

What happens to Special Education: Will Inclusion be the Solution?

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ABSTRACT— *Inclusion has come to stay in our school system. It should guarantee equal study opportunities for all, prevent stigmatizing, and accept heterogeneous students. The goals are promising. If inclusion widens various students study opportunities and enhances equality among children, it will be a giant educational headway. Will special education still be necessary? Can the goals of inclusion become true or will inclusion lead in a situation in which conditions of learning and teaching resources are tighter and everyone's learning becomes narrower? In this article, we discuss the relationship between special education and inclusion in the current Finnish education system and reflect on the various viewpoints to realize and research inclusive practices at school.*

Keywords— inclusion, special education, students with special needs, various learners

1. INTRODUCTION

The basic education systems both in Finland and in many other European countries have been transformed to fulfill the idea of inclusive schooling as defined in the Salamanca Statement [1]. All various learners study primarily in their neighboring school, in other words in ordinary basic education schools, and all receive tailored support for their special needs in their schools. For special education schools, this means that they must turn merely into resource and expert centers. This is a general trend of development in Europe. Finland has the same emphasis: segregating special education institutions will become expert centers that promote inclusion [2].

The historical developmental phases of special education have followed the same kind of path in Finland than in numerous other European countries [3]. In Finland, the idea of inclusion was preceded by the time of sensory disabilities in the end of 19th century, the time of special education schools and classes in the beginning of the 20th century, and the time of part-time special education since the 1940s [4] [5].

In an inclusive school, every student's education is individually designed and realized in the student's neighboring school within the group of local peers. In Finland, inclusion is the official educational policy, and the goal is that one school should be suitable for all pupils [6]. Thus, the educational trend has proceeded from segregated teaching toward inclusive schooling [7] [8] [9]. In practice, inclusion means teaching in a diverse classroom with pupils who have various individual needs [6] [10].

What does inclusion mean, and what kinds of challenges and opportunities does it bring to special education and all schooling? Will anything change eventually [5] [11] [12], and what does Finland have to offer in order to develop special [13]? These questions will be discussed in this article based on earlier research in the field and our own research and experience that have focused on young prisoners' school experiences [8] [14] [15] [16] [17] [18], inclusion [19], caring teacherhood [20] [21], and challenges of the Finnish teacher education [22] [23] [24] [25]. This various research work serves as the basis of our review that aims at outlining the challenges and opportunities of special education in the changed school reality of inclusive education.

2. HOW TO SECURE STUDENTS' EQUALITY?

Inclusion has been seen as an ideology promoting students' equality [26]. In Salamanca Statement [1], the school was defined as a place in which also those with special needs should study in general education classrooms instead of special education classrooms. The concept of inclusion was created to illustrate the ideological change. The earlier concept which was sometimes used as a synonym for inclusion, integration, was tied with the idea of a graduated service system where students with special needs could use general services "to the fullest possible extent" [5].

Inclusion requires a holistic change in school culture [27]. The change concerns the work of special education and elementary school teachers. Similarly, children's mutual relationships and ability to accept and respect others are crucial in the inclusive school [28]. However, one core question is whether a single school can meet the various needs of its each student.

If schools and teaching fail in their societal task, it will not be able to attach students in school: make them participate and include the growing children with their special features as full members of the community. If the task of individualized teaching fails, education may set students in great danger of exclusion from the society. In these cases, students with learning difficulties have not received enough support for learning—perhaps, difficulties of learning to read or write have not been noticed or students with hearing or visual impairments have not supported sufficiently. The school has not succeeded in coping with unstable students or students with low social skills and behavioral problems. Students with intellectual disability have not received enough support and guidance in their everyday life at school.

If schools and teaching succeed in their task of basic education, students will received all necessary information, skills, and preparedness to continue their studies to the secondary school and move on with their lives. In these cases, the most important task of education has been successful: students have been socialized and integrated in the society.

