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Inclusive Pedagogy in Iceland between Behaviourism and Social Constructivism[1]

This chapter is on two different learning theories and examples of how they are implemented in schools in Iceland. First two narratives are introduced, then a short explanation of the learning theories are given – in quite different ways which meet the logics of them. At the end the differences and how they relate to inclusion are discussed.

1 Introduction – two stories from Icelandic schools

Organised by the German education union of Saxony in October 2021, a group of teachers and students saw quite different situations and approaches in Icelandic schools. Here are two stories which show this.

> In one school the group was told that one important part of inclusive education is to learn to read and write in a very differentiated and individualised way. So, during the week there are daily situations in which the children are mixed by age and grouped homogeneously by reading abilities and reading speed. And then they start speed reading for one minute – supervised by a special needs teacher with a stop watch. Later the evaluating special needs teacher tells the group to like this way of learning because children also like to become better and faster: "they feel like they're successful, they feel like they're making progress." So, the acceptance of everyone is supported: "If the kids in the group are at the same spot, like in reading lessons, the groups can grow." Especially kids at-risk who should not be left behind "will get exactly what they need at that point." And "the experience is always good." In this school, this is an important part of inclusive education. The school has a contract with the university for students to learn how direct instruction and precision learning works. There are also parts of inclusive education like 'independent work', open play, and others.

> In another school the next day the group was told that for this school being a community of quite diverse people is the base of inclusive education. Of course, a differentiated way of learning is needed; this is done in a very flexible and situation-oriented way, with a team structure and a common responsibility – and most forefront: in dialogue with the children (see Kruschel & Schulte in this volume). During a meeting with some teachers they tell the visitors that most students of this school have known each other for a long time, maybe from grade 1 or even nursery. And so, they have lots of situations in which students support one another – and teachers "stand back" and let this "normal thing between teenagers" happen, with joy. In the same meeting a teacher for special needs education speaks about dialogues with "my children" – provoking raised eyebrows by some of the listeners. Immediately another teacher, specialist for Icelandic as a second language, says: "They are also mine." And so says the third teacher, a specialist for IT – and all of them start laughing: "We are all willing to share!" Now, the eyebrows come down again. The team shows a big table with nine colors in a list of all members of one class and their subjects, which show different levels of learning and support – and they say it is a just snapshot from last month, it could and will change in every month. And it is not a plan for activities of children but a help for reflection in the team and for having everyone in mind. There is a common responsibility for a wide range of 'special needs' in this

school. And even if there is a 'special room' with the focus on students with autism (or other needs) it is not a duty to get special education there. They all belong to a class and their peers. The 'special room' is not less and not more than a 'save place' they can go to if they need retreat or if they need to meet specific persons, often together with their peers.

Just to give a short comment: For the German group, it was nice to see such big differences in schools. It shows that each and every school takes the necessity seriously to build a genuine concept for learning and participation of their children. Nevertheless, there are different tendencies which raise fundamental educational questions, especially in the context of inclusive pedagogy.

In the first school it was obvious that they build on theories of behaviourism in their pedagogy and that the other school it looks like they build more on social theories as they construct the learning for their students. To try to understand these different approaches in more depth it makes sense to look more into these different theories behind learning and teaching and the pedagogy of inclusion.

2   Behaviourism

Practice built on behaviourism was obvious in some of the schools the German group visited and to explain it in more details the focus will first be on the theory behind the practical approach and then on the different practice in the schools.

2.1 Behaviourism as a theoretical approach

Behaviourism as a learning theory emphasises that behaviours are learned through interaction with the environment and that inherited sources have very little influence on behaviour. Behaviours can be learnt through classical conditioning, association, operant conditioning, or as consequences. Behaviourist define "learning as an enduring change in behaviour as a result of experience" or an interaction with the environment (Wolery, Bailey & Sugai, 1988, p. 3). The behavioural theory rests on the assumptions that behavioural components are antecedents conditions prior to a behaviour, the response to the antecedents and the consequences that occur afterwards. The behavioural approach focuses on observable learning (Wolery, Bailey & Sugai, 1988). Behaviour analysis studies the behaviour of human with a focus to understand, explain, describe, and predict behaviour (Wolery, Bailey & Sugai, 1988). Applied behaviour analysis (ABA), is the functional form of behaviour analysis and focuses on practical demonstrations of behaviour analysis in school, community, work, and home contexts (Wolery, Bailey & Sugai, 1988). According to Horner & Sugai (2015) ABA is a scientific discipline that applies empirical approaches based upon the principles of respondent and operant conditioning to change behaviour of social significance.

