

Implementing the Index for Inclusion for Inclusive Schools: A New Paradigm

Maria-Luise Braunsteiner*

Abstract

The introduction of the concept of inclusion into schools and other educational settings is a relatively recent initiative that is expanding regularly. Heretofore, students with special needs or with cultural or social differences were isolated from the mainstream with the thinking that this was the appropriate fashion of education. The broad adaptation of the concept of inclusion has required guidance so that educators could move expeditiously towards the goal of inclusive schooling. Towards that end, the *Index for Inclusion* has been developed and published in many languages. This article helps define inclusion and introduces this well received *Index for Inclusion*.

Keywords:

Inclusion
Inclusive Education
School Development
Index for Inclusion

1 Introduction

It is no longer a question if, but how inclusive education can be realized in educational systems as well as in single classrooms. Since the UN-Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (United Nations 2008) promoted the concept of inclusive education in both educational and social settings of all kinds, discussions and initiatives have led to the current educational landscape – especially in those countries where the Convention has been ratified. This contribution is based on a broadened view of inclusion, which entails celebrating differences of culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual education, needs and abilities. The *Index for Inclusion* is presented as a tool to facilitate the implementation of inclusive education in schools and beyond.

2 Clarifying Inclusion

As a result of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UCRPD, 2008) the term inclusion – representing a new orientation not only in education – is discussed to an extent, which was unimaginable a few years ago. The ratification of the UN Convention in many states has immensely accelerated the debate on the implementation of inclusion. However, the consequences of the discussion lead to a focus on disability on the one hand, and in an even more blurred use of the term inclusion on the other hand. Everything previously known as integration, is now called inclusion (Hinz, 2013). Inclusion claimed, in fact, a paradigm shift: from the “functional limitation perspective” to a “minority perspective” (Karagiannis et al. 1997, p. 10, cited in Hinz, 2002, p.352). Replacing the term “special educational needs” (SEN) by “barriers to learning and participation” as employed by Booth (2000) in the *Index for Inclusion*, another shift is taking place: the child no longer has to fit in a certain type of school, but the school has to identify barriers to learning and participation as well as resources to address and remove the barriers for every child in the community (Booth 2011).

* Pädagogische Hochschule Niederösterreich, Mühlgasse 67, 2500 Baden. *Corresponding author.*
E-mail: m.braunsteiner@ph-noe.ac.at

Although the goal for inclusive education is stated as promoting full participation of learners identified as having special educational needs, inclusion concerns a wider range of learners (European Agency, p. 15). It is an approach that investigates, "... how to transform education systems in order to respond to the diversity of learners." (UNESCO, 2003, p.7) As Vislie states "... the challenge for inclusion is to get free from the continuous focus on special education and become able to set its own agenda." (2003, p.32) According to Oswald "Inclusion is about a process whereby a school attempts to accommodate all students as individuals within an inclusive and supportive community." (2010, p.33)

There seems to be a strong cultural tradition in German-speaking countries, which defines difference hierarchically – meaning that best education takes place in homogenous learning groups, where for instance learners with "impairment" spend most of their time in small groups with other disabled peers. Of course, there have been progress and improvements during the last thirty years, by giving children (with disabilities) the right to attend mainstream schools – but without further changes within those schools (Hinz 2013). An inclusive educational system needs schools, which become better in educating all children in their community.

"Rather than being a marginal theme on how some learners can be integrated in the mainstream education, inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims to enable both teachers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment in the learning environment, rather than a problem." (UNESCO, 2003, p.7)

Defining inclusion as a fundamental right of all children to fully participate and contribute, it can no longer be an issue of placement of students, but an issue of a school-wide culture dedicated to the participation of all learners (Braunsteiner & Lapidus, 2014, p. 32). In light of this discourse the Policy Guidelines (UNESCO, 2009, p.10) highlight the following propositions regarding inclusive education: a) Inclusion and quality are reciprocal; b) Access and quality are linked and are mutually reinforcing; c) Quality and equity are central to ensuring inclusive education. From the perspective of schools Reich (2011) considers how they can transform into inclusive schools. Inclusion in this respect should lead to greater educational equity. He recommends two "instruments" for this development, the "Equity Foundation Statement" (Toronto, Canada) and the "Index for Inclusion" developed in England (Sauter, 2013).

The ongoing discussion about inclusive education will not be further explained in this paper as it varies with time and experience.

3 The *Index* for Inclusion

The *Index* has obtained international recognition and been translated into almost fifty languages – currently the second German version of the *Index* is in preparation and will be published at the beginning of 2017.

