

Carpelan, Raisa; Lahtero, Tapio
Leading education for inclusion

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Leading education for inclusion

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Text untersucht die Rolle von Führung und Management im Bildungswesen im Hinblick auf Inklusion. Inklusion wird als Leitprinzip betrachtet, das Vielfalt unter den Lernenden unterstützt und darauf abzielt, soziale Ausgrenzung und Diskriminierung zu beseitigen. Um inklusive Praktiken in Schulen zu fördern, sind Veränderungen und Führung auf allen Ebenen des Bildungssystems notwendig. Politische Rahmenbedingungen und Gesetzgebungen bieten die Grundlage für die Arbeit der Bildungseinrichtungen, wobei eine klare Definition von Inklusion oft fehlt, was die Umsetzung erschwert. Das Beispiel der finnischen Stadt Riverdale zeigt, wie lokale Bildungsverwaltungen durch organisatorische Veränderungen und die Zusammenlegung von Schulbezirken Inklusion fördern können. Es wird diskutiert, wie Führungspraktiken und der Kontext die Entwicklung inklusiver Schulpraktiken beeinflussen, wobei der Fokus auf sozialen Lernprozessen und der gemeinsamen Verantwortung liegt. Abschließend wird betont, dass zur erfolgreichen Umsetzung von Inklusion das Verständnis von Ausschlussmechanismen und deren Überwindung entscheidend ist.

Abstract

This text examines the role of leadership and management in education regarding inclusion. Inclusion is considered a guiding principle that supports diversity among learners and aims to eliminate social exclusion and discrimination. To promote inclusive practices in schools, changes and leadership at all levels of the education system are necessary. Policy frameworks and legislation provide the basis for the work of educational institutions, although a clear definition of inclusion is often lacking, which complicates implementation. The example of the Finnish city of Riverdale illustrates how local educational administrations can promote inclusion through organizational changes and the merging of school districts. The discussion highlights how leadership practices and context influence the development of inclusive school practices, with a focus on social learning processes and shared responsibility. Finally, it is emphasized that understanding mechanisms of exclusion and overcoming them is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusion.

Advance Organizer

Zielsetzung und Überblick

Das Kapitel „Leadership in Education and for Inclusion“ von Dr. Raisa Ahtiainen und Dr. Tapio Lahtero untersucht, wie Führungskräfte und Personen aus der Bildungspolitik inklusive Bildung unterstützen können. Die Autoren erörtern die breite Definition von Inklusion, die Bedeutung von Führung auf verschiedenen Ebenen des Bildungssystems und wie kontextuelle Faktoren die Umsetzung inklusiver Praktiken beeinflussen.

Schlüsselthemen und Konzepte:

1. Breite Definition von Inklusion:
 - a) Inklusion wird als ein Prinzip definiert, das Bildungsarrangements leitet, um Vielfalt unter allen Lernenden zu unterstützen, mit dem Ziel, Ausgrenzung und Diskriminierung aufgrund verschiedener Merkmale wie Fähigkeiten, Geschlecht, Ethnizität und mehr zu eliminieren.
2. Bedeutung von Führung:
 - a) Effektive Führung ist entscheidend für die Entwicklung inklusiver Praktiken. Führungskräfte müssen ein klares Verständnis von Inklusion haben, um deren Umsetzung in Schulen zu leiten und zu stärken.
 - b) Führung im Bildungsbereich erfordert die Schaffung einer inklusiven Kultur und das Engagement von Entscheidungstragenden und Führungskräften auf allen Ebenen.
3. Kontextuelle Faktoren:
 - a) Der Kontext, in dem Bildungspolitik umgesetzt werden, spielt eine entscheidende Rolle. Faktoren wie Standort, Schülerschaft, professionelle Kapazitäten und Unterstützung durch die Gemeinschaft beeinflussen die Schulpraktiken.
 - b) Schulleitungen müssen in der Lage sein, ihre spezifischen Kontexte zu analysieren, um inklusive Politiken effektiv zu planen und umzusetzen.
4. Bildungspolitik und Gesetzgebung:
 - a) Eine inklusive Bildungspolitik und entsprechende Gesetze bilden den Rahmen für schulische Praktiken. Allerdings fehlt es in vielen Ländern an einer umfassenden Gesetzgebung, die Inklusion für alle Lernenden unterstützt.
 - b) Klare Definitionen und regulatorische Rahmenbedingungen sind entscheidend, damit Führungskräfte Ausgrenzung verstehen und angehen können, um so inklusive Praktiken zu fördern.

