

Inclusion of children identified as having special educational needs (SEN) within the Austrian compulsory educational system

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Resumo

Este artigo pretende descrever vários aspetos da segregação, integração e inclusão dentro do sistema educativo obrigatório austríaco. Após uma introdução que contém definições e um resumo internacional, será brevemente descrito o sistema educativo da Áustria. Subsequentemente, três temas de interesse serão debatidos. Primeiro será caracterizada a situação atual referente à inclusão de crianças com necessidades educativas especiais. Esta situação difere bastante entre estados federais. Serão descritos os desenvolvimentos que conduziram à situação atual. Em segundo serão apresentados estudos empíricos recentes



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relativos ao movimento austríaco que almeja a inclusão. Em terceiro e a título exemplificativo serão apresentados em detalhe alguns desenvolvimentos recentes, alguns planos e visões futuras de três estados federais austríacos.

Palavras-chave: Inclusão, Necessidades Educativas Especiais

Abstract

The present paper aims at describing various aspects of segregation, integration and inclusion within the Austrian compulsory school system. After a general introduction which includes definitions and a short international overview, the Austrian compulsory school system is described shortly. Subsequently, three subjects of interest are discussed. Firstly, the current situation of inclusion of children identified as having special educational needs (SEN) is characterized. This is very different in each one of the federal states, and the various developments which led to this situation are described. Secondly, recent empirical studies on the Austrian movement towards inclusion are shown in a brief overview. Thirdly, by way of example, recent developments, further plans and future visions of three federal states of Austria are presented in more detail.

Key words: Inclusion, Special Educational Needs

Résumé

Cet article prétend décrire les différents aspects de la ségrégation, intégration et inclusion dans le système éducatif obligatoire autrichien. Après une introduction générale qui comprend des définitions et une perspective internationale, nous décrivons le système éducatif en Autriche. Ensuite, trois thèmes d'intérêt seront discutés. En premier lieu, la situation actuelle d'inclusion des enfants ayant des besoins éducatifs particuliers sera décrite. Cette situation diffère dans chacun des états fédéraux; les diverses conditions qui conduisent à la situation actuelle seront présentées. Deuxièmement, de récentes études empiriques qui abordent le mouvement vers l'inclusion seront présentées. Troisièmement et à titre d'exemple, les développements récents, plans et visions futures de trois états fédéraux seront présentés plus en détail.

Mots Clés :

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNESCO, 2006) was signed by many European countries, the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) has been on the agenda of many countries. Even though the concept of inclusion is widely recognized, its realization leaves a lot to be desired, and neither the teachers nor the schools are ready for its implementation. Hence, there is still quite a long way to go until the idea will have been put into practice completely and successfully. Concerning the definition of the term inclusion, disagreement is still common (Keramitchievska-Biljanovska, Mitrevska, & Sabolich, 2004). To clarify the approach of inclusion, it may be helpful to compare integration to inclusion. In educational systems, the term *integration* describes the placement of a specific

child (in our case a student with special educational needs) in mainstream schools, i.e. into an existing system which may be rather inflexible and uncompromising. Starting from this concept, one tries to integrate formerly rejected, excluded and side-lined children into society (Lebenshilfe, 2010). In contrast, an *inclusive setting* describes an already existing system prepared for different individuals and their unique requirements (Lebenshilfe, 2010). Thus, the organization takes care of each child and its needs. Each child is seen as a unique valuable individual with special abilities. Heterogeneity and diversity are welcome and respected as a precious resource. Therefore, each school needs to be prepared for various individual circumstances. Hence, inclusion can be described as a process, whereas integration is rather a state (Rieser, 2014). As a quite often used index, the integration/inclusion rate describes the percentage of students identified as having SEN who do not attend a special school but are somehow – either really included or at least partly integrated – taught in mainstream schools.

When mentioning the terms integration and inclusion, one needs to keep in mind their opposite, i.e. *segregation*, too. Segregation means that pupils identified as having SEN are taught separately, namely in a special school. Special schools usually are located in another building than mainstream schools. Often in this context, the segregation ratio is mentioned as an index. This index refers to the ratio between the total number of compulsory school students and students identified as having SEN who are taught in special schools (e.g. Flieger, 2012).

