation process from 1992 to 2001. After the successful evaluation of the pilot project the project has continued as an officially recognised experimental initiative, though state support is not very strong.

Relevant links:

- National Institute for Education: www.statpedu.sk
- Susan Kovalikovej Association: <http://www.ask21.sk>
- ITI initiative at the Park Angelium 8 School: <http://www.zspa.sk/index.php/skola/projekty/integrovanie-tematicke-vyucovanie-itv>
- Community of Valča: http://www.obecvalca.sk/zs_charakteristika

B. SUMMARY

The innovative programme *Integrované tematické vyučovanie* (Integrated Thematic Instruction - ITI) represents an important initiative in Slovakia, particularly for the first years of primary education. It began in 1992 as a “bottom-up” initiative by teachers, taking the form of exchanges of experience and classroom observation (internal school reform), with expert support from the NGO Susan Kovalikovej Association (ASK): Education for the 21st Century in Slovakia. The programme was disseminated via internal school reforms and was run as a pilot project over 9 years of compulsory schooling and pedagogical research was carried out to evaluate its success.

The programme’s use of innovative methods and practices was inspired by international professional pedagogical literature and educational programmes, which were developed and applied creatively within the framework of the Slovak curriculum and the situation of Slovak schools. The schools mostly apply selected single elements and methods of the programme that can function independently and help to enhance the quality of education. These are:

- Holistic teaching in context, not only between particular subjects (cross-curricular integration), but also in students’ lives and their close environment.
- The curricula of particular subjects are integrated on a thematic basis representing the key curriculum.
- Social teaching and prosocial education is an integral part of the educational programme. The social curriculum is partially finished, with an elaborated methodology of life-skills development and revised tools of classroom management (rules of classroom life, community as an integrated form of teaching), cooperative conflict solving and peer mediation.
- An emphasis on children’s creativity and self-reflection on their activity and development.
- Teachers create stimulating conditions for learning, e.g. relevance of content, possibility of task selection, an enriched environment, etc.
- Application of constructivist methods, cooperative teaching, project-based learning, experiential learning, mental mapping, problem method, Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences in the creation of tasks for students with different types of intelligence, revised Bloom taxonomy and others.

In a survey, 38% of primary school teachers stated that they use methods and elements of the programme. Incentives are given to school administrations to support teachers’ initiatives (soft management skills) and the schools carry out self-evaluation. The accredited educational programmes for teachers are ready and the support materials for students and teachers are being prepared. These activities, however, are mainly sporadic, and a more systematic approach on the side of the state administration is necessary in order to fully implement this successful pilot initiative.

C. IN DEPTH INFORMATION

Rationale/contextual background/motivation for introducing the initiative/reform:

The initiative is a complex holistic educational programme, integrating all principles of effective learning. It makes use of foreign resources, adapting them to the situation in Slovakia and developing them further. The same emphasis that is given to knowledge is also given to a child's development. The basic principles of the programme are the elements of effective learning and stimulating learning conditions, such as the absence of fear and a supportive environment, meaningful content, the possibility of task selection, an enriched environment, co-operation, adequate time, and immediate feedback.

Objectives:

- To ensure holistic teaching in context, not only between particular subjects (cross-curricular integration), but also in students' lives and their immediate environment.
- To develop students' prosocial skills.
- To develop students' cross-curricular skills, especially creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving, reflection of their own activity and development.
- To provide teachers with a wide range of methods for effective learning.

Dimensions targeted by the initiative/reform (e.g. student curriculum, assessment, initial/in-service teacher education, school autonomy etc.):

ITI is used in student assessment in primary and secondary teaching and provides teachers with active teaching methods. A further educational programme of teacher training is also accredited by the Slovak Ministry of Education.

Overall approach (e.g. holistic – existence of an overarching strategy, or targeted approach focusing on a specific dimension etc.):

The focus is on the educational process as a whole. The National Institute for Education, in cooperation with teachers and other experts, prepares methodological materials for teachers implementing the programme.