The ABA focuses on changing the behaviour by first assessing the functional relationship between a targeted behaviour and the environment. Further, the approach often seeks to develop socially acceptable alternatives for aberrant behaviours (Horner & Sugai, 2015). The following five features are used to define ABA: Applied and behavioural, analytic and conceptual, techno-logical, effective, and generality (Wolery, Bailey & Sugai, 1988). The promise of applied behavior analysis is that the understanding of human behaviour will have direct impact on improving social systems. The challenges faced in schools, families, work places, and communities require application of behavioural theory (Horner & Sugai, 2015).

Positive behaviour support (PBS) is a practical approach within this framework and the goal is to decrease problem behaviours and improving quality of life of individuals of all ages and abilities (Sugai et al., 2000). It grew from the scientific and procedural foundations of ABA and

is an intervention technology based on social, behavioural, educational and biomedical science that combines evidence-based practices with formal system change strategies (Carr et al., 2002; Dunlap et al. 2008). The focus is on both improving the valued lifestyle options available for an individual and reducing problem behaviours or an instance of behaviour analysis (Carr et al., 2002). The approach begins by defining the school most highly valued outcomes (e.g., reading, math, writing, and social behaviour), and the next step is to select the smallest set of research validated procedures needed to deliver these outcomes. At least 80 % of the target population needs to achieve the outcome for it to be considered. Most often schools focus on establishing a school-wide positive social culture that includes (Horner, Sugai & Anderson, 2010; Luiselli, Putnam & Sunderland, 2002; Sugai et al. 2014)

- defining and teaching a small set of behavioural expectations (e.g., be respectful, be responsible, and be safe),

- establishing a universal system for reinforcing performance of these expectations,

- implementing a consistent system for interrupting, correcting, and redirecting behavioural errors,

- building an efficient system to collect, summarise, and use data for decision-making.

2.2 Applied Behaviour Analysis in one school in Iceland

To show a picture of how APA works it makes sense to take an example from one school and introduce the school curriculum and the teaching methods applied in the school (the indented text is taken from the public homepage of the school). According to the school curriculum and information gained at the visit the methods of applied behaviour analysis (APA) are used as a guide to support the infrastructure of the schoolwork.

> Evidence-based and effective methods are used to assess behaviour and learning and design strategies to teach skills with student interests in focus. With effective teaching methods, students get the opportunity to demonstrate, maintain and generalise competence in a specific learning outcome more quickly than they could have done by themselves or with teaching methods that would have demonstrated less success.

The school does not use one educational or pedagogical strategy, but the staff has selected several ways to achieve certain goals in different areas. The following methods are on the list of these different strategies in the school curriculum.

Teaching methods

For teaching reading, mathematics, writing, and social behaviour the school has chosen teaching methods that build on the behavioural learning theory. In their school curriculum the reason is explained as follows.

> The school has adopted researched based and effective ways of teaching children to read. The methods are Engelmann's Direct Instruction (DI) and physical training based on Ogden Lindsley's method, Precision Teaching (PT). Students' skills are built in a systematic way and progressive requirements. Research has shown the success of these methods, on the one hand, guided teaching in introducing and teaching items, and on the other hand, dexterity training, which is well suited to speed up learning by training dexterity. Student performance is measured accurately, and results are recorded. The method therefore also acts as an evaluation tool for the student's progress and the effectiveness of the teaching.

> Engelmann's direct teaching is based on methods of systematic direct, clear, and controlled teaching. All students are arranged in groups according to their skills in the subject, so that the teaching is best focused on the needs of everyone. The lesson is predetermined and structured

in an organised way. It is taught according to a detailed script that requires a lot of activity and participation on the part of the students at all levels of the study, from the basics to understanding and speed.