Education has been noted to be socially inherited, which means that parents' education levels predict their child's education level. Mother's and father's education level have similar effects, yet mother's education is somewhat more influential [29]. Obviously, the higher the parents' education level is, the smaller the chance is that the child would only perform basic or secondary education. However, research has also revealed that the current education system has increased social variation: the children of parents with high education can end up with low education levels while children of parents with just basic education background can pursue higher education. In other words, parents' education level directs children's education. But then again, many other factors influence students' choices regarding vocations and education, too.

From the perspective of inclusive school, the children's socio-economic backgrounds pose a challenge for school as parents select schools for their children [30]. Collaboration with parents is demanding: they may set unrealistic expectations to the school and teachers about their child's success at school or blame the school if the child is not performing well at school. Parents do not always participate in education in a way that actually benefits the children: More is not always better, remind Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack [31].

Some researchers have mentioned that children who are doing well, will do better and better all the time whereas children who are not doing well, will do even worse [32]. If we consider the original ideas in basic education and inclusive education, the current direction is wrong. The initial purpose of equal education and inclusion has been to decrease differences that originate in children's family backgrounds, to decrease polarization [33]. However, various indicators show that the education society tends to be divided into the fortunate and unfortunate [28].

3. IS THE SCHOOL PROVIDING THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE OR BE LEFT OUTSIDE?

According to research [34] [35] [36], learning difficulties and for example challenges in writing and reading skills can be well noticed and met in basic schools. Those students who have behavioral problems are in greatest danger of exclusion.

A significant challenge for teaching is the question of whether the school and teachers can direct their action so that students actually are able to participate rather become excluded. This is a justifiable question because children's and young people's social problems and malaise are increasingly concerning and discussed in our society [37] [38]. According to Kauffman, Mostert, Trent, and Pullen [39], pedagogues should ask themselves at least the following questions: (1) Could this problem be due to an inappropriate curriculum, study program, or teaching strategy?; (2) What do I require or prevent, or what should I require or prevent?; (3) Why do certain kinds of behaviors bother me and what should I do about them?; (4) Should I intervene in extreme behaviors or in non-existing behaviors?; and (5) Will the reason for or a solution of a problem solve something else too [21] [39]?

The school alone does not cause or cannot cure schoolchildren's malaise. Often, it is a question of a much wider dimension related to the process of exclusion as referred in the previous chapter about, for example, families' socio-economic statuses. However, the school has a central role as it can either increase the malaise or decrease it even time to

time [15]. Children spend a great deal of their days at school with adults who work there—often, the time is considerably more than what they spend with their parents. According to research, already one safe relationship with an adult can prevent a child from exclusion [40]. Likewise, research says that the school can offer repairing experiences for children whose home environments have deficiencies or harmful factors [41] [42].

4. IS IT THE SCHOOL OR THE STUDENT WHO ADJUSTS?

The teacher has to teach students, and there are no students alike. Everyone has his or her own special needs for support already without any special educational analysis. For example, students differ in their temperaments, and thus have different ways and rhythms of working and behave [43].

Those students who show their malaise by misbehaving have their own reasons for the behaviors. The teacher should be able to pay attention to the fact that students' work habits, behaviors, coping styles, and even language usage have formed along their life within their living environments. Each child is socialized in the manners present in their homes and their neighboring environment [36].

The school and teachers face two cultures with the children with behavioral difficulties: the school culture and home culture. Hopefully, schools would have just one and as unified as possible culture, but each home has their own culture. All these home cultures are present in the classroom [35].

From the student's point of view, it is somewhat unreasonable to think that he or she should be able to "turn into someone else" when entering the school zone, to become someone who can behave more appropriately in that environment. The word "rules" is like a red rag to a bull for some students, who have learned from home that rules are meant to be broken [17] [18]. Some students are able to adjust to the rules of school while others may find it difficult to even understand the type of language used at school. Terms, concepts, norms, and values may not correspond these children's skill level or rules they have learned [44].

And students with disability or other difficulties as well as their teachers and schools probably perceive adjustment chances differently. Eventually, the question in the title of this chapter is a question that can be answered in an inclusive sense: "both". In the best scenario, the school would be able to teach about the culture in school and make the adaptation of it as smooth as possible, while the student learns about his or her position and opportunities that the school can offer [45].

