

## **Arts for inclusive education: insights from the InCrea+ project**

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*COVID-19 pandemic has forced schools to accelerate their digitalization process, causing an exacerbation of pre-existing educational disparities and a worldwide increase of students affected by mental health issues. In response to these severe issues, the OECD calls for the adoption of inclusive education strategies addressing both learning and emotional issues. This paper aims to illustrate how specific adoptions of arts education could effectively implement such strategies. Moreover, it will introduce the readers to the goals and future results of **InCrea+**, a European project aiming to provide an innovative method of inclusive education and promotion of wellbeing through arts education.*

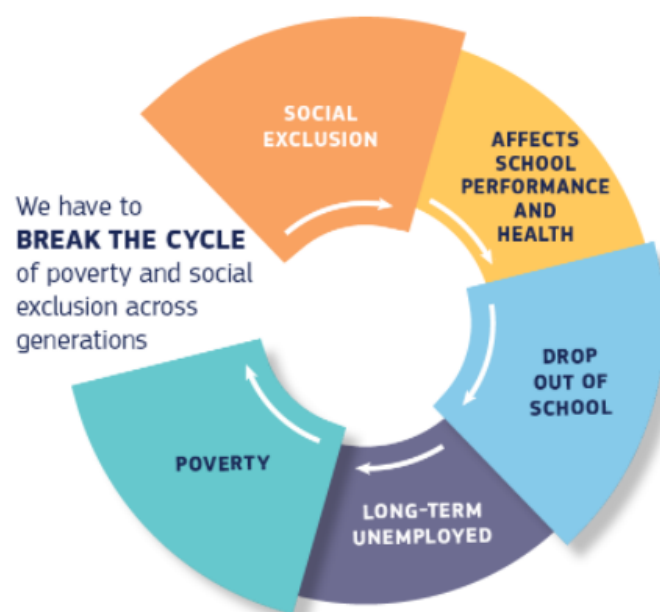
*Keywords: Education, arts, inclusive education, creativity through educational art, creative education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the school is conceived as a place where differences can coexist in a harmonious and positive way, but this has not always been the case. In fact, before the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policies and Practice in Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994), approved by the United Nations in 1994, there was a clear division between so-called “traditional schools” and “special schools” (Musneckiene, 2020), which left no room for inclusiveness in the school environment. With the Salamanca Statement, a new and essential principle emerged: schools should adjust their educational offer to the needs of every student, that is “children with disabilities, gifted children, homeless children, children belonging to nomadic groups, children belonging to linguistic minorities, ethnic or cultural, children with HIV or belonging to any other vulnerable groups”. The first human rights treaty to make explicit reference to “inclusive quality education” has been the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted by the United Nations member states in 2006.

Since the approval of the Salamanca Statement and the CRPD, the concept of educational inclusion has been reiterated many times by international organizations, such as the European Union (EU). A perfect example are the 20 principles of the European Pillar of social rights (EC, 2017), since they were adopted with the aim of making Europe “fair, inclusive and full of opportunities”. In fact, this document claims that “everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning [...]”. Another case in point is the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, an important action plan developed after a consultation process that involved more than 10,000 children at the beginning of 2021. In addition to making the social and economic inclusion of children one of the 5 key thematic areas of intervention, this strategy aligns with the European Child Guarantee (EC, 2020) that aims at breaking down the vicious cycle of disadvantage.

**FIGURE 1**  
**CYCLE OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION ACCORDING TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**



According to the European Child Guarantee, member states are encouraged to provide children in need with free and effective access to essential services, such as inclusive education and care, school-based activities and healthcare. Similarly, the strategic framework “Education and Training 2020” states (ET, 2020) that “education and training systems should aim to ensure that all learners -including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants – complete their education, including, where appropriate, through [...] the provision of more personalized learning”. The reference to a “personalized learning” is of key importance. Indeed, over the years, we have passed from a "segregated" education to a type of education that, despite the search for inclusiveness, was in fact just "integrated". There is a discrepancy between integrated and inclusive education. On one hand, when an education system is “integrated” it means that it is the child who has to adapt to a teaching system, with the risk of being excluded if it fails. On the other hand, in inclusive education systems it is the educational system itself to adapt accordingly to the needs of children. This substantial difference is the reason why it is worth emphasizing the importance of the expression "personalized learning", which refers to inclusive education, contained in the Education and Training framework 2020.

Finally, all these principles are now included in the “Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021 - 2027” (EC, 2020), approved in Brussels last year by the EU, that lists among its priorities: inclusion for all, mainstreaming gender and anti-discrimination actions and providing support at all stages of the integration process, starting with life-long education.

