

# The Heart of Inclusive Education is Collaboration<sup>1</sup>

Comment on Monograph “Inclusion in Socio – Educational Frames: Inclusive School Cases in Four European Countries”

Lani Florian

University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education, Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity, Simon Laurie House, 186-198 Canongate, EH88AQ Edinburgh, United Kingdom, lani.florian@ed.ac.uk

Just over twenty years ago, the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain (Unesco, 1994) called for students with disabilities to be educated within an inclusive education system. Inclusive education is based on the principle that local schools should provide for *all* children, however there are different interpretations of what this means in practice. Early efforts to include students with disabilities in mainstream classes focused on preparing them to fit into an unchanged education system. When this proved limited, subsequent efforts sought to change the mainstream by shifting focus from the problem of the child to the problem of the school, and researchers began to focus on the influence of school factors in learning and in student outcomes. With funding from the European Commission Erasmus+ Programme, the research presented in this volume continues this tradition by investigating the socio-psychological and educational factors that facilitate and enhance quality inclusive education in four European countries, Lithuania, Poland, Austria and Finland.

An analysis of the legal basis for inclusive education in each of the four countries that participated in the project, along with a summary of the relevant research literature, is followed by case studies of how inclusive education is enacted in one school in each country. The research focus on the socio-psychological environment is particularly interesting because it permits a consideration of individual differences as something to be understood in terms of the *interactions* between many different variables rather than fixed states within individuals. Similar to a sociocultural perspective, it offers a productive way of thinking about how to understand and respond to the complexities inherent in educating diverse groups of learners and encourages open-ended views of all children’s potential for learning. This is consistent with what Susan Hart and her colleagues (Hart,

<sup>1</sup> The title is taken from Outi Kyrö-Ämmälä and Suvi Lakkala (p. 307)

Dixon, Drummond, & McIntyre, 2004) have called the core idea of *transformability* (*ibid*) to assert the principled belief that ‘children’s capacity to learn can change and be changed for the better as a result of what happens and what people do in the present’ (p. 166). Their argument is that how teachers respond in the present can affect any child’s capacity to learn. Such a view is essential to the development of inclusive education but it is not often the subject of research.

In this volume, socio-psychological environment is defined as “multidimensional interaction between various education participants (pupils, teachers, pupils’ parents, and representatives of different structures operating in the school)” (p. 34). It is an important aspect of inclusive education that goes beyond studies of school level factors and teaching strategies that can improve academic outcomes for students who struggle to learn in school. The research in this volume explores the important role that socio-psychological factors play in inclusive schools. Though there was variation between countries in how these factors were expressed the common value of empathy is evident across all the cases and the benefits of collaboration between teachers and other professionals, pupils and parents was affirmed leading Kyrö-Ämmälä and Lakkala to proclaim, ‘the heart of inclusive education is collaboration’ (p. 307).

This finding is consistent with a growing body of research on how schools approach the complex task of supporting the inclusion of all learners in the community of the school. It is important because it helps to shift the focus of research on inclusive education away from traditional approaches that focus on individual differences and the idea that differentiated teaching for ‘some’ is the process by which all are ‘included’. The alternative inclusive pedagogical approach that has emerged in recent years (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011) helps to overcome the barriers to inclusion that are embedded in the traditional individual needs approach to inclusive education. As this work has shown, an inclusive pedagogical approach focuses on the students’ relationships in the community of the classroom. This approach does not rely on addressing individual differences in isolation but focuses on extending what is generally available to all, taking account there will be differences between learners (Florian, 2014).

The research presented in this volume concludes that education, “based on the culture of participation and co-operation opens space for every pupil to work towards the highest personal result and mature in the environment of respect and trust” (p. 461). This conclusion aligns with Black-Hawkins’ (2014) Framework for Participation, a research tool designed for capturing evidence of inclusive classroom practices that considers participation a defining characteristic of inclusion that consists of four elements: (1) *access*, (2) *collaboration*, (3) *achievement* and (4) *diversity*. Recently we used this tool to study inclusive schooling practices in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Florian, Black-Hawkins & Rouse, 2017). Our identified five propositions about the nature of the relationship between achievement and inclusion derived from the literature on this topic. These specify that:

1. “Practices in schools will reflect the changing national policy contexts, and schools are able to create their own solutions to improving achievement and inclusion, although these will be enabled and constrained by broader contextual factors.
2. High levels of inclusion, in terms of a school’s enrolment of a diverse student population, can be compatible with high levels of students’ achievements as measured by a school’s overall progress in national standardised tests.
3. Staff, who work successfully within this system, see their schools as diverse problem solving organisations where policies and practices are dynamic rather than static. Different schools use different approaches to support inclusion and achievement so as to respond creatively to the circumstances and needs of their students.
4. Supporting achievement and inclusion is about being equitable towards all learners. It is not about denying differences between them.
5. All teaching and learning takes place within the context of human relationships, shaped by a school’s culture and the values and beliefs of its members. Relationships – amongst students, amongst staff and between staff and students - are at the heart of understanding and developing policies and practices which support inclusion and achievement” (p. 133).

