

Research Programme

Inclusive education

Detailed description

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1 Introduction

The performance mandate of the Governing Council at the Bern University of Education for the years 2014 to 2017 includes the following aims: "Bern University of Teacher Education fulfils its social and environmental responsibility by advocating sustainable development and ensuring equal opportunities among its members, and by preparing teachers for gender-appropriate teaching and adequate handling of heterogeneity (integration)" (State Council of the Canton of Bern 2013, p. 3).

The professional handling of heterogeneous learning groups is a great challenge in school practice (Lütje-Klose, Wild & Schwinger 2015). The Research Programme "Inclusive Education" addresses this issue by focusing all ongoing or planned projects on the three dimensions of the Index for Inclusion (Boban & Hinz 2003, p. 14): on the one hand this includes the analysis of existing inclusive cultures (attitudes, prejudices), inclusive structures (concepts, framework conditions) and inclusive practices (forms of teaching tailored to heterogeneity); on the other hand, new measures and strategies towards an inclusive school are developed, implemented and tested within these dimensions. The primary aim is to discuss where the standard classes are in terms of inclusion, and to what extent targeted developments can be launched.

Although politics and the judiciary at the federal and cantonal level act as though school development should be directed towards inclusion (e.g. Strasser 2006), inclusive educational and social models have not yet become a reality. Therefore, the Research Programme "Inclusive Education" also deals with the other side of the coin, namely the selection and separation of specific groups of people. The question arises as to which processes and mechanisms lead to some groups being disadvantaged due to certain determinants (e.g., due to their social/cultural background, gender, disability, place of residence) and how to reduce exclusion processes and promote developments towards inclusion.

2 Clarification of the terms separation/selection, integration and inclusion

Inclusion is still more a vision than a reality in the Swiss school system. The controversy between separated/selective and inclusive forms of education continues. As, above all, the terms integration and inclusion are often not clearly separated from a conceptual point of view (Hinz 2002), a definition of these is required.

In an educational context, *separation/selection* refers to a selective system in which children and adolescents are housed in separate groups and institutions according to predetermined standards. In practical terms, this means, for example, that children with learning disabilities are separated into special classes, and intellectually handicapped pupils are supported in specific special schools. The separation is based on the perception of special characteristics in some of the students (e.g., having a foreign language as their native tongue, underachievement, behavioural problems, etc.) and the development of differentiated programmes, such as classes with special curricula (Strasser, 2006). Selection at the lower secondary level (school types with different requirement levels) is also included in the Research Programme, as there are large parallels here to the selection within special education (e.g., Kronig 2007).

In contrast to separation, school *integration* is understood as the sharing of information among children in public school system classes with different educational starting points (e.g., children with/without learning disabilities or a migrant background). Children with special needs are not separated from other children at school, but are supervised on the spot in addition to their lessons (Bless & Mohr 2007).

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Inclusion goes one step further and requires a change of perspective: the mainstream school accommodates all children living in their catchment area, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, as well as their cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds. In this understanding of school education, all children are considered "normal", which eliminates the integration of "others". The main aim of inclusion is a "good school for everyone" in which every child is welcome and receives the best possible support (Boban & Hinz 2003, pp. 12-14, Fischer et al. 2012). The term inclusion (Latin *includere* = include) is used in distinction to the term integration. While integration means integrating people retrospectively, inclusion is about designing society and, therefore, also the school as a social institution in which every human being can equally participate in all processes and help shape them from the outset. Inclusive pedagogical approaches emphasise diversity in education as an enrichment for "all", as social skills and mutual respect are promoted and no one is excluded from common learning and life. This inevitably implies that mainstream schools must change their cultures, structures and practices (Boban & Hinz 2003).

3 Historical outline, research results and the current situation in Switzerland

If one looks at developments and research findings in the last hundred years, parallels can be drawn between the currents of intercultural, feminist and integration pedagogy (Prengel 2006). Efforts and developments have been aimed towards equity, equality and integration for all disadvantaged groups (*ibid.*). Political efforts and legal foundations led to the fact that in the recent past, girls and women were more than able to make up for their gap in education compared to boys and men during compulsory schooling (e.g., Becker et al. 2013). Origin-related educational inequality has also decreased in the course of educational expansion (e.g., Hadjar & Berger 2010). Nevertheless, children and young people with a migrant background are still at a disadvantage in the Swiss education system compared to local children (Becker 2013). The acquisition of higher education depends in particular on one's social background, which means that children with a socially privileged background have a clear advantage (Becker & Zangger 2013; Buchmann et al. 2007; Jann & Combet 2012).

If one considers the group of persons with "disabilities", it becomes clear that this group was the one separated and permanently excluded from regular class education for the longest period of time: the school separation of disabled persons was therefore legitimated with small class sizes, specially trained teachers, specific methods and curricula which responded to the individual needs of the students (Haeberlin, Bless & Klaghofer 2003).

