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DESIGNING A JUST/EQUITABLE EDUCATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY/SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: AN ENHANCED INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATIONAL COMMONS PERSPECTIVE FOCUSED ON POLICY AND PRACTICE AS TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Since the 'inclusive turn' (Ainscow 2007; 2020), the discussion on Inclusive Education policy is growing (UNESCO 2016; 2020). Many countries worldwide are in transition from Special Education to Inclusive Education policy and practice. In this paper, the problem of Inclusive Education for persons with disability/special educational needs is examined as a hypothetical wicked problem concerning both policy and practice (Rittel & Webber 1973; Pesch &Vermaas 2020). The evidence suggests that the problem of Inclusive Education for persons with disability/special educational needs is a wicked problem that needs to be readdressed. The suggested new approach refers to a collective process of designing a just/equitable education for persons with disability/special educational needs. I argue that, in order to design a just/equitable education, enhanced educational knowledge commons - consisting of more than teachers, learners and their guardians- can provide

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alternative ways of thinking and doing. Also, within enhanced digital interdisciplinary educational commons, solutions to existing tensions and dilemma scan be better understood and approached. In this paper, opportunities and challenges that fields such as Science-Technology-Society, History/Historiography of Technology, Philosophy of Technology and Transition Design Studies present in the process of designing a just/equitable education for persons with disability/special educational needs are described. In the discussion, the argument of the paper and its premises are presented.

Keywords: just education, inclusive education, persons with disability/ special education needs, digital interdisciplinary educational commons

Introduction

Since the 'inclusive turn' (Ainscow 2007; 2020), the discussion on Inclusive Education (IE) policy is growing (UNESCO 2016; 2020). According to the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), by 2030, every member state must ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO 2016), including persons with disability/special educational needs (pwd/sen). Although the challenge of developing educational policies and practices that will respond to learning diversity has been prioritized since 1990 (UNESCO, 1990), it is still current. IE policy, like all major policy changes that refer to the overall improvement of educational systems, requires an effective strategy for implementation and a new approach that focuses on learners' barriers and connects IE with the details of educational policy and practice (Ainscow 2007; 2020).

In their classic paper, Rittel and Webber suggested that planning problems of social policy are wicked problems (wp) characterized by the following ten properties: (1) there is no definite formulation of a wp, (2) wp have no stopping rule, (3) solutions to wp are not true-or-false but good-or-bad, (4) there is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wp, (5) every solution to a wp is a 'one-shot operation', because there is no opportunity to learn by trial and error, (6) wp do not have enumerable set of potential solutions, (7) every wp is essentially unique, (8) every wp can be considered to be a symptom of another problem, (9) the existence of a discrepancy representing a wp can be explained in numerous ways and the choice of explanation determines the nature of the problem resolution, (10) the planner has no right to be wrong (Rittel & Webber 1973). Since the development of IE is a current challenge, IE for pwd/sen can be perceived as a planning problem concerning both educational policy and practice. In this paper the IE for pwd/sen is studied using the lens of wickedness (Rittel & Webber 1973; Pesch &Vermaas 2020).

The wickedness of the IE for pwd/sen problem: The research

The aim of the research was the identification of references relevant to the ten properties of the wp (Rittel & Webber 1973). The studied texts were chosen for their availability and their relevance to the research topic (Florian 2019; Ainscow 2007; 2020; Kauffman, Anastasiou, Hornby, Lopes, Burke, Felder, Ahrbeck & Wiley 2022a; Kauffman, Burke & Anastasiou 2022b; Kauffman, Anastasiou, Badar, Travers & Wiley 2016; Nilholm & Göransson 2017; Wulff, 2020). The research question was: 'Is the IE for

pwd/sen a wp?' In each of the questions that follow, text references that answer directly or indirectly to them are quoted.

Is there only one problem formulation?

The answer is no, because although we have witnessed an increased interest in the idea of IE, 'the field remains confused as to what it implies' (Ainscow 2007). 'There is a lack of clarity concerning the definition of inclusion' (Nilholm & Göransson 2017). The IE processes as well as its outcomes are varied. 'IE is a contested concept with disagreements in the literature about how it should be defined, enacted and evaluated' (Florian 2019). Although the terms 'Special Education (SE)' and 'IE' are different as concepts, their synonymous use, in many countries, contributes to confusion about the distinctions between them (Florian 2019).

Is there a stopping rule?

