



"MyHub – a one-stop-shop on inclusion practices, tools, resources and methods for the pedagogical staff at formal and non-formal educational institutions"



WP7: Pilot upscaling and implementation onto practice

# DEL. 7.3 "Case studies from implementers – pedagogical staff who used the inclusive learning resources"

September, 2021

**Author:** 

Marie Curie Association, Bulgaria





MyHUB

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## **CASE STUDY NEDA**

My name is Neda and I am primary teacher at a Bulgarian mainstream school. My work in the education system has started 28 years ago and first I was pedagogical advisor for 7 years and then I have continued as a teacher for 21 years.

Since 2016 the inclusive education is compulsory for the schools and although teachers are regularly invited to numerous trainings to obtain knowledge on the topic, there are still gaps in our skills. Therefor, when my school headmaster offered me to participate in the Myhub testing, I gladly accepted. My desire was to learn how to adapt my teaching approaches to the various needs of students with disabilities and how to make my classroom an inclusive place for all pupils. I have some experience with STEM classroom as well as in use of screen readers, however I am convinced that I need more knowledge in order to be effective in the teaching process and again I would like to highlight that my desire is to be equally effective teacher for all students with and without disabilities.

When I first entered into the MyHUB portal I saw the ppt "How to use the learning resources". A very handy material as it provides useful guidelines how to explore the platform and what I should be careful with. Then the navigation was very easy. My first impression was that this is a huge online storage place and teachers can spend hours and days in examining it. Then, I have tried the searching tool, which listed to me targeted results, thus saving time and offering the thematic area, which I am interested in. This is really useful to me as a teacher, as I could search by type of disability, level of education and on other useful criteria. The information presented is not just theoretically valid, but is really practical, so I could implement the solutions found directly in my work. Another positive feature is that the style of the description was not sophisticated, but at the same time was professionally focused on the concrete topic. That is why every teacher would be able to grasp the idea and implement it in the classroom. Some practices presented in MyHub demand more financial resources, but the majority are knowledge-based. These are just are few arguments, which inspired me to recommend MyHub resources to other teachers.





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Up to now when teaching I was mainly concerned about my attitude and behavior, as well as I was focused on the educational content. My primary goal was to ensure that my students with disabilities have mastered the content of the lesson. After I have examined the MyHub resources my attitudes and believes were changed. Now I do more experiments, such as different arrangements in the classroom, new tools used in the teaching, more group activities etc. Now I could say that my classroom favours both acquiring of academic skills and socializing.

In the resources I found helpful advices for planning the lesson in a more flexible way. For example different students with different needs may have diverse roles in the learning process. A student with speech impairment may not be fluent in reading aloud, but he may receive a task to follow whether his class mate is doing this correctly.

There are also useful materials advising how the school staff can work together to create more welcoming environment for students and how to adjust the educational plans, so that students with disabilities could attain the set goals and requirements. My message to the colleagues is: base you teaching on the knowledge you have, but try to find specific approach to each student. Be open minded and make use of self-learning.



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### **CASE STUDY Silvia**

My name is Silvia and I am a secondary education teacher at private school in Bulgaria. This is the first private school established in our city, and since 2018, we have 9 students with disabilities. For the time being, in my class, there is one child with autism spectrum disorder. Although I have 14 years of experience as a teacher, I still face challenges to integrate efficiently children with special educational needs in my classroom. As private school, we invest time, efforts and resources to equip our classrooms with modern educational technologies, software and hardware, to be used by all students with and without disabilities. On the other hand, I myself as well as my colleagues, realize that we need additional training in order to meet the needs of different students. This is the reason why, I was very eager to participate in my hub piloting. As we are facing a lot of uncertainty, due to continuous anti-pandemic measures, and the constant changes in the educational environment, we have less time for new trainings. When I found out that MyHub training will be mainly online and I could follow it, with my individual pace, I was very pleased.

I have attended a dissemination workshop where Myhub was presented and I was very impressed by the concept. Shortly after the event, I sent my application form and I received an answer almost immediately. Then I registered in the platform and this was the beginning of my new training experience. When I first started exploring the resources I realized that this is a huge data base and it would be difficult to find a particular resource I am interested in. Then I contacted the project team in Bulgaria and they guided me how to use the search tool. Gradually, I started to get a hold of it. A very useful option, it made my research in the portal easier.

