



Treat the unequal as unequal! Inclusion means thinking differently

► The concept of inclusion has become established in various fields such as special needs and mainstream school education, social work, migration research and the sociology of education. Even in business administration and management theory, the inclusion of diversity is attracting ever increasing interest, not least from an economic viewpoint. The question this raises, however, is whether this interest is not just “old wine in new skins”? Why did integration dominate the discourse until quite recently, and why the growing emphasis on inclusion today? This article compares the concepts of inclusion and integration and looks at the different logic of educational practice entailed by each concept. Attention is also directed to the structures and mechanisms of an exclusive German education system. The implementation of an inclusive pedagogy calls for changes to these precise aspects, which will be outlined in the conclusion.

Production-line education

If the task were to summarise the criticisms of Taylorism, the analysis would inevitably have to include the following aspects: detailed instructions and fragmented tasks which permit only one pathway to the finished product; rigid one-way communication with tightly circumscribed content; strictly specified place and time of production; quantified targets for the individual; overall objective alienated from the job done by the individual. This management logic can be transferred astonishingly well to the reality of teaching and the school system: there is a plan (the curriculum) that stipulates the input relatively precisely; this input is broken up into 45-minute time-slots (teaching periods); during such a period teachers pose numerous questions (on average 50 to 80, depending on the study) which the learners have never generally asked themselves (form of teaching); there are various “production lines” for high, medium, basic and lower quality (types of school), and a continuous selection process addresses any deviations from tolerance limits (pass/fail grades, being made to repeat a class or transfer to a different school type). Whereas in the past almost all young people – regardless of their school career – could be integrated into the labour market in some form, today educational impoverishment is manifesting itself as a central problem for the economy and the social state. Some 400,000 young people per year find themselves without a place in company-based nor in school-based initial vocational education and training, but in what is known as the “transition system” (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2010). Not only does this cause the social insurance funds to lose revenue, but the prolonged duration of school attendance or alternative measures to assist disadvantaged individuals in the vocational training system give rise to additional costs. That sums up the economic rationale for inclusive participation in education. The normative perspective, which lays claim to a far longer philosophical and educational tradition, prioritises aspects of fairness and personality development. Both lines of argumentation come together in the concept of inclusion: inclusion effectively means fostering involvement or belonging. So how does it differ from the concept of integration?



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Inclusion: being different and belonging

Here the differences will be made explicit using the example of the social integration of migrants. So, for example, ESSER (2000) understands social integration to mean both inclusion, i.e. multiple integration, and assimilation, i.e. simple integration (cf. Table 1). Assimilation means that immigrants adapt to the majority society, meaning that they assimilate to the status quo in relation to things like language, social contacts and their personal identification. For this form of integration, participation in the host society is of prime importance and ethnic origin declines in significance as the years go by.

In contrast, the “inclusion” type of integration focuses on an equivalence between people’s background of origin and their present location and future prospects. Immigrants speak both languages, for example, have social networks in both directions and identify themselves both with the culture of origin and with the one into which they are growing. What is criticised in many cases is the tendency for ethnic communities to form which are socially excluded. This state of affairs, which is discussed in terms of a “parallel society”, is labelled as separation in the model. The essential difference between inclusion and integration is therefore the degree to which the individual’s characteristics and the ideas of the social majority are brought into alignment. What is decisive is whether or not a “strong” underlying assumption of normality is made. Social opening and integration have long been understood to mean that the assumptions about normality in organisations and institutions need not (or must not?) change, and that “what does not fit will be made to fit” by a process of assimilation and homogenisation. Since it has generally been concluded that this approach does not yield the desired results, the concept of inclusion has begun to garner attention. So inclusion always means – and indeed this is a key difference – that even ideas about normality must be reconfigured. That is easy enough to say, but harbours an enormous challenge. Otherness and diversity are not merely to be tolerated but to be recognised as integral components of the system. In view of the strongly normative and selective structures in the education system, this is a major challenge.

Structures of exclusion in the German education system

In the German education system there seems to be a strong impulse to preserve the system. Every change in structures has engendered differentiation rather than standardisation: there are now such multitudes of strengths at special schools, of vocational training courses (particularly in the

transition system), of options for catching up on school-leaving certificates, of forms of higher education institutions and admission routes, of legal provisions and curricula, etc. that they virtually defy comprehension. By the same token, the logic of the financing is similarly diffuse. Expenditure on secondary level II in Germany is above the average for OECD countries, whereas compared with the OECD average, primary level (and elementary education) is distinctly underfinanced (cf. Table 2). This means that “overfinancing” is confined to the phases of education in which not all learners are able to benefit from the expenditure any longer.