The answer is no, because as policy is made at all levels of an educational system, the promotion of equity and inclusion requires changes across an educational system. 'These changes span from shifts in policy makers' values and ways of thinking to significant changes within schools and classrooms' (Ainscow 2020: 7). According to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its General Comment, inclusion is:

> ...a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences (§11, 4 in Florian, 2019).

'Disability is a starting point for understanding IE' (Florian 2019). The major challenge seems to be judging whether there are limits to IE and whether SE is and will be needed (Kauffman et al 2022a: 8).

Are solutions true-or-false or good-or-bad?

The solutions are good-or-bad, because although simple solutions to complex problems are sometimes suggested, the proposed simple solutions, such as full inclusion, are often wrong (Kauffman et al 2022a). IE is very often a good thing, but it can be taken to a harmful extreme. 'In fact, full

inclusion might be considered too much of a good thing' (Kauffman et al 2022b: 1).

Is the testing of a solution possible?

The answer is no, because there are numerous interpretations of IE and a great deal of variability in practice. 'Knowing what counts as good practice is not clear cut' (Florian 2019). Although the term 'full inclusion' has typically referred to educating all students in general education at all times, its priority of placement is neither appropriate nor consistent with reality and lacks convincing evidence demonstrating its efficacy. 'The failure of any individual(s) to benefit from the general education setting belies the full inclusion mantra 'all means all'' (Kauffman et al 2016: 154-155).

Is the solution a one-shot operation?

The answer is yes, because there is no opportunity to learn by trial and error. There are two contrasting visions of how pwd/sen could be better served by public education: (a) full inclusion with no SE and (b) IE with integral SE (Kauffman et al. 2022a: 5). 'It is possible to imagine policy and practice that combine the philosophy and values of IE with strategies and programs from SE in order to serve all students with disabilities'. An example of this is Inclusive Special Education (ISE) and involves recognition that all pwd/sen can be provided for appropriately within education systems that combine effective general education schools with high quality SE (Kauffman et al. 2022a: 14-17).

How many potential solutions are there?

There are some potential solutions, but they are not enumerable or exhaustively describable. Many have argued for learning outcomes as a proxy for equity and inclusion in education, suggesting that this would entail a shift from equality of opportunity to equality of outcome. But they are likely to reproduce patterns of inequality. 'Rather than increasing the number of standardized assessments, equity requires more attention to processes of teaching and learning and how equity can be fostered and ensured in the classroom' (Wulff 2020: 19). 'Standardization and datafication give disproportionate emphasis on a narrow set of data points and on global convergence' that denies the importance of contextually relevant education, the complexity of processes of teaching and learning, and the expertise and professional autonomy of teachers. 'Knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes and values are integral components of a quality

education, but are not easily standardized or measured' (Wulff 2020: 21-22).

Are all inclusive education problems the same?

The answer is no, because countries are expected to translate SDG4 into national policies and plans, based on their contexts and their current state of education (Wulff 2020: 7-10). 'What works in one country may not work elsewhere'. Emphasis on system change strategies being contextually sensitive is important (Ainscow 2020: 8).

Can an inclusive education problem be the symptom of another education problem?

The answer is yes, because in the ecology of equity there are three interlinked areas within which equity issues arise: within schools, between schools, beyond schools. 'The starting point must be with policymakers and practitioners' (Ainscow 2020: 9). 'Part of the tension arises from the fact that the SDGs simultaneously represent the world we aspire to create and the world in which we currently live' (Wulff 2020: 2).

Does an explanation relate to the nature of a resolution?

The answer is yes. SE, positioned at the margin of education's normative center, reproduces exclusion. This structural positioning is a key barrier to inclusion and equity in education. 'This relationship can be altered by changing the ways differences between learners are accommodated in schools' (Florian 2019). Part of an effective instruction is considering the practical details of what a practice or policy requires. 'We call attention to a few of the organizational, practical and logistical details the policy of full inclusion requires' (Kauffman et al 2016: 156-158).

Does the IE planner have the right to be wrong?

The answer is no, because the idea of inclusion can be taken too far. 'Failure to address its limitations is ultimately destructive of an otherwise good idea' (Kauffman et al 2022a: 6). Recognition and acceptance of pwd/sen must not lead to disability being made namelessbecause of an exaggerated fear of discrimination. SE categories must be maintained so that adequate support can be provided. 'If disability is made

unrecognizable, the right to appropriate education is endangered' (Kauffman et al 2022a: 11).

