Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

An article concerning romanticism, nationalism and the moral argument in special education

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Within the inclusion debate, the concepts of participation, equality, fraternity, liberty and democracy are often used by those favouring the inclusive perspective. These concepts are used to create a distance between traditional special education and inclusive education that seems to be grounded in a moral argument in favour of inclusive education. In order to better grasp the consequences of the moral argument in special education this article explores some of the mechanisms underlying the debate between traditional special education and inclusive education. Based on some major claims presented in childhood research, I focus on aspects of the history of childhood in relation to romanticism and nationalism. The claim made in this article is that the historical framework of childhood, related to romanticism and nationalism, creates a moral opposition that can be used to support praxis both for traditional special education and inclusive education.

Keywords: inclusion; special education; school

Inclusive education is not just about disabled or disadvantaged students. It is about ALL students, human rights, democratic values and participation, and quality education for each and every learner. There is no one right way to inclusive education, but that does not matter; it is the moving, stumbling and trying again, learning from mistakes and successes, that makes the journey worth while. (Bjarnason 2010, 72)

Because postmodernists have aligned themselves with words such as *justice* and *liberation*, any criticism of their ideas is made to sound like a criticism of these concepts [. . .] Hence, intimidation has been a major variable in the spread of relativist dogma. However, it is also becoming clear that many special educators find postmodern notions abhorrent and damaging to children (Kauffman and Sasso 2006, 66)

Participation, benefit, equality, fraternity, liberty and democracy are all concepts that are commonly used when the purpose and goal of inclusive education are presented. All these concepts bring a positive flavour to the goal of creating an inclusive school and society, and are presented as antonyms to words such as exclusion and marginalisation. These latter concepts are often associated with traditional special education, as viewed from the inclusive perspective (e.g. Brantlinger 1997; Gallagher et al. 2004; Hausstätter 2011), creating a distance between traditional special education and inclusive education that seems to be grounded in a moral argument in favour of inclusive education (Vehmas 2008; Oliver 1991). The power of the moral argument in

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special education is overwhelming to the degree that it seems impossible to argue against the *truth* presented. It is however necessary to point out the claim that:

> Truth is a thing of the world: it is produced only by multiple forms of constraints. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements the means by which each is sanctified; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980, 131)

According to Foucault, truth is produced and transmitted through important channels including scientific discourse and economic and political incitement. The establishment of truth through these channels is part of a battle for truth in society, a battle about 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true' (Foucault 1980, 132). Social institutions are an important factor in developing and supporting the establishment of truth and one such institution is education. Education presents truth that is part of a scientific discourse through an institution that is more or less supported politically and economically. The political and financial support is part of an apparatus controlled as part of a political and social debate.

The debate about the role of special education in schools is one example of how truth is presented in a political argument (Biesta 2010; Imsen 2011). The issue raised here challenges us to try to understand the techniques and procedures that bring forth the truth – a truth that is truer, more sanctified, than other possible true statements in the area of special education. There are of course several techniques and procedures working within this area, hence my answer to this challenge in this article is limited to the exploration of some mechanisms underlying the powerful moral arguments in special education.

Debating the moral position

The moral argument is linked to the philanthropic heritage of special education, a heritage that involves an obligation to help and to educate people that do not fit into the established general norms of education (Hausstätter 2004). The question is not if special education should help these people, rather it is a question of how special education should offer help (Hausstätter 2007). According to Kirkebæk and Simonsen (2008) the philanthropic solution from the middle of the nineteenth century was to relay on scientific criterions to define when help should be needed. The scientific based philanthropy developed a set of classifications in order to distinguish between people and what kind of help they should get. Different classifications were offered and used by educationalists in order to help disabled children to learn. From this point a medical based understanding of special education was developed – and is nowadays described as the traditional perspective of special education.

Within the traditional perspective the child fitting criteria for special education is understood as having some sort of deficit (Brantlinger 1997; Gallagher et al. 2004). The goal and moral obligation of special education is therefore to reduce the consequences of these shortcomings so that the child becomes a more able and less disabled citizen (Hausstatter and Connolley 2012). The society is, in the traditional

perspective, presenting the standard of the necessary skills that the disabled person has to strive to achieve.

