

Löser, Jessica; Rabenstein, Kerstin

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Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS
DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung
E-Mail: pedocs@dipf.de
Internet: www.pedocs.de

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Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Jessica Löser and Kerstin Rabenstein

The development of teaching, instructions, pedagogy and didactics in inclusive schools. Ideas from a practice-theoretical and/or ethnographical perspective

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Text untersucht die Entwicklung von Unterrichtsmethoden und -didaktiken in inklusiven Schulen aus einer praxistheoretischen und ethnografischen Perspektive. Ethnografische Forschung betrachtet Schulreformen, die durch Gesetze und Bildungspolitik initiiert wurden, und betont die Unterschiede zwischen Programmen und alltäglichen Praktiken. Der Fokus liegt darauf, wie schulische Reformen unbeabsichtigte und wenig beachtete Effekte haben können. Durch die Untersuchung der Praktiken im Schulalltag zeigt die Forschung, dass pädagogisches Handeln zur (Re-)Produktion von Ungleichheit und Differenz beitragen kann. Es werden vier Annahmen über inklusive Bildung kritisch diskutiert: den Umgang mit Unterschieden, alternative Formen der Leistungsbewertung, die Individualisierung des Unterrichts und die Bedeutung des Co-Teachings. Die Autorinnen argumentieren, dass Reformen oft widersprüchliche Effekte haben und regen zu einer differenzierten Betrachtung der Schulentwicklung an.

Abstract

This text examines the development of teaching methods and didactics in inclusive schools from a practice-theoretical and ethnographic perspective. Ethnographic research looks at school reforms initiated by laws and educational policies, emphasizing the differences between programs and everyday practices. The focus is on how school reforms can have unintended and overlooked effects. By examining the social practices in everyday school life, the research shows that pedagogical actions can contribute to the (re)production of inequality and difference. Four assumptions about inclusive education are critically discussed: handling differences, alternative forms of performance assessment, the individualization of teaching, and the significance of co-teaching. The authors argue that reforms often have contradictory effects and call for a nuanced consideration of school development.

Advance Organizer

Zielsetzung und Überblick

Der Artikel „Die Entwicklung der Unterrichtsdidaktik und -pädagogik in inklusiven Schulen: Ideen aus einer praxis-theoretischen und ethnografischen Perspektive“ von Jessica Löser und Kerstin Rabenstein untersucht die Komplexität und unbeabsichtigten Konsequenzen von Inklusionsreformen aus ethnografischer und praxistheoretischer Sicht. Die Autorinnen analysieren, wie Reformen mit alltäglichen Schulpraktiken interagieren, und betonen die Bedeutung, die manchmal widersprüchlichen Effekte dieser Veränderungen zu verstehen.

Schlüsselthemen und Konzepte

1. Ethnografische Perspektive auf Schulreformen:
 - a) Ethnografische Forschung konzentriert sich auf die alltäglichen Praktiken und Routinen in Schulen und analysiert, wie Reformen zur Inklusion in realen Umgebungen umgesetzt werden.
 - b) Es gibt einen konstitutiven Unterschied zwischen den beabsichtigten Zielen von Reformen und deren praktischer Umsetzung.
2. Annahmen über inklusive Bildung:
 - a) Der Artikel untersucht kritisch gängige Annahmen über inklusive Bildung und legt nahe, dass gut gemeinte Reformen manchmal bestehende Ungleichheiten und Ausgrenzungen verstärken können.
 - b) Ethnografische Erkenntnisse zeigen, dass pädagogische Handlungen unbeabsichtigt Unterschiede zwischen Lernenden hervorheben und neue Formen der Ausgrenzung schaffen können.
3. Vier zentrale Bereiche der inklusiven Bildung:
 - a) Produzieren und Umgehen mit Unterschieden: Ethnografische Forschung zeigt, dass pädagogische Praktiken nicht nur auf vorbestehende Unterschiede reagieren, sondern diese aktiv produzieren und verstärken können.
 - b) Alternative Formen der Leistungsbewertung: Der Wechsel von numerischen Noten hin zu Selbsteinschätzung und Feedback kann zu weniger Transparenz in Bezug auf Leistungserwartungen und zu einer erhöhten individuellen Verantwortung für Lernergebnisse führen.
 - c) Öffnung und Individualisierung des Unterrichts: Obwohl individualisierter Unterricht als vorteilhaft gilt, kann er Herausforderungen mit sich bringen, wie z. B. personalisierte Lehrkräfte-Lernenden-Beziehungen und ungleiche Vorteile für unterschiedliche Lernende.
 - d) Bedeutung von Co-Teaching: Die Annahme, dass Co-Teaching automatisch Inklusion fördert, wird hinterfragt. Strukturelle Herausforderungen

