

2 Inclusion in Australian Public New South Wales Primary Schools: What Germany can learn from “Down Under”

2.1 Abstract

As of 2013, children with disabilities will have the right to be taught in mainstream schools. The topic of inclusion has been intensely discussed in Germany mainly with the focus on the costs that educating those with disabilities external to or within mainstream schools might rise. As German schools have social workers based in schools, the topic of inclusive educational practices in schools raises many different aspects that will be examined from a social work perspective in order to fully understand these aspects. The question of what ‘inclusion’ means in German schools, and why it is more appropriate to speak in terms of ‘inclusion’ in schools rather than ‘integration’ will be explored. It is important to note that whilst the current German concept of inclusion is not the main focus of this chapter, it will be briefly discussed and contrasted later with the Australian concept. Future recommendations on how to improve the current German system will be provided to at the end of the chapter.

2.2 Integration and Inclusion

Forms and Changes of Integration

The use of the terms “Integration“ and “Inclusion“ from a sociological perspective reinforce why it is more appropriate to use the term “inclusion” instead of “integration”. The use of the term “integration” from a sociological perspective recognises and appreciates how differentiations develop in a society as it highlights the relation between a society and the individual.

There are three distinguishable types of differentiation: i) Segmentary, ii) Stratificatory’ and iii) Functional. Segmentary differentiation historically is the oldest form of differentiation and divides society into families, tribes or clans, which comprise a closed unit. Thus, an individual is born into their unit automatically becomes a member of their small part of society: “Their integration was proven by their interaction with others.” (Bardmann 2008, S. 53). The different units

or subsystems residing at different locations meant that these locations flagged the borders and affiliations of society. Over time however, these borders could not be sustained because of the impact of some families' influences e.g. through trading. Consequently the Segmentary differentiation became stratified, or known today as 'Stratificatory differentiation'. In 'Stratificatory' differentiation, people were also born into a subsystem, but society was divided vertically into ranks and classes. This form of differentiation can also be seen in Europe from the Late Middle Ages to the 17th century: "The ancestry (noble or not) defined the belonging to a social stratum and regulated the access to social resources." (Bardmann 2008, S. 53) Social inequalities and deficiencies lead to the third form of differentiation known as 'Functional differentiation'. It was not one's ancestry that decided their place in society, but their attainment within each functional system. In every functional system there are sets of complementary roles e.g. Priest and Believer; Politician and Voter; Employer and Employee. In the field of social work, the social worker and client form a complementary role. As people are no longer born into subsystems, but are born "un-oriented", they need to find their social position through attainment: "In return, society has to make the complementary roles of all functional systems accessible for everyone" (Bardmann 2008, S. 55). Theoretically this means that everybody can gain membership into every subsystem without looking at the ancestry, individual attitudes, norms and values.

Societal functional differentiation is a characteristic of modern society, and the three different subsystems fulfil different functions. Among others, important Functional differentiation systems include: Religious, Political, Economic, Science, Family, and Social Support. Every subsystem serves the society in its own ways, and is therefore exclusive. Thus, the standardisation of individual attitudes is no longer in the foreground, but the diversity of the subsystems: "What holds the society together is not the unison of individually lived values but the functioning of the functional context – beyond and independent from individual beliefs and biases." (Bardmann 2008, S. 54)

For the purpose of this chapter, the term 'integration' will be used when different units of a system work together so well that the system works as one unit. In doing so, a loss of stability and decay of the system is prevented: "If one applies this general definition of integration to the integration of people in a social context, so can integration be seen as successful when the individuals come together in such a way that they boost the existence and the functioning of social contexts, and finally society as a whole." (Bardmann 2008, S. 55).

Integration is an achievement that the individual has to make happen. It is thereby imperative to develop collective opinions, habits, value patterns and behavioural orientations. These are typically conveyed through religion, politics, education and mass media: "Individuals are 'integrated' when they regard the same things as important and right as other individuals [...]" (Bardmann 2008, S.

55) According to this view, integration is desirable for the individual as well as for society. The counter term to 'integration' is 'disintegration'. Someone who is 'disintegrated' avoids collective activities; has no feeling of belonging to society; experiences a loss of control, and is disinhibited in their individual behaviour. Disintegration occurs when a social change is needed. If nothing needs to change, integration seems like a positive goal.

2.3 Inclusion

Based on Systems theory, there was a shift away from 'integration' towards 'inclusion': "[...] Inclusion refers to how communication accesses people, that is to say how society, its subsystems and their organisations as well as interaction broach the topic of people as human beings [...]" (Badmann 2008, S. 55). Here, the counter term for 'inclusion' is 'exclusion'. Typically in the modern German society of today, everybody is equal and has the possibility of partaking in every subsystem. However, within the functional systems of this society, there are conditions and rules that decide who is included and who is excluded: "Hence, the modern society has to live with a self-contradiction." (Bardmann 2008, S. 55). This chapter will focus on the functional system of school and education from a social worker's perspective. It will examine how and in which ways inclusion is realised. Inclusion within a school context means that no child is excluded from individual support on the grounds of any impairment: "The goal of inclusion is to create the best basis for the development and education of all children and adolescents by having kinder gardens and schools work in keeping with the ideas and values of inclusion." (Haug 2008, S. 36). However, inclusion does not begin with how every child presents at a regular school, but features much earlier within the current political framework, the amount of school resources, and teacher qualifications. How these are implemented in Germany and Australia will be explained in the following two chapters.