Having said that, after the COVID-19 outbreak, the forced acceleration of schools’ digitalization has often hit harder and left behind the most vulnerable students (UN, 2020). Indeed, the crisis has revealed many inequalities in our education system, such as uneven access to digital tools, low level of teachers and trainers’ digital literacy (Portillo et al, 2020) and lack of supporting tools for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Indeed, during the pandemic, despite the great commitment and effort of educators, SEN students have often experienced a gradual narrowing of access to the so-called “reasonable accommodations” (e.g. specialized teachers, psychologists, dedicated learning materials, etc.) (Petretto et al., 2020). Those allowed until that time to provide SEN students with the necessary educational support. According to these premises, it can be easily understood that Covid-19 and distance learning have had serious consequences on the inclusion of students with SEN (Inclusion Europe, 2020) and caused severe distress in all pupils (UNESCO, 2020).

Numerous studies have reported the emergence of mental health issues across all age groups since the beginning of the pandemic (Ahrendt et al., 2020), particularly among young people and pupils from different countries. A survey conducted in Italy evidenced that over 50% of children showed mild mental issues, while around 20% manifested acute psychological problems (Pisano et al., 2020). Similar results have also been found in Spain, where 85% of parents reported similar observations to the ones in Italy (Orgiles et al., 2020; Magson et al., 2021). In the UK, according to the results of a survey released by the mental health charity YoungMinds, that involved 2111 participants up to 25 years old with a history of mental health, 83% of young people reported that their condition became worse with the pandemic (Lee, 2020). Due to the fact that similar effects have also been reported in other countries, some researchers started to refer to this phenomenon as "secondary pandemic" or "silent pandemic" (Scholz, 2021).

According to the 2020 Eurochild Semester Report (Eurochild, 2020), mental health problems related to anxiety and insecurity caused by the pandemic have increased worryingly among children in England, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Romania, Estonia, Finland, Slovenia and Portugal. In addition, even children who had not previously shown behavioural disorders began to experience insomnia and to show more aggressiveness.

These factors contribute to the educational loss forecasted by the World Bank, which claims that 25% more students may not achieve adequate levels of proficiency to participate in society (World Bank, 2020). To counteract these negative effects which impact “not only people’s health, but also how they learn, work and live”, the Organization for the Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) calls for the adoption of a holistic approach on inclusive education, addressing students’ learning and emotional issues (OECD,

2020). To adopt such an effective approach, a co-ordinated action is needed, resulting in a strong collaboration among stakeholders who work with and for children (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021).

In line with what has emerged so far, recent literature has found new promising applications for arts education. When referring to theoretically based strategies that meaningfully and effectively address the strengths and needs of a diverse range of students, arts teaching can support the establishment of a more inclusive school culture and promote students' wellbeing (Hannigan et al, 2019; Gnezda, 2015). Arts can effectively address students' mental issues (Lyshak-Stelzer et al., 2007) and psychological distress, promote inclusive education, intercultural dialogue (Hannigan et al., 2020; Favella, 2017), and the attainment of the "21st Century Skills" (Kay & Greenhill, 2011; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The positive effect of arts on achieving the skills considered most relevant in the contemporary job market (i.e. 21st Century Skills) is particularly relevant: it shows how, in addition to medium-term benefits for children, arts teaching can also have long-term positive effects. In this regard, the "21st Century Skills Map: Arts" (Dean, C. et al., 2010), developed by six art education institutions, is particularly noteworthy. The Map provides people with practical examples on how arts (i.e. theater, dance, music and visual arts) can positively impact on all three 21st Century Skills categories (learning, literacy and life skills).

Taking into account the background outlined above, this paper will illustrate the theoretical principles and practices guiding the Erasmus+ project "**INclusive CREativity through educational artmaking**" (InCrea+). The aim of this project is to disseminate and facilitate the adoption of inclusive education practices at European level through the development of an innovative educational approach based on arts content and practices stemming from sound educational theories, such as *Positive Youth Development*, *Universal Design for Learning (UDL)* and *Educational Art-Therapy* (Lerner et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2012). InCrea+ involves 7 institutions from 6 countries, i.e., Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Italy and Spain. Recently, partners have completed a survey analysis among schools and organizations from the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS), which will be involved in the implementation of project results. Partners administered surveys to almost 150 teachers and arts educators from all project countries in order to integrate their knowledge and perspectives into the InCrea+ methodology, also called "**Inclusive Educational Artmaking**". To put into perspective the idea revolving around the methodology proposed, this study will present a literature review on the benefits of arts education, paying particular attention to how it provides valuable support in re-orienting the educational system towards a holistic strategy to inclusive education (OECD, 2020). The chapters following will show the main aspects of the InCrea+ project, the results of the survey carried out by the partners and the foundational framework of "*Inclusive Educational Artmaking*". What is presented here will also be part of university courses delivered to teachers in training throughout the InCrea+ project lifecycle. The authors believe that the InCrea+ project would promote inclusion and wellbeing in the European educational system, providing a valuable contribution to school's revitalization after Covid-19 outbreak.