und Rollenkonflikte können eine effektive Zusammenarbeit zwischen Regel- und Förderschullehrkräften behindern.

4. Kritische Reflexion über Reformen:

- a) Die Autorinnen plädieren für einen kritischen und reflexiven Ansatz bei Inklusionsreformen, der die Komplexität und potenziellen unbeabsichtigten Konsequenzen dieser Initiativen anerkennt.
- b) Es besteht ein Bedarf an fortlaufender Überprüfung und Anpassung von Reformen, um diese besser mit den Zielen der Inklusion und Gerechtigkeit in Übereinstimmung zu bringen.

Verbindung zu Vorwissen und Kontext:

Dieser Artikel baut auf bestehendem Wissen über Bildungsreformen und inklusive Bildung auf und bietet ein tieferes Verständnis dafür, wie diese Reformen in der Praxis umgesetzt werden. Pädagogen und Pädagoginnen sowie Entscheidungstragende, die mit den Herausforderungen der Implementierung inklusiver Bildung vertraut sind, können von den ethnografischen Einblicken profitieren. Indem sie das Potenzial erkennen, dass Reformen unbeabsichtigte Effekte hervorrufen können, können Beteiligte reflektierte Praktiken entwickeln, um Inklusion zu unterstützen. Dieser Ansatz betont die Bedeutung der Berücksichtigung der gelebten Erfahrungen und Interaktionen in Schulen, um wirksamere und gerechtere Bildungsrichtlinien und -praktiken zu entwickeln.

Introduction

Ethnographical research does not employ a concept of evidence in the sense of an empirically generated and therefore objective knowledge. Nevertheless, ethnographic research is interested in analyzing changes within schools that are initiated by law and educational policy to become inclusive. For this purpose, ethnographic research looks at school reforms by including the assumption of a constitutive difference between programs/objectives and practice. Due to the ethnographic commitment to daily practices and routines, ethnographical research has something to say about the contingency of school development processes. Based on findings in qualitative research on individualized and personalized teaching, learning, and inclusive schools, we want to sensitize those people involved in inclusive school development to concerns about some unintended, at times little-noticed effects that might occur in the medium to long term.

This goal brings a few general understandings concerning school reform from an ethnographical point of view: Beyond a discourse aimed primarily at the competencies to be acquired by individuals (teaching staff, school leaders, and students), we will point out interdependences between continuing orders of difference and

discrimination in and outside of school. Since we cannot go by that assumption of a technological conception of pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical action, we assume that reforms are accompanied with contradictory effects. However, we go along to not have a general 'skepticism' in respect to the discussed reform approaches. Nevertheless, we would like to draw attention to the contingency of school development.

Initially, we present our starting points based on a practice theoretical or ethnographical understanding. Secondly, we outline four assumptions about inclusive education and contrast these with ethnographic findings which we summarize as hypotheses. This is followed by the conclusion.

Starting point

As we cannot describe the research designs and data basis of the studies that we refer to in detail, we want to highlight some general characteristics of ethnographical and so-called practice theoretical research in the following. From our point of view this research approach does not strive for an improvement of schools in a rational-technological sense, and therefore is not aimed at individuals or competences, attitudes, or outlooks for which individuals are responsible and which they must change. It also means that the results of ethnographic and practice theoretical research does not aim to define certainties – as education 'always' is.

