

THERE ARE ALMOST NO MORE DRAMATIC DIFFERENCES IN GENERAL EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES AND PHILOSOPHY THAN THOSE BETWEEN CANADA AND GERMANY.

A World of Difference: Inclusive Education in Canada and Germany

ANDREAS HINZ

WORKING AS A PROFESSOR FOR special and inclusive education in the eastern part of Germany kindled a special interest for Canada for two reasons. First, the result of the international comparative study of students assessment (PISA) showed Canada as one of the top countries and Germany as one of the countries far behind. Second, my interest in inclusive education led naturally to Canada as a country that has made inclusion a hallmark of its educational systems. For example, UNESCO tells us that one of the world's most inclusive school systems is located in New Brunswick, where funding for special programs is included in the school's general allocations and does not require a system of labels for individual students with special needs.

This article focuses on four areas of comparison: system-wide structural differences, inclusive structures within schools, inclusive processes and performance standards, and some common problems and challenges. This is not a scientific comparative analysis of the two countries, but rather a reflection based on personal experiences and my visits to several schools in different parts of Canada.

GENERAL STRUCTURES

There are almost no more dramatic differences in general educational structures and philosophy than those between Canada and Germany. In Canada, all "normal" children attend the same elementary and secondary schools, regardless of ability level or post-graduation expectations, where-

as in Germany, beginning in Grade 5, children are streamed into four different secondary school systems with different academic standards. The differences in special education are not quite as great, but still notable. While some Canadian provinces and territories use an inclusive model for all students, others have a continuum of special education services ranging from inclusion or integration to segregation. In Germany, there are ten different types of special schools, connected to the old medical model of disability; where parents and teachers fight for it, there is sometimes some opportunity for integration.

In general, educational structures in Germany still adhere to the model of homogeneous groups of learners, even after the terrible PISA results which showed, among other things, that German school outcomes are more dependent on social class than those of any other developed country. As soon as these results were made public, a coalition of educational policy-makers, representing almost all political parties, agreed: Discussion about structural changes to the school system was taboo. Instead of examining the ways in which the system itself might be contributing to poor international results, Germany responded to its poor standings by lengthening the school day. This change has been touted as a solution to a wide range of problems, promising better social integration, reduced violence, improved academic results, better transitions to adult life, better access to the labour market (not easy in the east with an

unemployment rate of 20 %), and less discrimination in the education of immigrant children. This persistent commitment to homogeneous groups of learners is held with almost religious fervour by German education policy-makers – a commitment that can only be understood within the context of Germany's specific historical and cultural background.

In practice, the policy does in fact allow for different forms of integration of students with special educational needs, including the integration of whole classes or individual students into the neighbourhood school. Some strange models of integration exist as well. In some federal states, special classes – still administratively part of a special school – are moved to a general school. Called "outsourced" classes, their place in general schools is referred to as a "camp" – a strange term, if one considers 20th century German history. So the students and teachers of these "outsourced" classes are guests in the general school, and it is up to the teachers to determine how much and in which subjects students are educated together or separately.

INCLUSIVE STRUCTURES

In Germany every person working for inclusive education in heterogeneous settings is fighting an uphill battle – struggling against educational structures instead of being supported by them. By contrast, in Canada I saw outstanding support systems for inclusive education in schools with a heterogeneous student population.

The "students services teams" in New

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Brunswick and the analogous structures in “inclusive pockets” of other provinces and territories (e. g. the Catholic School Board of Hamilton-Wentworth in Ontario) are examples of such support, and have become essential components of these inclusive school systems. Their specific quality can be seen in a process-orientated approach that is sensitive to whatever problems and needs arise – the psychological problems of a pregnant 15-year-old girl, the needs of an autistic student for personal contact, or the need of an immigrant student to learn French. These service teams are not focused on disabilities – they are focused on individuals.