## **THE BENEFITS OF ARTS EDUCATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

The link between arts and inclusive education has still received little attention in the literature. Researchers of educational sciences tend to focus more on the use of arts in general education settings compared to special and inclusive education (Lloyd, 2017). Before delving into the subject, it is important to clearly discern the terms special and inclusive education. Generally, special education refers to the practice of providing individualised instructions and support to students with disabilities or learning difficulties, often referred as Special Educational Needs (SEN). In other words, special education means that all students will have a different plan depending on their needs, abilities and goals. Lately, as explained by Florian, this practice has been put into questioning by many researchers, who associate it with problems of marginalisation and exclusion (Florian, 2008). From this controversy, inclusive education emerged as the

solution to avoid marginalisation and social stigma of SEN students. Inclusive education is based on the premise that there is no such thing as an average learner and everyone develops and learns differently. In an inclusive setting, SEN students spend most of their time with their non-SEN peers rather than in separate classrooms or schools and activities are designed to meet the diverse learning needs of everyone, independently from their abilities (Kirschner, 2015).

Despite strong criticisms, special education has not been completely supplanted. Due to several reasons, different degrees of inclusive and special education co-exist in many educational settings and some scholars have also claimed the actual impossibility of reaching full inclusion. For instance, Cooper and Jacobs have described this notion as a “delusion” based on a misplaced ideology equating being present in a school with being socially and educationally included (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011). As the debate continues, it is interesting to note that some other writers decided to merge the two perspectives to elaborate new frameworks, such as the Inclusive special education promoted by Hornby (Hornby, 2015).

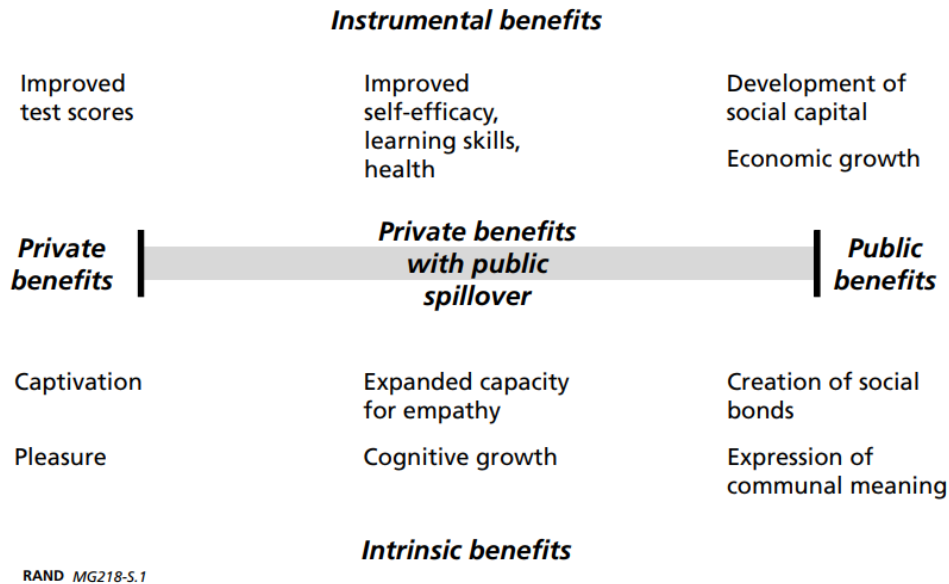
It is not among the aims of the present paper to dispense a conclusive answer on this debate, which has been briefly described just to provide some background reference. This study will mainly discuss inclusive education strategies, as InCrea+ project and methodology have been planned to establish educational settings involving students with different abilities, cultures, social backgrounds, emotional or behavioral issues. Within this framework, educational activities will be designed to equally engage any pupil, which, according to the Salamanca’s Declaration (1994), means also “*children with disabilities, gifted children, homeless children, children belonging to nomadic groups, children belonging to linguistic minorities, ethnic or cultural children with HIV or belonging to any other vulnerable groups*”. However, to understand how arts education is applied in general, special and inclusive education, in order to deliver a more comprehensive account of the benefits that arts education provides.

A simple and very practical way to elaborate the present examination is to start by considering, in general, how arts are taught in different educational settings, i.e. schools, communities, informal spaces, associations, etc. A study conducted by K.F. McCarthy et al. (2004) described four different forms (also called *treatments*) of arts education:

- **Arts-rich environment**, which incorporates the arts throughout the school curriculum and/or offers students a range of extracurricular activities in the arts;
- **Arts used as a pedagogical tool** to help students learn traditional academic skills;
- **Arts integrated into non-arts courses** to facilitate the learning of non-arts subjects;
- **Direct instruction in the arts** to promote both arts appreciation and artistic skills.

Within this same study, the several benefits deriving from each of the methods proposed are deeply analyzed. The authors also elaborated a captivating and very broad framework for understanding the benefits of the arts, which will be transposed also in this analysis, as it incorporates many elements useful for the conceptualization of arts practices for inclusion.