5. IS THE SUPPORT FOR VARIOUS STUDENTS BROAD ENOUGH?

The challenge of inclusion in practice is that students in an inclusive classroom have such a wide spectrum of needs that one educator does not always have enough expertise to meet them. The situation is challenging both to elementary education teachers and special education teachers. Special education teachers are required to possess more and more specific expertise that should currently cover profoundly all special needs. Students with special needs include students with intellectual disability, with autism spectrum disorder, with behavioral problems, and with dyslexia as well as immigrant students with their special needs.

Learning and learning results, learning environments and teaching arrangements often are a sum of even mutually contradictory factors. Likewise, the relationship between reasons and consequences is usually complicated when planning teaching and support for special needs.

The Finnish basic school became known internationally after the first international students comparisons (see e.g., PISA). Finnish schoolchildren were successful in reading, math, and sciences leaving other Nordic Countries, United Kingdom, Germany, France, and United States of America behind [46] [47] [48]. After 2006, the success started to decrease slowly. There are many reasons, but interestingly the decrease in student comparisons happened the same time with the increase of inclusion in schools. Simultaneously with introducing inclusion comprehensively in schools, the learning results started to decrease. However, in the public debate often people do not notice the fact that cuts in the public sector (including schooling) and, for example, increased class sizes also happened the same time. There is no reliable research about the connection between the decrease in learning results and inclusion.

The decrease does not mean that Finnish education would not be appreciated or the learning results would not be good still. Indeed, also the success have many explanations. In Finland, education and teachers as well as teacher training are highly appreciated. This appreciation is shown, for example, in the popularity of teacher training programs in universities: the best of the best students apply and still becoming selected in the program is difficult [25]. Learning is perceived as every Finnish citizen's basic right and everyone should have quality education. Free, basic education for all is internationally quite rare solution [49].

The new education system—the inclusive school—has a two-dimensional challenge: how to develop schools so that students learn new kinds of skills and knowledge in the ever-changing world of information, and how to make it possible to learn for all students regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds [50] and in a way that would make learning life-long for also those students with special needs [51].

Public schooling has been claimed to be in crisis in various countries. For example, USA, UK, Sweden, Norway, and France are developed countries whose public education is facing great challenges. How to provide sufficient learning opportunities for all children? Quite often administrative solutions are made [52] [53] leading to certain consequences, such as tightening competition between schools, constant measurement of learning results with standardized tests, teachers' salaries becoming tied with students' test results, and cutting off schools for those with learning problems.

The aforementioned measures are considered as solutions to educational challenges. Instead of competition and control, school systems could be developed other ways too by enhancing considerate activities that appreciate students' and teachers' strengths [20].

6. WHAT DOES INCLUSIVE TEACHERHOOD AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERHOOD NECESSITATE TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

Inclusion requires more and more versatile skills and expertise from teachers. The constant change is demanding for them [54]. Simultaneously, the role and education of special education teachers renew [55]. The especial challenge in the renewal is the ever-increasing number of students with special needs [37].

Along with inclusion, special educational expertise and multi-professional, broad collaboration will have an increasing emphasis. Likewise, the parents' and guardians' role will become more important for the collaboration with school [56]. Parents cannot be just bystanders but their activity for children's motivation and success at school is crucial. Students' and teachers' well-being also has to be supported positively by parents. The question is how to increase parents' pedagogical knowledge? This would need a new kind of methods from the inclusive school and insights of how to establish good collaboration with parents. And who will support parents in their upbringing task [57]?

The multi-professional collaboration should create and develop broad support and interventions that enhance studies. Thus, just singular lessons during a schoolweek offered for those who have learning difficulties are not enough. Teaching personnel has to be able to work in broad and varied collaboration [58].

Inclusion provides that special education teachers and elementary education teachers have more intensive collaboration [59]. Actually, there is relatively much research of the direction in which to develop learning contents and how to renew teaching methods. For example, multiculturalism and global questions are new contents of teaching [60]. Information technology and multimedia can provide new opportunities [61], as audiovisual solutions [62] and online teaching [63] have proved to be quite useful in special education, too.

