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Education For All: Approaches to Teacher Education for Inclusion

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Abstract

Over the last thirty years, there has been an international aspiration to make education provision both inclusive and equitable with resultant policy production at both international and national level. Over time, the focus of this activity has moved from the specific needs of disabled students to consideration of how schools might celebrate diversity and provide effective learning for all students. Teacher education is viewed as a key factor in creating school environments where all young people have equity of access to relevant learning opportunities no matter their background or circumstances.

This paper presents six case studies from Finland, New Zealand, Lithuania, Scotland, Norway and Canada charting the changes made over time to educational provision within their national context aiming to make schools more inclusive. Each case study highlights some of the ways in which teacher education has adapted in response to these policy changes to prepare new teachers to work in inclusive school settings. Common to all case studies is the identification that further research and change is required to meet the professional learning requirements of our future teachers. In response to this identified need. Highlighting the complex nature of providing inclusive education for all, it is suggested that future teacher education must continue to explore new ways to enhance the professional expertise of teachers to be inclusive of all learners in their daily practice.

UNITWIN Network on Teacher Education for social Justice and Diversity, coordinated by
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Content

Abstract	1
Introduction	3
National Case Studies	4
Finland 2.1	4
New Zealand 2.2	4
Scotland 2.3	4
Lithuania 2.4	4
Norway 2.5	5
Canada 2.6	5
Conclusions and Recommendations	5
References	6

Introduction

The United Nations has identified the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) as Quality Education – the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>). In its recent report published in 2021 ‘Reimagining our Futures Together: a new social contract for education’ (<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379381>), UNESCO highlighted the need for schools be protected as educational sites because of the inclusion, equity and individual and collective well-being they support but also reimagined to better promote the transformation of the world towards more just, equitable and sustainable futures.

Education has long been viewed as a vehicle for transformation of society contributing to social justice and equity within society (Desjardins, 2015). Over time, a general international policy direction has been charted advocating for education provision to move away from segregated provision that sought to meet the needs of distinct categories of students by matching specific curriculum and pedagogies with identified categories of individuals. A sea-change in international perception of how educational provision should be viewed occurred with the publication of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education in 1994 (<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427>). The Salamanca Statement (1994) aimed to inform international and national policy makers around the world as to how educational provision might be both more socially just through measures to ensure that the education of all young people might be an integral part of the education system. The Statement was informed by the principle of inclusion, by recognition of the need to work towards ‘schools for all’ where all education institutions would be marked by their inclusion of everybody, celebration of differences, support for learning, and effective responses to individual needs (Booth and Ainscow, 2011).

Of course, inclusion policies do not only refer to those with disabilities. Konstantoni, Kustacher, and Emejulu (2014) identify ‘race’, class, gender, sexuality, disability, age and ethnicity as potentially leading to social, economic and educational disadvantage. Davis (2008) notes that each distinctive characteristic has the potential to disadvantage young people from these communities within educational provision but that a more embedded issue is that young people may lie at the intersection of these categories with Konstantoni, Kustacher, and Emejulu (2014) providing a critique of how the actions of social movements and policy makers often minimise the importance of differences within and between groups. The Salamanca Statement (1994) viewed each child as an individual with unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs. The discussion paper ‘International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education – every learner matters’ (2019), prepared to inform discussion at the Conference to examine progress since the 1994 Salamanca Statement, confirmed this perspective on the diversity that individual children and young people bring to education but also notes the challenges still facing the implementation of inclusive education as envisaged in the original seminal statement.

Since 1994, in line with the trend within international policy direction, many national governments have instigated a range of national policy initiatives that support the move to inclusive education as envisioned by the Salamanca Statement (1994). However, the implementation of inclusive policies to practice within educational provision has not been a straightforward process. It has been noted that the translation of international policy recommendations within national contexts can be problematic if the individual social, cultural, linguistic and economic contexts of each country are not taken into consideration (Robinson et al., 2021). Additionally, Ball, McGuire and Braun (2012) highlight that although reference to

policy may imply its most recent iteration, ‘there is a history of other policies, other languages and other subjectivities, a *discursive archive* on which, at least sometimes, teachers draw, over and against contemporary policy’ (p.6). Acknowledgement of this discursive archive is an important factor in the implementation of inclusive education policy to practice as teachers may still be operating within this discursive archive retaining elements of uncontested segregated practices alongside inclusive practices. As a result, analysis of the journey towards more inclusive education practice in line with the aspirations of international and national policy directives within equitable, inclusive education systems indicates a patchwork of success and outstanding challenges to be faced (Haug, 2017).