Instead, this approach looks at school reforms by including the assumption of a constitutive difference between programs/objectives (i.e. the anticipated school reform) and practice (i.e. daily school life). But it does not seek to ascribe the identified differences only to the stakeholders in the schools, as could be assumed of an individual-centered perspective, or to overarching structures. Rather, this research approach understands the actions of people as interwoven into powerful, ongoing, and even materialized practices.

The main methodological assumptions therefore are that firstly ethnographical or practice theoretical research assumes that lessons and schools are to be examined as a social practice, i.e. that practices of teachers and students can only be understood as integrated into (following Schatzki, 2002) a bundles of practices and material arrangements. Secondly, social practices can only be broached as an 'interpreted' reality, i.e. that they can be described from (multiple) perspectives, so that the descriptions of educational and school daily life become more complex and multi-layered. Thirdly, social orders of lessons and schools should be regarded as (un)stable in the way that norms and the focus (desired by educational policy and a programmatically approach) of changes in school and practice within lessons themselves can be prone to conflict or can be disputed.

To distance the research approach from normatively determined objective, ethnographical or practice-theoretical research (or also, in a broad sense, qualitative

reconstructive studies) is interested in the ‘interaction orders’ of lessons and schools. Consequently, this research approach asks about practices of exclusion and inclusion of students.

Discussion of (progressive) pedagogical assumptions in the discourse on inclusive education and inclusive schools

In the following, we attempt to give a critical commentary on a number of widespread assumptions associated with the design of inclusive education in schools. In this critical examination, we intend to formulate hypotheses – in the spirit of suggestions – for the further development of inclusive schools. For this purpose, we have selected assumptions on four topics.

On producing and dealing with differences

A widespread assumption is that inclusive education just needs to respond to the diversity of learners. Thus, in pedagogical discussions about inclusive education, recourse is currently made to the progressive discourse of an individualization of teaching and learning, e.g. ‘differentiation practices’ (Lindner & Schwab, 2020; Rabenstein, 2021; Tomlinson, 2014). According to this, learners bring with them different social, habitual, cognitive, emotional, physical, etc. conditions for learning and performance, to which the teacher must respond by means of an individualization. These differences are attributed to different categories among people on the basis of gender, country of origin, age etc.. Ethnographic research reverses this perspective. It asks how differences between persons are produced in everyday actions (Bührmann & Rabenstein, 2017). Thus, pedagogical action in a school context can participate in the (re-)production of inequality and difference and can initiate consequent inclusion and exclusion processes (see e.g. Huf & Raggl, 2017; Merl, 2023). Our hypothesis, in response to the first assumption, is thus: Pedagogical action does not respond simply to differences, but risks to contribute to the emphasizing of knowledge about differences between learners; consequently, it can produce differences.

In response to this and in view of the effects of knowledge about differences among learners for labeling or stigmatization, it is often assumed that Learners benefit when differences in education are not thematized by category, or alternatively when categories that are treated as unspeakable, e.g. disabled/non-disabled, are not invoked. The ethnographical study of Ludwig (2023) of an inclusive high school (‘Gymnasium’) observed practices of masking categories of difference with the purpose of avoiding categories in the class discussions. She concludes critically that although the categorizations are not verbalized in speech, they nevertheless continue to have some effect in the manner in which learner groups are divided.

By masking the difference, teachers have the option in view of a “paradoxical requirement of inclusive differentiation in order to remain capable of acting” (ibid., no page given). Yet this approach to difference (e.g. disabled/non-disabled) leads to paradoxical consequences for the learners: through the masking of difference by teachers, “the learners are denied the cognitive capacity (...) to see through the categories by which differentiation arises and thus also to protest against them” (ibid.). This leads to our next hypothesis: Through the (spoken) avoidance of thematization or concealment of differences, processes of exclusion can be initiated in what is formally an inclusive setting (ibid.).