The direct teaching is teacher oriented as the teacher not only plans the lesson but directs the students through the tasks. According to the school curriculum other methods are also used in teaching reading and one of them is Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies for kindergarten students (K-PALS).

> K-PALS – a teaching method in phonemic awareness and reading instruction, where students train each other on a peer basis.

In the school curriculum it is recognised that it is very important to pay attention to social behaviour, and the school has adopted different methods to use to receive their target goal for acceptable behaviour in the school.

> Friendship – Blue –The friendship project is based on the latest research on bullying. Key concepts are tolerance, respect, caring and courage.

> ART (Aggression Replacement Training) is a pedagogical training model that supports students to build social skills, self-control and morals.

> YAP (Young Athletes Program) – An international project run by the Special Olympics organization.

> PECS (The Picture Exchange Communication System) is a picture exchange system that has been used mainly with children with autism spectrum disorder, who have limited or no communication skills and do not have the skills to use speech to communicate.

> DT (Discrete Trials) are used to teach new or complex skills that require a lot of attention from a child.

The PBS has been applied in all pre- and compulsory schools in one town and together with that some schools around the country have applied this method in their school. PALS is used in some schools. These teaching methods are introduced as very promising methods, research based and considered to be best practices – "always working precisely" as the special education teacher tells the German visitors.

In their research Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling (2012) found that it was typical that special education looked towards behavioural psychology, medicine, and psychometrics for its theoretical grounding. A perspective that calls for identifying the deficit skill that hinders learning, and then finding the most effective teaching strategies (best practice) to teach that skill. This promises a lot of certainty to parents, students, and teachers. At the same time general, multicultural and subject education looks rather at education from a more social justice perspective, e. g. anthropology, sociology, cultural psychology, and sociolinguistics.

3   Social Constructivism – social justice and human rights

General teacher educators working from a social justice orientation are committed to a social constructivist view of learning, which situates human learning in the context of human relations. According to constructivism students can come to know the truth or learn about the world with different degrees of validity and accuracy and there is no single valid methodology, but a diversity of useful methods. From this point of view, it is the environment that disables people rather than each person is disabled (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012). Globally, differentiated pedagogies and outcomes reflecting the abilities and preferences of learners, their families, communities and cultures are favoured over educational systems based on notions of normalising students (Kozleski et al., 2014). This means that while the needs of learners and

their families can be considerably different, not every school has to be a warehouse for all the possible variance.

Inclusive pedagogy is fundamentally grounded in the principles of social justice, democracy, human rights, and full participation of all (Ainscow, 2020; Boban & Hinz 2022; Florian, 2008; Guðjónsdóttir & Jónsson, 2011; Karlsdóttir, 2009; also Jörgensdóttir Rauterberg & Hinz in this volume). These principles are connected and dependent on each other in various ways. A socially just education system is premised on the beliefs that quality education is the democratic right of all rather than a prise to be competitively fought for (Reay, 2012).

A fundamental premise in the inclusive pedagogy approach is based on rejecting ability labelling as a deterministic notion of fixed ability that has historically underpinned the structure of education (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Thus, inclusive pedagogy is particularly aimed at contesting practices that represent provision for most with additional or different experiences for some, because the very act of focusing on difference intensifies the isolation and marginalisation of children and adds to the social construction of disability (Grenier, 2010). So, it seems to be much more inclusive to see a heterogeneous learning group as a "undividable spectrum" (Hinz, 2004, 45) of same *and* different individuals instead of a "two-group-theory" (Hinz, 2004, 45) continuing from segregation understandings.

Three fundamental pedagogical principles are necessary for the development of inclusive practices (Hart, Drummond & McIntyre, 2007).

- The classroom teacher is responsible for and committed to the education of all the students in their classroom, not just some of them.
- The students are seen as active agents in their education and
- the teacher trusts that they want to learn and does not blame them when it doesn't happen (or it happens differently than intended), instead asks what needs to be changed in the learning environment.