I also observed that in Canada, standards and tests of performance, even participation in international comparative studies, are embedded in inclusive structures of the single school system. Although not all children achieve the same levels, all are subject to the same standards and evaluated with their peers. In Germany, every Federal State has its own curricula, differentiated in general education according to the several types of secondary schools with their different academic standards, and in special education according to different types of special schools. As a result, German students can only be evaluated within the context of their particular type of school. The structures of the school system, themselves, produce different achievement levels – an example of structural discrimination that secures the educational privilege of the elite.

While not the norm, some examples of inclusive structures, perhaps best seen as “inclusive pockets”, do exist in German elementary education. The best known are the Inclusive Primary Schools in Hamburg, where every child from the neighbourhood has the right to join the primary school for all, irrespective of abilities, ethnic background, social class, first language etc. Because these schools – mostly located in poor areas of the city – receive all-inclusive financing, children with special needs do not have to be labelled to enrol. Every primary school that applies to be an inclusive school must guarantee not to exclude any student, and on this basis it gets four additional professionals – special education teachers and educators – for every eight classrooms. This allows team

EN BREF Il serait difficile de trouver deux nations ayant une philosophie et des structures scolaires aussi dissimilaires que le Canada et l'Allemagne. Cela est particulièrement manifeste dans les approches que chacun de ces pays a adoptées à l'endroit du concept de l'éducation inclusive. Même si il existe des pratiques « d'intégration » en Allemagne, le système scolaire allemand privilégie fortement les regroupements homogènes d'élèves. Par conséquent, les partisans de l'éducation inclusive n'ont pas la tâche facile et doivent lutter avec acharnement pour faire accepter leurs idées. Même si les pratiques canadiennes ne sont pas toujours à la hauteur des normes prescrites par les politiques gouvernementales, et même si aucun pays ne peut se vanter d'avoir réalisé une pleine intégration scolaire, l'Allemagne et les autres pays du monde ont beaucoup à apprendre du modèle canadien.

structures to be developed and the schools to develop an inclusive culture.

Nevertheless, after grade four children are segregated into different secondary (and special) schools. As a result, even at its best inclusive education in Germany is contradictory. When teachers of a regular class and an “outsourced” special class with a status of “guests” in a general school want to work toward inclusion, the existing structures of the wider system work against them. When, in spite of obstacles, some are able to work with their students as a single class, the result looks like inclusive education. But in reality, it is a self-limiting process because of the rigid division of secondary and special schools that inevitably follows.

INCLUSIVE PROCESSES

The interaction among students and between teachers and students tells something about how inclusion works. In Canadian schools, there is a lot of inclusive rhetoric (“you are unique because you are you”), a lot of rhetoric about “respect”, and an open commitment to “school for all”. In fact, there is an enormously high acceptance of specific needs – if a blind student needs a dog beside him, it is no problem, neither for teachers nor for other students. Schools care about everyone, whatever he or she needs.

But even in Canada, things are not always as they seem. Very clear expectations about appropriate behaviour of students in Canadian schools goes hand in hand with the inclusive rhetoric, and sometimes “respect” seems more like “control”. I have seen this result in the assignment of students to a “silence” room for inappropriate behaviour, where they are required to spend three days working all the time, without speaking a single word. I have also heard of a system in a Canadian school in which students who are out

of the classroom during class hours must carry a timetable with a teacher signature giving them permission to move around in the school. Students without appropriate signatures are disciplined. Inclusive education?

For a German educational researcher these strategies appears strange and inconsistent with the philosophy of inclusion – reminiscent, even, of the so called “socialistic” times in the East. So even in Canadian schools, apparently committed to inclusion, one can sometimes have the feeling that how to “behave” is more important than how to “be”. Why? In the U.S., the “no child left behind” policy has tuned out to be a program of punishment that exacerbates the social selection process. But no such program exists in Canada. Are these contradictions a consequence of a strong tradition of behaviourism? Or pressure for schools to be secure? Or a fear that parents will go to court? Could this also be a consequence of academic standards based on evaluation with exclusively quantitative methods? Or a sign of the commercialization of the educational system, with a stronger competition between public and private schools? Many questions.