The development towards, as well as the status quo of inclusive education differs considerably between the countries in Europe. The following data is based on information of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2010a; for further country information see <http://www.european-agency.org/>). In general, in Europe, the integration/inclusion rate is about 55%. When looking at the numbers more specifically, some countries show a rather low percentage of pupils identified as having SEN who do not attend a special school. In Germany for instance, the majority of students identified as having SEN are taught in special schools. There, only 17% of these students at compulsory school age are educated in either integrative or inclusive settings. Other countries have less special schools, e.g. Portugal, and are doing quite a good job when it comes to integration and inclusion. There are only private special schools and no public ones. Therefore, the integration/inclusion rate of 93% is rather high. Nevertheless, there are many segregated special classes in public mainstream schools. In France also, there is quite a high inclusion/integration rate (79%). However, also in this case, more students identified as having SEN attend segregated special classes rather than inclusive settings. In Austria, 59% of the students are in integrative/inclusive settings. Of these 59%, nearly all students are in really inclusive settings (96.6%) because there are hardly any segregated classes in mainstream schools (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2010b). To conclude, it can be noted that, when looking at the rather big differences between the countries, a higher commitment towards inclusion is urgently needed especially when looking at the “real inclusion rate” (the big differences between the countries in terms of segregated classes or full inclusion).

In the present article, a closer look is taken at Austria and its development towards inclusion, the current state of this development as well as Austria’s future plans on inclusive education.

1.1 Aims and purpose

Firstly, a brief introduction about the Austrian compulsory educational system is given in order to ensure that the reader possesses the information needed to understand the Austrian context. Secondly, the current educational choices and options of children identified as having SEN are shortly discussed to show the status quo of inclusion (legislatively and practically) in Austria. Thirdly, three subjects of interest are presented. These subjects focus on three different aspects. Broadly speaking, they are concerning the *development of, the empirical research on and future visions and plans regarding the movement towards inclusive education in Austria.*

The *first subject of interest* takes into account the status quo in Austria and its federal states, focusing on the historical development of integration and inclusion of children identified as having SEN in Austria. More precisely, we aimed at finding answers to the following central questions: what is the current situation in Austria and its federal states, respectively, like? Which developments have led to the current situation? How, when and where did the movement towards inclusion in Austria start? Who were significant people who dared the first steps? Where has this development led us to?

The *second subject of interest* pays attention to the current empirical research which has been done during the past five years in the field of integrative and inclusive education. Therefore, the following central questions are asked: what have researchers of inclusive education in Austria been focusing on during the past five years? Which were the areas of interest in empirical research in this field in Austria? Which results have been revealed?

The *third subject of interest* addresses ideas concerning the future development of inclusive approaches in Austria. By way of example, three federal states were chosen to demonstrate different approaches. The three federal states of Tyrol, Carinthia and Styria were singled out to demonstrate any movement towards inclusion via three different approaches. These approaches result from different initial conditions in the three federal states of Austria. With each federal state, one example has been taken to describe a currently rather low, medium or quite high percentage of inclusion scenario. Based on the initial conditions, three different innovative strategies are presented. More precisely, the following central questions have been asked: in which direction is the current inclusion development in Austria heading? What are the plans of Styria, Tyrol and Carinthia (3 federal states of Austria) in terms of allocating resources? Which are the changes to be realized in Styria, Tyrol and Carinthia?

2. AUSTRIA AND ITS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Austria is a small country in Central Europe with 8,401,940 inhabitants (Statistik Austria, 2013). It is divided into 9 federal states (Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, Upper Austria, Vienna, and Vorarlberg; for geographical details see Figure 2). "School attendance is compulsory for all children who are permanent residents of Austria"

(Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen - Federal Ministry for Education and Women's Affairs, 2013). The compulsory education in Austria takes nine years and starts at the age of six, not taking into account the kindergarten years at the ages from three to six. However, the last year of kindergarten has been free of charge for parents since 2009/2010 and, besides, the last year of kindergarten turned to be compulsory in 2010/2011 (Bundeskanzleramt Österreich - Austrian Federal Chancellery, 2014). Therefore, there are actually ten years of compulsory education of which nine are to be attended at school.

