

Pedagogical Traditions and Conditions for Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT *The idea of “a school for all” has been on the agenda for a long time both within disability research and educational practices. Experiences however show that there is a long way between idea and realization of that idea. This article looks into conditions to develop an inclusive school from the perspective of different pedagogical ideas and traditions. It argues that one roughly can distinguish between two pedagogical traditions with different ideas about such things as learning, knowledge, teaching and diversity. It also argues that there is no self-evident correspondence between pedagogical ideas manifested in today’s educational practice and pedagogical ideas the pedagogues of today hold for true.*

The moulding and development of education are not governed by any natural laws, but by different ideas which are “mulled over” and compared. Some of these ideas manifest themselves primarily in practice – in the way schools are built, education organized, how teaching is practised, textbooks written, etc. – other ideas only manifest themselves in theory and some in both theory and practice at the same time. It is reasonable to argue that at least some of the ideas that shape the practice of education should emanate from the realm of pedagogy. However the realm of pedagogy is diverse, with different traditions concerning perspectives on issues such as knowledge, learning and teaching.

The purposes of this article are to argue that: (i) conditions for inclusion can be understood from the context of different pedagogical traditions of ideas; (ii) pedagogical traditions of ideas that are manifested in today’s practices do not necessarily correspond with pedagogical ideas manifested in theory. By theory, in this context, I mean how pedagogues of today conceive, for instance, how learning occurs and how teaching and education ought to be practised as a consequence of these pedagogical ideas.

Over a period of 18 months I had the privilege to follow and support one school that is trying to create an inclusive school. I spent approximately 1 day per week on the school during this period. Each fortnight we had staff meetings solely devoted to the question of inclusion. I also attended lessons,

interviewed and talked to teachers and pupils. Even though this article is not about that project, the thoughts I will put forward have been inspired by my time at the school, and the quotations from teachers are from the recorded staff meetings.

Some Ideas About Knowledge and the Purpose of Education

How the purpose of education and curricular goals are formulated by the educational system implicitly says something about what kind of students that will be permitted to participate in the school. Experiences also show that in schools trying to restructure to a more inclusive education, teachers are beginning to question the former goals and trying to develop others (Berres 1996, Ferguson 1996, Göransson 2004, Villa & Thousand 1993).

The purpose of education and curricular goals are normative, in the sense that they formulate the kind of knowledge that is valued within the system. It is therefore quite natural to discuss and try to understand them within the framework of value orientation. Eisner (1998) and Gallagher (1992) make a rough distinction between two traditions of ideas regarding the purpose of education. One of them aims ultimately at controlling or manipulating, the other at a more existentialist comprehension or understanding. The former tradition is perhaps most aptly formulated by the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561–1626), in the motto: “Knowledge is power”. In more modern time ideas within this tradition are manifested in a kind of education technology, inspired by learning theorists such as Thorndike and Skinner.

The latter tradition involves a more humanistic outlook, whereby the aim of education is to support the development of the personality of each individual and to foster humanitarian and cultural values. In modern time this educational ideal was developed in Europe in the 18th century (Olofsson 2002, Sandström 1975). This latter tradition is as can be seen more in correspondence with the idea of inclusion, with its emphasis on humanitarian values such as full participation, celebration of diversity among students, the development of each students personality and abilities and the like. Sapon-Shevin (1993) formulates the idea of inclusive education thus: “Our responsiveness to all children’s differences is what creates inclusive schools – schools that model respect and appreciation for the full spectrum of human beings” (p. 335).

In theory hardly anyone will oppose the importance of education supporting these humanitarian values. I will, however, argue that what is manifested in practice within the educational system of today seems to originate from a tradition of ideas that emphasize a more “technical” understanding of the purpose of education and I will do that from an epistemological perspective.

