

## Inclusion in Austria

In Austria we had a heavily dispute about inclusive education in the eighties and the beginning of the nineties. A legal framework for a joint education of disabled and non disabled children was set up by the Austrian government in the year 1993 for primary education and 1996 for lower secondary education.

It is significant that Austrian research into inclusive education is dedicated to quantitative aspects like quotas of pupils with SEN (special educational needs) in mainstream settings, resource management, attitudes of teachers etc. Research into the pedagogics (what happens in the lessons) is rare.

Austria maintains a parallel education system for pupils with SEN, where approximately 50% of pupils still attend Special Schools.

There is no political strategy towards an inclusive school system in Austria. The decisions of a high number of parents depend on what advice they receive from experts, and this is visible in the fact that learners with an underprivileged background are overrepresented in the group of pupils with an SEN status.

### The current level of the Austrian discussion

In their report “Quality in Special Needs Education” Werner Specht et.al (2006) identified the following central problems:

- The coexistence of different principles and organizational forms of special needs support without clear-cut decision making rules for the adaptation of institutional care to individual needs.
- The allocation of special needs resources to the individual child and the consequent lack of flexibility of resource usage, also when preventive measures are at stake.
- The weak anchorage of institutionalized forms of quality assurance in special needs education and the absence of quality standards and evaluation procedures for special needs provisions.
- The insufficient professional basis and standardization of the procedure to identify special needs.

The conclusion of the report gives seven focus points for a so called quality orientated development of the special needs sector in Austria which shows the current level of the discussion:

- 1. Inclusive education as the standard alternative of special needs support***
- 2. Making resource allocation for special needs support more flexible***
- 3. Special Education Centers as hubs for resource distribution and as quality agencies***
- 4. Objective procedures to identify special educational needs***
- 5. Individual education plans - process standards for special needs support***
- 6. Optimal usage of resources and support potentials in fully adapted inclusive classrooms***
- 7. Minimum standards for material equipment and personnel resources***

## However do these items reflect the inclusive principles necessary for the development of inclusion in Austria?

### Inclusion means more than a “standard alternative”!

Inclusive education means more than that! - More than a “standard alternative” which just needs enough resources. Inclusive education is an issue of human rights. It is about values like social justice, equality and independent living and it demands a political will to realize it. This change will be a difficult process with broad political and social implications. Inclusive education is about the participation of all pupils in a reformed school system.

Inclusive education cannot be implemented without questioning the understanding of disabilities as a form of social oppression. Disability is not an individual problem, it is a societal problem.

The idea of the human being, that assumes an impaired person to be biologically-medically-psychologically defective and pedagogically handicapped, can produce only selection and segregation in the social process, even if this social process calls itself “inclusive education”.

The development of inclusion in Austria unfortunately has to be described as stagnant and stumbles over unchanged conditions of the school system which is still characterized by a very early selection of pupils at the age of 10 into lower and higher secondary education, external differentiation into learning performance groups, different curricula for pupils with and without SEN status, comparative performance testing and marks even in the primary schools, SEN status due to medical diagnosis of a disability. All this is in diametrical contradiction to what must be understood as inclusive pedagogics. It is not possible to implement inclusive pedagogics within a selective school system.

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