In the beginning, it was quite difficult to me to browse through the portal, because the information is really a lot. Then I learned to use better the search criteria, and this is how I found many useful materials for inclusion of children with autism. I have read many practices, most of them were scientifically proven, while the others were the personal experience of teachers like me. In both cases, I obtained useful ideas that I am now applying in my classroom.

The first contribution of the My Hub resources to my practice was that the information I found help me realize that there is no one-size-fits all approach to students with autism. That is why I stopped struggling to find a concrete methods and I started to consider different modifications to my teaching style every day.

When I met with other colleagues during the training workshops, and we discussed the training materials and exchanged experience, I obtained useful ideas. The online repository on the other hand, is a helpful place with permanent access, which is very convenient, especially in our days when most of the activities are implemented in a digital asynchronous environment.





"MyHub – a one-stop-shop on inclusion practices, tools, resources and methods for the pedagogical staff at formal and non-formal educational institutions"

At the end of the piloting I could conclude that my knowledge in the field of inclusive education was significantly expanded, especially with regards to the technologies for alternative and augmented communication. I enhanced my skills to teach students with SEN and became more confident to observe and reflect on their behavior. I also realized that the personal conditions of the student and their emotional state may affect positively or negatively their academic achievements. Following the advices provided in the MyHub portal I started to communicate more intensively with the parants and to explain to them the small achievement and the progress made by their child every day. In addition, I started to design new flexible exercises, which involve all students with and without disabilities. This strengthened the mutual support among classmates. Now my classroom is like a micro community where children recognize diversity and support each other.

My key message to my colleagues is to be open, to do experiments, and study new materials because in the future, unfortunately, more and more students will require additional support from the teachers due to the different challenges they face. Our role will be not just to teach educational content but also to stimulate the individual learning potential of the student.



WP7: Pilot upscaling and implementation onto practice

DEL. 7.3 "Case studies from implementers – pedagogical staff who used the inclusive learning resources"





"MyHub – a one-stop-shop on inclusion practices, tools, resources and methods for the pedagogical staff at formal and non-formal educational institutions"

### **CASE STUDY Boris**

My names is Boris and I am a teacher in entrepreneurship and technologies in high school in Sofia, Bulgaria. Before I joined the team here I was a teacher in "Zaedno v chas" (Together in class) initiative. While working, one of my tasks was to teach students with learning difficulties and visual impairments. This experience has helped me a lot in my current work because in my class there is one student with dyslexia. He is a very bright boy, however in written exercises and exams he is incapable to show his potential and what he knows. For me, as a teacher, this situation is quite annoying and I started to look for ways to help him. This is how two years ago I have found the website of Myhub project and sent a letter of interest to be involved in the training.

When the pilot phase started in Bulgaria, I joined a group coordinated by Marie Curie Association.

During the 1<sup>st</sup> induction workshop I received helpful guidelines how to use the resources on my own. As my particular interest was related to students with dyslexia, I first read the resources linked to that. This is how I found DyslexieFont.

As we are a private school, with less formal procedures, it was relatively easy to convince the school director to buy this font. My student now uses it and it seems that he could write and read substantially easier. It has also positively affected his performance during the exams. In fact,





"MyHub – a one-stop-shop on inclusion practices, tools, resources and methods for the pedagogical staff at formal and non-formal educational institutions"

this was very reasonable adjustment, which we offered to our student, but it made the learning process very efficient for him.

I'm still exploring the various materials, but in my opinion the main advantage of My hub, is that every time we need information on a concrete topic, we can search for it in the database.

Unfortunately, due to the anti-pandemic measures, we have had a few workshops and the majority of the time we read the materials through the portal. In this way, we had fewer chances to exchange personal experience and discuss specific cases. On the other hand, the option of the portal, which allows users to add content, is a very good idea. It is a pity that in the current situation, the teachers are fed up with online activities and teaching, so they were not so active in using the provided options so far. As the portal will be maintained in the future, I am sure that many teachers will be eager to contribute.

Overall, I would describe my participation in the Myhub project as fruitful and beneficial for me as a teacher. I have acquired new skills to support students with SEN as well as to adjust the training materials for children with difficulties in reading and writing or those who have problems with the processing of symbolic information. These are important skills, which I could transfer to other teaching practices. Now I am more motivated to carry out different experiments in order to support students to work together as well as to support these children who are confronted with challenges in processing the learning content.

I would recommend, to my colleagues to try the MyHub portal and not just to rely on the additional trainings organised by their school.