The school system is uniform nationwide for all nine federal states and contains a joint education until the age of ten (see Figure 1). Four years of joint education implies an early educational segregation, since the decision on which school to attend after primary school influences the children's later school career. From age six to ten, children are educated together at primary school. Usually, they have one teacher throughout the four years who is responsible for all the subjects at school (e.g. reading, writing, mathematics, geography, etc.). At the age of ten, children can either go to an Academic Secondary School, a Central Secondary School or a New Secondary School. *Academic Secondary Schools* comprise two levels and only the first level accounts for compulsory education in Austria (see Figure 1). This type of school frequently evens the path to university and does not focus on a career in workmanship, which again means an early separation (right after primary school – at the age of ten) of children due to their academic performance and choice. *Central Secondary Schools* focus on a career in workmanship. *New Secondary Schools* have been in existence since 2008/2009 and are supposed to contain aspects of both Central Secondary Schools and Academic Secondary Schools. *New Secondary Schools* are aiming at avoiding this early separation of children (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen - Federal Ministry for Education and Women's Affairs, 2014). These schools will gradually replace Lower Secondary Schools, with full implementation is planned to be achieved in 2015/2016 (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen - Federal Ministry for Education and Women's Affairs, 2013). Already nowadays, more *New Secondary Schools* than *Central Secondary Schools* exist. The last year of compulsory schooling can be completed at Polytechnic Schools, which only comprise one grade. The objective is to prepare pupils for a career focusing on workmanship. Therefore, this type of school is offering, apart from general education classes, vocational orientation and training (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen - Federal Ministry for Education and Women's Affairs, 2013). The ninth year of compulsory schooling can also be completed at Academic Secondary Schools. In other cases, the ninth year of compulsory schooling is also realized when a student needs to repeat a year due to not sufficient achievement.

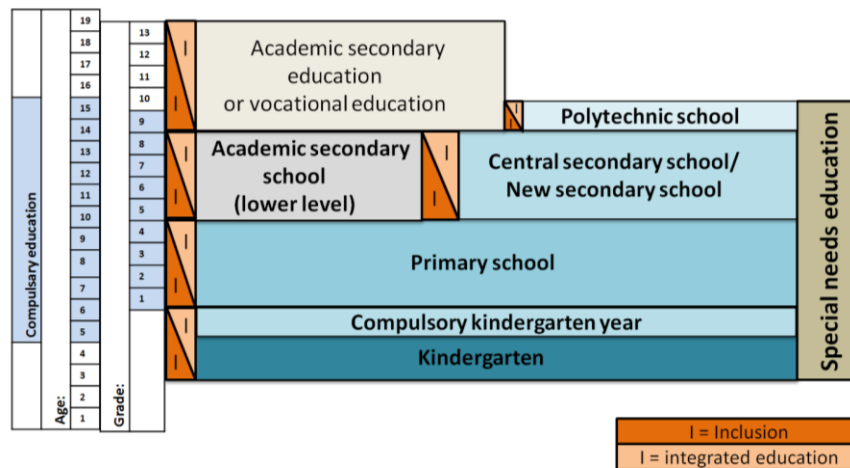


Figure 1 The Austrian education system with a focus on compulsory education

The Austrian school system is rather resistant to change. New approaches face quite a lot of difficulties and unwillingness. Therefore, ambitious persons or groups often rapidly reach their limit when trying to implement renewals or restructuring concerning the educational system. These difficulties are due to the Austrian Constitutional Law which also includes school laws. To achieve changes in these laws, two conditions are required: at least half of the members of parliament need to be present at the council meeting and a two-thirds majority needs to be achieved (Bundeskanzleramt Österreich, 2015). Usually changes concerning established structures can only be realized by means of a project, so called "Schulversuche" (also the New Secondary Schools started off as school projects). These projects have rigid limits in terms of duration and only few schools can participate. Scientific evaluation frequently does not take place and modest financial means are common. School projects rarely are implemented in or have an impact on mainstream schools.

In the next chapters, a focus is laid on integration and inclusion in the Austrian educational system. First, a look at the status quo will describe the current situation in Austria and the differences between the federal states. Second, a short overview will be given about the development of the Austrian inclusive system. These two chapters refer to the first subject of interest and aim at answering the first central questions.