"The Index for Inclusion is an example of a developmental, self-evaluation tool (Ainscow and Booth, 2011) which has been designed specifically to support and assist with the process of developing inclusive education. It can be modified for local use and adapted to meet the needs of individual institutions and is intended to support critical reflection and action through a process of self-review and evaluation." (EASPD, 2012, p.7)

The *Index* can be used for learning – not for transfer – it needs social interaction and negotiation between the stakeholders in a school and beyond. It invites a school community to share and build on the existing knowledge and experience of staff, children, youngsters and their families, about what impedes learning and participation and how their educational setting can be improved (Booth, 2016, p.21). The key concepts of the *Index* "barriers to learning and participation", "resources to support learning and participation" and "support for diversity" can provide appropriate direction. By inviting professionals to dialogue, the *Index* transforms a school community into a learning community.

3.1 The structure of the *Index*

The review – at the beginning of a school development process – is considered along three dimensions: cultures, policies and practices. Each dimension is divided into two sections. Both dimensions and sections can be used as a planning framework (Booth & Ainscow 2016, p.13).

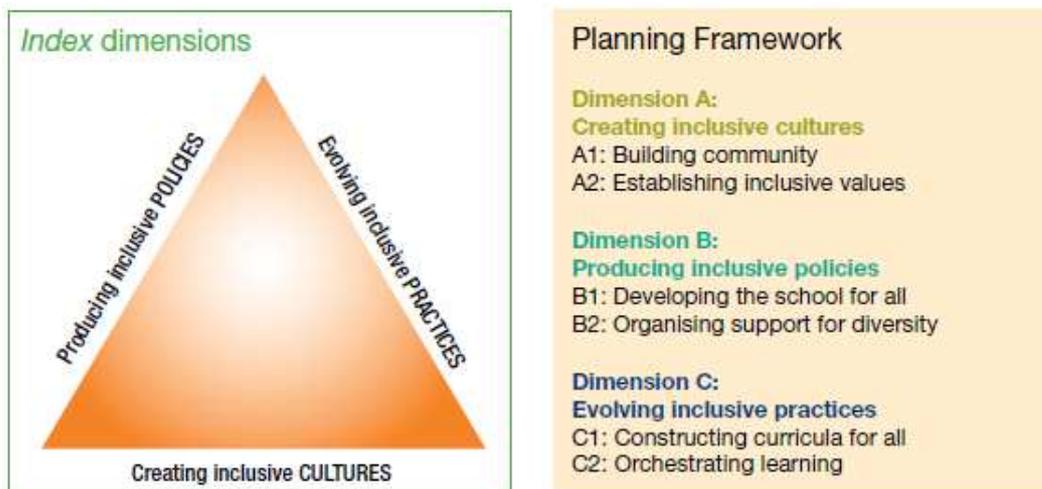


Fig. 1: The three dimensions of the *Index* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p.13)

“**Cultures** reflect relationships and deeply held values and beliefs. Changing cultures is essential for sustained development.

Policies are concerned with how the school is run and plans to change it.

Practices are about *what* is learnt and taught, and *how* it is learnt and taught.” (Booth & Ainscow, 2016, p.17)

Each section contains up to 14 indicators. They are headings for possible school development goals and can be used to review existing cultures, policies and practices in order to set development priorities (Booth 2016, p. 51). Questions define the meaning of the indicators and can be used to initiate dialogue and review – based on inclusive values. Figure 2 gives an example of the indicators of section A2, while in figure 3 examples of questions may illustrate, how they can sharpen the investigation of a current situation.

A2: Establishing inclusive values

- 1 The school develops shared inclusive values.
- 2 The school encourages respect for all human rights.
- 3 The school encourages respect for the integrity of planet earth.
- 4 **Inclusion is viewed as increasing participation for all.**
- 5 Expectations are high for all children.
- 6 Children are valued equally.
- 7 The school counters all forms of discrimination.
- 8 **The school promotes non-violent interactions and resolutions to disputes.**
- 9 The school encourages children and adults to feel good about themselves.
- 10 The school contributes to the health of children and adults.

Fig. 2: Indicators section A2 (Booth & Ainscow 2016, p. 12)

Example indicator A2.4:

Inclusion is viewed as increasing participation for all

Questions that define the meaning of the indicator:

- e) Is inclusion seen to be concerned with the participation of adults as well as children?
- f) Is inclusion about everyone not just children with impairments or those seen as “having special educational needs”?
- g) Do staff avoid seeing barriers to learning and participation as caused by deficiencies or impairments in children?
- h) Is it understood that anyone can experience barriers to learning and participation?
- i) Is it understood that who experiences barriers to learning and participation varies with context?

Fig. 3: Questions to indicator A2.4 (Booth & Ainscow 2016, p. 94)

According to many reports on the use of the *Index* (Boban & Hinz, 2015; MSJG 2011), the *Index* can be used as an integral part of an existing development plan (e.g., SQA¹ in Austria). People in schools also started anywhere in the *Index* – by finding and sharing an interesting question – and got into a discussion with each other, arriving at improvement ideas and discovering appropriate resources (Brokamp in Booth & Ainscow 2016, p.6).