My key message is that in the era of technologies there should not be even one teacher who feels like they are left alone. Many resources are invested to support teachers in applying inclusive design of teaching and we should make ultimate use of them.



WP7: Pilot upscaling and implementation onto practice





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### CASE STUDY Elena

This is me, Elena, I am a young teacher in a public kindergarten and I have just two years of experience. In my group, two pupils are with disability – motor and autism spectrum disorder. The building of the kindergarten is accessible hence, the child has no barriers to move around. The man challenge is the attitude of the staff and the fact that the children without disabilities are too young to figure out that their two peers require more support and attention to participate in different activities. As I obtained my master's degree in general early education, I found myself totally unprepared to teach students with disabilities. It would be correct to say that such students are arriving in the mainstream kindergartens quite intensively and this was my motivation to start a post-graduate qualification in inclusive education. Another teacher, told me that there is a project called MyHub, in which I could find many useful materials. I contacted the project team in Bulgaria and they invited me to participate in the pilot phase. My director also welcomed the idea. We agreed that for the workshops where I have to be physically present, I can use a day off from the kindergarten. Most of the time I was able to review the materials individually in a time convenient for me, which was an additional benefit.

When I used the search tool for the first time, it seemed that the interface was not as intuitive as I expected it to be. At first I struggled with finding the results I was looking for, but after a few searches and guidelines from the project team, I understood how to operate with the tool efficiently. The most useful resources I encountered were practices and tools driven from the teaching experience. Although, the best examples are coming from other countries, still I believe that with minor modifications, we could apply them in Bulgaria. My secondary motif was that I wanted to use some of the publications I found for my university thesis. Indeed MyHub is a valuable repository with huge number of digital resources and references. Therefore, it was ideal to support my qualification program.

As a whole, I achieved good progress in terms of my knowledge and skills to adapt my teaching style to the individual needs of my students. I have started to implement different modifications



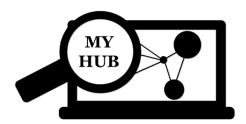


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in the games for pupils I also introduced new toys, some of them with interactive features, and I have even tried lesson about the colors and shapes using an educational robot. All children in my group including these two students with disabilities were very committed and have enjoyed the activity. The more I was progressing, the more confident I became, hence both students and parents have registered that I am more genuine and successful in interacting with children.

Now I could say that I see the inclusive education as mutual and iterative effort rather than as a model that I am supposed to follow. I realized that actual inclusion means not to just ensure that the students with disabilities can participate in the leaning process, but to support their strengths and motivate them to work for better achievements.

I am appealing to my colleagues to search for help and additional training when they could not cope with the challenges of today's educational environment. It is so dynamic and the students are with such diverse needs, therefore we need to update our qualifications regularly.



WP7: Pilot upscaling and implementation onto practice

DEL. 7.3 "Case studies from implementers – pedagogical staff who used the inclusive learning resources"



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### **CASE STUDY Mariana**

My name is Mariana and I am primary teacher in mainstream school in a small town in Bulgaria. This year my students are in first grade and among them I have one child with ADHD and one from a minority group. I have a university degree in Special Education completed in 1984 and another degree in Primary Education completed in 1991. Although I have more than 30 years of experience as a teacher, due the new reform in the Bulgarian education system, which promotes the inclusive education in the mainstream schools, I had to follow different qualification courses in order to upgrade my qualification. I still have a strong desire to learn new things and to be as much useful for my students as possible. The head teacher in my school is also aware of my willingness to learn contemporary facts and practices about inclusive education. So she invited me to participate in the training within Myhub project.

I took part in the first workshop where the project partner explained to the participants how to register and navigate through the portal. As during the last two years we are teaching mainly online, for me it was easy to use just one more platform for distance learning. First, I read the guide and then I started to read the set of good practices. I was amazed how many practices do exist to teach students with ADHD. Some of them I already tried relying on my teacher intuition. The others were new to me and I will try them in the next coming months.

My major difficulty was to find time available to review the resources because my free time was reduced when I have taught online. I also shared the link to the Myhub portal with my younger colleagues and they found it as useful.

In the team discussions, we shared the new practices we have learned about, it turns out that we started to use more online tools when we present the content to our students. Maybe in the future, we will be more open to use graphical representations and games to support our students in mastering the learning content.