Detailed explanation of the key competence/s concerned:

The use of a constructivist approach, active teaching methods, project-based themes and cooperative education enables the development of all key competences listed in the European Parliament's Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning.

- Integrating the content of two or more subjects into a central theme develops, in particular, the competences of communication in the mother tongue and in foreign languages and learning to learn.
- A detailed social curriculum containing a precise methodology of life-skills development and detailed tools for class management allows for an effective development of social and civic competences and transversal skills, especially creativity, critical thinking and problem solving.

Specific subjects concerned or cross-curricular approach:

The programme applies a cross-curricular approach.

How the initiative/reform is being implemented (e.g. process followed, political commitment, consultation with stakeholders and their respective roles, incentives for stakeholders, dedicated funding, teaching material, definition of goals and standards, assessment and evaluation mechanisms, impact on teacher training/professional development and school practices/leadership, scaling-up approach, based on research/evidence? etc.):

The Ministry of Education is responsible for generating systematic conditions for the implementation of successful pedagogical innovations. Teaching materials and training is provided by the Slovak National Institute for Education, the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre, ASK: Education for the 21st Century in Slovakia and the Children of Slovakia Foundation.

Present stage/phase of implementation:

The methods of the programme are used mainly by teachers in the first years of primary education. Accredited learning materials are available for teachers but additional systematic support from the state is needed for wider implementation.

Pedagogical issues (issues related to how key competences are being taught to students and how are teachers being prepared to teach them):

The students are taught in a perceptive and participative way and are given the opportunity to discover the new content themselves. Teachers use Anderson's Revised Bloom Taxonomy and Gardner's Multiple Intelligences for creating the tasks and should learn how to use these methods in an accredited programme of continual education.

What works well (to identify enablers):

The dissemination of the ITI educational programme through direct observation in the classroom followed by interactive training for the teachers in the “model week.”

Challenges and how these are being addressed (to identify obstacles and solutions):

The spontaneous impulses of internal school reform have been more or less exhausted and deeper systematic support from the state is needed. The next stage should be to develop further, well-planned steps towards the implementation of the entire programme, or of selected elements and methods that can be applied independently. Even the application of selected parts has the potential to improve the quality of education, as the OECD’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation shows in its publication *Innovating to Learn, Learning to Innovate*.

Monitoring & evaluation so far/planned, and which methods are being used (e.g. internal/external quality assurance, inspection, national assessments, international tests, self-evaluation, formative or summative evaluations):

This programme and its methods have been subject to an evaluation by the National Institute for Education of the 9-year pilot phase.

The schools that apply this programme carry out a self-evaluation of the quality of their work and an external evaluation is provided by the state school inspectorate or through the national monitoring project. The emphasis is on the formative and authentic assessment of students, but there is still a lot to be done in this field.

Impact (e.g. any planned impact assessment?):

Qualitative research of the use of this programme and its elements in schools in Slovakia is currently under preparation.

Communication of the initiative/dissemination of outputs and activities:

The initiative is disseminated by means of published articles, methodological materials, web pages of the organisers and project partners, the organisation of open teaching followed by an analysis of learning units in classroom, educational activities etc.

Next steps/follow-up:

One of the next steps is to create a catalogue of the methods of teaching used in the initiative. This catalogue should enhance systematic support of the implementation of the programme and provide teachers with free access to information and methodological documents. The catalogue could be continuously updated with other innovative pedagogical methods or educational models and programmes. The conditions for entry into the catalogue, as well as methods and conditions for the implementation of published pedagogical methods into school practice, will be clearly defined. The catalogue will also function as a methodological manual, at the disposal of teachers, schools and parents to help in deciding on appropriate educational methods and processes. It will support pedagogical creativity because it will ensure an up-to-date list of other proven pedagogical innovations and methods for further implementation

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