Inclusive education can also be traced back to a philanthropic heritage. However, the inclusive idea is more closely connected to the moral obligation to help, and less related to scientific standards of development. From focus on the moral obligation, theories describing an alternative understanding of the relationship between the individual and society developed (e.g. Oliver 1991). Today, the inclusive perspective understands disability as a result of our society's faults and shortcomings in relation to offering a democratic society where everyone has equal rights and equal opportunities (Brantlinger 2001; Bjarnason 2010). Instead of limited focus on the individual, the moral obligation for inclusive education is to focus on school organisation and relationships between people (Haug 2010).

As previously stated, there is a discussion within the field of special education about how to deal with the challenge of disabilities (for more see Gallagher et al. 2004 and Mostert, Kavale, and Kauffman 2007). However, this is only one aspect of how the truth is established. As pointed out by Nietzsche (1989), morality, moral judgement and moral stands must be understood as part of a social complexity. In his book *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1989) he clearly distinguishes moralities that originated in ruling classes from moralities that originated among the oppressed. The distinction between the ruling class and the oppressed is also important within special education when examining the differences between the traditional and inclusive perspectives. Brantlinger (2001) claims that the traditional understanding, through the definitions of classifications, supports the ruling classes in society. In other words, the moral argument in special education cannot be simplified to a debate about the ontology of disability. On the contrary, moral arguments have to be understood as part of a cultural and historical complexity that establishes the truth within this area – a truth that is also part of a battle of what counts as true positions (cf. Foucault 1980). One aspect of this historical complexity is the field of education as part of romanticism and nationalism.

Romanticism, nationalism and education

Romanticism and nationalism were both parts of the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. This is the same period in which the practice of organised education for all citizens was starting to develop in several western countries. Changing views of childhood and education were central to this development (Thuen 2002, 2008).

> ... up until the end of the 17th century, there was an 'autocratic, indeed ferocious' attitude to children. They were viewed as being full of 'Original Sin,' whereas in the late 17th century a new social attitude towards children began to strengthen. Parents adopted a gentle and more sensitive approach to their offspring. (Pollock 1983, 8)

A central claim made by Pollock (1983) is that the understanding of children and childhood has changed according to historical and cultural changes. The claim 'a gentle and more sensitive approach to their offspring' is therefore made within the framework of today's understanding of childcare. It is also necessary to keep in mind that changes within this area are not something that happened in all layers of society at the same time. The change described in the quotation above was relevant for the

middle and upper-class children. The poor child was still ignored and exploited. Thuen (2008) claims that this is a paradoxical situation in which large groups of poor children where exploited as cheap and necessary labour, while at the same time childhood as a romantic concept developed among the middle and upper-class parents. It is therefore necessary to approach the understanding of childhood in a historical and cultural context as an area with several layers. With reference to Hugh Cunningham (2005), the Norwegian criminologist Kjersti Ericsson (2009) describes out four different views on children and childhood that have developed over the last 200 years which contribute to defining our view of the child's role in society: *the romantic vision, the state and the nation's children, the autonomous child* and *the Christian vision*.

Throughout history, Christianity has had a major impact on cultural views of children in the western world It is therefore possible to find aspects of the 'Christian vision' in all other descriptions of childhood offered here. It is, however, necessary to emphasise that what is considered to be the correct Christian view is open for debate – and it is not part of this article's aim to debate it. For the purpose of this essay, it is important to point out the clear opposition between *the romantic vision* of childhood and *the state and the nation's children* in order to clarify some central aspects of the debate within special education.

The romantic vision, according to Ericsson, grew out of the shift in views on children and childhood that occurred in the eighteenth century. Based on the philosophy of the Enlightenment (e.g. Lock and Rousseau), the view of children changes from seeing them as born sinners to seeing them as innocents that should be able to enjoy childhood as a happy period and a basis for liberation from the adult world. As pointed out by Cunningham (2005): There were no toy stores in England in 1730, but a lot of them in 1780 (67). Practical parenting changed very little in this period, but this view of childhood as a carefree period had influence on the emerging bourgeoisie view on education and training:

> The idea that childhood was a period of great value, a period that should be happy, protected and carefree, and that the child was nothing more than a small and stupid adult, would grow stronger and stronger. In practice, there were upper class and middle class children who were affected by such ideals, while working class children continued to be what they had always been, namely, the necessary labour. (Ericsson 2009, 11)

