

Inclusion in school

Kristin Marie Berg

Student ID: 1905001

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Intro

In this paper I will look at det inclusive practice in mainstream school. I will try to define what inclusive practice means and how pupils are supported in their learning environment. In some parts, I will look at some of the challenges in secondary school and some of the barriers that might be different from primary school. I will roughly go through the changes in the different legislations in school history in Wales and reflect on how the new ALN reform might affect the school and pupils.

Inclusion is giving all members of the community the right to participate and to remove any barriers. All members in this case will be students, teachers and other staff of the school. This community should be supportive and with no prejudices. (Armstrong 2016). Some might say it is as simple as treating others as human beings. To make an 'education for all', developing the school for all, as a response to exclusion. (Howes, Davies & Fox 2009). All members should be able to participate, have access to the same facilities and be treated as equals. Inclusion might be defined as recognizing and valuing the diversity. Another way of seeing it is overcoming exclusion. To find ways to increase participation or the construction of teaching and learning. (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson 2006). It might also be the willingness to offer new opportunities to all. (Hodkinson & Vickerman 2016).

Armstrong refers to The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE) and their index for an inclusive process. This is not a checklist, but might be used as a guidance in a process of positive change. Some of the description for this process are: valuing all students and staff equally; Reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students, not only those with impairments or those who are categorized as 'having special educational needs'; Viewing the difference between students as resources to support learning, rather than as problems to be overcome; Improving schools for staff as well as for students and; Recognizing that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society. (Armstrong 2016).

The term 'inclusion' did not appear until 1988. A group of people from North America thought that the term 'integration', that was used until then, was not a good description. Therefore, they came up with the concept 'inclusion'. (Thomas & Vaughan 2004).

Integration might be a restricted definition. Some may even say the integration is finished the moment all enters the school building. For some it might be a confusing term and the connotation to the term might not be all that positive. Thomas and Vaughan questioned if the children with additional learning needs need ‘education’ rather than ‘integration’. The point of this question is to make a discussion whether integration automatically leads to learning. (Thomas & Vaughan 2004). Armstrong points out in her definition that ‘integration’ lacks the part of ‘recognition’. Inclusion is about acknowledging the differences and the diversity, such as culture, believes, appearance, interests, lifestyle and unique-ness. While in her definition integration focuses on how the learners might fit in. (Armstrong 2016).

Barriers

To get a fully inclusive practice we might have to break some barriers. Moore mentions social model thinking. It is about socially constructed barriers. This may be attitudinal and cultural barriers. The social model of disability looks at the constructed barriers that limit the lives of people with impairments. (Moore 2016). It was inspired by disabled people. Rather than changing the pupils it focuses on changing the attitude of the schools and staff to accommodate the diversity of the learners. Also, the environmental barriers rather than the child’s individual condition. Environmental barriers can for example be accessibility for wheelchair users or the layout of the classroom. Yet, some teachers might not feel prepared or educated enough to teach children with ALN. (Richards 2016). Some also feel they are not given directions for how to develop their practice. They express a feeling of lack of time and not enough time to engage with their peers. (Howes, Davies & Fox 2009). By breaking the barriers we might give the teacher an opportunity to a creative approach in the learning environment rather than worrying about the barriers who creates segregation and exclusion. (Moore 2016).

Some of the barriers might also be resolved with better communication with the parents. The teachers who believes in social model thinking are more focused on their own teaching difficulties rather than the child’s learning difficulties. The social model thinking focuses on breaking barriers, strengthen the parent-teacher relations. They try to be solution-oriented and never sees the blame in the child. With this cooperation parents might also come with

information that can be used to adjust the child. For example, a parent with a child with hearing impairment might know where to place to child in the classroom better than the teacher. A parent with a child with concentration problems might have some tips to how to be proactive in the planning. (Moore 2016).

Barriers in secondary school

In Australia and Scotland they looked at inclusion in secondary school and concluded with three types of barriers: ways of knowing; ways of learning and; ways of working. They meant the various forms of care between teachers and pupils were a factor for inclusion. The achievement of such relationships changed from primary school to secondary school. In a way, the social and organizational structure in school changes from primary school to secondary school. (Howes, Davies & Fox 2009).

With the term ‘ways of knowing’ they are talking about special education in school and how to match the curriculum for the individual pupils. These would be finding methods to meet the additional needs. Some problems in secondary school might come with all the testing and achievements of the pupils. This might become a barrier for children with ALN. (Howes, Davies & Fox 2009).

‘Ways of learning’ refers to the job related to be a teacher and their professional practice. It is about the development of the pedagogical skills rather than the educational values. This might be a challenge in secondary school. The relation between teacher and student becomes more focused on education rather than the social skills. Teachers also have less connection with parents. These types of relations often get replaced with tests and grades and the educational achievements. The differences in the achievements might make the demand on special education higher and might make an argument to making more special schools. (Howes, Davies & Fox 2009).

The term ‘ways of working’ is among other things about the barriers related to organizational issues in secondary school. Some of the barriers might be: the number of pupils a teacher sees a week; the separation created between professional colleagues or; between teachers and other adults, such as support staff, through the lack of time to establish effective collaboration. (Howes, Davies & Fox 2009).