Table 1 Types of social integration of migrants

		Social integration in ethnic community	
		Yes	No
Social integration in host society	Yes	Inclusion as multiple integration (plurale/multi-cultural society)	Assimilation as simple integration (homogenous society)
	No	Separation as social exclusion (parallel society)	Marginalisierung as multiple exclusion (isolation)

Source: ESSER 2000, p. 287

Table 2 Expenditures per pupil by educational phase (in PPP US dollars) and deviation (in %)

	Primary phase		Secondary level I		Secondary level II (schools providing general education)		Higher education (excl. research)	
Germany	5,548		6,851		9,557		8,534	
OECD-average	6,741	+ 22 %	7,598	+ 11 %	8,746	- 8 %	8,970	+ 5 %
Sweden	8,338	+ 50 %	9,020	+ 32 %	9,247	- 3 %	9,402	+ 10 %

Data source: OECD 2010

Table 3 Expenditures per pupil by school type at secondary level I (in EUR)

Special school	Lower secondary	Grammar school (without sec. II)	Intermediate secondary
13,100	6,000	5,600	4,600

Data source: Statistisches Bundesamt 2010

Table 4 Expenditures per pupil after leaving general education (in EUR)

Prevocational training year	Full-time vocational school	University	University of applied sciences	Dual system (public spending only)
6,900	5,800	5,700	5,300	2,200

Data source: Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2008

Table 5 Inequality and normality as dominant educational ideas

	Concrete diversity is dominant idea – assumption of inequality	Formal equality is dominant idea – assumption of normality
Form of integration	Inclusion of heterogeneity	Assimilation and homogenisation
Starting point	A person’s concrete learning process, needs and abilities	Standardised, “normal” learning and development process subordinated to the curriculum
Mode of learning	Inductive – starting from the lifeworld, then abstracting	Deductive – starting from thematic areas
Theory of assistance	Treating the unequal as unequal and learning together	Learning at the same pace in homogenous teaching groups
Goal dimension	Output: What should everyone be able to do?	Input: What content should be taught to everyone?
Reaction to deficits in attainment	Change learning modes and teaching methods	Homogenisation through selection
Logic	Resource-orientation: discovering strengths	Deficit-orientation: looking for weaknesses
Sequence	First assist, then make demands	First make demands, then assist
Effect	Inclusion by treating as unequal	Exclusion of certain groups by treating as equal

Undertaking a differentiated analysis of expenditures for the different institution-types at secondary level I, it is noted that the expenditures for special and lower-secondary schools are highest (cf. Table 3). This fact is not in any reasonable proportion to the outcomes from these types of schools. And expenditures on the vocational training courses within the transition system are significantly higher (cf. Table 4). Annual per capita expenditure on the pre-vocational training year, which is mainly attended by school pupils who want to repeat their lower-secondary school-leaving certificate, exceeds the expenditure on all other German training courses. In summary it can be stated that the “theory of assistance” that is dominant in the education system consists in on-going selection and not in early help and prevention. The upshot is that deficits become chronically established and require financially burdensome compensation. Therefore what we can identify is not just underfinancing but particularly a structural misdirection of financing.

Inequality as a dominant educational idea

In a meritocratically legitimised education system, a person’s attainment is relevant to the educational qualification obtained. Thought must be given, however, to what understanding of attainment the system is based upon, including the production and measurement of that attainment. The fundamental thought that all children and

young people have equal or comparable outset chances and could be “differentiated” in a fair competition turns out, under empirical scrutiny, to be ideological. It is justifiable to pose the question as to why competition between children begins at a very early age but schools and teachers are almost entirely “sheltered” from competition. Repetition of classes, different school forms and even (numerical) grades are introduced very much later in inclusive and measurably successful education systems. Even people with physical or intellectual impairments do not receive any special treatment in special schools. In Finland, for example, schools and teachers take responsibility for all children’s and young people’s learning development, but also have a distinctly higher degree of autonomy in shaping the learning environment and the teaching on offer. In these countries, the competitive situation is displaced: from a competition among pupils to a (moderated) educational competition between teachers and/or schools. This compels cooperation, innovation and evaluation as well as an intensive engagement with the individual young person. In contrast, the existing structures in Germany encourage a mentality whereby the teacher’s teaching is always right, and any deviations from expected attainment levels are put down to having the wrong pupils (cf. EL-MAFAALANI 2010).