**FIGURE 2**  
**FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE BENEFITS OF ARTS**



As described in FIGURE 2., benefits are distributed along 4 axes. On the top half of the scheme are presented the instrumental benefits of the arts, those that are related to the teaching of arts but are not inherent to them, while at the bottom are listed the intrinsic benefits, those that belong more closely to arts themselves. From the left to the right side of the figure are collocated different degrees of private and public benefits, i.e. those that are *primarily* more meaningful to individuals or society. Finally, in the middle, are established those benefits that are private but have positive spillovers on the public sphere.

This articulation of arts' benefits will be the main reference for this review, which will elaborate more on each of the 4 forms of arts education briefly presented above. Through further analysis on these frameworks, overlapping with studies on general, special and inclusive education, it will be established a more round understanding of arts education benefits and their relation to inclusiveness.

### **Arts-rich environments**

Schools with arts-rich environments are those that extend artistic activities both at curricular and extracurricular level. Some schools may provide an arts-rich environment by infusing arts in different subjects, displaying plays or offering other extracurricular activities, such as school bands, orchestras, choirs, visual arts exhibits, etc. However, what really defines a school with an arts-rich environment is not the kind of activities offered, but the fact that it "*acknowledges the value of [artistic] activities and provides recognition to student participation*" (McCarthy et al., 2004, p. 23).

Musneckiene (2020) contends that this form of arts education, infused with inclusive practices, is able to "*ensure a positive emotional atmosphere, and psychological safety for every pupil, as well as tolerance, freedom and active communication*". In line with this claim, a study published in 2017 (Favella, 2017) described a series of "*creative art-based projects*" (CABPs) carried out in Italy with over 620 children aged 10-14 in the form of artistic workshops. CABPs covered intercultural subjects in the shape of tales, dramas, and illustrations in order to promote intercultural dialogue and inclusion in schools. The results from the qualitative and quantitative analyses manifested evident positive results. Before taking part in the CABPs, many pupils were facing dynamics linked to the so-called "*defence phase*", in which they tended to

avoid interaction with cultural differences. After engaging in the activities planned, many pupils transitioned to the “*minimization phase*”, manifesting a stronger intercultural sensitivity.

A research study published in 2016 shares some similarities with the one just discussed (Valentino, 2016) in terms of activities and goals. The author developed and completed a living mural project involving students from an elementary school in the USA. Starting from the idea that “*there is no right or wrong way to participate in the arts and [...] everyone is equally able to contribute to the production of the arts*” (Valentino, 2016, p.28), the project was designed to allow SEN and non-SEN students to interact in a schoolwide project aimed at fostering inclusive education and understanding of diversity. After taking part in this project, students improved their attitudes toward school, acquired communication, cooperation skills, and increased their sensitivity toward disabilities.

Another study (Lloyd, 2017) devoted particular attention to the benefits of arts-rich environments, but focusing more on a different aspect. The author discussed the results of a study conducted on over 2000 students attending public schools in grades 4th through 8th. The aim of the study was to compare the skills and academic results of students who were more and less exposed to arts. The study found a “*significant relationship between rich in-school arts programs and creative, cognitive, and personal competencies needed for academic success*” (Lloyd, 2017, p. 5). In fact, also non-art teachers involved in the study realized that students participating in arts-programs were more curious and able to express ideas than others.

What the cited studies testify is that arts-rich environments affect students on both academic and personal level and that they can help foster inclusion by providing a channel of communication on multiculturalism and disabilities. In accordance with the framework proposed by McCarthy et al., it can be said that art-rich environments support:

1. Creation of social bonds, through the involvement in cooperative and engaging activities;
2. Increase of empathy, through the understanding of different perspectives;
3. Improvement of test results, through the development of cognitive and learning skills acquired by the means of creative activities;
4. Growth in self-confidence and self-efficacy, thanks to the sense of fulfillment deriving from the completion of a work of art.

## **Arts as a pedagogical tool**

This practice is partly related to Henry Gardner’s famous theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999), in which he postulates that individuals use 8 different forms of intelligence in the learning process: language, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, naturalist, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Capacities in these intelligences vary extensively among individuals, and this translates into different modalities of learning, sometimes in conflict with the linguistic and logical/mathematical models applied in schools. Thus, certain students may find school subjects more challenging because the educational models applied do not stimulate their learning process.

This diversity in the learning process of students makes the arts a good means for teaching academic skills in inclusive educational settings. For instance, as arts do not heavily rely on language or English proficiency, they can be accessible to all students, regardless of language differences or language abilities (Henderson & Lasley, 2014). Examples of teaching practices falling under this form of arts education are the use of music while studying or performing a scene from a reading lesson. In line with *Universal Design for Learning* (UDL) (Hall & Rose, 2012), when arts are used as a pedagogical tool, the goal is to provide students with “*multiple means of representation*” to better acquire information and knowledge.