As pointed out, the change towards a romantic understanding of children and childhood happened within the upper and middle classes as family life changed from an extended family structure to the nuclear family. According to Cunningham (2005), the private rooms in the houses of the upper and middle classes provided space to nurture familial love, especially that between mother and child. Essential for the romantic view is that the child and childhood have a *value in themselves*. Children and childhood are not just preparation for adulthood but a period that also has an impact on the life one should live in the future. This principle is also the basis for the autonomous child. When the child and childhood are understood as being things that have value unto themselves, it also becomes necessary to make arrangements so that we can safeguard the child's value. Ericsson (2009) shows how legislations have historically have provided an increasing degree of participation for children and youth. The development of special education can be understood as one example of how children were protected. At least in the Nordic framework, special educational

support started as a private organized support for children from the middle classes (Johansen 1996). In 1881 legislation in Norway extended the benefit of special educational support to schooling for 'abnormal children.'

The concept of *the state and the nation's children* is part of the development of statehood and nations (Hobsbawm 1990). The population, especially the children, becomes an important part of a nation's development – to secure the future of the state by increasing the state's ability to reproduce itself:

> And it's evident that the upbringing that one generation gives its children, is crucial for the next generation [...].The country's future depends on the nation's position [...] power and will to maintain Sweden's position in the [...] competition, and, if so required, to protect the country's freedom. Government intervention in child welfare is as much in the interest of the state's duty to itself as it is in the interest of the rights of the child. (Lindstrøm 1911, in Ericsson 2009, 12)

The state and nation's children were taken care of through the systematic development of different legislations and institutions throughout the nineteen century (Foucault 2003; Froestad 1995; Thuen 2002). Important for the field of special education is the development of a state that takes on the responsibility for those children who do not receive acceptable parenting and/or those children who did not develop or behave sufficiently within the normal school setting. This control over the individual is described by Foucault (2001) as an example of both how the nation took responsibility for its inhabitants by establishing institutions that gave people the necessary means to live, as well as of how the same state developed a systematic control over human life in order to control individuals that were not part of the established society. A central goal for the state in relation to the nation's child, was the moral obligation to rescue the child from a bad upbringing or bad social influence so that they could become skilled workers for the state (Thuen 2002). Focusing on children and childhood was therefore *an investment* in the future made by the government. Education in general, and special education specifically, is part of this investment. To focus on children with specific needs was, from both a philanthropic scientific aspect and romantic perspective, 'true,' but it was also necessary for the state to have systems where 'dangerous' children were controlled and made into necessary labour (Kirkebæk 1993; Thuen 2002).

A central point made by Ericsson (2009) is that these different ways of presenting truth about children and childhood still dominate our attitudes, values and practices, particularly in child welfare but also in education. I will also argue that special education's role, values and functions can be related to these different visions of children and childhood. The autonomous child is expressed through legislations focusing on children's rights – for example the right to special education. However, more important for the field of special education, when it comes to understanding the moral argument in special education, are the aspects of the romantic vision and the state and the nation's children.

The purpose of organised education

The development of the field of special education is historically linked to the nineteenth century – approximately the same period to which Ericsson ascribes the awakening of different views on children and childhood. As pointed out, special

education has its roots in philanthropy (Askildt and Johnsen 2008), but it is also part of the modern state's commitment to professionalism and efficiency (Froestad 1995; Ravneberg 1999).

As presented earlier the traditional and the inclusive understanding differ in how they describe the way special education should help people with disabilities. The central claim of this essay is that these differences must be related to the historical development of society, political processes and the view of what education is and should be.

The purpose of organized education is itself, historically, heavily debated (Biesta 2004, 2010). Several different theoretical frameworks and practical models, related to such ideas as nationalism and romanticism, have been presented. An area of focus that is central to many of these theories is that of the relationship between the individual and society (e.g., Durkheim 1972). I claim that it is possible to describe two main competing objectives when defining the role of the school: that of the classical school, focusing on social formation, and that of the progressive school, focusing on self-formation (Hausstätter 2007). The school with social formation as its goal aims to educate good workers for the community. Alternatively, the school that focuses on self-formation strives to create individuals who are more self-realized (Biesta 2004, 2010).

Schools focusing on social formation are guided by a curriculum, representing a specific, socially constructed knowledge base that the school is tasked with imparting to the students. Those focusing on self-formation are guided by a belief that the educational process is based on the interests and abilities of the students involved. In the latter perspective, the school's task is to focus on the realization of the individual, advancing their ability to learn as well as to reflect and to express themselves. In relation to special education, the traditional view is linked to the school focusing on social formation, while the inclusive perspective is connected to the school that focuses on self-formation (Hausstätter 2007) (Table 1).