The dominant educational idea of normality with regard to development, ability and achievement is replaced with one that recognises inequality, accepts it and transforms it into usable potential. The individual is credited with being able to develop, receives individual help and remains in a teaching group comprised of young people with different abilities, weaknesses and interests. In Table 5 these interrelationships are compared point by point with a series of (educational) implications. Key differences are whether the starting point of educational endeavour is the learning content, the curriculum and the expected attainment levels (i.e. the learning object and input), or whether the learners and learning itself (i.e. the learning subject and output) are central to such efforts. Of course, learner-oriented learning settings are already part of current practice in the existing system, but this can only take place on an ad hoc basis and within the restrictions of the school system. Meanwhile the school system is geared towards homogenisation and selection.

Inclusive pedagogy requires the right structures

Given that selection is and must remain a basic function of the education and training system, the question that needs to be addressed is whether selection represents the result of education processes or whether it is made an integral part of the education process from a very early stage. Too soon,

in Germany, learning is geared towards passing examinations and not, for example, towards solving stimulating problems, managing complex situations or developing self-esteem. Too soon, children learn to adjust to teachers instead of becoming proficient learners themselves.

Hence it is commonly complained that a school education relies on certain skills which learners cannot be expected to learn except at school (cf. BÖTTCHER 2005). Another frequently overlooked danger of competence-orientation is a tendency to exclude people even more than was previously the case. If competences are understood as “abilities and skills that individuals possess or can acquire in order to solve particular problems along with the associated motivational, volitional and social dispositions and abilities to make successful and responsible use of problem-solving in variable situations” (cf. WEINERT 2001, p. 27 f., own trans.), then precisely these dispositions and abilities ought to be fostered. In particular, the distribution of motivational, volitional and social competences is markedly unequal at the time of primary school entry. School confines itself largely to imparting cognitive skills, however.

The potential of vocational education consists precisely in another mode of access to the curriculum. Concrete practical situations, which are certainly relevant from a work-related if not a lifeworld perspective, are simulated and rehearsed systematically. So the vocational education system gives primacy to an inductive, practice-oriented learning design, which could in principle improve the participation of socially disadvantaged young people. However, the structures of vocational education are no less selective than in the education system as a whole. Here again, a tripartite division can be discerned: in 2008, some 48 per cent of young people were placed in the dual system, around 18 per cent in the full-time vocational school system, and 34 per cent in the transition system (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2010). And the “measures” to assist disadvantaged individuals in the vocational training system, which bring all the “school under-achievers” back together as a group, are most likely to stigmatise these young people and reduce their labour market opportunities (cf. BOJANOWSKI 2008).

Complex processes in simple structures

On overall consideration, there seems to be a particularly strong inclination in the German education system towards homogenisation, differentiation, ordering and norming. Born of this tendency, on the one hand over-complex, heavily differentiating and obviously inefficient institutional structures have developed, which lead on the other hand

to under-complex, barely differentiating and ineffective individual teaching and learning processes. Yet precisely the opposite is important, from the viewpoint of an inclusive conception of education: on the process level, what is unequal must be treated as unequal; strengths and potentials must be maximised in a variety of ways; on the level of structures, all possibilities should be kept open (as long as possible) and all people treated equally. Complex processes in simple structures – how easy it sounds!

Unfortunately, large sections of the population are not in favour of any such opening up of structures. Too many privileges would be up for renegotiation (as the example of the failed school reform in Hamburg shows). Yet educational impoverishment and a welfare state cannot exist in parallel in the long term. Nor, in the long run, can proxy debates be conducted on demographic, migration and Hartz IV unemployment-benefit issues without turning the spotlight on the themes of education and educational justice.

In the meantime there are now also economic arguments in favour of social opening. And economic arguments have always been more effective than normative ones. It is no coincidence that normative and economic perspectives are pointing in the same direction – unusual though this is – but rather, an inevitable conclusion based on the realisation that the fundamental precondition for a functioning society is not the paternalism of the social state but people's own self-responsibility. And this responsibility has to be learnt! ■

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