It will be fair to say that we still need to make efforts to guarantee that students with disabilities can receive good quality inclusive education, but at least on the level of teacher's attitudes, we achieved good progress. Now we are more focused on creating positive and welcoming atmosphere in the classroom, than just to teach well-known facts. I also have started to train my students in how to get useful information instead of concentrating on the academic content that they need to learn.

In the classes dedicated to Civil Education, now I include more topics related to recognition of diversity, supporting children from vulnerable groups, etc. In my opinion, the kids are also more open to communicate on such issues and provide good ideas.

I would like to share with my colleagues who are of the same age as me that it is never too late to learn and experiment with new approaches. Today's children have new needs and we should be able to meet those using contemporary approaches.





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### CASE STUDY Vihra

My name is Vihra and I am working as a resource teacher in a mainstream school in Plovdiv. I was participating in a dissemination event when I saw a presentation about myHub project. I was impressed by the concept, therefore as soon as I received an email about the launching of the portal, I registered myself and started reviewing the content. As a resource teacher, I consider myself well-prepared to teach students with disabilities. But of course, I am open to learn about new practices especially from the most advanced EU countries. My colleagues from the school, who are mainstream teachers, also asked me to recommend relevant materials, which they could implement in their practice. My Hub project has offered to me and my colleagues this practical information which before that we have been searching for in various sources.

This is what I like the most, the fact that you could find wide range of practices in one portal. For me the English language is not a barrier, I even prefer to read in English, but it is not always the case with my colleagues. This is the only disadvantage of the portal. There are many descriptions of useful practices, but the source files are not in BG language. Even though, the practices are applicable in our country, many teachers could not understand them. On the other hand, this has inspired us to search for alternative platforms in Bulgarian language. Still, there are few but at least we could use my hub portal as a good example to promote such channels for informal training of teachers. I am also the member of the Bulgarian Association of the resource teachers, which provides me with an access to different events where I could promote the useful practices I have found on MyHub Portal.

After I have read useful articles about the inclusive design for all, I increased my knowledge and started to implement approaches, which are suitable, both for students with and without disabilities. Before that, I was more concerned about the students with special educational needs I work with. Now I realise that in the future, our priorities will be to make the classroom a place for all children

Our pedagogical strategies will be oriented to the small community of students, rather than on solving the problem and completing the educational gap on one particular child. On the other hand, we should not forget that there are still children with severe disabilities and complex needs, who need multidisciplinary approach and it seems that they are left behind.

Considering this, I would like to see a more balanced approach in our education system, so that teachers and children can feel at ease when they are at school. I will continue to use MyHub resource because for sure there are materials that I didn't review before, it is a really huge database.

My message is that we should be well-prepared for the future, that's why we should invest time to learn more in the present.





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"MyHub – a one-stop-shop on inclusion practices, tools, resources and methods for the pedagogical staff at formal and non-formal educational institutions"

### **CASE STUDY Daniela**

My name is Daniela and I am an English teacher in Primary School. I have more than 7 years of experience as a teacher; so basically, I know only the system of inclusive education, as I teach pupils in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade. At the moment I have 4 children with disabilities, One of them is with Autism spectrum disorder, two are with sensory impairments and one is with physical disability. My pedagogical approaches are quite flexible especially in the last 2 years when we constantly shift from traditional classroom teaching to online education.

Due to the unpredictable circumstances of the education for the time being, I noticed that the students motivation to learn is negatively affected. Both children with and without disabilities need more positive experience from learning in order to achieve good academic results.

While I was struggling to find a solution on this problem during one of the workshops I have attended a year ago, I heard about Myhub project. As the training was for free, I accepted the invitation to participate. Another advantage was that I could learn in time convenient for me. I was particularly interested in one issue, i.e. to find new ways for rewarding of my students. In Bulgarian Schools, only conventional methods for providing feedback, like scoring system for assessment, are in place. Alternative rewarding mechanisms are less used and sometimes this leads to poor student engagement. When they receive bad score, they lose their motivation to learn. This is especially valid for young children, who need rewards for their efforts rather than assessment of their results.

When I entered the Myhub portal for the first time, I specifically searched for a tool or practice offering information about example for rewarding system. The first result found was the Reward Schedule - a five-step process that gives a guidance to the teacher on how to create a reward system to support student engagement in a training. I reviewed the practice and it appeared that it might be very useful to my students and me. It was necessary to use English language to make use of it, but being an English teacher, it was even better for me. In 3 months' time I created new rewarding system following the suggestions and the result was positive to my students and me. I noticed that they feel more recognized and concerned about what they invest as efforts in order to fulfill the task. My students with disabilities also became more motivated to participate in activities, which they hardy enjoyed before.