Within this application, studies have been devoting some attention to the effects of arts teaching practices based on art-therapy methods (Gnezda, 2015; Hannigan et al., 2019; Lyshak-Stelzer et al., 2007; Cochran, 1996; Sa et al., 2014). Although art therapy is a “*highly specialized area of therapeutic practice and healing*” (Musneckiene, 2020), there are ways for teachers to infuse art therapy experiences into their

practices. Hannigan et al. (2019) define this approach as “*creative art therapy*”, a method that employs insights from art-therapy practices to foster inclusive education and address issues of students experiencing or at risk of mental health problems. This approach is even more relevant today, amidst the consequence of COVID-19 pandemic, which caused an alarming increase of mental health issues in young students (Scholz, 2021). According to research, “*Creative art therapy*” promotes: (i) action-based learning, (ii) SEN education, (iii) self-esteem, (iv) positive communication, (v) conflict resolution, and (vi) student support. This occurs because, according to Council (2016) art therapy helps students to:

1. develop problem-solving techniques;
2. make use of nonverbal expressions, facilitating communication;
3. connect them with universal themes through metaphors;
4. provide them a safe platform to discuss personal issues and build stronger connections with their peers.

### **Integration of arts in non-arts courses**

Studies provide several examples on how the integration of arts in non-arts courses contribute to increasing proficiency in non-arts subjects. The STEAM approach is a perfect example of such practice, which integrates arts in the teaching of STEM subjects. Liao (2016) presented a STEAM pilot, in which students worked in groups to create interactive 3-D story books to teach the concept of embracing difference. Results of this pilot suggest that the knowledge and skills acquired “transcended” the subjects involved. Robinson (2013) also noted potentially positive effects for students with disabilities, such as increase in self-efficacy, self-regulating behaviours, and the use of learning strategies.

### **Direct instructions in the arts**

Finally, direct instruction in the arts has been found beneficial for the development of communication skills, critical thinking, positive values and pupils’ interest in the arts. Musneckiene (2020) evidences how arts encourage gifted children to “research about their area of interest”. In traditional school settings, gifted students are prone to (i) lack of motivation, (ii) anxiety, and (iii) dissatisfaction with school (Abu-Harmour & Al Hmiuz, 2013). When similar characteristics are found, sometimes they obtain lower academic results than expected. The stimulation of gifted students’ creativity through arts play an important role in confronting them with their emotional issues, and support the development of problem-solving, logical reasoning and critical thinking (Ronksley-Pavia, 2014).

### **INCLUSIVE CREATIVITY THROUGH EDUCATIONAL ARTMAKING – INCREA+ PROJECT**

The Erasmus+ project “INclusive CREATivity through Educational Art Making” (<https://increaplus.eu/>), or InCrea+, fits perfectly into the context outlined above. InCrea+ has been approved and co-financed by the European Commission in March 2021 and it will last until February 2023. Within this project, seven partner organizations from six European countries (Italy, Spain, Turkey, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria) are cooperating together. The different backgrounds of these organizations allow them to address the theme of inclusive education in a more effective and comprehensive way; the project in fact involves 3 schools, 1 institution that has its own school, 1 budgetary institution responsible for pedagogical and psychological services, 1 non profit organization and 1 University.

InCrea+ aims at providing an innovative method of inclusive education and promotion of wellbeing through the adoption of arts based on theoretically based strategies. The main target groups of this project are secondary education teachers, students from 11 up to 16 years old, education help specialists and workers from the Creative and Cultural Sector (CCS).

Project results will be based on different educational methodologies, such as Positive Youth Development (Lerner et al., 2009), Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Hall & Rose, 2012) and



Educational Art-Therapy [15]. These educational methodologies are combined by the promotion of inclusion in schools and remove any barriers that may prevent students from learning in a positive and open environment. In particular, Educational Art-Therapy shows how arts subjects can be seen as a vehicle for flexibility, helping to create an educational method that can adapt to the needs of all. The InCrea+ project will work in the same direction, strengthening teachers' inclusive education competences, promoting a stronger inclusion of disadvantaged students, devoting more attention to student's emotional wellbeing and providing the CCS workers with new skills and competences.

The goal is to establish a comprehensive arts curriculum (the InCrea+ Curriculum) based on art therapists' insights, that will effectively implement the holistic approach of inclusive education promoted by the OECD. This will be achieved through the development of three results:

The InCrea+ Methodological Material on inclusive arts' education and wellbeing, which will explore the most suitable artistic means, practices, teaching methodologies and their effectiveness in the promotion of inclusive education, multicultural dialogue, wellbeing and the 21st Century Skills. The methodological material will be available as an e-book in order to maximise its impact.

The InCrea+ Curriculum, which will establish proper activities, tools, teaching materials, resources and instructions on how to adopt them in school.