The tendency to fall back on categorizations of learners can be understood as a mode of dealing “with overwhelming situations” (Horvath 2019, p. 136), as they are often described for dealing with a heterogeneous body of learners. Yet with this argumentation, it should not be neglected that categorizations can lead to inequality, “be it that they are reflected in selection decisions or performance assessments, or be it that subjectivization processes predominate” (ibid., p. 139). What can be concluded from this?

Categorizations of learners in connection with their divisions into groups etc. in class and in conversations about them – can be understood as attempts to find explanations for their behavior in view of limited effectiveness of pedagogical actions. They are neither easy to avoid nor always to be applied. “The critical thematization of knowledge and practices of differentiation in the sense of a reflexive practice” (Horvath 2019, p. 139) could thus mean that teachers reflect: with which differences and categorizations they legitimately affiliate themselves outside of the classroom and in what way, in what way categorizations of learners serve them and in which situations and which legitimizable effects they entail for learners.

On alternative forms of performance assessment

The understanding of ‘performance’ is “as indeterminate as it is controversial” (Rabenstein et al. 2013, p. 676). At the same time, the construct of ‘performance’ as the “central school ‘currency’, into which almost everything else within the school can be ‘converted’” (ibid., p. 675), can also be held as valid. The approach of the non-use of numerical grades – i.e. the replacement of teachers’ evaluations in the classroom with self-observation and self-evaluation by the learners and feedback from the learning process by the teachers – has accompanied the institutionalization of the school evaluation system – internationally – for a long time already. In recent years (in German-speaking countries) this has developed from a reform project realized only in exceptional situations by mostly elementary schools, to a widespread demand.

A critique of the performance principle of a school is formulated in the context of inclusive education, primarily in connection with the “humiliation” associated for

those learners who do not match the performance requirements (Rübben 2022, no page given): As a consequence, the assumption is then often made that inclusive education can be made more conducive to learning by avoiding the use of numerical grades. In the last decade, ethnographical studies have examined assessment practices without the use of grades at different school levels and types of school in highly differentiated ways; they indicate which (un)desired effects are or can be also linked with this. We outline very briefly three findings (Rabenstein, 2021).

- 1) In classes without numerical grades, performance expectations are less transparent.
- 2) A retreat can be observed of teachers from a pedagogical responsibility for the design of the learning process and the learning by the learners. To the extent that teachers are being shifted into the programmatically desired position of ‘advisors’, their task is minimized of providing learning subjects for learners in such a way that they can be discussed with them and that they can be experienced, worked through and appropriated by them.
- 3) The responsibility for learning and for personal progress at school is being further individualized.

Using the self-planning, self-monitoring and self-assessment tools provided, learners move into the position of those who take decisions and who can be retrospectively made responsible for the consequences of those decisions – such as not having learnt the right things, not having learnt enough, or not having learnt successfully.

Our hypothesis is that the obtaining of school performance in the absence of numerical grades is understood still in a shared responsibility of, on the one hand, the possibilities opened up by the teachers to learn and to demonstrate performance, and on the other hand, the responses of the learners. Reflecting pedagogically on the function of performance assessments in the classroom would, however, mean also thinking about the proportion of pedagogical activity in the obtaining of performance and reflecting on performance assessment again as more than just a “hinge function” between teaching and learning (Ricken & Reh, 2017, p. 248).

On the opening and individualization of classroom education

The ‘opening and individualization of classroom education’ has been seen up to now as the ideal solution for responding to the different learning requirements of learners in a pedagogically appropriate manner. In the following, we will briefly point out three assumptions and our responding hypotheses.

- 1) Inclusive education is often discussed as more or less guaranteed success when individualization and an opening of teaching and learning is offered. Looking at ethnographic research, there is a risk that not all learners benefit from the opening in the same way (Rabenstein, 2016; Merl, 2023). Based on this, tools and methods

of individualized teaching and learning cannot be simply adopted for the design of inclusive education. Rather, a suitable adaptation or a critical reflection of this is necessary.