The moral argument in special education

The goals of schooling and theories of childhood may be attributed to the different perspectives in special education in order to highlight the moral argument in special education. The traditional pedagogical view of investment in professional special educators is part of the nation-state's investment in the child (Ravneberg 1999).

Table 1. Social formation and self-formation (developed from Hausstätter 2007).

	Basis	Focus	Goal
Teaching for social formation	A clearly defined knowledge base (a curriculum).	Academic knowledge – Focus on teaching methods that lead to increased knowledge. Knowledge that can be measured.	The knowledgeable person – the worker.
Guide to self-formation	A debatable knowledge base that is based on students' interests.	Competence – Focus on individual reflection and expression.	The competent person who masters change – the performer.

Inequality within the state and the nation's children is problematic and a challenge for both the school and society (Durkheim 1972). To deal with this schools organise students according to normal standards related to, for example, age, gender and intelligence. Special education is, within this framework, a way of meeting the needs of the normal standard by regulating education for those students who are residuals of the normal educational system. The objective is however to adapt these students to the goal of normal education as part of the schools general ambition of social formation – or, within the framework of Foucault (1980), to make the students part of the dominant, hence acceptable, social discourse. Disability within this perspective is an actual situation of some people that we need to relate to by offering an educational system that makes the person more able and less disabled. Special education has within this framework a moral obligation to help disabled people to cope with the world they live in.

The inclusive perspective in special education is closely connected to the romantic view of the child. The central goal of inclusive education is, according to Brantlinger (1997), first and foremost to cut through socially constructed categories, such as disability, that exclude people from being participants in a democratic society. Hence, diversity among children is natural and expected, and it is unnecessary and unmoral to define people in terms of how they deviate from the normal. It is natural and normal for all age groups to include a broad spectrum of behaviour, learning level, learning methods and other skills. People learn different things at different speeds, but learning occurs through contact and interaction, so a socially inclusive environment is best for all children. The classroom should be an environment where everyone can feel welcome and all are active. The moral obligation for this perspective is therefore to emphasise that all children have value in themselves; and as a consequence we should foster diversity in the classroom environment (Bjarnason 2010).

In other words, the argument presented here is that the theoretical discussion within special education must be related to trends within romanticism and nationalism, and that the truth in the special education profession must be seen as a part of the general debate on the school's mission and content (Table 2).

Table 2. Romanticism, nationalism and special education.

Special educational values	School project	Views of children and youth	The child's value	Special educational action
Traditional	Social formation 'Collective responsibility'	State and the nation's children	The child is an investment	Difficulties are an obstacle to community participation and should therefore be reduced
Inclusive	Self- formation 'Individual rights'	The romantic view (The autonomous child)	The child has value in itself	Difficulty is a measure of variation and should be the starting point for self-formation and should therefore be nursed

The truth of the moral argument

I started off this article describing the opposition between a traditional and inclusive perspective of special education. With reference to Foucault, I stated that in order to understand the role and the position of these alternatives in today's school debate, it is necessary to look at the historical development of childhood and schooling. The claim made here is that traditional special education is historically linked to the development of nations, a perspective on childhood as the responsibility of the state and a school system that first and foremost has a responsibility to develop good citizens for the society. Inclusive education is alternatively part of a historical development connected to romanticism, an understanding of childhood as something that has a value in itself, and to a school system that aims at fostering self-formation that does not necessarily support the established society (Gallagher 2001).

It is a heated debate within the academic area of special education about the role and position of special education (Hausstätter 2011). However, as presented in this text, the real competition of this internal debate is first seen when we look at how the society in general view special education and the role of deviant children in school. In other words, what is the dominant truth in education policy today, and why is it like this? To answer this question in detail will be impossible within the framework of this article, thus I wish to make a couple of personal remarks related to the development seen in present education policy with reference to Norway.

Inclusive education is still a general goal in Norwegian education, however it seems like this part of the education policy is less dominant in policy documents now than they were ten years ago. My impression is that the focus on self-formation and inclusive environments has become less true in the political discourse. It seems that the romantic vision of childhood as value in it self is loosing terrain to the global competition of education (Sahlberg 2007).