It has long been acknowledged that the quality of teacher education is a key determinant of quality education provision (Hattie, 2012). Globally, there remain concerns about the numbers of teachers who have not received training. In 2019, 81% of primary teachers globally had received training but in South Asia this percentage drops to 76% and sub-Saharan Africa only 65% had been trained. Within those countries providing teacher education, there are ongoing concerns about the nature of the teacher education provide. Classrooms around the world continue to diversify with this trend set to continue (Adams, Bell and Griffiths, 2007). This increasing diversity within classrooms can be perceived by teachers as a challenge as they seek to provide inclusive learning opportunities for all learners within their classrooms (Hick and Thomas, 2000). Florian and Camedda (2020) note that many teachers express concern that they are not effectively prepared to work in these diverse classrooms stating that knowledge and understanding of how to ‘deliver high quality inclusive education and training for student teachers at all levels remains unclear and contested’ (p.6).

National Case Studies

Within this policy brief, we provide six case studies with supporting research literature from members of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Network for Teacher Education for Social Justice and Diversity coordinated by University of Lapland but with representation from both the global North and South. These case studies provide short synopsis of current progress within their national contexts towards the aspiration of achieving an equitable and inclusive education system. It is acknowledged that the case studies are not inclusive of all parts of the globe but it is proposed that insight into the diversity of progress exemplified within the offered case studies provides insight and recommendations for future progress and that in particular, the comparison provides insight into how future teachers might be better prepared to meet future challenges in inclusive education provision.

Finland 2.1

The reform of compulsory education in Finland in the early 1970s was based on an aspiration to provide all students aged between 7–15 years with a common curriculum in the one school building where only after the age of 15 would they choose between vocational or academic-oriented education. In addition, since 1979, the qualifications of primary school teachers (Grades 1–6) and lower secondary school teachers (Grades 7–9) in compulsory education have been at master's level. The number of special schools has decreased and comprehensive schools have been tasked with providing a wide range of support for children and young people in the local community after the support system was reformed in the early 2010s. Increasingly diverse students are calling for closer collaboration between teachers to support everyone (Lakkala & Thuneberg, 2018).

Due to these reforms, the number of children with special needs in mainstream schools has increased (Official Statistic Finland), and there is evidence that teachers are using diverse pedagogies, including co-teaching, to promote inclusion (Saloviita, 2017). However, teacher's meta-consciousness of developing inclusive schools and competence in inclusive pedagogy varies (Isosomppi & Leivo, 2015). In response to this, more effort has been invested in developing student teachers' skills to meet students with diverse needs. For example, in initial teacher education more attention has been paid to topics such as language and cultural awareness and diversity of learning. In addition, socio-emotional skills and the creation of a warm and safe learning environment have been highlighted in teacher studies (Pan, 2020; Kyrö-Ämmälä, 2019).

However, there remains further development work to be done. For this reason, the Ministry of Education and Culture has set up a national Teacher Education Forum to reform initial teacher education, induction and in-service teacher training to further develop comprehensive schools learning environments and teachers' competencies. The studies carried out by Teacher Education Forum researchers demonstrate that inclusive educational issues are related to teachers' competencies, such as self-organising creative expertise and agency. By development of these and other competencies, teachers are expected to construct diverse and flexibly changing learning environments in collaboration with other professional networks. (Lavonen et al., 2020; Lavonen et al., 2021.)

New Zealand 2.2

New Zealand has been embarking on the road to remove the language of *special* education from their education policies and practices. The Education Act of 1989 entitled all children between the ages of 5 and 18 to free education in state schools with Section 8 of the Act stating that '... people who have special educational needs (whether because of disability or otherwise), have the same rights to enrol and receive education at state schools as people who do not.' The Act retained the rights of parents to choose whether to enrol their child who had special needs in a state school, special class or school.