The practice of inclusive education is grounded in a pedagogy that includes more than a skill in using prescribed instructional practices. Rather, this practice integrates professional knowledge about learning, teaching and child development, and involves an ethical and social commitment to children. Pedagogical qualities of the responsive professional teacher are witnessed in teachers who understand child development and individual differences (Guðjónsdóttir, 2000) – with respect to different constructions of potential racist, classist, sexist, ableist, etc. marginalisation.

The general school curriculum and an access to it for all learners matters. The context of the learning environment affects how and what people learn and therefore it matters how learning opportunities are created and that they are for all learners. Gaining more access to the general curriculum for those with special needs has been a strong agenda for inclusive education for many years. The information age has greatly influenced the personalised and contextualised learning spaces created in schools, meaning that the hierarchies and structures governing these spaces have transformed. All students bring valuable resources and experiences to the classroom – their talents, strengths and skills, built upon their personal experience, knowledge and beliefs. Teachers who understand their students' resources can better attune their teaching to their students (Jackson, Ryndak & Wehmeyer, 2008; Rodriguez, 2007). Hence, inclusive practice is distinct in the ways that teachers respond to diversity, how they make decisions about group work and employ specialist knowledge (Florian, 2010).

Important elements of teaching approaches that provide an opportunity for all students to succeed include comprehensive and systematic ways to gather information about students, connections between learning and their lives, and a focus on flexibility and open-endedness of

the curricula. A flexible curriculum with alternatives gives teachers a chance to respond to the differences in each class (Guðjónsdóttir, 2003; Rouse, 2008).

Research into effective inclusive classrooms and schools has portrayed the following areas as important for the development of inclusive practices (Guðjónsdóttir, 2000; Ferguson, 2008; Meijer, 2003):

- an emphasis on student-centred and activity-based learning,

- a focus on the classroom environment for diverse groups of students,

- methods for designing universal curricula and teaching,

- collaboration with colleagues and parents.

With these areas in mind it is needed to look for teaching and learning methods that are student centred, flexible, emphasise students choice, cooperation, in(ter)dependence and suitable for diverse groups of students (Guðjónsdóttir & Óskarsdóttir, 2017).

These beliefs are integral to inclusive education systems as those advocating for critical social justice seek a world that is fair and builds on equity for everyone, not that everyone gets the same to reach their goals. Inclusion furthermore implies a shift from emphasising the source of learning difficulties or difficulties in school as coming from within the students or stemming from his/her social circumstances to viewing the problem as the influence of the system of education or the environment (UNESCO, 2009). So, it is logical to provide support primarily in a systemic way as support to a group or a class and only secondly with a close personal connection to an individual – which could result in socially disabling and marginalising processes (see Sigþórsson et al., Óskarsdóttir et al., and Köpfer & Óskarsdóttir in this volume).

4 Discussion

On one hand, it seems as if these two main approaches show different pedagogical worlds – the way of thinking and the way of setting priorities are so different (and so it is in the presentation of these theories in this chapter). On the other hand, there are no two homogeneous blocks of understandings – there is no either or, polarised thinking or all-or-nothing. Instead of that there is a spectrum between different understandings with endless varieties of practices.

Nevertheless, it seems to make sense to reflect the contradictions between a behaviourist and a social constructivist understanding of pedagogy (see Fig. 1).

Explaining the table: A *Teacher-centred* approach is characterised by a strategy where the teacher is actively involved in teaching while the students follow or are in receptive mode. The teacher-centred approach builds on the *didactic approach* or on a *structured programme* (best practice). This approach to learning has been the dominant method of instruction for a long time and is based on the belief that the teacher is the expert and the source of knowledge. The teacher presents the knowledge to the students through *lectures, textbooks, demonstration, reading, discussion, practice-based strategies* and other didactic strategies where the students are doing the same thing at the same time. *Direct instruction* is one of the teacher-centred strategies, in which a teacher presents information while typically standing at the front of a classroom and leads the students through the tasks. Having the teacher be the focus allows for a streamlined learning process and it is often said that it is conducive for discipline. On the other hand, the drawbacks to the teacher-centred approach is that it can be too restrictive and hold back creativity, it can limit students' ability to explore and ask questions and it can lead to students feeling like they are not capable of learning on their own. Very often there are students in the class who feel unable to keep up with the classroom pace.