3. INTEGRATION/INCLUSION WITHIN THE AUSTRIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: STATUS QUO AND DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The current situation of integration/inclusion of children identified as having SEN in Austria

In Austria, there exists a so-called two track system (see Figure 1) for students identified as having SEN. For the entire compulsory school career, as well as for the kindergarten, parents of children identified as having SEN get to choose whether their child participates in an integrative/inclusive setting or gets special needs education joint with peers identified as having SEN in a separate setting (Klicpera, 2007). Parents can hence choose between a mainstream school and a special school. In order to facilitate this choice for parents, Special Education Centers are supposed to support parents. Special Education Centers are, still, responsible for all the questions referring to the education and enrollment of children identified as having SEN. This includes assessment and diagnosis of SEN, consulting parents concerning their decision whether they prefer an inclusive setting or a special school for their child, allocation and distribution of resources. However, these Special Education Centers are special schools at the very same time, so besides counseling the parents, Special Education Centers need to consider the management of their own special school. An obvious conflict of roles and interests is the consequence. This conflict and future plans for changing this situation are discussed when undertaking a closer examination of the third subject of interest and its central questions, namely the current developments in the movement towards inclusion.

Even though there is a common legislative regulation in terms of compulsory schooling, the system concerning the kindergarten is anchored within each federal state's jurisdiction (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2010b). This has led to quite a variety of different models for inclusion in kindergarten. There exist inclusive groups as well as individual inclusion in mainstream kindergartens. Additionally, there are remedial kindergartens which can be either public or private institutions (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2013).

As mentioned before, in terms of children identified as having SEN at school age, two different approaches are common and existing side by side within Austria. On the one hand, there are special schools that comprise nine grades (leading to an accomplishment of the compulsory school attendance). These special schools exist in ten different branches, depending on the type of impairment the child shows (e.g. for children with hearing impairment, visual impairment, language disabilities, severe intellectual disabilities, etc.). Special education teachers teach the students by using methods tailored to the individual requirements (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen - Federal Ministry for Education and Women's Affairs, 2013). On the other hand, there are three different models of joint education (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2010b) Firstly, in *inclusive classes*, a team of teachers instruct students with and without SEN. In all lessons, the team of teachers instructs together which means that the children with and without SEN are in the same classroom all day long. Secondly, in *classes with support teachers*, pupils identified as having SEN receive extra support for a few hours per week. This support is offered by a special school teacher in an extra room, whereas the remaining time students identified as having SEN stay

in the mainstream classes. The model of classes with support teachers is only applied when the number of students identified as having SEN is below five (Landesschulrat für Steiermark, 1998). Thirdly, though not found very frequently, there is the model of inclusion summed up as *co-operation classes*. Usually, primary, lower secondary and pre-vocational school classes have different forms of organization than special school classes. However, in this model of inclusion, teachers agree upon a plan of common instruction. This time of instructing pupils together might range from only some time up to the entire time of instruction (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2013).

In Academic Secondary Schools, until today, integration and inclusion have been rare, since the separation of children due to their academic achievement happens at an early stage. Hence, most academic secondary schools have shown an anti-inclusive character; however, there are some exceptions (for further information see Diakonieverein Salzburg, 2009).

3.2 Integrative/Inclusive education in the different federal states

In general, the situation for people with special needs in Austria has been improving (Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz - Federal Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, 2012). The development towards inclusion has been in movement for over three decades; nonetheless, we are still far from reaching a fully inclusive system. Overall, 53.7% of Austrian students identified as having SEN are educated inclusively within mainstream schools (data concerning the school year 2012/2013¹; Statistik Austria, 2014b).

