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# Introduction – In the Light of Educational Justice: International Perspectives on Inclusion

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In the international discourse, there is a broad consensus that inclusion-oriented developments of education systems go hand in hand with an increase of educational justice or even represent an active contribution to it (Ainscow 2020; Seitz et al. 2012). The current debate in this area often refers to international agreements such as the Agenda 2030, which postulates strengthening high-quality, inclusive education and reducing social inequity (United Nations 2015; goals 4 and goal 10).

However, within this context, it is noticeable that different concepts of justice are referred to quite inconsistently, either implicitly or explicitly. First, the concept of *distributive justice* in the sense of equality of opportunities (Rawls 1971; critically Walzer 2006) receives widespread attention, above all, in approaches following the meritocratic principle and compensatory approaches (critically Berkemeyer 2018). According to a concept of distributive justice, it is considered fair if well-performing children assume privileged positions in society once they are adults. The concept thus presupposes the autonomy of young learners since it is up to them to achieve through effort. Equality is therefore also reflected in the provision of compensatory means in case of disadvantage. Such an understanding is criticised since all children are rather dependent on kindergartens and schools, which offer appropriate opportunities to develop autonomy (Stojanov 2011: 22), and the idea of compensation for the “disadvantaged” is framed by hegemonial concepts of normalcy. Therefore, these connections are often discussed with reference to Bourdieu's theory of habitus (Bourdieu/Passeron 1971). Second, reference is made to *social justice* in terms of capabilities (Nussbaum 2006). Following the idea of social justice or participatory justice, according to the Capability Approach, policies should ensure conditions that enable everyone, considering the diversity of life situations, to develop their capabilities with the perspective of equal citizenship in societies (Otto/Ziegler 2010; Terzi 2007). Equity in education is then not simply demonstrated by the fact that as many children and young people as possible achieve measurable, high performance in school – as often postulated in discussions around the international large-scale-assessment studies (PISA; OECD 2019) – but rather by the extent to which they are given the opportunity in schools to develop their personality, considering the diversity of their life situations (Sauerwein/Vieluf 2021). A third perspective is the concept of *recognition justice*

(Honneth 1992; Stojanov 2011; Prengel 2013), which is led by a particular focus on pedagogical relations based on recognition. According to this approach, educational justice indeed shows that recognition, seen as a social practice, opens paths to self-realisation and personality development.

These briefly outlined varying understandings of educational justice are also linked to different perspectives on childhood and youth, particularly in relation to the notion of its temporality: in the context of the above mentioned internationally observable output-orientation of education systems, children are primarily addressed as future adults and childhood is understood as a phase of “becoming”. Against this background, the main task of educational institutions would be to achieve systematic competence acquisition in children, whereas a view on childhood and youth as a phase of “being” seems to be increasingly pushed into the background (Honneth 2020.) and, together with this, possibly also the recognition of children as persons who are endowed with biographies and valuable characteristics. Further, it can be noted that this does not yet clarify the extent to which different perspectives on childhood and youth might be linked to hegemonic concepts of normalcy, as might be seen in the above-mentioned preventive and compensatory approaches, which are therefore often criticised (Kelle/Tervooren 2008).

This already indicates that the discourse on educational justice still holds meaningful gaps. In particular, the open question how the tension between societal, institutional, and individual responsibility for education and the view of children and youngsters as more or less endowed with autonomy (Bou-Habib/Olsaretti 2015) can be theorised more precisely.

Given the complexity of the issue, we deliberately place them here in an international context to bring together different perspectives on inclusive education which refer to or compare various education systems in Europe and to reflect them in the light of educational justice. We do so in three parts:

Section I entitled *Conceptualisations underpinning research on diversity, equity, and inclusive education* (Chapters 1–4) contains contributions presenting theoretical approaches or discussing theoretical conceptions, which can be understood as a possible starting point for conducting future-oriented research on the topic. Overall, the single chapters add to a growing repository of theoretical foundations on inclusion-relevant aspects of education and educational justice and offer implications for research and educational practice.

Section II on *Educational justice within different educational systems* (Chapters 5–8) details the findings stemming from studies that present various facets of diversity, normalcy and inclusion and the different characteristics they take across multiple discourses. The comparative studies included in this section offer impulses to reflect cultural-normative as well as structural dimensions of (in)equity in the education systems.

Section III *Ambivalences: Doing Inclusion – Doing Difference* (Chapters 9–11) triggers the debate on dealing with diversity and equity in education

seen as a social practice in kindergartens and schools. What follows is an exploration of frictions between regulative level and educational practice as well as hidden rules of normalcy and dynamics of classism, racism and ableism in education and also in scientific discourses.

In the following, each chapter is briefly summarised by highlighting its importance to the readers of this volume.

The entry point for the first section is a contribution that focuses on the political ontologies of difference. As such, Chapter 1 (Boger) arises from the author's theory of "trilemmatic inclusion", which maps concepts of anti-discrimination and/or 'inclusion' through the differentiation of their political ontology of 'otherness/multiplicity/difference'. In doing so, she elaborates three knots, namely, *empowerment*, *normalisation* and *deconstruction*, three vectors that can be triangulated into contradictory desires, which, however, all aim to end discrimination. In this volume the approach is focused from an international position which the author describes as *trans\_position*.