5. Management und Organisation:

- a) Das Management und die Organisation des Bildungswesens auf höheren Ebenen (z. B. auf kommunaler oder staatlicher Ebene) haben erheblichen Einfluss darauf, wie Inklusion in Schulen wahrgenommen und umgesetzt wird.
- b) Die Fallstudie von Riverdale zeigt, wie Änderungen in der Organisation einer Region Segregation bekämpfen und Bildungsgerechtigkeit fördern können.

Verbindung zu Vorwissen und Kontext

Die in diesem Kapitel behandelten Themen bauen auf bestehendem Wissen über Bildungspolitik, Implementation und inklusive Praktiken auf. Pädagogen und Pädagoginnen sowie Entscheidungstragende, die mit diesen Konzepten vertraut sind, können ihr Verständnis vertiefen, wie Führungspraktiken und kontextuelle Faktoren den Erfolg inklusiver Bildung beeinflussen. Durch die Untersuchung von Fallstudien wie Riverdale können Lesende praktische Strategien zur Förderung von Inklusion und zur Bewältigung von Herausforderungen im Zusammenhang mit Segregation und Bildungsungleichheit erlernen. Dieses Kapitel hebt die Bedeutung eines systemischen Ansatzes hervor, bei dem Führungskräfte auf allen Ebenen zusammenarbeiten, um ein unterstützendes Umfeld für alle Lernenden zu schaffen.

Introduction

Our approach to inclusion is grounded on a broad definition that sees inclusion as a guiding principle for educational arrangements supporting diversity among all learners (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). Within that frame, the aim of inclusion is to erase behaviour, attitudes, and responses to diversity that create and maintain social exclusion, or discrimination against individuals or groups based on their ability, gender, wealth, ethnicity, language, migration, sexual orientation, gender identity or religion (Ainscow, 2020). To develop schools in moving towards practices and ways of working that are more inclusive requires changes in attitude and leadership across the education system (Ainscow 2020; UNESCO 2020). The values policymakers and leaders at different levels of the system have, and the way they think about inclusion are crucial, otherwise they will be unable to lead or provide a direction for building and strengthening inclusion in schools and classrooms (Ainscow 2020). A central factor is building a culture of inclusion that lays the grounds for schooling, and its development requires the support and commitment of all those in leadership positions in every corner of the education system (Ainscow, 2020; Fullan 2015).

When discussing any education policy implementation, the context plays a crucial role. The contextual factors affecting schoolwork are multifaceted, varying from location, student population, professional capacity, and infrastructure, to pressure and support coming from the local community and educational authorities (Braun et al. 2011). Further, the history of a school covering earlier experiences and current future visions of teachers and leaders affect the way attitudes around education and its development are formed (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Within schools, the leaders must be capable of analysing their own contexts and situations to plan the policy implementation, and each should be able to identify factors that facilitate or hinder the process in their school (Ainscow, 2020). Corresponding qualities are needed at the level of the local and/or district educational authorities designated to manage the bigger picture and to support the school level actors.

There are several factors affecting leadership and leaders' actions and opportunities to act when the goal is inclusion. This chapter highlights elements we see as being among the more significant when discussing educational contexts, and leadership and management required to promote inclusion.

Prerequisites for leading: education policy and legislation

The way inclusive education has been perceived and developed in national contexts has changed over the years, and although some countries still see it as service provision for children with disabilities, understanding it in a broader sense has increased (Ainscow, 2020). Nonetheless, the narrower approaches are understandable, as inclusive education has its roots in special education (Slee, 2013). That connection has influenced the beliefs, attitudes, and the concept and practices related to inclusion, because the field of special education has traditionally had a strong focus on segregation, and identification and responses (e.g., treatments related) to disability, deficit, and difference (Schuelka, Johnstone, Thomas & Artiles, 2019).

Laws and policies provide the framework within which the education system and individual schools function and develop their practices. It is worth noting that even though inclusion has belonged to the guiding principles of national education policies for decades, a broader approach to it is lacking in legislation globally. UNESCO's (2020) review shows that although 17% of 194 countries had formulated a comprehensive inclusive education policy concerning all learners, and specified inclusion as one of their goals, inclusive education was non-existent in the legislation. In addition, several researchers and policy reviewers have pointed out how the vagueness or lack of a clear definition of inclusion hinders its implementation in practice (e.g., Ainscow, 2020; Jahnukainen et al. 2023; UNESCO, 2020).