The formulations of goals and purposes can be understood as an expression for beliefs about what constitutes knowledge, which is an epistemological issue. Closely related to what we believe constitutes knowledge is the concept of truth, or rather what criteria for truth we apply, as

knowledge by definition has to be in some way true. This becomes particularly interesting when considering the goal-directed school, where there is an ever increasing demand on evaluations as a means to control the results of education. This in turn means that schools have to formulate goals that they believe are possible to evaluate.

An excerpt from a staff meeting from the school I studied will illustrate the difficulties that may emerge. The teachers and the headmaster are discussing goals for the subject Swedish. The teachers have formulated some, but they are not satisfied with them. They want the subject Swedish to develop the students' ability to think, to be creative, to work together with others, take responsibility for their own learning, to actively search and construct knowledge, etc. The goals they have formulated are, as one of them expresses it during the discussion, "just the technical side", for example "Being able to write one's name and name ten letters in the alphabet". After a while Jill exclaims: "And on top of that the importance that we can evaluate our goals! We have to be able to evaluate our goals. And it's difficult perhaps to evaluate ...". Peter breaks in: "... how one co-operates". Jill continues: "Yes, perhaps it's more difficult to evaluate that. That's something you feel all the time, all the time it's about being able to evaluate". After a while Peter concludes: "So actually you can say that the goal is that the student is a person who takes responsibility for his own learning?" Jill and the others agree and Peter continues: "Actively seeks knowledge and actively constructs... Yes, but I mean if you are going to formulate that as goals". Jill continues: "Yes that's a goal, yes". Peter finishes the discussion with: "Yes. But you know, this is why it's so difficult to write goals!"

Why do these pedagogues experience this dilemma? One way to understand the dilemma is that the goals they conceive as important, for instance "actively seeking knowledge", require other concepts of knowledge and truth than the ones underlying and influencing current practices regarding formulating goals.

Some philosophers as well as pedagogues argue that we today have a less complex and less developed concept of knowledge than the ancient Greeks (Gallagher 1992, Gustavsson 2002, Heidegger 1942/1971, Kroksmark 2003). The ancient Greeks talked about three types of knowledge: theoretical, technical and phronesis. Gallagher (1992) defines the last type as an interpretational virtue that we apply in situations where there are no simple or clear-cut answers. Technical knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge about means, and requires, as Gallagher puts it, "cleverness in application", whereas phronesis "requires understanding" (p. 153). It is this last type of knowledge, phronesis, that some argue is no longer included in our concept of knowledge. Gallagher means, for instance, that the distinction between technical knowledge and phronesis has been more and more blurred to the advantage of technical knowledge. Heidegger also argues that our concept of knowledge has become more technical. He explains it in relation to our concept of truth compared with the concept of truth of the ancient Greeks. He argues that truth in the

meaning of “unconcealedness” as the Greeks had, has become transformed to truth as correctness. Truth in the sense of correctness is applicable to theoretical and technical knowledge, it is, however, not applicable to phronesis.

Some Ideas About Learning and Teaching in Relation to Sense of Community and Participation in School

It is possible to distinguish roughly between two pedagogical traditions that consider diversity among students and subsequent consequences for learning and teaching very differently. One is sometimes referred to as the “traditional” approach. Kugelmass (1996) characterizes it as based on the following assumptions: the content of the curriculum should be fixed, there is *one* best way for all children to learn which is the same for everyone and all children need to learn the same thing at the same time.

John Dewey describes the traditional approach in pedagogy as follows: “Subdivide each topic into studies; each study into lessons; each lesson into specific facts and formulae. Let the child proceed step by step to master each one of the separate parts, and at last he will have covered the entire ground. The road which looks so long when viewed in its entirety is easily travelled, considered as a series of particular steps. Thus emphasis is put upon the logical subdivisions and consecutions of subject-matter. Problems of instruction are problems of procuring texts giving logical parts and sequences, and of presenting these portions in class in a similar definite and graded way. Subject matter furnishes the end, and it determines method. The child is simply the immature being who is to be matured; he is the superficial being who is to be deepened; he is narrow experience which is to be widened. It is his to receive, to accept. His part is fulfilled when he is ductile and docile.” (Dewey 1902/1956:8).