I would describe my experience in Myhub training as positive and beneficial.

Despite that, the meetings with physical presence were limited, still we had the chance to communicate, ask questions, and discuss the inclusive education in our schools.

It is crucial for the teachers to receive support as well as to have access to practical materials, which they could apply in the school. I would recommend to the project team to optimise the resources and maintain the database so that other teachers could access and use the information.

My key message is in fact a reminder to my colleagues and me that our students no matter if they are well performing or not, they all need to receive acknowledgement in order to move forward.





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## **CASE STUDY Stefan**

I am Stefan and currently I am physical activity teacher in a secondary school in Plovdiv. 4 years ago, as part of Erasmus + exchange, I took part in mobility visit in Denmark. In the last 5 years, more and more students with disabilities are being sent to the mainstream schools and teachers must support them to study and to be part of the class. As I am teaching physical activity subject, I am curious about how I could adapt the exercises and sport activities so that my students with disabilities could participate. During my visit in Denmark, I saw good examples, especially in athletics and swimming. Since then, I am very open to Erasmus initiatives because I know they are teacher oriented and centred in practical solutions.

My headmaster, has forwarded to me an invitation sent by Marie Curie Association to participate in Myhub pilot course. Although it was mainly online, I decided to accept the invitation. The first workshop was useful and informative and as additional benefit, I met new people with whom I started professional cooperation.

My first impression was that they are not as many resources in physical activities and sport, as for the other subjects. Nevertheless, one of the first results I have found was well-designed handbook titled Primary Physical Education, guidelines for teachers of students with mild general learning disabilities. The content was well-structured and especially the last part with examples was very useful. The layout was reader-friendly and it looked like a modern textbook. There were also some highlights about students with learning difficulties, which helped me to develop accessible warm up activities for them. The more I read in the portal, the more eager I became to challenge myself and do experiments in the gym. Gradually my student with learning difficulty became more confident and active in doing different movements. It seems that he felt my confidence too. My positive experience with the practice I have found in my hub portal, made me search for other useful materials especially now when we are teaching mainly online.

Therefore, I am searching for videos with physical exercises and in the future, I am planning to contribute to the myhub portal with relevant videos. It seems that for the time being, there are not many videos related to inclusive sport, so this will be my contribution.

During our in-house training, for upskilling of teachers, held in October '21, I presented the myhub portal to my colleagues at school and even helped some of them register. When they entered the portal for the first time, they were surprised of different searching criteria, which initially have confused them when using this functionality. Step by step, they got used to it and now they find the resources more easily. Our school headmaster, who is also adult trainer, shared with us that he is willing to include the myhub portal as a useful reference in the presentations he makes.

It is a joined opinion that the division of materials, according to the level of education, is helpful in order to access practices and guides, which are applicable and appropriate for the age of the students.

I am appealing to my colleagues to find time to observe their students and to find out what works best for them. Although we apply universal design of teaching, it is required to individualize our





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pedagogical approaches in order for the children to make use of the material we teach. It will be ideal if parents also share with us what works for the child and what they prefer. If we work as partners, then the learning outcomes will be improved and sustained.



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### **CASE STUDY ELENA**

I am Elena and I am working as a school psychologist in a public secondary school. I am also responsible for the teachers training and qualification, hence I need to find and recommend to my colleagues suitable trainings.

A year ago, I attended event where Myhub project was presented, then I got in touch with MCA team and they invited me to take part in the pilot phase. Because of Covid restrictions, all activities were mainly online but in the given circumstances, it was the best they could do. Furthermore, it seems that the portal is designed for individual use without supervision. So this was like self-explanatory experience for me.

I have found out very good examples as well as methodologies that were not absolutely clear to me. This is the reason why I have used frequently the functionality about submitting comments. Then I was able to see the comments and reflections of others, which is indeed a good idea. As a psychologist, I do different interventions with my pupils and thanks to the good ideas in the portal, I prepared two posters, one about respecting diversity, and the other about expressing emotions. These posters are now used also by class teachers in the extra curricula activities. I also made a PowerPoint presentation describing the Myhub portal, which I use regularly in our internal team meetings.