Using the theoretical ideas associated with our work on inclusive pedagogy to reflect on the propositions, we suggested that even though practices reflect changing national policy contexts, schools create their own solutions to the challenges of inclusion. These different solutions may be enabled and constrained by broader contextual factors but they do not undermine the school’s fundamental commitment to principles of social justice and equity. Indeed, staff see themselves as creative professionals working together in a dynamic problem-solving organisation and all learners are supported to achieve. In addition, provision that is made to safeguard the achievements of those most vulnerable to processes of exclusion is undertaken in ways that do not marginalise those students. Most importantly, the values and beliefs that shape the culture of that school and the nature of the relationships amongst its members, are at the heart of practices which encourage both high levels of inclusion and achievement (pp. 144–145).

In May 2015, the World Forum on Education reaffirmed its commitment to inclusive education with the *Incheon Declaration* and the Education 2030 Framework for Action. The Declaration notes that ‘inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda’ and that ‘no education target should be considered met unless met by all’ (Unesco, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 set the global education agenda for 2030 in SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. The findings of this study offer insights for developing a collaborative approach to inclusive education based on the principles associated with inclusive pedagogy that privilege difference as an ordinary aspect of human development, and teachers as competent agents who have the capacity to teach diverse groups of students

by working collaboratively with others. It is a welcome addition to the literature on inclusive education.

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## Įtraukiojo ugdymo esmė – bendradarbiavimas<sup>2</sup>

Atsiliepiamas apie monografiją „Inclusion in Socio – Educational Frames: Inclusive School Cases in Four European Countries“

Lani Florian

Edinburgo universitetas, Moray House švietimo mokykla, Įtraukties ir įvairovės švietime tyrimų centras, SimonLaurie House, 186-198 Canongate, EH88AQ Edinburgas, Jungtinė Karalystė, lani.florian@ed.ac.uk

### Santrauka

Prieš dvidešimt metų pasaulinė UNESCO konferencija, vykusį 1994 m. Salamankoje (Ispanija), pakvietė mokyti mokinius, turinčius negalių, bendros paskirties arčiausiai mokinio gyvenamosios vietos esančiose mokyklose, taikant įtraukiojo ugdymo strategijas. Pirmieji tokio ugdymo bandymai buvo orientuoti į mokinio, turinčio specialiųjų poreikių, paruošimą dalyvauti įprastoje, nepakitusioje ugdymo aplinkoje. Vėliau pedagogų ir mokslininkų pastangomis imta keisti ugdymo aplinką taip, kad ji nesudarytų kliūčių mokytis skirtingų poreikių turintiems mokiniams.

Monografijoje „Inclusion in Socio-Educational Frames: Inclusive School Cases in four European Countries“ (*Itrauktis socialiniu-educaciniu aspektu: įtraukčiųjų mokyklų atvejai keturiose Europos šalyse*) analizuojami keturiose Europos valstybėse – Lietuvoje, Lenkijoje, Austrijoje ir Suomijoje – atlikto tyrimo rezultatai, kurie atskleidžia įtraukčiųjų ugdymą skatinančius veiksnius socialinėje, psichologinėje ir edukacinėje plotmėje.

Atlikta keturių Europos šalių įtraukiojo ugdymo srities teisinės ir mokslinės bazės analizė atskleidžia kontekstą, kuriame veikia mokyklos, dalyvavusios moksliniame tyrime. Tai, kad tyrimo tikslai telkiami į sociopsichologinę ugdymo aplinką, yra išskirtinai įdomu, nes leidžia suprasti individualių skirtumų sąveikas įvairių kintamųjų kontekste, nefiksuojant individualių atvejų. Sociokultūrinė perspektyva atveria produktyvaus mąstymo būdus, suprantant ir atliepiant skirtingus ugdytinių poreikius ir išsaugant atvirą požiūrį į kiekvieną mokinio potencialą mokytis.

Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidžia įtraukčiųjų mokyklos bendruomenę kaip bendradarbiaujančią komandą, kuri lanksčiai sprendžia visas išskylančias problemas, neapsiribodama vien tik konkreto mokinio ugdymo diferencijavimu. Kaip teigiama šio tyrimo išvadoje, „ugdymas, grindžiamas dalyvavimo ir bendradarbiavimo kultūra, atveria erdvę kiekvienam mokiniui siekti aukščiausio asmeninio rezultato ir bręsti pagarbos ir pasitikėjimo aplinkoje“ (p. 461). Ši išvada atliepia K. Black-Hawkins (2014) dalyvavimo įtraukčioje klasėje charakteristiką, kuri apima keturis komponentus: (1) prieinamumas, (2) bendradarbiavimas, (3) pasiekiamumas; (4) įvairovė. L. Florian, K. Bleck-Hawkins ir M. Rous (2017) pabrėžia, jog vertybės, kuriomis yra grindžiama mokyklos kultūra ir jos narių tarpusavio santykiai, yra joje vykdomos veiklos šerdis ir lemia aukštą įtraukties lygį bei mokinių pasiekimus.

<sup>2</sup> Pavadinimui panaudota Outi Kyrö-Ämmälä ir Suvi Lakkala citata (p. 307).

Šioje monografijoje pateikiamos įžvalgos skatina bendradarbiavimu grindžiamą įtraukiosios pedagogikos prieigą, kuri skirtumas pripažįsta kaip natūralų žmogaus vystymosi reiškinį, o mokytojus – kompetentingais tarpininkais, kurie geba, bendradarbiaudami su kitais, ugdyti skirtingas mokinių grupes.

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**Esminiai žodžiai:** *įtraukusis ugdymas, sociopsichologinė ugdymo aplinka, sociokultūrinė perspektyva, bendradarbiavimas.*

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