Behaviourist pedagogy	Social constructivist pedagogy
Teacher-centred with structured programme	Student-centred with learning spaces for students
Mainly influenced by the deficits of the child	Influenced by lots of systems (systemic) resources
Students are following the programme	Students are learning from the environment, choosing from different options
Teaching strategies	Teaching methods
Individual learning	Individualised and collaborative learning
Praising, rewarding and punishing	Giving feedback
Assessment by tests	Assessment by reflection of processes
Reducing complexity	(preferably) meeting complexity
Strengthening the traditional system	Facing a transformation challenge

Fig. 1. Main aspects of behaviourist and social constructivist pedagogy (own figure)

The intention of *student-centred learning* is to move the learners from "defensive" receivers of information (Holzkamp 1995, 441) to "expanding" participants (Holzkamp 1995, 491) in their own discovery process and to encourages them to continually sharpen the skills they'll use throughout their lives. The focus is on creating a *learning space* for the students using methods that give the students to be active in their learning. These are for examples *inquiry-based* learning that begin with problems that are considered from a learner's perspective. The purpose is to lead students to move beyond basic knowledge to a deeper understanding of *critical thinking, evidence-based reasoning, and creative problem-solving. Project-based learning* involves creating a highly collaborative environment where students examine questions and challenges stemming from the real world. Students explore a real problem and map out solutions together, often presenting their work publicly at the end of the unit. This method opens up a learning space for students to gain knowledge that transfers seamlessly to their daily lives. Following a constructivist viewpoint, the main aim is that the students are active sense-makers, learning to learn in a sustainable fashion and are not expected to learn the same, at the same speed, or employ the same approach (Wolfe, Steinberg & Hoffman, 2013).

Since teaching and learning built on behaviourism emphasises that behaviours are learned through interaction with the teacher, *praising and punishment* is a big factor in the teaching strategies. The teachers focus on rewarding students as they show the desired learning, behaviour or accomplishments believing that will have positive effects on the students and enhance their motivation and boost their self-esteem. On the other hand, some students will not receive positive praise very often and might therefore experience failure; also the ‚responding ones‘ could increasingly get dependent on external praise. Students accomplishments are assessed through testing, tasks and grading. The grades play a big role in assessment of learning, and it is assumed that students desire good grades and will therefore do what needs to be done to receive them.

Student-centred assessment involves active engagement of students themselves (Guðjónsdóttir & Óskarsdóttir, 2017). In student centred learning environments students along with their teacher set their goals for their learning, observe their progress, and decide how to address any holes in the learning. It matters that students are actively engaged in their learning paths by having intrinsic motivation. So, they are encouraged to review their work, identify their progress as well as areas that need improvement. Putting ownership on students will more likely promote sustainable, self-regulated learning and reduce discipline challenges.

By using structured programmes with ready-made strategies or offering tools and toolboxes for teachers the intention is probably with good thoughts to reduce the complexity of teaching, but might just increase linear thinking, control and predictability (Gough, 2012). For at least the last two decades there has been an increasing emphasis on making education an evidence-based practice linking measured educational involvements and the measurement of outcomes (Gough, 2012).

Acknowledging complexity creates a space to ask questions about how *complexity reduction* is achieved and who is reducing complexity and for whom and in whose interests (Biesta, 2009). By *meeting complexity*, it invites to think teaching as an open, recursive, natural, nonlinear and promising activity. Complexity offers different ways to think about education, from qualification of knowledge and skills to becoming unique individuals (Biesta, 2006). The world is constantly changing and in a way that calls for transformation in education (Hecht, 2011).

The *traditional education* or systems have not worked for all students, some were privileged and some were disadvantaged (and some of them both in different ways intersectional) – strengthening the reproduction of the hierarchy of society in and by education. So, it is necessary to call for change, face the *challenge of transformation* and move into a system that is open for diversity and social justice.