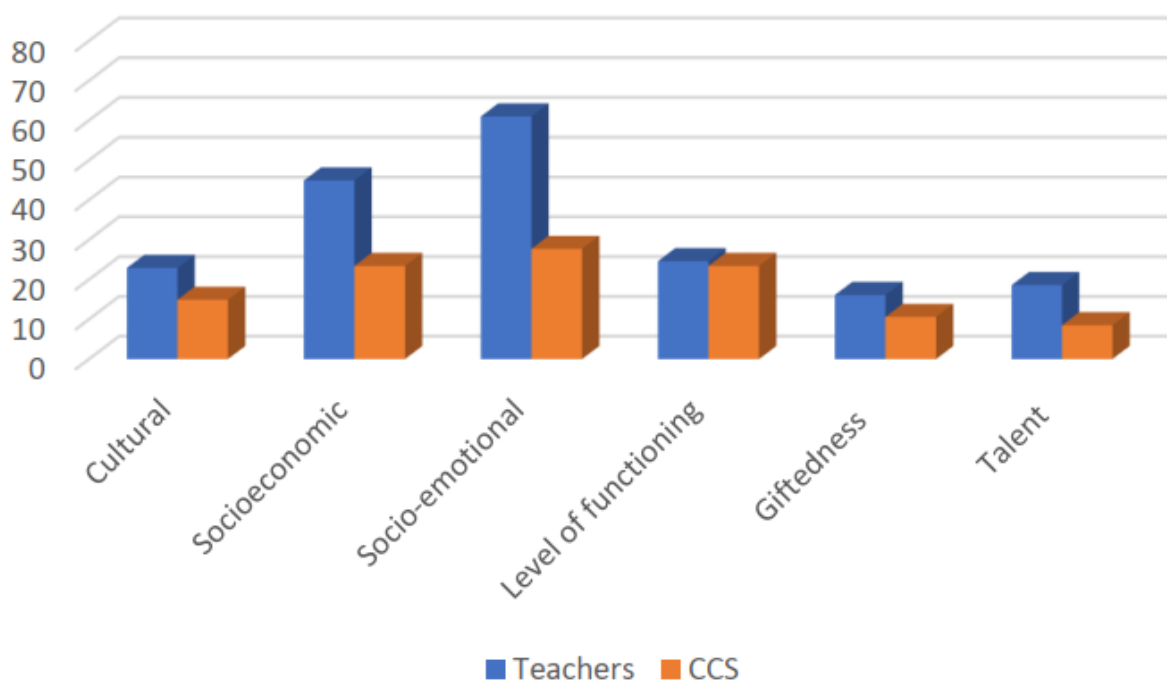
An online Open Educational Resource (OER) platform. This platform will serve as a host to the InCrea+ curriculum, which will be digitized, uploaded and freely available to everybody so that the project's results reach the widest public possible. Through the OER, teachers and CCS workers will be able to easily adopt in everyday activities all the InCrea+ results.

### **Teachers and Creative and Cultural Sector perspectives on Inclusive Artmaking in the 21st century**

Although the project is still ongoing, some activities have already been completed and provide a useful source of data. In particular, from April to June 2021, the partners created, distributed and then collected questionnaires via Google Moduli for teachers and CCS workers in their countries. The survey involved 100 teachers and 46 professionals from the CCS, in 6 different countries, i.e. Italy, Spain, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Lithuania. The data related to the questionnaires were analyzed by the University of Padova, the leading organization of the first output, and included in a report.

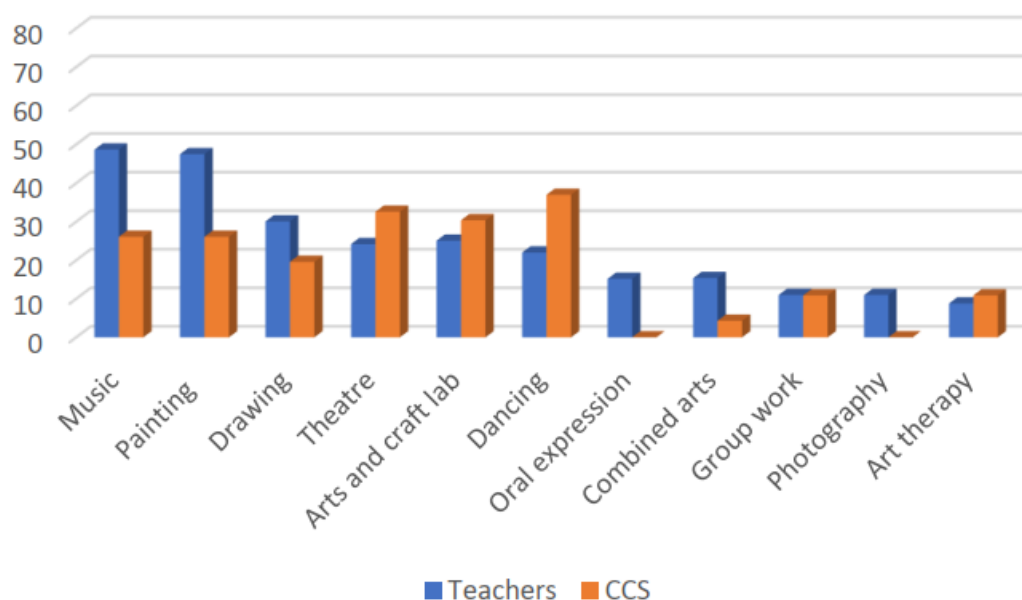
What emerged from the report is that both teachers and CCS professionals consider socio-emotional (e.g. depression, behavioural problems, stress management problems, anger, etc.) and socioeconomic (low-income families, limited access to educational/technological resources, etc.) challenges the main obstacles in adopting inclusive education. This fact is represented in **FIGURE 3**, below.