2) An individualized education entails a giving of pedagogical attention to individual learners by their teachers, which is viewed as conducive for learning and success at school. Ethnographical studies have shown that in such teaching and learning arrangements, in which teachers can spend more time in discussions with individual learners and small groups, a number of challenges arise. Firstly, we assume that ‘teachers as a resource’ in the classroom is to be regarded as ‘scarce’ (Breidenstein, 2014). Secondly, teacher-learner relationships have the tendency to become ‘personal’ in the sense that learners are addressed in a more extensive way as ‘whole persons’ and likewise address the teachers as ‘whole persons’ (Reh, 2012). The extent of these challenges has so far scarcely been described.

Our hypothesis is: It is valid to investigate the social conditions of a changed teachers’ role in inclusive education – i.e. the teacher’s resources of attention, time and support for (individual) learners in the classroom. At the same time, the conditions must be examined under which teachers can avoid the friction and conflicts that arise from diffuse, personalized relationships, or else how, in a classroom setting in which individual support is offered, the possibility can be created repeatedly of responding to friction and conflicts with distance (Reh, 2012).

3) A third assumption is thus: Inclusive education is successful when it is based on symmetrical relationships between learners and encourages ‘help’ as a core competence among the learners. Ethnographical studies point, however, to the ambivalence of ‘help’ in the classroom (Bender & Rennebach, 2018): that precisely an instructing, regulating, explaining attitude among learners toward the learning subjects in the classroom puts learners into unequal, different positions and leads to hierarchization among the learners is still little discussed.

Our hypothesis is: The fact that learners must strike a balance, ensuring their own progress in their work on the one hand, and also sharing responsibility for the progress of others (Steinwand, 2024) on the other hand, should also be reflected as a requirement of learners.

On the importance of co-teaching

Cooperation between mainstream and teachers for special educational needs in formally inclusive settings is often discussed more or less as a guarantee for the implementation of the objectives of inclusive education. Qualitative studies identify next to the benefits also structural challenges such as conflicts of roles and limits to classroom-related cooperation, e.g. when teachers for special educational needs are usually deployed in an assisting role, while the mainstream teachers lead the classes alone (e.g. Arndt & Werning, 2013; Friend et al., 2010). In one ethnographic study it is shown that even in shared classes, “the responsibility

remains mostly stable” (Budde et al., 2019, no page given) and a “division based on difference criteria” (ibid.) is undertaken, which can lead to a moment of exclusion even within a formally inclusive class: “Education for all is not created by a common space (everybody in the same classroom). Rather, competences arise along a professional separation between mainstream and special-needs pedagogical fields” (ibid.). In this study, co-teaching does not necessarily result in the mainstream and teachers for special educational needs teaching together throughout the class, but rather, a spatial division frequently takes place.

Our hypothesis is: Team-based teaching is becoming more complex for the teachers. The linearity between the possibility of co-teaching and successful inclusion can thus be questioned, since sensible concepts and changes in teaching do not necessarily go along with it. Possible social effects that may occur through the presence of multiple teachers in the classroom must be observed and taken into consideration.

Conclusion

The objective was to counter widespread, in some cases handed-down assumptions and ideas within the reformist discourse on inclusive schools with findings from ethnographic research and to sensitize for the observing practices. In addition, we wanted to point to exclusion processes in formally inclusive settings and to uncover the difference-setting and discriminating factors still present in the school context. With the impulses selected, we would like to show that even a number of reforms currently being initiated in the development of inclusive schools are prone to contradictory effects that should be considered and discussed in a differentiated sense.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies plus a professional translator in the writing process

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Authors

Löser, Jessica is an assistant professor for inclusion in secondary education at the Georg-August-University of Goettingen in Goettingen.

Rabenstein, Kerstin is Professor for School Pedagogy at the Georg-August-University of Goettingen in Goettingen.