As can be seen from this, the traditional approach treats diversity among students by establishing that there are no differences between students that have any consequences for their learning. Teaching method is, as Dewey writes, only seen in relation to the subject matter, not in relation to interests and abilities of different children. Children who do not learn are regarded as not normal or exceptional, they are segregated and placed in special groups.

This tradition is, for instance, manifested in a teaching format characterized by oral presentation of subject matter for the whole class by the teacher, alternatively it starts with some oral or written test on homework. It is followed by individual work with worksheets, which are the same for everyone, as is all curriculum material. Finally the lesson might end with some kind of summary and assignment of homework for the whole class. Students who work fast are not allowed to work too far with the worksheets, when finished with the assignment of the day they are assigned other exercises, in an attempt to guarantee that all students are on roughly the same level. The students’ achievements within the subject area are then tested with the same test for everyone. These ideas also appear in, for instance, the use of national timetables, and nationwide tests.

Another tradition is sometimes called the “progressive” approach to teaching, to use a term from Dewey. It is based on almost opposite ideas about children, and about knowledge and learning. Diversities among children are supposed to be of importance for learning and have subsequent consequences for teaching and curricular design. This idea has existed for several centuries. In the 17th century Johann Comenius, for example, put this idea into the following words: “That what is the aptitude of one is unfamiliar to the other. The natural character of plants, trees, and animals is diverse and some wants to be treated in one way, others in another, and everything does not permit itself to be used in one and the same way. That is also the nature of human aptitudes. . . . If the teacher thus is the servant of nature and not its master, if he can form but not transform nature, he must not urge on, when a pupil sets about something that is absolutely not in his nature.” (1632/1989:197; my translation).

During the 18th century the idea emerges that diversity among children not only has consequences for how children learn, i.e. teaching has to be adjusted to each child’s aptitude, but also that each child has a unique personality. In accordance with this idea the notion appears that one goal for education is to create conditions for, in some sense, the “unrestricted” or “free” development of each child. These ideas appear very explicit in the novel *Émil* by Jean-Jaques Rousseau, first published in 1762.

Ferguson (1996) emphasizes this idea, which actually implies that every child does not have to, in fact should not, learn the same things, as very important for the creation of an inclusive school. If one assumes that diversity among children both have consequences for how they learn and what they learn, i.e. children learn in different ways and they learn different things, then teaching and education must be designed in accordance with these assumptions.

Comparing these two pedagogical traditions of ideas with the discussion above about different ideas about knowledge and the purpose of education it appears that the progressive approach is related to the tradition that advocates more humanitarian and cultural values as important goals for education. I argued, however, also that ideas about valuable goals and purpose of education manifested in today’s practices seem to be influenced by concepts of knowledge and truth that do not easily apply to such more existentialist and humanitarian values.

What Ideas are Manifested in Today’s Practice?

In Swedish national steering documents the idea that differences between children have importance for how children learn has been adopted. In the *Curriculum for the Compulsory School System* it says: “Consideration should be taken to the different abilities and needs of the students. There are different ways to reach the goal. . . . Hence teaching cannot be designed in the same way for everyone.” (Lpo94: 6). That diversity also has consequences for what goals the students attain, is however not an idea that has been adopted by the regular school in Sweden. On the contrary one maintains that all students should reach the same goals.

If one adopts the idea about diversity among children in the meaning that they learn in different ways, but not in the meaning that they also develop differently and attain different goals, the traditional idea that conformity is the norm reappears in the idea that all children can learn the same things. Students who cannot learn in the “normal” way must be helped in “special” ways (special education) to reach the “normal” goals. This is an idea Haug (1998) calls the “compensatory solution”, which in turn leads to what he calls “segregating integration”. Ferguson (1996) and Kunc (1993) also mean that this compensatory idea does not really talk the language of community and participation. It celebrates conformity rather than diversity.