**FIGURE 3**  
**CHALLENGES TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ACCORDING TO TEACHERS AND CCS PROFESSIONALS**



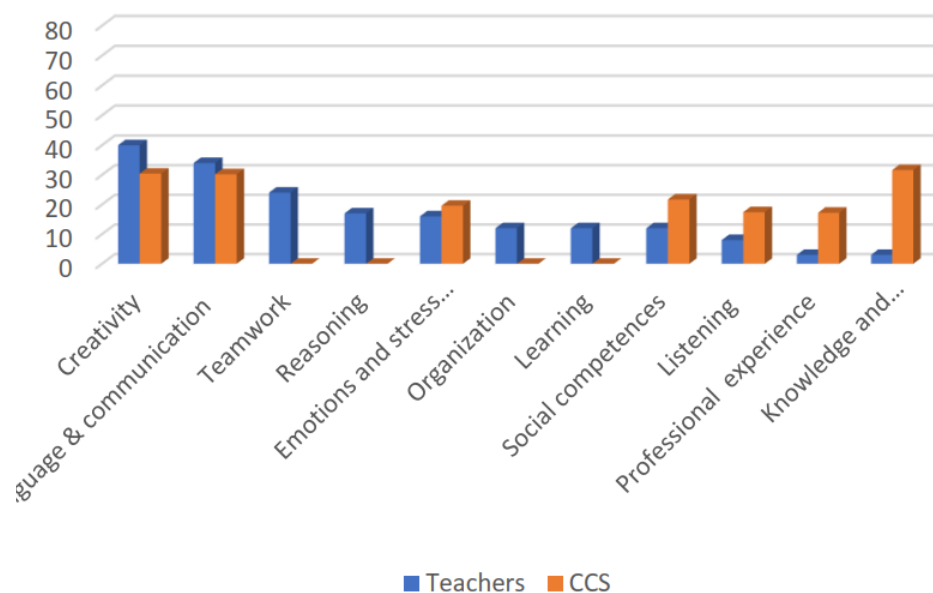
As **FIGURE 4** explains, there is a substantial difference between teachers and CCS workers when it comes to the definition of the main artistic means that can be associated with inclusive practices: while music, painting and drawing are the most effective artistic means according to teachers, CCS workers gave their preference to dancing, theater and arts and craft labs. This information will be essential for the development of the project, as they give us an idea of what are the activities to focus on and to include in the InCrea+ Curriculum.

**FIGURE 4**  
**ARTISTIC MEANS OF EXPRESSION ASSOCIATED WITH INCLUSIVE PRACTICES**  
**ACCORDING TO TEACHERS AND CCS PROFESSIONALS**



In addition, the project foresees the direct involvement not only of those who are already teachers, but also of future teachers (i.e. university students) to allow them to immediately acquire techniques to promote inclusive education. Once again, the attention of project’s partners has turned to the maximization of the impact that will allow to spread InCrea+ methodology as much as possible.

**FIGURE 5**  
**MAIN COMPETENCES USEFUL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL**  
**ARTMAKING ACCORDING TO TEACHERS AND CCS PROFESSIONALS**



In this regard, another evidence provided by the report (**FIGURE 5**) provides us with relevant information on the main competences that might be useful to develop inclusive education and artmaking activities: according to teachers the most relevant skills are creativity, language and communication skills and team work, while for CCS professionals listening skills, social competences and knowledge/experience in the artistic field are the most important ones. Therefore, the main competencies and skills to consider are identified when interested in meeting teachers and future teachers' needs when training them on the topics of the project.

### **Key contents and issues for an Inclusive Education through arts**

Responses from teachers and CCS participating in the survey underline the need to integrate knowledge and perspectives, both in actions aimed at the experts and in the choices guiding the development of an innovative curriculum for secondary school students but also in the analysis of changes instilled and positive and inclusive development promoted in all students from secondary school.

As regards educational activities aimed at professionals interested in promoting Educational Artmaking and INCREA+ goals, the analysis of the results from the survey suggests as mandatory:

**A.** Developing a clear and deep understanding of theoretical and methodological choices related to inclusive education and Universal Design for Learning

**B.** Developing knowledge on current and expected future challenges, on 21st century skills, and on relevance of addressing skills from the diverse domains, namely Learning, Literacy, and Life and Professional Skills.