In Germany, educators working in inclusive settings experience such contradictions all day, every day. In the “inclusive pockets”, teachers are free to use methods like the “diagnostic jigsaw” for focusing on the biographical and the social dimension of an individual situation and to reflect the dynamics of learning – and their own role in these processes. One can find these attitudes and this kind of reflection in some schools, although the time devoted to it is limited to a couple of hours a week, at most. In many more schools, though, one will not find any evidence of such attention to the individual circumstances of students. In many cities of West Germany, students from immigrant families make up a



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disproportionate percentage of those enrolled in special schools for students with learning disabilities (the largest of the special schools). This is arguably a form of ethnic selection that fails to acknowledge the special needs and life circumstances of these students.

Evaluation as a way of controlling academic standards is growing in Germany, where schools are responsible for evaluating themselves (a requirement for professional development). But as the debate intensifies about the quality of education, its dangerous implications for “quality of students” also intensifies, leading to the exclusion of “lower quality” students from certain types of schools. And so we have a growing tendency to standardization and selection, leading to further pressure for homogenization of groups of learners.

COMMON PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

We can see amazing examples of inclusive education in many countries, including both Canada and Germany, although German structures are much less supportive. But internationally, inclusive education faces a serious image problem: most people still see it as a concept related exclusively to special education. For many general schools, inclusive education is simply a new way of referring to the ongoing challenge of meeting the needs of specific students. This was one of the reasons the term “inclusion” was introduced in both Canada and Germany a few years ago, replacing the term “integration” which had primarily applied to students with disabilities or students from immigrant families. The term inclusion is intended to make clear that all dimensions of heterogeneity are the focus, and the separate discussions about girls education, immigrant education, integration, age-mixed grouping and others are in fact one big debate about homogeneity and heterogeneity. The intention is not to exclude disability, but to consider it in a wider context –

the context of education for all.

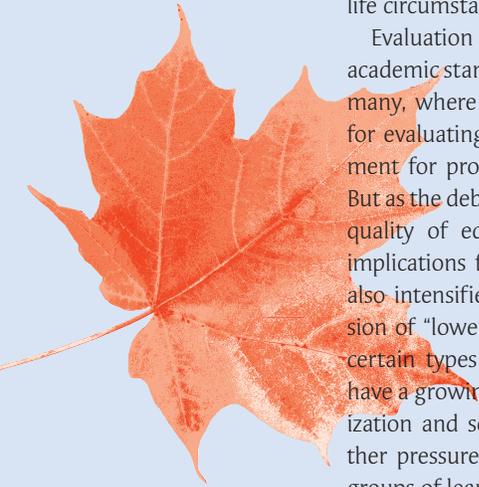
Another common problem confronting all countries is the confusion about crucial terms: What is the meaning of terms like integration, inclusion, special education, special needs education? What are the main points of different concepts? To which concept belongs the “least restrictive environment” or the “cascade model”? As Gary Bunch and Kevin Finnegan of York University have pointed out, inclusive education in Canada would take a leap forward if there were agreement about such terms. And in Germany, “integrative” has come to mean anything that can be shown to be helpful, successful or good – even special schools which obviously do not lead to inclusion into the society. Already “inclusive education” is beginning to experience a similar inflation

in meaning on the international scene.

Many countries have good – no, brilliant – examples of inclusive education. But in almost all countries they are still the exception rather than the rule. Canada can be proud of the provinces and territories where full inclusion is a reality, but even in Canada inclusive education is not a general practice for all students. In fact, there is no country where all students have the right to attend general schools. This still is a big challenge internationally – one in which Canada is well positioned to become a lighthouse for the worldwide development of inclusive education, but it needs to do some internal work, brightening and focusing the beam and polishing the mirrors and lights. |

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