Regarding leadership, the education policy and legislation form the ground on which leaders work, and on which their decision-making is based on (Simola & Ahtiainen, 2023). Therefore, that ground must be solid. Moreover, a practice guiding definition of inclusive education should involve elements that enable leaders at all levels to understand exclusion as a phenomenon, and to recognise its nature, consequences, and patterns (Slee, 2013). Further, the practice should identify and remove obstacles to participation, presence, and achievement of all learners (Ainscow, 2020). Hence, to understand and lead inclusion, knowledge of its counterpart (exclusion) provides tools for analysing the current situation and taking necessary steps to facilitate change.

Management and organisation of education

Although the education policy and legislation provide a framework for organising and leading inclusive education at the level of an individual school, they are not the only factors affecting the practices. The system level above schools, with its values and choices, and decisions made at that level, plays a role in how inclusion is perceived and managed. Thus, the realisation of inclusion is not a matter of an individual school leader alone, instead, the tools and degree of freedom given to a school leader depend on management and direction coming from the higher levels of the educational system (e.g., local municipality, state). Further, these other levels influence the way inclusion becomes an issue, is the target of discussion, and how it has realised activities within a school and its classrooms. To enlighten the matter, below we reflect on it through an example from the Finnish education system.

Wider context

The education system in Finland is decentralised, and the local education providers of comprehensive school education (i.e., municipalities), have extensive freedom in interpreting and applying the national level norms and legislation. The municipalities differ from each other regarding the autonomy given to school leaders in deciding on their finances and decision-making regarding the student intake, for example (Risku, Kanervio & Björk, 2014; Simola & Ahtiainen, 2023). Although there is an ongoing discussion around inclusion in comprehensive schools in Finland, the policies and legislation related to it are rather vague and loose. For example, the Basic Education Act (1998/628) does not mention inclusion, and leaves it open as to how and where (i.e., placement) education for pupils in need of support for their schooling ought to be arranged, giving leeway for interpretation. The other central document guiding education, namely the National

Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Agency for Education [EDUFI]), requires that schooling is organised and developed according to the principle of inclusion. However, the document does not take a clear stance on what that means, or how it could be achieved in practice. Although the guiding idea for educational arrangements is that all pupils should be able to attend the school nearest to their home (i.e., the neighbourhood school principle), many questions are left open, and this has led to variations between municipalities in the way they manage their schools. Having this big picture as a backdrop, a case study of a local educational management can be discussed.

Starting point: two schools, two districts

The Riverdale municipality (a pseudonym) has several school districts. Two schools are located relatively close to each other, and they serve students in their respective districts. School 1 is a comprehensive school that has grades 1-6 and School 2 has grades 1-9. However, the pupil population at School 2 is more diverse, and the number of underprivileged pupils is much higher. In Riverdale's context, 'underprivileged' refers to multiple gaps in well-being (i.e., cumulative economic, social and health deprivation). That is, the catchment area of School 2 has regional and family-related social and economic resource deficits in factors known to contribute to school achievement (Bernelius & Huilla 2021, 16). To support the pupils in their learning and school attendance better, School 2 has set up special classes. (NB: pupils attend special classes or small group education full-/part-time for a variety of reasons related to their need for support, e.g., learning and/or behaviour, and a diagnosis is not necessarily needed).

The above-mentioned factors started creating segregation between the two districts in Riverdale. No special education classes targeted at students struggling with their schooling were established at School 1, whereas at School 2, there were five special education classes (Figure 1). Consequently, if a pupil living in the catchment area of School 1 needed continuous support for schooling, they were moved to School 2. Hence, Schools 1 and 2 started to diverge from each other regarding the heterogeneity of their respective pupil populations and the school profiles in learning outcomes. The situation accelerated the development of special education service provision at School 2. Further, it created dramatically different grounds for leadership around equity and inclusion at School 1 when compared with School 2.

New district model: change through educational management

The municipal education management perceived the development in these two districts to be problematic, due to the increased segregation between them. They felt that all this reduced educational equity in Riverdale. Consequently, Riverdale made a political decision that involved all its school districts: schools must wel-

come all pupils living in their catchment areas, regardless of their backgrounds, individual characteristics, or abilities. Riverdale also merged some districts and changed grade levels within schools to improve the implementation of the aim in practice (Figure 1). That led to a new situation at both School 1 and School 2. First, the schools were now located within the same district, and they had a shared catchment area. Second, to balance the number of pupils in one school, School 1 started to accommodate grades 1-4 and School 2 grades 5-9. This change left several pupils at their old school, whereas some pupils needed to move to a new school.