**C.** Developing knowledge on the meaning of the experience coming from diverse artistic expressions, addressed both as art reading and art making.

The emphasis on specific and diverse issues at the core of the answers underline the relevance of following basic guidelines:

**D.** Develop activities addressing the main challenges to inclusion and inclusive education

**E.** Develop activities tapping the 21st century skills from each of the three main areas (Learning, Literacy, Life and Professional Skills)

**F.** In developing activities use artistic means tapping both fine arts (paintings), visual arts (movies, photographs), plastic arts (sculpture), performance arts (theatre and dance), applied arts and decorative arts are the major classifications of the arts

**G.** Developing activities addressing both famous artistic expressions and artmaking activities might also support a reflective approach to coded experiences and the meaning-making associated with a direct involvement in making art.

Some methodological choices follow, in light of the integration of perspectives:

**H.** Using multiple artistic means of representation, processing and expression in each activity in the curriculum

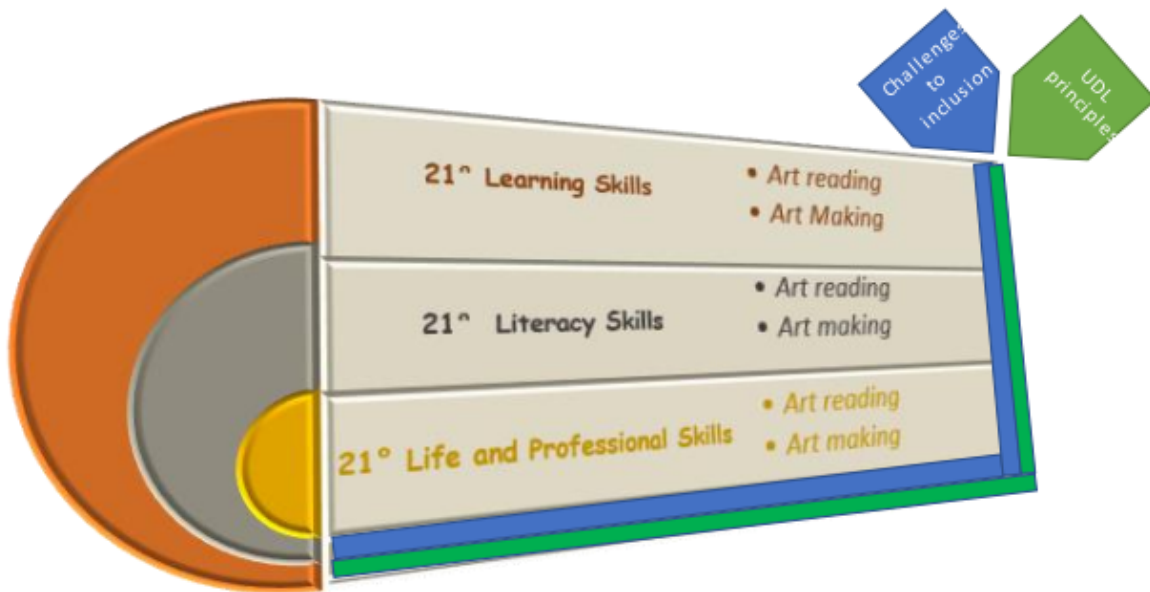
**I.** Actively involving participants in developing narratives related to inclusion and to the skills important for an inclusive personal growth

**J.** Assessing learning along the diverse themes and perspectives

**K.** Including reflective questions and other tools tailored to support the meaning-making of the artistic experience or product

**L.** Focusing reflective questions on the inclusion issues and the 12st skills both in terms of awareness of their relevance but also as active engagement in implementing proactive behaviors after participating in the curriculum implementation.

**FIGURE 6**  
**COMPONENTS OF AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL ARTMAKING**



As summarized in **FIGURE 6**, addressing the challenges to inclusion through working on 21st century skills and education art-based activities of diverse types, with an innovative approach, the curriculum will promote wellbeing as well as inclusion and a positive development.

## CONCLUSIONS

The need for innovative teaching methods that promote inclusivity is more relevant than ever in the context of the digitalization process of education produced by COVID-19. Arts education provides the perfect platform for the establishment of engaging learning activities, as it is a universal communication channel for all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, cultural status and/or disabilities. As proved in the literature review previously discussed, arts education can produce benefits that go beyond the personal results of each student, contributing to the erosion of the vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion illustrated by the EC (see FIGURE 1). In this regard, the *InCrea+* project gives its contribution by attempting to elaborate an innovative approach of inclusive education based on artistic practices that tackles both the learning and emotional needs of all students. Although the project is still in its infancy, it has already defined some of the basic guidelines, activities and methodologies that will constitute an *Inclusive Educational Artmaking*.

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