In my view, the historical tradition where the child is seen as an investment for the nation is the dominant truth of education today. Even though the concept of inclusion is not forgotten it is the perspectives of children as an investment that in reality defines the content and structure of education. Especially I want to point to the increasing demand for effective teaching (e.g. Imsen 2011). As pointed out by Hausstatter and Takala (2011), with reference to the PISA-results, special education seems to be an effective way of raising academic results in the school. However, as presented in Table 2, this is only 'true' when special education is understood within the traditional perspective.

When faced with the demand for a quick increase in academic results the traditional perspective of special education seems to be more effective (Hausstätter and Connolley 2007). Individual pupil's academic problems are solved by individual-oriented measures that can relatively easily determine what kind of help is required. The traditional perspective, through their historically well established methods, will relatively quickly be able to offer solutions in order to help those feeling disabled. The focus is on the individual and it is very often possible to increase ability in identified areas of need. In addition, by implementing specific solutions for individual students and groups of students, a greater homogenization of general teaching can be achieved. This homogenisation leads to the general teaching being easier to plan and carry out – in turn making it appear to be more effective. The moral obligation to help people is within this framework, traditional special education, made as a measurement of how well we are able to help each single

individual to cope with the requirements of the society. Within the historical framework of 'the state and nations children' and todays focus on effective teaching, this is therefore a reasonable and moral acceptable way to argue. The legitimation of special education within this framework can also explain the quite dramatic increase in children in need for special education that we experience in Norway today (Nordahl and Hausstätter 2009).

Facing the demand for effective teaching, the inclusive perspective within special education seems to loos the power of the moral argument. I have previously argued that there exists a time-lag in relation to different perspectives in special education (Hausstätter 2007). The inclusive strategy is to focus more on preventive measures, organisational solutions and attitudes in order to discourage the progress of disabilities. A potential problem of this approach is that it can take a long time, perhaps too long, to see measurable change in the individual. The debate about effectiveness in education is therefore challenging the inclusive strategy to the degree that it is possible to speculate that an inclusive strategy will not actually result in the school society wants (e.g. Hegarty 2001; Connolley and Hausstätter 2009).

The goal of inclusive education is loosing terrain to a more dominant perspective supporting the strategies of individual support for children with special need. However, the political rhetoric on special education and inclusion has not changed. The political goal is still to create an inclusive school, thus as pointed out by Kiuppis (2011), instead of changing the school, the definition of inclusion in practice is altered. The adaption of inclusive education to fit the dominant perspectives of education is elaborated in a forthcoming article (Hausstätter accepted), however I will briefly mention one example of how political rhetoric of special education is adapted to the dominant view of the 'state and nation children.' Both Tables 1 and 2 outline a clear theoretical distinction between the traditional and the inclusive values. In practice, however, it may be difficult to separate the arguments from each other and one result might be that the concept of inclusion is used in favour of the 'state and nation child':

> One argument that is used in order to prove the necessity of inclusive education is that inclusion makes schools more effective (e.g. Lunt and Norwich 1999; Mitchell 2007; Fredricson and Cline 2002; Weiner 2003). The search for an effective school seems to be central for the established school system (e.g. Hattie 2009), and by relating the search for an effective school to inclusive education it seems that it is possible to develop a potentially strong argument in favor of inclusive education. The problem with linking effective schools and inclusion is that it reduces the prospective of an alternative education to a tool in the search for an effective school. (Hausstätter accepted)

The power of the moral argument in special education is a question of what dominates the discussion about the school's role in society (cf. Foucault 1980). Challenging the understanding of special education is therefore also a confrontation of an opposite understanding of the role and content of the school (Graham and Slee 2008). The moral argument must therefore be placed into a bigger picture that reveals the connection between moral arguments in special education and what makes this argument a moral argument in our society. The reduced power of the inclusive perspective is in this light not surprising. As pointed out by Brantlinger (1997) the school is basically organised to support the prevailing cultural power. The school is therefore, as also pointed out by Durkheim (1972), an institution that has social formation as the main objective. An inclusive perspective as outlined in Table 2 can

therefore be a contradiction to a political school community-building project and therefore very difficult to realise. Inclusion is perhaps facing the same situation as the romantic view on children did over 100 years ago – the paradoxical situation descried by Thuen (2008), where large groups of poor children where exploited as cheap and necessary labour, while at the same time childhood as a romantic concept developed among the middle and upper-class parents. The need for necessary labour is perhaps still the dominant, and true, obligation for school development, and inclusion is a luxury only for a few.

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