However, over the years policies directed towards inclusion and the shortcomings of the resulting funding frameworks (Education Review Office, 2015; Kearney and Kane, 2006) have steadily forced a shift in thinking and policy language from inclusion of young people with 'special needs' to recognising the learning needs and supports for all children. A Cabinet paper (2016) titled *Strengthening Inclusion and Modernising Learning Support*, signalled the intent to shift the language from 'special educational needs' to 'learning support', based on consultation and engagement with stakeholders. This shift in language is also embedded in the revised Education and Training Act (2020), which now stipulates that schools must be inclusive of students with 'differing needs', moving away from the paradigm of 'special needs'.

The vision of the New Zealand education system is currently 'for an inclusive education system where every child feels a sense of belonging, is present, makes progress, where their wellbeing is safeguarded and promoted' (MOE, 2019, p.5). A six-year *Learning Support Action Plan* (LSAP 2019-2025) built with extensive consultation from stakeholders, including those with disabilities, has been actioned to support all learners from early childhood through to high schools. In parallel, all initial teacher education providers must ensure that student teachers meet the teaching standards set by the Teaching Council of Aotearoa NZ, one of which is to *promote high-quality teaching and leadership for all learners across all education settings*

(Education Council, n.d). Thus, the focus of teacher training is on inclusive and culturally relevant pedagogy, rather than 'special education'.

Scotland 2.3

Within the United Kingdom, each devolved administration holds responsibility for education policy production within their country. As such, the Scottish Government holds responsibility for all education provision within Scotland. Scotland has a long and proud tradition of egalitarian, meritocratic, state education (Paterson 2003). Since 1965, all secondary schools have been comprehensive in nature with no academic selection at point of entry. This aspiration for inclusive education was further advanced with the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (2000) which adopted the 'presumption of mainstreaming' resulting in any parents who wished their child to attend special provision to justify this choice. Further policy shifts in Scotland included the Additional Support Needs Act (2004, amended 2009) shifting from dedicated support to limited categories of educational need to a consideration of young people all having forms of additional learning need at some point in their school career that teachers must be prepared to address.

With oversight of teacher education provision within Scotland, the standards provided by the General Teaching Scotland (GTCS) determine how each teacher education provider designs its programmes of teacher preparation based on the Teacher Standards prepared by the GTCS (<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-standards/>). The Scottish Government was supportive of the necessary changes required to facilitate a teaching workforce that can meet the challenges of the diversity within Scottish classrooms funding the development of the National Framework of Inclusion (Barrett et al, 2015). Challenges in preparing student teachers remain however as for example, Beaton (2020) identifies that teacher educators were used to operating with more traditional ways of working and therefore may struggle to implement this new inclusive approach to education provision including all learners.

It has been noted that a distinctive challenge for Scottish education are the high levels of poverty in some communities in Scotland with the resultant impact this can have on the educational experiences of young people. McKinney et al (2020) note high levels of poverty in both urban and rural settings in Scotland and Sosu and Ellis (2014) in their report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation identify significant attainment gaps even in early years settings for young children that can be linked with high levels of poverty. The Improving Schools in Scotland; an OECD Perspective Report (2015), commissioned by the Scottish Government as they sought to address this inequity, provided 3 key recommendations including the need for a consolidated and evidence-informed strategic approach to equity policies.

Lithuania 2.4

The beginning of the formation of inclusive education in Lithuania was related to the transition of the country's education system from a strictly segregated and unified system during the Soviet period to a system based on equity and equality after Lithuania regained its independence. The first steps in integration were aimed exclusively at changing the educational situation of children with disabilities. With the active involvement of non-governmental organizations and private initiatives, the transition of children with severe disabilities from homes to special schools has begun. The transition of children with disabilities from boarding schools to mainstream schools was also encouraged. There was a need to

change the attitude of educators and develop competence in the transition from homogeneous to heterogeneous group education. A high level of support and impetus in this regard was established by Lithuanian teachers in the American Professional Partnership for Lithuanian Education (A.P.P.L.E.) organisation (<http://www.applequest.org/>). The A.P.P.L.E. organisation is an international, volunteer, non-profit educational organisation, With the support of the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science, A.P.P.L.E. partnered with Lithuanian educators to foster the implementation of innovative educational approaches that contribute to a more democratic society. Volunteers of the organisation organised professional learning seminars for teachers in Lithuania for more than 10 years during the summer holidays