Towards a knowledge commons

Considering the quoted references concerning the properties of wickedness (Rittel& Webber 1973), there seems to be strong evidence that the IE for pwd/sen is a wp. Every planner who works with the open systems involved in the process, is caught up in the ambiguity of their causal webs (Rittel& Webber 1973) and his/hers possible solutions are confounded by a further set of planning dilemmas: (a) there is no way to come to consensus about what is the societal good, (b) the wickedness of problems is an intrinsic quality and (c) the rising emancipatory demand for equality conflicts with the presence of societal pluralism, resulting in irrefutable tensions (Pesch&Vermaas 2020). So, what can be done?

I argue that if we define technology as

…all the knowledge, concepts, experimental processes, tangible and intangible artefacts and wider sociotechnical systems that are required to recognize technical problems and to conceptualize, formulate, research, develop, test, apply, diffuse and maintain effective solutions to those problems as they change through time (Nightingale, 2014), we can perceive educational policy and practice as technologies and reframe the wp of IE for pwd/sen, shaping a new potential solution within the commons paradigm.

The Interdisciplinary Digital Educational Commons (IDEC)

The proposed knowledge commons is called Interdisciplinary Digital Educational Commons (IDEC). IDEC is a digital educational commons enhanced by four disciplines: Science-Technology-Society (STS), History/Historiography of Technology (HoT), Philosophy of Technology (PoT) and Transition Design Studies (TDS). The opportunities and challenges that the four disciplines represent in the process of designing a just/equitable education for pwd/sen are described in the following paragraphs.

Discipline 1: Science-Technology-Society

The discipline of STS studies offers citizens of modern societies the resources with which to evaluate the benefits and the risks, the perils and the promises of advances in science and technology. The biggest challenge within the STS discipline is making the study of Disability-Education-Technology-Society relationships a research priority. Within STS, researchers

may study the impact of educational policy and practice, as technologies, to pwd/sen and their lives.

Discipline 2: History/Historiography of Technology

Within the discipline of HoT, historians of technology study selected novelties when they were new or in historically familiar surroundings, with the aim of illuminating the technology-society relation. They also study histories of particular technologies, the nature of technological change, technologies in use, users of technologies, etc. The biggest challenge for the HoT discipline is focusing on technology concerning the education of pwd/sen, e.g. the history of the technology of student assessment, etc.

Discipline 3: Philosophy of Technology

The discipline of PoT is a highly interdisciplinary one. It consists of insights from different kinds of technologies, epistemological approaches and philosophical schools of thought. The PoT, taken as a whole, presents an understanding of the consequences of technological impacts relating to the environment, the society and human existence. The biggest challenge for the PoT discipline is making the study of the philosophy of educational policy and practice a research priority. Within this particular discipline, researchers may focus on technologies concerning the education of pwd/sen, e.g. the philosophy of technology of student assessment, on defining concepts such as d/sen, equity, quality, etc, and on identifying tensions and dilemmas in educational policy and practice.

Discipline 4: Transition Design Studies

Within the TDS discipline, there is a heightened awareness of the wp confronting us and an acknowledgment that they are interconnected. The biggest challenge is making the study of the transition from SE to IE a research priority. Within the TDS discipline, researchers may study the IE of pwd/sen as a wp and research the visions, the theories of change, the mindsets/postures and new ways of designing the IE paradigm within the Transition Design Framework (Irwin 2015).

Discussion

> Education systems are only as inclusive as their creators make them. Countries can choose to address inclusion in a piecemeal

approach or they can tackle the entire set of challenges head on. Inclusion is not just for policymakers, imposed from above. It will never work (UNESCO 2020).

The IE for pwd/sen, being a wp, needs to be redefined. The argument presented in this paper is the following: (1) the 'inclusive turn' is happening worldwide, (2) education systems are on transition from SE to IE, (3) the discussion about the transition is ongoing and fierce, (4) IE, according to the evidence provided by this study, can be identified as a wp, (5) wp are hard to solve, (6) we need to establish a new goal for the education of pwd/sen, (7) The new goal: a just/equitable education for pwd/sen, (8) The proposition: an enhanced educational knowledge commons.

The proposed educational knowledge commons IDEC is designed to be a collective project that aims at the co-design of a just/equitable education for pwd/sen. Consisting of more than teachers, learners and their guardians, IDEC can develop new frames of reference for the process of co-designing, inspired by disciplines that perceive educational policy and practice as technologies to be studied and understood in depth and in numerous ways: in their social contexts and human-material relationships, as histories/historiographies, as philosophies and as transition processes. The IDEC proposition is open to discussion.

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