Successful co-teaching can support the school community and work of different groups of teachers [64]. The challenges and opportunities of co-teaching have been widely studied especially in inclusive teaching arrangements [65] [66]. As co-teaching defies the traditional form of teaching, it faces plenty of prejudices [67]. On the other hand, special education teachers themselves could become pioneers of renewed education [68]. Students should practice co-teaching already during their teacher training and wider in universities [69]. Furthermore, special education and inclusive education should have wider collaboration with work life, too [70].

The position of people with disability as well as the position of special education is concerning given the tight economic situation in current politics [71]. Special education experts should, indeed, dare to bring forward their knowledge and influence the decision making [72]. Special education teachers also have an important role as local community developers and busters of prejudices in society [70]. Teachers' attitudes set the example to the tolerant atmosphere in society [10]. Thus, the new inclusive special education teacherhood also necessitates a change in teacher training [73].

7. HOW TO USE RESEARCH TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE PRACTICES?

The field of research in special education is wide, and abundantly research is conducted all the time. It would be important to stop and consider how to use the research results in practice in a way that supports inclusion. How to turn research into simply enough, concrete, inspiring, and convincing practices [74]? Teachers should also become convinced of and enthusiastic about the use and benefits of new methods [75].

We refer here to studies that have provided research-based information about, for example, how various practical measures increase students' joy [76], success at school [77], students' well-being [78], and teachers' well-being [21]. Ways to thank and encourage students are manifold according to the research results [18] [79]—and it is not difficult to apply them in practice.

Perhaps, reward systems for inventing and developing good practices would be a solution now when new methods are desperately needed [80]. Various actions to increase research and practical developmental work are important. The whole society is responsible for this and not just singular active schools and teachers.

Pressures for change threaten teachers' well-being, too. In the inclusive school, the need for teachers' mentoring is clear and hardly getting any lesser due to the new learning, teaching, and study practices [19]. The forms of mentoring

and supervising should be actively developed, also remembering the opportunities of various online mentoring or e-coaching systems [81].

8. HOW TO CREATE INCLUSIVE SOCIETY?

Despite the many challenges and threats, inclusion has many potentials. As it develops and becomes more established, it will not just remain a feature of elementary schools but will extend to other school levels [27] [82]. Inclusion will also become a part of university studies [83], and eventually a part of the whole society.

Schools have the means to make the future more humane and equal than ever. Inclusive attitudes give hope and courage to people with disabilities and other special needs—and help them find their place and contribution in the world [84]. As the word inclusion suggests, its main benefit is the prevention of its opposite, exclusion. By developing special educational methods and research, we will give chances to teachers to make their work meaningful and sensible, and tools to support their own well-being, and most importantly, students with special needs will have increasing opportunities to learn about their own positive resources, strengths, and opportunities.

Yet, there is a long way to societal inclusion. Today's school-aged children know that people are different and see how differences are used for categorizing people. For example, they know that that rich and poor people are more different than similar. Children see and notice that things like wealth are unevenly distributed [85]. To become an inclusive society, children should perceive inclusion as a central part of societal organization. Research has shown how children's attitudes toward diversity can be molded with various kinds of support. Simons and Cleary [86] noticed that through socio-emotional learning processes students can develop in their diversity and political awareness, community self-efficacy, and civic engagement.

It is possible to influence children, they are our future. They can build a better society [87]—if they are allowed to participate and their voices are heard. Nutbrown and Clough [88] are certain that children's views can contribute to the development of inclusive practices and that identity and self-esteem are key to the successful promotion of young children's positive sense of inclusivity and belonging. The authors refer to "a positive sense of inclusivity" that can be enhanced in children if their voices, opinions, and ideas are actively heard [88].

Home-school collaboration supports inclusion among children and in school, and thus societal inclusion as well. Teachers are expected to pursue strong interactional relationship with homes in order to be able to examine their beliefs and reflect on their practices with families [89]. In all, equality in education cannot be achieved if educational structures and curricula are not based on the idea of democratic justice. Therefore, further discussion about the principles of equal, inclusive school is very much needed so that we can clarify the objectives and methods of such schooling.

9. REFERENCES

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