Today, more than 90% of children with special educational needs study in Lithuanian general education schools. In 2020, amendments were made to the Lithuanian Law on Education, establishing the obligation of all educational institutions to educate all children without discrimination. Research conducted in Lithuania demonstrates teachers have an open attitude towards inclusive education but a great deal of confusion about its quality implementation in practice. As a result, interventions have begun that will support the transformation of teachers' competence from traditional to inclusive. To support these interventions, research on educators' attitudes and competencies and inclusive teacher education is viewed as essential.

Norway 2.5

In Norway the existence of a school system for everyone has made the country a world-leader in terms of social equality (Gini coefficient of 0.25, OECD, 2019, p. 99). By integrating special and general education laws in 1975 Norway pre-empted international calls for integration and inclusion. This change brought in adapted education (*Tilpasset opplæring* in Norwegian), and this principle – comparable with integration and inclusion – intended to remove the distinction between 'special' and 'general' education such that everyone received education that fitted their learning needs, however diverse, in the general classroom.

Norway requires a 5-year integrated master's degree for all teaching at primary and middle-school levels (grades 1-10); this was introduced to complement a centralised-based system of mainly comprehensive schools. The 5-year master's was introduced in 2017 with the intention to produce more research-competent teachers who could work more critically and analytically. Attempts were also made to make the teacher-training curriculum more inclusion-focused by removing specific courses on special education and instead integrating the theme into all courses. Student teachers can also choose a master's specialisation in special education, however not all training institutions choose to offer this.

Norway too has seen a recent increase in children receiving special education support with figures stabilising in the last 4-5 years at around 8% of children in compulsory education (Statistics Norway, 2021, p. 10). The system is not entirely without flaws and a recent national report (Nordahl et al., 2018) finds that support systems are not effective and create exclusionary special education systems. Additionally, most children receive support from personnel lacking in appropriate competences (Nordahl et al., 2018).

Adapted education challenges traditional teaching knowledge and approaches in Norway. At the curriculum-level it has been taken as a general principle comparable with integration and inclusion, however this has led to an intention of an ideology-based practice. Intentions tend to be abstract and provide little on how values will be executed in practice. Consequently,

uncertainty often manifests as a result of various conflicts and dilemmas as the way adapted education is understood and practised do not converge (Maxwell, 2019). One specific example is that of value-conflicts relating to the prioritising of some pupils over others collide with the general intention to treat all pupils equally. Norway nevertheless still strives to deliver inclusive and equitable education to all children and perhaps can be seen to exemplify that inclusion is an ongoing process rather than a final end-goal.

Canada 2.6

Canada became one of the first nations in the world to protect the right to an equal education for all its citizens when it created the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1985 (Council of Canadians with Disabilities, 2012). The Charter of Rights signalled an inclusive stance for society that protects the rights of all Canadians, regardless of disability, where differences are both respected and honoured (Government of Canada, 1985). Although most educators support the philosophy of inclusion in schools, Canada still struggles to put these values into practice (Sokal and Katz, 2015; 2020). Nonetheless, teachers serve as important agents in educational reform (Engelbrecht, 2013), with UNESCO (2013) supporting teacher education about inclusion as being equal in importance to policy initiatives around inclusion.

In Canada, each province has developed its own policies around inclusion, with significant differences between them in practice and success. As a result, there have been calls for a closer examination of pedagogical practices with a focused energy on learners' needs including students with ethnic and linguistic abilities, children of Indigenous heritage as well as children with disabilities and without.