2.4 Inclusion: German Context

The German school system has 'regular' and 'special' schools that focus on the different types and levels of student support. The different foci include emotional and social development, mental development, physical and motor development or learning. The ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009, flagged a change in the North Rhine-Westphalia school law to come to effect in the 2014/2015 school year. What this change means is that pupils with special educational needs, will have the right to be educated at a 'regular' school.

For different student foci, there are different curricula and requirements. By way of illustration, a student whose focus is on emotional and social development, must complete a 10-year compulsory full-time education, whereas a student focus on mental development, must complete a compulsory full-time education of 11 years. Hence, the different foci categorises from the outset which category the students with special needs belong to. The teachers have to comply with these categories because those teachers wanting to teach at a special school, need to be trained in special needs education where the subjects of study include pedagogy, two special needs foci, and two teaching subjects. At the University of Cologne, students wishing to teach in a special school need to undertake the mandatory study of the special needs focus learning subject, and the teaching subjects of Mathematics and German.

Teachers at regular schools need to choose the pedagogy subjects alongside their two chosen teaching subjects, but not necessarily a unit with a special needs education focus. This means that students choosing a teaching career decide before their teacher education begins, whether to study in a regular or special school. The ramifications of where teachers study is that they are context trained for only one of their target pupils (vgl. Bildungsministerium des Landes NRW, 2013-2014, Technische Universität Dortmund, 2014). The ramifications of such a stratified education training system becomes evident when the shift towards including all students into regular schools next year becomes a reality. Currently, children with special needs are allocated to special schools, and there is the model of joint lessons: *“Parents of children who have a special need and who are taught on a level of ‘Hauptschule’ can file an application for joint lessons at a Hauptschule. This is possible for the special focuses of seeing, hearing and communication, language, emotional and social development as well as physical and motor development.”* (Bildungsministerium des Landes NRW 2014). The shift towards inclusion in German schools translates as a substantial change to the German school system, that continues to spark much public debate and raises questions about teacher education and preparedness to promote inclusive practices in their regular classrooms.

2.5 Inclusion: Australian Context

The way in which ‘inclusion’ is framed in Australian conversations is as *“children with special needs”* (Sens 2008, S. 285). In Germany, ‘inclusion’ is referred to as *“people with disabilities”* (Sens 2008, S. 285). “Special needs” can mean many things, and are not restricted to just physical or mental disabilities: they also include children whose parents have a disability; children whose families identify as Aboriginal, as well as those children from different cultural backgrounds (Send

2008, S. 285). Alongside mainstream Australian schools, there are 'special' schools that cater for "*children [with] multiple and serious disabilities.*" (Sens 2008, S. 285). History reports that the parents of children with 'multiple and serious disabilities' that have challenged the education system and fought to have their child educated in a mainstream school, have won as they argue that mainstream schools are able to meet the needs of their child. Regardless, parents have a choice of where to send their child: "*the Australian education system emphasises .. inclusion, on the other hand the parent's freedom of choice. This is what is special about the Australian education system.*" (Sens 2008, S. 286).

In order for a school to meet the 'special needs' of a prospective student via funding and resource support, the child needs to prove their need through thorough paediatric and psychological assessments. The end-product is a label attached to the child's condition thereby qualifying for categories of funding support. It is important to highlight that depending upon the child's 'special need', it will attract a different label and thereby funding support. The process to determine the level of student need demands a vigorous file of evidence and documents for teachers to better prepare for the student: "*A precondition for this is establishing of a knowledge base for teachers concerning information about different various types of various initial positions for learning (such as second language acquisition), latest empirical findings of learning research, structural and financial help as well as a successful cooperation with parents and others.*" (Sens 2008, S. 286).

In Australia it is common for teachers to have exact knowledge about child development, specifically about optimal learning and teaching. The individuality of the child remains the focus evidenced by the fact that every curriculum is developed individually and is based on the learning ability of the child.

Every child with a 'special need' will have an individual learning support programme tailored by their teacher in consultation with other para-professionals involved with the child e.g. speech therapist, paediatrician. For example, children whose first language is not English will study in the "Language other than English" (LOTE) program. These students are taught topics from other fields of education in their mother tongue. These children "*experience an appreciation of their [language] competences and initially monolingual children profit from native speakers when learning a second language.*" (Sens 2008, S. 288). The focus therefore is not on a student's inability to speak a language of the country, but on acknowledging multilingualism as a valuable resource.

Inclusion in Australia involves a careful and precarious balance between individual needs and financial capabilities. All students with special needs in Australian schools attract a combination of shared mobile services in school districts, including counseling, behaviour support and resources. Sen (2008) comments that inclusion in Australia "is not about more financial resources than less inclusive countries but that the resources are more mobile." (Sens 2008, S. 289).