Sometimes there are tendencies to mix both approaches. An impressive example for that is cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is one of the methods where the emphasise is to teach students to work together and to maximise their own and each other's learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). It can be organised as both formal and informal learning as students complete jointly specific tasks and assignments or to achieve a joint learning goal. Mixing these two approaches often causes problems and taking existing lessons, curricula or courses adding think-pair-share as a five minutes task during Teacher-centred class will not really teach students to work together in a democratic way. It looks more like a short break up often used to convince others that students have opportunities to be active and collaborate.

Even it seems to be the case that educational systems like in the US or Canada have the behaviourist tradition 'in their educational DNA'. So, it is no problem for many to build inclusive pedagogy on a behaviourist base. But this creates massive contradictions, if inclusive pedagogy has a critical view of any hierarchies and domination structures, favouring a democratic and partnership understanding of pedagogy. Then it becomes questionable how to 'make' students to 'appropriate Canadian citizens' in and through 'inclusive settings' with tendencies towards normalcy, adultism, colonialism – to indigenous peoples –, and ableism (Boban & Hinz 2022). But there are also controversies, opposing tendencies and strong criticism, e.g. from indigenous perspectives.

5   Conclusion – core aspects of inclusive pedagogy

The differences in the two theoretical approaches could be based in a different anthropological understanding of the child. A behaviourist understanding would mean that the child must be guided to become a social being in society by following well-structured programmes. Included in this is a 'freeing-process' of their self-centeredness to social connections. A social constructivist understanding would mean that the child is already competent, has empathy etc. and has to be accompanied into the world with masses of opportunities. Therein included is a 'freeing-process' of removing barriers of any kind – from discrimination of children by adults through adultism to communication. These are extremely different freeing-processes, and it is obvious that inclusive pedagogy fits to the second understanding. And this is about all children – every child, irrespective of being labelled as disabled or whatever, has resources and abilities which need to be supported by pedagogues – and not 'fixed' by training.

Based on this thought there are three main aspects which seem to be crucial for the understanding of inclusive pedagogy.

First, students need to be subjects of their own learning (Jörgensdóttir Rauterberg 2022; Jörgensdóttir Rauterberg & Hinz in this volume). The more opportunities they have the better. Children can strengthen their self-esteem and realise self-efficacy by participation in their own learning processes (Jürgens, 2020) and in school development (Hinz et al., 2013). So, it is needed to avoid any tendencies which hinder students to become subjects of their own learning – and behaviourist thinking and acting are some of them (Hopmann, 2022), even if they are combined with active looking phases.

Second, the arrangement of learning opportunities for students and the working space for pedagogues need to be corresponding to students as subjects of their learning. In this sense, the results of Icelandic studies on teacher work have shown that collaboration, teamwork and team teaching have positive effect on communication and cooperation, as well as increasing respect towards students (Karlsdóttir & Guðjónsdóttir, 2022; Sigurgeirsson, 2021; Sigurgeirsson & Kaldalóns, 2017; Svanbjörnsdóttir, 2019). Collaboration is important in all areas of schoolwork, in terms of organization and implementation of teaching but also for all members of the school community, students, parents and experts outside the school. Team teaching is important in terms of enriching learning and teaching.

Third, learning and teaching is an endless process of search – hopefully in a reflecting team, also with parents and with the children themselves. With this view 'diagnostic methods' orientated on reflections of processes (Boban & Hinz, 2016) are more important than on status, deficits and aims of normalisation. And: uncontrollability (as shown in the resonance theory; Rosa, 2017) and contingency (as shown as "technology deficit" in the systems theory; Tenorth, 1986) are always important aspects of reflection – no one knows really what is going on in learning processes but everyone needs the feeling for planning that all know it.

So, at the end it could sound a bit contradictory if it was written at the beginning that it was a good experience for the German visitors to see so different school practices on the base of different pedagogies or even philosophies of pedagogy. And it is! For the reflection of the visitors it was wonderful to see these differences but for the children learning in both schools…

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