Instead, Chapter 2 (Tervooren) critically discusses the subordinate role of the socially constructed category of 'disability' in childhood studies in Germanophone contexts. The issue is negotiated in three steps: by drawing upon childhood studies' critique of the developmental paradigm, by showing how 'disability' as social category is debated in research on childhood in German-speaking contexts, and by elaborating the international discussion on 'disabled children's childhood studies'. Building on these, the author concludes by addressing possible challenges of intersectional childhood studies which are related to the complex social category of 'disability'.

Guided by the aim to get a deeper knowledge on children's perceptions of academic performance and assessment, Chapter 3 (Seitz & Imperio) elaborates the state of the art of existing research on the topic. The contribution provides a detailed overview of studies conducted around the globe, taking the perspective of the approach of Childhood Studies and the Student Voice movement, and raises the question what role children play in these studies and how the image of the child underlying research might be reflected in the light of educational justice.

In Chapter 4 (Kaiser & Seitz) the section closes with an analysis of the discourse on achievement and inclusion. Starting from the role of schools in reproducing inequities, on the one hand, and the two international political agendas related to large-scale assessment and inclusion and sustainability, on the other, the authors elaborate the narrative formations and stabilising rules of interpretation of (the) discourse(s) within scientific articles in German language.

The second section begins with Chapter 5 (Seitz, Hamacher & Berti) pursuing the question if all-day schooling can be seen as one way to strengthening educational justice in terms of equity, shedding light on the topic from the children's point of view. Along with findings from an investigation that

captures primary school children's perspectives of all-day school, the relationship between formal and non-formal education as well as children's social role (i.e., being children, students, and peers) within both of them constitutes the central point of the contribution.

Starting likewise from the results of an empirical study involving primary school children, which show that the latter differ in the importance they attribute to specific values according to the school system their school belongs to, Chapter 6 (Auer) approaches the topic of inclusiveness of the education system in the Province of Bolzano (Italy), a multilingual region. Taking the perspective of the socialisation of values within the school context and considering the organisation of schools through a tripartite division according to the official languages of the territory, the question is raised how far the latter is in line with a conception of inclusion as *one school for all*.

Chapter 7 (Bellacicco & Cappello) focuses on data on school inclusion in Italy: the critical analysis of different statistics collected at national and local (Province of Bolzano) levels about inclusive education is significant for determining how Italy monitors the quality of education. The study leads to a questioning of different priorities of analysis emerging in different reports and, above all, the missing dimensions which would be necessary to gather data for strengthening inclusive policies.

Through an international comparison of three national cases – Ireland, Italy, and Norway – commonalities and differences of funding models and the related policy contexts are elaborated in Chapter 8 (Banks, Cappello, Demo, Hausstätter & Seitz). Referring to neo-institutionalism (Scott 2014), the authors structure the investigated object on different levels, summarising the interrelationships of governance, funding and pedagogical practice. Reflecting critically on the conception and funding of inclusive education, the authors dare to examine how the idea of funding inclusion is culturally constructed in the three countries.

To reframe policy and practice of inclusive education, an intersectional and interdisciplinary framework focusing on racism and ableism as interlocking systems of oppression in education – the Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) – is discussed in Chapter 9 (Migliarini), which begins the third and final section of this edited volume. The contribution explores the “SENitization” of students with experience of migration and brings it together with a pilot study in a school in Italy that struggled to provide appropriate support to these students who have been labelled as “disabled”. Examples of an intersectionally reflected inclusive practice by means of DisCrit are illustrated.

Chapter 10 (Frizzarin) is based on a validation study. The validation of an instrument aimed to measure adolescents' attitudes towards otherness which combines a qualitative and a quantitative approach is detailed. Moreover, the representations of students involved in the study are directly drawn upon

concerning their definitions of otherness. The results of the study facilitate a discussion about attitudes that school and classmates hold towards peers identified as "Others" and that likely result in marginalisation and exclusion.

A reflection of the issues identified in international literature about Individual Educational Planning in inclusive classrooms and the underlying tensions is provided in Chapter 11 (Bellacicco, Ianes & Auer). Problems where there can be several different and combinable solutions, and dilemmas, consisting of two conflicting alternatives, are identified here as two crucial challenges. The chapter concludes by ways to bring together the two poles of dilemmas highlighting some progress of recent Italian laws that have promoted a new perspective on Individual Educational Planning.

The book concludes in Chapter 12 (Demo) with a reference to the *dispositif* of the dialogic. The author uses it to discuss a possible integration of central antinomies of inclusive education, both on a theoretical level and on the level of educational policies and practices. On this basis, she proposes the image of a border crosser for the role of inclusive education and inclusive research.

Overall, this book offers a rich dialogue of different perspectives on inclusion-related research in the light of educational justice as well as different and complementary approaches to further theorising and researching educational justice in the light of inclusion-related issues.

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