The Warnock Report was published in 1978 and looked at special education in England, Scotland and Wales. The report supported the parental voice and for them to be seen as equals with professionals in the process. It also influenced to improvements in the social life of children with disabilities and learning difficulties. Yet, they did not support the further thought of integration in schools. Even though they might have brought the idea of integration, we should look at the report with carefulness and a critical view. The majority of the consulted professionals for the report was associated with separate special schools. Some of these investments includes buildings, career structures and philosophical commitment. (Thomas & Vaughan 2004).

Education Acts

There has been several Education Acts on the way to integration and inclusion in school. In England and Wales it might be said it started in 1944. Back then, it was the children with 'severe' disabilities whom was placed in special schools. This 'permitted' the children with 'less severe' disabilities to participate in the mainstream. The conclusion for these disabilities were based on medical examinations and intelligence tests. (Thomas & Vaughan 2004).

Also, some groups had been denied access to basic education for generations. In 1970's Education Act all children were entitled to an education. A lot of them where still labelled 'severely educationally sub-normal' and were placed in special schools. This may seem as a further segregation, but might also have led to the further transfer to the mainstream. (Thomas & Vaughan 2004).

A new Educational Act were released in 1981 as a result of the Warnock Report. This allowed children with special educational needs into the ordinary schools, if they were compatible with a set of three provisos. This may have led to a negative approach to integration in schools and made it hard for some to stay in the mainstream. Also, it made it harder for the parents to keep their child in the mainstream. Thomas and Vaughan believes this Educational Act may have tried to camouflage discrimination in schools. (Thomas & Vaughan 2004).

In 1993 and 1996 came new Educational Acts. The first mentioned concluded that children should be included in the mainstream school as long as the parents agreed. In between, in

1995, the Disability Discrimination Act came. Yet, in 1996, they added a new provision to the Act. Now, there was four provisions. This made it harder for children with SEN to stay in the mainstream. (Thomas & Vaughan 2004).

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) came in 2001. They now deleted two of the provisions leaving: that it is in accordance with the parents' wishes; and that it does not affect the efficient education of other children.

They made it a duty to make arrangements for resolving disagreements that parents might have with the schools or given statements. Another example is that they made time limits for the implementation of the decisions. The schools were also obligated to increase the accessibility for disabled pupils. (Thomas & Vaughan 2004).

The ALN reform

The term 'special educational needs' (SEN) is now being replaced by the term 'additional learning needs' (ALN). This reform is expected to be implemented in a three-year period starting in 2020. The goal is a unified legislative framework to work in the best interest for the child or youth with ALN. They wish to start the identification and intervention for children with ALN earlier and to strengthen the information and advice provided. (Welsh Government).

The reform will work with a whole school approach for ALN and includes higher participation in mainstream education as fully as possible. With the new act, they want early identification and intervention. In the old act the age span was 3-18 years. They are going to widen it, now from birth to 25 years. One of the goals is to include the child and parents more in the process and decision making. These are only some aims and principles. Hopefully this will create a unified plan for all schools. (Swansea Council).

The term 'ALN' might also be more including than 'SEN'. First, SEN refers to education whilst ALN refers to learning in general. Also, there are groups that might have additional

needs and not necessarily special education. The term will therefore also be more open to for example mental health issues, and also less severe learning needs.

The statements and Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be replaced by Individual Development Plan (IDP). IDPs will be prepared when decided a child got ALN. If the child has started school, it will be the school's responsibility to decide whether the child got ALN or not, and if they require an IDP. There will also be a conversion for children with existing plans. The statements have for some families been an economical cost. Yet, there might be some concerns that no statement may weaken the arguments for their child's needs. (Welsh Government).

This is a big and long process and since it is not done yet, we do not really know the outcome of it. Some aims and goals might seem as good ideas, but we must also ask if the system is prepared for such change. For example, the term opens up to even more children to get help with their needs, but is the mainstream school ready to take care of all. The age span will also increase the number of children who might receive help. Therefore, the funding must also change. In further education you can receive help and with the new age span it also comes with a legislation. We can question whether this might slow down the process and exclude the students who is over the age of 25. There are also some additional needs that might not be discovered before the child starts school, for example ADHD.

Conclusion

Some may say the Warnock Report introduced us for the thought of integration in school in England, Scotland and Wales, but we still need to look at the term critically and evaluate what they meant with integration. The term was later replaced with 'inclusion' due to the doubt if integration led to learning or not.

When we look at the definition of inclusion, we see a lot of similarities from different authors and researchers. Some common definitions are the right of participation and for any barriers to be removed. It is accepting and recognizing all members of the society and valuing all equally. We might also add the willingness to offer all member new opportunities.

Barriers might be social or environmental. The barriers are not necessarily something only the pupils might feel, but also teachers and staff. Some teachers may feel a lack of education to teach children with ALN, and some feel the lack of time with both their pupils and peers. This might become a bigger problem in secondary school due to changes in the organizational structure of school.

There has been several Educational Acts through the years and the new ALN reform might start next year. The biggest change might be the expansion and understanding of inclusion. By changing the term from SEN to ALN we might include more children, also with less severe needs, and the age span has been expanded.

As for now the ALN reform seems to look like a positive change. Still, it is important to look critically on the changes and how it might affect some also. For example, it will need much more funding than now and the age span might create barriers for some groups, even though they might make it better for others.

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