Implementation in Teacher Education

The following section explores the pre-service preparation teachers undertake to qualify as teachers. The focus will mainly be on the field “Early Childhood”, meaning children aged between zero and eight years.

After four years of studying and finishing with a Bachelor’s degree, teachers can teach in pre- and primary schools. This makes the transitions between school forms easier for teachers: *“The transition between pre-school and primary school is freer because classic elementary pedagogic concepts are also included in the first years.”* (Sens 2008, S. 290).

Bachelor graduates can join an Honors and Masters programs, and afterwards study towards a Doctoral degree. This model is more research-oriented: *“By now there is a Professor of Early Childhood Education in every Australian State who has achieved this position through praxis.”* (Sens 2008, S. 290).

Teacher training in Australia tends to have a strong focus on linking theory to practice. The importance of linking theory and practice becomes apparent when considering a teaching career in Australia as many academically educated teachers work alternating at a school and in the research and/or further education field. Another important aspect of teacher training in Australia is that of personal development: *“Pedagogic practice is always shaped by the attitude of the people involved.”* (Sens 2008, S. 293). Although the role of the teacher is highly professional, one cannot ignore how personal views, values and norms may impact upon teacher classroom behaviour. At UNE, part of the teacher training involves the students interrogating their own values and upbringing as it is recognized that not everything that is pedagogically and politically desired [in the classroom] is automatically the view of the future teacher. The goal is not to change the views of the students, but to increase their awareness of any transference into the classroom.

An effective teacher does not work in isolation and needs to communicate with a variety of people in and outside the school community. An important group of people teachers need to speak to, are the parents of their students. Training teachers learn how to communicate appropriately with parents to promote seamless communication between the contexts of the classroom and home. This consistency in language strengthens the authority of those in both contexts and promotes consistency every student requires.

Inclusion in Australian classrooms are effective because not only is every child seen and supported as an individual, but also because teacher education prepares teachers theoretically and practically with an understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses.

2.6 Summary and Future Recommendations

Comparing the concept of ‘inclusion’ in both German and Australian contexts reveals that teacher attitude underpins the degree of its success in the classroom. There is a difference in the tone and language used to describe students with special needs, and the schools in Germany and Australia: in Germany it is “*children with disabilities*”, and in Australia the term is “*children with special needs*”. In Germany, the schools are called “Förderschule” and no longer “Sonderschule” – “Sonder” derives from “sonderbar” meaning odd, weird, strange, peculiar; “Förder” means foster, promote, stimulate, support. Irrespective, a teacher who wishes to teach “Förderschule”, still needs to study “Sonderpädagogik”. A shift in the terminology would be an improvement to address any negative connotation surrounding special needs.

Since the ratification of the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, Germany has committed to create conditions in their schools to promote inclusive practices.

Starting with the school year 2014/2015 parents of children with special needs can register their child at a regular school. However, what happens after that is not clearly regulated: “*Every child is entitled to being admitted to their closest primary school, choosing the school form in accordance with the intake capacity set by the school authorities, when the school authorities have not established a school catchment area for this school form (§ 46 Absatz 3 SchulG)*” (Schulministerium des Landes NRW 2014). Thus, school authorities can individually establish an intake capacity and when this capacity is full, parents have to choose another school. When no regular school can be found, the parents have no choice but to send their child to a “Förderschule” in order to comply with certain criteria, such as a minimum number of pupils (Schulministerium des Landes NRW 2014).

There are also many more views and concepts in Australia that are worth exploring for the German context. The practice that children with a different cultural background attract additional support is something that the German school system does not practice. Children, whose mother tongue is not German, are taught in a single class at a “Hauptschule”, without any differentiation of age or previous school career. This may lead to a child who still needs to learn the alphabet sitting next to a child who has a proficiency level of a regular class but only lacks German vocabulary. If Germany was to adopt the ‘Language Other Than English’ (LOTE) program, the children could learn from each other – language, culture and class topics at the same time, and this collaborative practice may prevent many prejudices and discriminations.

2.7 Conclusion

The focus of German teacher education may benefit from adopting a more holistic view of the child and the classroom as practiced in the Australian context. Viewing a child holistically means to appreciate all aspects of the child including individual special needs, and their personal and cultural background. In German schools, they recognize that even without an attested special need, not every child is able to successfully negotiate everyday school life. In response, the employment of Social Workers in schools supports these students. In order to improve this relationship however, the Social Workers need to appreciate the demands and pressures of the classroom teacher and special needs teacher, and vice versa, to provide a seamless and consistent level of support. Often the Social Workers are employed on temporary contracts that are ultimately disruptive and hindering to promoting consistency. Based on the current teacher education preparation, teachers for regular schools lack the training needed in special needs education, so the pragmatic question for the shift towards inclusive practices next year would be How will this work? Although some classes will have an additional special needs teacher or other professional, this may not be possible for every class. There are no concrete and binding statements regarding the realistic inclusion process, but maybe these problems and challenges need to occur in order for the politicians to understand that a change in society and the school system is long overdue.

2.8 References

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Inklusion in Deutschland und Australien

Harrington, I.; Kastirke, N.; Holtbrink, L. (Hrsg.)

2016, XII, 127 S., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-658-14462-3