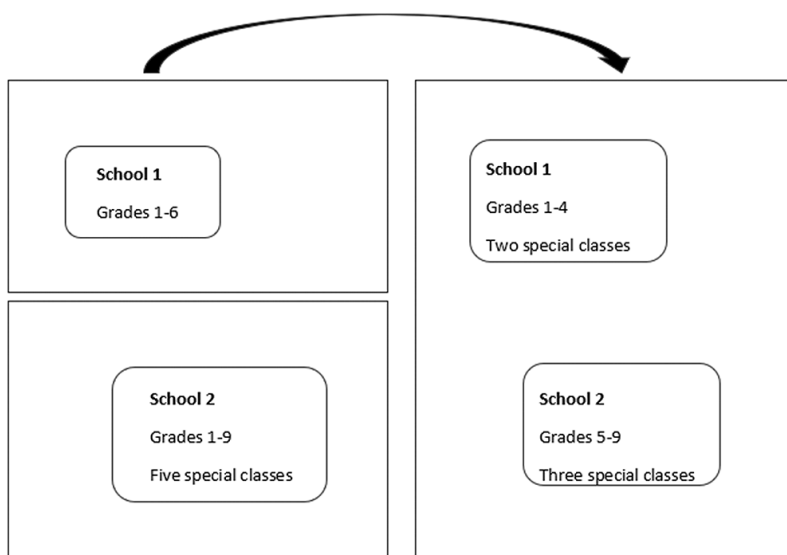


Figure 1: Changes in the organisation of two districts and schools.

What followed from this change is that the gap in pupils' learning and school achievement started to level out between the former two districts. Over the years, the schools have started to resemble each other in terms of their pupil profiles. In addition, School 1 no longer has a culture of sending pupils to other schools because of their individual needs. Now both schools welcome all pupils and have developed practices which enable them to meet the needs of all learners, sometimes even in the form of full-time or part-time placement in a special class.

Concluding thoughts

From the perspective of the management of education, there were observable practices within the two districts which led the education in a direction that did

not support equity, but increased exclusion and segregation. Something needed to be done, and they did it! The decision made by Riverdale's municipal educational management was a big decision, a brave one. It led to many opposing voices and debates as it changed the culture at all Riverdale's schools. However, now about ten years after that change, everyone seems to be happy with it and, it has made education function better in Riverdale.

Discussion

Leadership in education is composed of social practices taking place in a specific time and space. Hence, leadership in its nature is contextual and relational (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Further, an essential part of leadership is power that can be viewed as a way of producing and modifying practices and hierarchies within an educational organisation, and in its connections with the external world. Power is grounded in the shared understandings of the experienced reality and values (Foucault, 1971). Within this framework, leadership practices of schools are an essential part and product of the existing and earlier social conditions, and therefore, inseparable from their contexts (Simola & Ahtiainen, 2023).

To lead and develop a school in the direction of inclusive practices is concerned with social learning processes affecting the way people act and think (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Along with practices and beliefs, it is essential to pay attention to the language in a way it supports the intended development. When the aim is to develop the practices of the work community, the starting point lies with its members (i.e., the school leader, teachers, and other staff). Therefore, it is necessary to create a sense of shared responsibility for achieving the aims set for the development work around inclusion (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). However, the policy frame within which all that can take place, and to what extent varies, and consequently, the conceptual tools and opportunities for leading the work can look very different depending on the immediate local and wider (national) context.

The case of Riverdale shows how the local context of schools shapes the way the school communities can start to develop their practices. In the first phase, the school cultures started to diverge: School 1 allowed the exclusion of pupils based on their individual abilities, characteristics, and backgrounds, whereas School 2 worked with practices to enable them to accommodate all learners. Consequently, the starting point for leading these schools were not the same, and the concept of inclusion had a different meaning in these two schools. In the second phase, the actions of local educational management reshaped the circumstances in which the school leaders work and lead the discussions and practices related to inclusion. The contextual circumstances affected the attitudes, understandings,

and beliefs about the responsibilities a school has in relation to including or excluding a certain group of pupils. The circumstances create and modify school histories regarding the degree of diversity the schools should agree on. The new model created in the Riverdale municipality brought new grounds for discussing inclusion, and everyone's responsibilities to meet the needs of diverse learners. Further, it pointed out the importance of the identification and management of practices that decrease exclusion and enhance pupils' opportunities for attending a school in their neighbourhood. The actions taken at the level of the municipality's educational management brought the schools closer to each other, both in terms of their pupil population, and in school achievement profiles. The Riverdale case illustrates how geographical change in the boundaries of the schools' catchment area can be one of the factors contributing to a decrease in the segregation between schools (Bernelius & Huilla 2021, 106). However, the provision of special classes by Riverdale's schools can be a target of debate within the framework of inclusive education, its conceptualisation and realisation, yet at the same time, it provides perspective on the way the national policy framework guides the educational management locally.

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