

Editorial

Priority Education in European Countries: Comparative Backgrounds

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Abstract: The present special issue is focussed on priority measures that enhanced the opportunities of disadvantaged pupils and that enhanced the inclusion and chances of discriminated groups of pupils, such as e.g. Roma children, minority children and/or immigrant children. They followed from national reports on ten European countries and their comparative analysis.

Keywords: Priority education, national case studies, disadvantaged pupils, discriminated groups, measures, comparative assessment, European countries.

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

The special issue on priority education in European countries followed from a comparative research project on inclusion and education in European countries. The research project was carried out on assignment of the European Commission.¹ In ten countries, case studies were reported and secondary documentation and data were assessed. The ten countries were: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. In addition, experts in other countries belonging to the EU were consulted. The foci and terms of reference of the studies regarded five topical issues, being:

1. Measures to reduce early school leaving,
2. Measures to enhance the educational chances and perspectives of disadvantaged pupils and pupils belonging to discriminated groups, referred to as 'priority education measures',
3. Measures to enhance the inclusion of pupils with special needs and/or restrictions, referred to as 'inclusive education measures',

4. Measures to reduce bullying and harassment of pupils, referred to as 'safe education measures',
5. Teacher support measures.

National teams prepared national reports on France [1], Germany [2], Hungary [3], Italy [4], The Netherlands [5], Poland [6], Slovenia [7], Spain [8], Sweden [9], UK [10], and 'the experts' [11].

On the basis of the national reports the comparative analysis of inclusion and education in European countries was carried out. Muskens reported these in three reports, i.e. a report giving the empirical findings and comparative conclusions [12], a report in which the conclusions were discussed and recommendations were set out [13] and a summary report in English, French and German languages [14].

The present special issue is focussed on priority measures that enhanced the opportunities of disadvantaged pupils and that enhanced the inclusion and chances of discriminated groups of pupils, such as e.g. Roma children, minority children and/or immigrant children. The special issue followed from a symposium held at the ECER-Conference in Vienna, on 30 September 2009. The articles are workouts of the papers that were read there by:

1. Danielle Zay, University of Lille 3 and PRISME,
2. Pál Tamás, Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences,
3. Francesca Gobbo, Roberta Ricucci and Francesca Galloni, University of Turin,
4. Dorothee Peters, Expert Centre Mixed Schools, and George Muskens, DOCA Bureaus,

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¹Procurement procedure EAC/10/2007-Lot 3 "Strategies for supporting schools and teachers in order to foster social inclusion, dated 9 August 2007, contract-2007-2094/001 TRA-TRSP0. The project started effectively on 16 December 2007 and was concluded on 16 August 2009, by submitting the reports to the Commission. The reports were accepted by the Commission on 12 October 2009.

5. Albina Necak Lük and Sonja Novak Lukanovic, University of Ljubljana,
6. Gisela Redondo, Mimar Ramis, CREA – University of Barcelona,
7. Rae Condie, Lio Moscardini, Ann Grieve and Ian Mitchell, University of Strathclyde.

Three articles discuss cases and conclusions with regard to the inclusion of Roma pupils in mainstream education, with special attention for the measures that are applied to reduce their discrimination and exclusion in e.g. special Roma schools, and the cultural support that schools and specialised teachers may offer. It regards the articles of Pál Tamás [Hungary], Albina Necak Lük and Sonja Novak Lukanovic [Slovenia], and that of Gisela Redondo and Mimar Ramis [Spain]. The article of Rae Condie, Lio Moscardini, Ann Grieve and Ian Mitchell has close links to the issue as they are dealing, among others, with a case of travelling pupils that are received and supported very well by a Scottish school where they return at seasonal occasions.

The article of Francesca Gobbo, Roberta Ricucci and Francesca Galloni is referring to the closely related issue of intercultural pedagogy and the measures in several Italian schools and regions to encourage it.

Further on that line are the cases analysed and discussed by Dorothee Peters and me, with regard to mixing schools in Dutch municipalities. In that way, the 'intercultural condition' is created, either by local dispersion policies or parental grassroot initiatives that should counteract 'white flight' as occurring [15].

This and other articles, i.e. the ones of Danielle Zay in French good practices, that of Francesca Gobbo, Roberta Ricucci and Francesca Galloni on Italian schools and regions, as well as that of Rae Condie, Lio Moscardini, Ann Grieve and Ian Mitchell on English and Scottish ones, pay attention to the chances of pupils and groups of pupils of lower class immigrant descent. The chances should be enhanced by the policies, measures and practices as analysed and discussed.

All cases show, in varying degrees, that under the specific condition of the cases, positive inclusive and educational effects were reached.

The European educational systems can contribute to the social inclusion of those groups more affected by educational inequalities or, on the contrary, they can reproduce these inequalities, strengthening segregation and exclusion of people belonging to these groups. European research can be a powerful tool to provide elements for the implementation of successful actions in education and for the improvement of the learning processes of all children.

We, as members of the European research community, can promote that our research results contribute to these aims, developing rigorous research processes and defining ways to transfer our findings to the educational and social agents which can transform the European school systems. The contributions included in this special issue are addressed to reveal the findings from European research which can guide these educational transformations and the overcoming of educational inequalities in Europe, especially those

affecting vulnerable groups as cultural minorities or immigrants.

These issues are elaborated and discussed in my comparative chapter to these that will conclude the present special issue.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their great appreciation for the following persons and groups, who have contributed to the INTMEAS research project:

1. The further research teams in Germany (University of Hamburg: Ingrid Gogolin, Sten Mellethin, Christine Jochum), Poland (Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology: Michal Federowicz, Michal Sitek), Spain (University of Salamanca: Mariano Fernández Enguita), Sweden (Elena Dingu-Kyrklund),
2. The experts, who have responded to the INTMEAS expert survey: Peter van Puyenbroek (Antwerp), Dragana Avramov (Brussels), Krassimira Daskalova (Sophia), Jan Jirak (Prague), Christos Panayotopoulos (Nicosia), Niels Egelund (Århus), Marita Mäkinen (Tampere), Roman Gerodimos (Bournemouth), Brigitta Zepa (Riga), Mary Anne Lauri (Malta), Candida Ferreira (Lisbon), Olga Pombo (Lisbon), Maria Coimbra Vieira (Coimbra), Luisa Marroni (Coimbra), Gabriel Bianchi (Bratislava),
3. Jaap Dronkers, then European University Institute, Fiesole; now University of Maastricht, as a special adviser of the team,
4. The national representatives, who attended PLACONFERENCE in Brussels in January 2008 and June 2009, where the INTMEAS-project was presented and discussed,
5. The two independent reviewers, who helped us very much with their valuable feedback on the draft papers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

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