It is also within the context of the traditional approach that the Swedish grouping of children, in children who have a right to attend a special program and children who have the right to go to regular compulsory school, appears. The *Swedish Education Act* states that children who are judged as not being able to reach the goals in the regular compulsory school, on account of intellectual disabilities, shall be accepted in the programs for students with intellectual disabilities. That is to attend the regular school you are required to be judged as being able to reach certain goals or develop certain kinds of knowledge. If it is discovered that you probably cannot reach those goals, you are excluded. No personal abilities, however, are required to be accepted in the compulsory programs for students with intellectual disabilities; one cannot be excluded from this program. On paper and in accordance with the Swedish law parents have a right to choose between the two school forms. Whether it is an opportunity in reality is, however, questioned in an evaluation by the National Board of Education (Skolverket 2002).

These traditional ideas about children, learning, and teaching also imply that the normal school does not consider children who have an intellectual disabilities, or some other diagnoses that show that these children differ from the “normal”, as their problem. It is not the problem of general education to change and develop a school and curriculum that also includes these children. That would mean that it had to disavow its basic ideas about children, learning and teaching, namely the ideas that children must learn the same things, in the same way and in the same time.

These traditional ideas also manifest themselves in that it is groups that the regular school has excluded that have initiated and spoken in advocacy of integration and inclusion. It is mainly in national and international conferences in special education, where the greater part of the participants represent groups who do not participate in general education, that those issues are on the agenda. It is mainly in journals on special education that you find articles about integration and inclusion. At least in Sweden they also appear when, for instance, the government decides that the national syllabus for regular compulsory education needs revision; it is not done with the intention to adjust them in such a way that they will include all children. Not once have the national syllabus for regular compulsory school and the compulsory programs for students with learning disabilities been revised at the same time in order to at least render a dialogue possible. When the future of the Swedish compulsory program for students with intellectual disabilities

was to be investigated by a committee appointed by the government it seemed as if it was regarded as an internal issue for the “special program” that was not related to regular compulsory school. The terms of reference clearly stated that the area to be investigated were the programs for students with intellectual disabilities and not the whole compulsory school system.

The issue of inclusion often seems to be treated as a special educational reform, which among others Ferguson (1996) means at the most results in “pretty good integration” (p. 17). Several researchers mean instead that inclusion concerns the whole school system (e.g. Berres, Ferguson, Knoblock & Woods 1996, Ferguson 1996, Putnam 1998, Villa, Thousand, Stainback & Stainback 1993). The inclusion of children with intellectual or other disabilities must be treated as just one part of a bigger change. This change involves the development of an educational system that considers the consequences of the fact that children are different, not only children with functional disabilities. How many teachers do not, for instance, recognize the following experiences of an American principal: “Students in a traditional Grade 4 classroom might read at levels that range from first to seventh grade, and their understanding of math concepts might span a similar range” (Berres 1996: 71).

The list of examples that shows how traditional ideas of children and learning manifest themselves within the educational system of today can, however, be long. Rather provocatively you might say that the problem for the regular school in relation to children who do not benefit from the education it offers is to find ways to diagnose or categorize those children as not normal and in that way exclude them. In doing so the regular school does not have to question some of its basic pedagogical ideas, and as a consequence it does not have to change.

What I suggest is that part of the resistance to inclusion within the educational system has its roots in educational practices, emanating from ideas about the process of learning and the purpose of education that do not correspond either with ideas that many pedagogues of today hold for true or with the idea of inclusive education. To paraphrase Haug (1998) one might say that pedagogical ideas from the traditional approach represent “. . . a frozen ideology that lie beneath the educational practices of today like a solid tundra and influences it” (p. 58, my translation).

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