In this presentation I highlighted not just the educational sources, but also some policy documents, which can be useful when we need to justify the proposals we make to the Bulgarian Ministry of Education. It is always helpful to base ourselves on researches, strategic documents and EU directives and reports.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> workshop the myhub portal was presented as one stop shop for resources and it seems this is true. If we all contribute to the Bulgarian version with practices in Bulgarian language, driven from our country, then it will become richer depository, just like the English one.

Our intention is to suggest My hub portal to the young teachers who start work in our school. It will be a good reference material, which they could use to improve their skills in inclusive education, as well as will allow them to reflect on their pedagogical approaches.

After the end of the pilot phase, I could say that it was useful and pleasant time I have spent navigating in the portal and communicating with the project team.

My key message is the principle I follow in my work: Before I design a specific intervention, I always try to look from the child's perspective and figure out what makes them happy and content. Only then do I start thinking about the outcomes we want to achieve. When we work with children with disabilities, we need to give time to all of us to work and attain our goals.





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## **CASE STUDY Dimitar**

My name is Dimitar and I am the headmaster of public mainstream school in Plovdiv. I have been working at this managerial position since 2017 and before that I was a teacher in Mathematics for 18 years. While I was a teacher, I have attended a training workshop organized by MCA on teaching students with disabilities and complex needs. This was in 2014, when the inclusive education was a hot topic while 2 years later the legislation officially imposed specialised schools to be closed and all children with disabilities to be referred to the mainstream schools. Back then, the majority of the school headmasters have focused their efforts on creating the Accessible infrastructure at school and the attitudinal barriers were left behind.

When more and more students with disabilities arrived in the mainstream schools, these attitudinal challenges have become relatively apparent. Teachers on the other hand, were confronted with the new reality, trying to address diverse needs of various children studying in the same class.

Despite that, the Bulgarian ministry of Education has initiated and still organises professional trainings on inclusive teaching me and my colleagues still need practical guidelines and tips in order to cope with the new reality. All above-stated motivated me to take part in the MyHub piloting. I was specially invited by the team of Marie Curie Association and because I knew them before, I accepted without any doubts.

As part of my responsibilities being a school headmaster, I should internally train my teachers and offer them upskilling trainings. Therefore, this was one more reason to join the MyHub Portal.

When I first entered the database with good practices, I was positively surprised that all resources are grouped according to the precise criteria. For example, it was very handy to search for practices that are matched with concrete level of education – primary, secondary and others. In fact, all education levels are covered, which makes the database applicable from kindergarten till the university setting.

When reviewing the practices I realized that they derived from the experience of teachers from different countries, so, we from Bulgaria, should think carefully how to adapt them in our schools. In the last two years, we are confronted with students with dyslexic problems, and I found good practices on this topic as well. Basically, it is difficult to summarize the scope of practices in the portal which is so wide and can be used in long-term period. This is the main advantage of such repository. Teachers in the mainstream schools work with children with different disabilities in different periods, and because it is difficult to be an expert in all disabilities, the best solution is to stop and read what you need in the concrete teaching situation. This is how I introduced the MyHub portal to my colleagues. 6 months later, I observed that my colleagues also embraced my appeal to upgrade their skills according to each case with a child with disability. When we linked the practices with the concrete child, we also realized that even when two children have one and the same disability, they experience different special educational needs. For example, we have a



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"MyHub – a one-stop-shop on inclusion practices, tools, resources and methods for the pedagogical staff at formal and non-formal educational institutions"

child with sensory impairment, who is fluent in using assistive technologies but they have serious problem socialising and presenting oral information. Another child with sensory impairment in the same grade, is with well-developed social skills and has excellent achievements in group activities and exercises, while in the individual tests/exams they fail. In MyHub project, me and my colleagues have discovered publications, which helped us be more flexible and adaptive when working with different children.

Now, at least one time per month we arrange team meetings to discuss the adjustments needed in our classroom environment. One of the practices we found, made us think on the welcome process of the students with disabilities. That's why in the next academic year, we will introduce new welcoming activities for students who enrol in our school. Now I could say that our school environment is less rigid and more open to innovations.

My key message to my colleagues is to be open-minded and listen more before they decide to act. Teachers and parents might give us useful ideas so that our school to become joyful place where children willingly come without fears or frustrations. Furthermore, the cooperation among schools should also be encouraged because we could succeed only if we learn from each other and create good practices together.