4 The *Index* in Use

The following examples may provide a brief illustration of how the *Index* can be used.

4.1 A Networking project using the *Index*

From 2006 to 2010 the *Index* was used in the town of Wiener Neudorf – the project was subject to a formative evaluation process by the University College of Teacher Education in Lower Austria (Braunsteiner, Germany 2009, 2011). Educational institutions (including kindergartens, which in Austria are not a part of the public schools) and the town community wanted to improve their cooperation. They were guided by inclusive values by adopting a self-review approach based on the *Index* for Inclusion. Figure 4 shows the networks that have been formed since 2006. See also: <http://www.wiener-neudorf.gv.at/Zusammenleben/Inklusion>

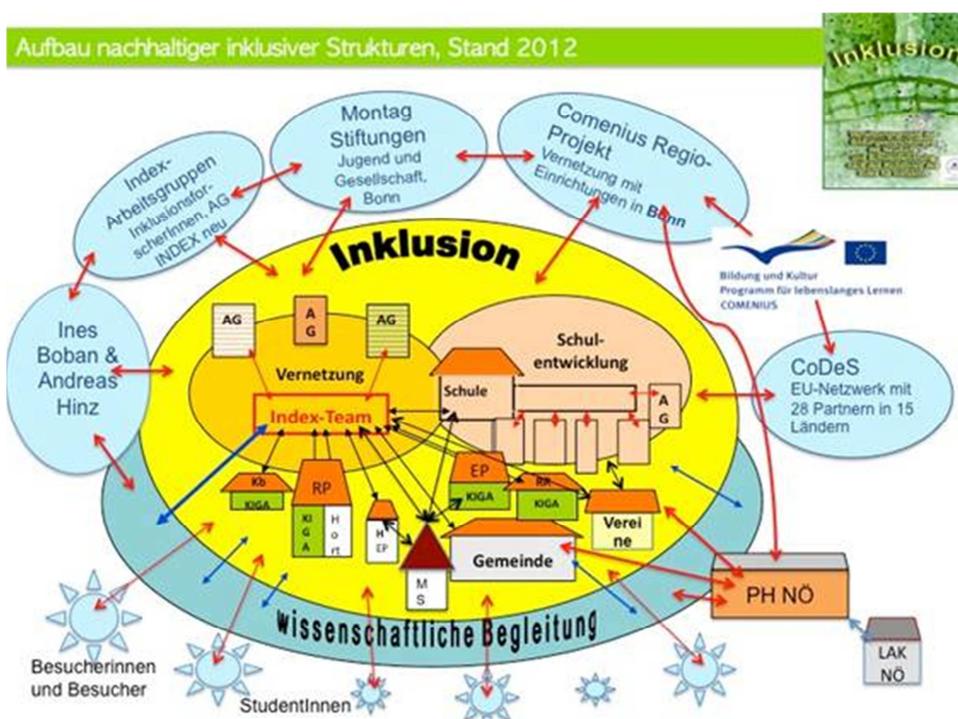


Fig. 4: Sustainable Structures in 2012 (Gebhardt, 2013)

4.2 Goals in a Model Region using the *Index*

According to the UCRPD (2008) one of the goals in Austria is establishing inclusive regions (Gasteiger-Klicpera & Wohllhart, 2012) – applying the *Index* in schools within QSA (Compulsory Quality Management for all schools).

Goals in the Model Region in Styria are:

- Increasing inclusive quality in primary, secondary (I and II) and vocational schools
- Further development of transforming special schools into inclusive schools retaining special educational expertise

4.3 The *Index* in higher education

Making the university colleges and the universities in Austria inclusive is, thus, an active process that requires building communities with colleagues and students to help integrate diversity, equity and educational quality efforts. Recently the Centre for Inclusion at PH NÖ has constituted as an open group – based on earlier initiatives and expertise with the *Index* for Inclusion – to:

- discuss and promote the development towards an inclusive institution
- identify inclusive educational practices,
- discuss student access issues and high-quality learning conditions

5 Conclusion

Considering the discussions on inclusion at the beginning of the 21st century, it is obvious that school systems have to meet the diversity of children, youngsters and adults. While the UCRPD (2008) stimulated the discussion on inclusive education and policy papers state that inclusion concerns a wider range of learners, in many cases it is still not seen that quality of schools and inclusion are linked and mutually reinforcing.

Understanding inclusive education as reducing barriers to learning and participation as well as identifying recourses for learning and participation for all learners, the *Index for Inclusion* provides an approach to developing schools and educational institutions – based on inclusive values and self review. In addition to worldwide reports (<http://www.indexforinclusion.org>) there are numerous articles that provide examples for inclusive development using the *Index for Inclusion*.

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¹ SQA: Schulqualität Allgemeinbildung