Recently in Canada, an enhanced focus on Indigenous education to improve outcomes for Indigenous children has emerged in public discourse. In particular, there is a focus on closing the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners (Cherubini, 2018). As a result, Canadian teacher education programming is being introduced to Indigenous pedagogies and ways of knowing through the use of a Universal Design Framework (CAST, 2018). This framework seeks to provide guidelines to make learning accessible and meaningful to all learners. It ensures that all children have maximum access to the curriculum content which makes learning meaningful. The use of UDL has a growing presence in four Canadian Atlantic provinces, who share resources and practices in school curriculum development, alongside the Canadian Western provinces of Manitoba and British Columbia. All of these provinces have implemented the Three-Block Model (TBM) of Universal of Design for Learning (UDL) (Katz, 2012). This model considers the needs of all learners in educational practice, by creating pedagogies which place the social and emotional health needs of children alongside inclusive pedagogical practices and create and embrace multimodal instructional initiatives to enhance these values.

However, as large and diverse is Canada, it still has challenges which can impact forward strides in teacher preparedness. For example, as Canadian Teaching Qualification Licences vary from province to province, provincial pre-service teacher preparedness programs may lack needed diversity training. These disconnects between teacher training and current pedagogical practices in classrooms (Sharma, 2018) speak to a need for future research to address the growing gap between the theory and practice of inclusive pedagogies in schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Policy concerns about the provision of quality education for all children, in the context of demographic changes, are creating challenges for teacher education worldwide (Opertti and Brady 2011). Whilst all countries are subject to similar global pressures on their education systems, each country responds according to its own culture, history and values (Lingard 2008). For this reason, we can all learn from approaches taken by colleagues in different countries. This has been evidenced by the collation of case studies from the UNITWIN partners in Finland, New Zealand, Scotland, Lithuania, Norway and Canada.

Commonalities exist in the direction of travel for education policy production between the different national contexts represented in this policy brief. Each case study demonstrates a clear aspiration by national governments to move towards a more equitable and inclusive education system. This policy direction has taken place at different speeds dependent on other societal factors. Whilst some countries such as Norway, Scotland and Finland now have a relatively long history of implementation of the type of inclusive education as outlined by the Salamanca Statement, others such as Lithuania demonstrate a more recent set of policy changes which move education provision in this direction. It is also noteworthy that each country has identified different priority groups of young people whose needs must be addressed to ensure their full participation in educational provision. For Canada, an ongoing priority are those young people from Indigenous communities whereas in Scotland, a high priority remains those young people impacted by high levels of poverty.

All the case studies note that inclusion is a process, not an end product. Each case study highlights that there is more work to be done to ensure inclusive, equitable educational provision for all. Schools need to be places that bring diverse groups of people together and expose them to challenges and possibilities of interaction and collaboration not available elsewhere. School architectures, spaces, times, timetables, and student groupings should be redesigned to encourage and enable individuals to work together. Digital technologies should aim to support – and not replace – schools. Schools should model the futures we aspire to by ensuring human rights and becoming exemplars of social and cultural sustainability.

To support this aspiration, each case study has identified changes within teacher education that can prepare all teachers to create these inclusive schools that provide learning opportunities for all young people ensuring equal access to learning opportunities through effective teaching practices (Ainscow et al., 2006). These include advanced masters courses in Finland and Norway, teacher education materials such as the National Framework of Inclusion in Scotland, special training courses for qualified teachers as in Lithuania and national approaches that promote the inclusion of Indigenous communities in Canada and New Zealand.

Again, despite many advances in teacher education that promotes inclusion, the case studies also identify areas for improvement. In Norway, the tension between the intention of an ideology-based practice and the traditional practices in many classrooms has been identified. In Scotland the issue of many teacher educators not having experience of working in inclusive ways in classrooms has been highlighted. UNESCO (2021) highlights that a re-professionalisation of the teaching workforce is required to meet the challenges of the future. This would include the need for reflection, research and the creation of new knowledge about pedagogical practices to become an integral aspect of teaching similar to the recommendations of the Donaldson Report (2011). Key to this ambition, UNESCO suggests that teachers' autonomy and freedom must be

supported and that they must participate fully in public debate and dialogue on the futures of education (Ainscow, 2020).

Educators who seek to provide inclusive learning for all face professional dilemmas that are complex and unpredictable and recent transnational research indicates that to address this challenge, educators require professional learning that is collaborative, interprofessional, and acknowledges that the challenges they face are multifaceted (Beaton et al., 2021). Future educational research is required to inform how teacher education might continue to enhance the professional expertise of teachers to be inclusive of all learners in their daily practice.

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