In the 1970s, the separated form of schooling, which until then had been uncontested, was increasingly caught in the crossfire of criticism. Fears were voiced that pupils in separated forms of schooling are subject to negative labelling and are perceived predominantly through negative stereotypes in a performance-oriented environment (Kronig 2000, Blanc & Sahli Lozano 2013). This criticism, in addition to the results of numerous studies, led to a rethinking of, and a change of perspectives towards, integrative and inclusive school forms. The possibility of schooling close to the place of residence as well as greater progress in the achievement of the integrated children, a more positive attitude of the parents and, not least, better future prospects in adulthood are confirmed as arguments for integrative/inclusive forms of schooling by the comparative research (integrative versus separated schooling) (e.g., Feuser 2009, Bless 2004; Wild et al. 2015; Sahli Lozano 2013). The fear that integration would take place at the expense of the development of non-disadvantaged children could not be confirmed by previous research.

The learning progress of the classmates is comparable to or slightly greater than that of children in standard classes without integration (e.g., Sermier Dessemontet, Benoit & Bless 2011; Voss et al. 2015).

These findings from comparative research support current educational policy decisions that clearly point towards an integrative/inclusive training system. For example, the Federal Law requires the elimination of discrimination against people with disabilities: "The cantons promote the integration of disabled children and adolescents into mainstream education with the appropriate forms of training as

far as possible and as far as this benefits the disabled child or adolescent" (Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation 2002, Art. 20 para. 2).

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities dated 2006, Article 24, stipulates to the contractual states that they have to ensure an educational system which is inclusive. The Convention came into force in Switzerland on 15 May 2014 (Tobler 2014).

4 The main objective and theoretical framework of the research area "Inclusive Education"

All research projects within the framework of the proposed Research Programme "Inclusive Education" shall focus on inclusive cultures, inclusive structures or inclusive practices (Fig. 1). The projects requested in the Research Programme are not primarily focused on separative settings, but rather, above all, the inclusion efforts which are currently happening in many regular classes shall be analysed, and new aspects shall be implemented and tested.

The main aim is to discuss where standard classes are in terms of inclusion, and where targeted improvements can be made. The direct initiation of partial aspects of inclusion, or of good "schools for all", should be realised with concrete development projects.

Development towards good, inclusive "schools for all" should be understood as a process and offers a variety of starting points for interventions and measures. Boban and Hinz (2003) distinguish three dimensions in the Index for Inclusion along which the development towards an inclusive school or good "school for all" can be illustrated: *inclusive cultures*, *inclusive structures* and *inclusive practices*. Inclusive cultures (attitudes, prejudices) are a prerequisite, meaning that the structures (concepts, frameworks, guidelines, forms of organisation) can develop in the direction of inclusion, followed by the practices (didactic settings, dealing with heterogeneity, promotion of children with special needs, cooperation between professionals, with parents and others). The goal is the development of a community in which every human being is valued and in which inclusive values are shared (ibid., p. 15). Developmental steps towards inclusion can be initiated in all three dimensions that influence each other.

In addition to the three dimensions of the index, the model "*Structural Levels of Inequality in Education*" is used to structure the focal research area "Inclusive Education".

Although politics and the judiciary at both the federal and cantonal level act as though the school system should move in the direction of integration and inclusion, the propagated inclusive educational and social models have not yet become reality (Strasser 2006; Blanc & Sahli Lozano 2013).

In a fully established and well-functioning inclusive educational and social model, as envisioned, the educational inequalities described would disappear. As this is not the case at the moment, it is also important to look at the other side of inclusion, namely the selection and disadvantage of specific groups of people. With reference to the sociology of education, the question arises as to which processes and mechanisms lead to some groups being disadvantaged due to certain determinants. Figure 2 gives an overview of the determinants, possible explanations, outputs and effects of educational inequalities. In addition, measures represent an important part of the model, in the sense of processes and mechanisms which counteract educational inequalities.

Determinants of educational inequalities refer to the social characteristics of persons which provide the basis for advantages and disadvantages (output) in certain conditions affecting actions and life (Solga, Powell & Berger 2009, 16f.). The model also shows the immediate influence (output) that discrimination can have, and the influence it can have on the later life (effects) of those affected. It also shows which measures can be counteracted by possible disadvantages. Measures aimed at inclusion serve to reduce educational disadvantages, as they can break through common exclusion mechanisms. Therefore, the three dimensions of the index (cultures, structures and practices, see Fig. 1) are established in measures to reduce educational inequalities.

Within the "Inclusive Education" Research Programme, the projects presented here will examine the effects of different manifestations of the various determinants on formal and content-related opportuni-

ties (output), and the effects on the lives of the disadvantaged. In addition, various pedagogical and educational policy measures should be developed in detail and analysed with a view to their efficiency and practical implementation. The complexity of the topic, in particular the analysis of the processes and mechanisms which can play a role in the development of educational inequalities, makes it necessary for other actors (e.g., parents, the social environment) to be taken into account in various projects in addition to the direct focus on the school and teaching.

5 Research methodology and overall concept of the Research Programme

The projects included in the "Inclusive Education" programme differ in their methodological orientation and focus on different dimensions of the Index for Inclusion.

Care is also taken in the design of the project selection and focus, to ensure that all important determinants and outputs of educational inequalities are taken into account in the focus of the research.

As already mentioned, the state of research and theory in particular determines whether a project has a character which generates or tests a hypothesis. All projects have the claim of intersubjective comprehensibility in common. Opinions with a scientific claim to knowledge should always be systematically substantiated and should be rationally comprehensible for other people (Haeberlin 2005). This intersubjective comprehensibility applies not only to the research methodology, but also to the entire process, from posing the question to its practical application.

6 Literature

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