However, inclusion rates, i.e. the percentage of children identified as having SEN taught in inclusive settings instead of being taught in special schools, show a rather high variation when comparing the nine federal states of Austria. In 2009, the federal state of Styria managed to nearly fully realize the idea of inclusion, which can be seen from an inclusion rate of 82.4% (Specht, 2009). However, the inclusion rate declined a little in the subsequent years and in 2012/2013 just 79.1% of the students identified as having SEN in Styria were taught in an inclusive setting (see Figure 2). Although Styria has been in the pole position for many years, in 2012/2013, the federal states of Upper Austria (72%) and of Carinthia (74.8%) were almost at the same level as Styria. In contrast, in three federal states of Austria, only approximately a third of the students identified as having SEN was taught in an integrative/inclusive setting: Tyrol: 29.8%; Vorarlberg: 31% and only 31.9% in Lower Austria. The federal states of Vorarlberg, Burgenland and Vienna are ranking in mid-range between 46% and 55%. When talking about overall figures, one needs to bear in mind that there exist also variations within

¹ This percentage considers students identified as having SEN at the compulsory school age. However, students of academic secondary schools (lower level) are not taken into account in this statistics, as the responsibility of academic secondary schools lies within each federal state and is not regulated on a national level. Primary, Lower Secondary, New Secondary and special schools are based on a common legislative regulation, i.e. on a national level. Therefore, data about the inclusion rate is only available for these schools. However, in general students identified as having SEN up to now have hardly been enrolled at academic secondary schools.

the Federal States in terms of how high the percentage of inclusion is (Flieger, 2014). In Tyrol, for example, the inclusion rate varies between 22.02% and 26.45% (in the capital Innsbruck and its surroundings), 56.10% in Imst (a municipality in Tyrol) and 100% in Reutte (an exceptional district where the last special school closed in 1997, which is unique for Austria) (Flieger, 2014; Friedle, 2006). In the map of Austria (see Figure 2) the different federal states are colored referring to their ratio of inclusive education (Lebenshilfe Österreich, 2010). This map depicts the existing differences in inclusion between the nine federal states in Austria based on statistics of the year 2012/2013 (Statistik Austria, 2014a).

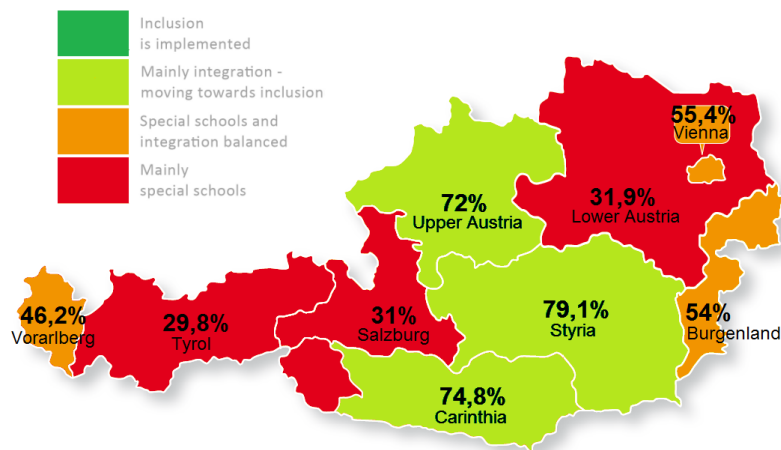


Figure 2. Barometer of Inclusion in the year 2012/2013 (adjusted from a figure published by Lebenshilfe Österreich, 2010; based on data of 2012/2013 Statistik Austria, 2014a)

To better understand where the rather high differences between the federal states of Austria stem from, a closer look into the development of the inclusive movement in Austria is necessary. Therefore, the next chapter focuses on the first steps taken towards integration and inclusion. Moreover, the development from the early 80s to now will be roughly described.

3.3 Development towards an inclusive school system in Austria

Before 1980, all children with special needs in Austria were taught in special schools. There, they stayed until the end of compulsory schooling. This view depicted the idea of segregation where pupils identified as having SEN are educated separately from their peers without SEN who attend mainstream schools. However, over the last three decades, the Austrian school system has been moving towards being more inclusive (Gebhardt, Krammer, Rossmann, & Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2013).

The movement towards integration, and subsequently towards inclusive education, rooted in the early 1980s to a large extent in the federal state of Styria; there, a good cooperation between parents, teachers and in the end also politicians eased the process. Back in the 1980s, the aim was rather an experiment as to if and how integration could work principally speaking. The situation was a fully separated setting for children with and for those without SEN. “Lone fighters”, mainly parents (mothers) of children identified as having SEN, (special) teachers or both, started to consider putting in question the system and its segregating strategies. By realizing that even with highly motivated teachers in special schools, no one could provide contact between children with and without SEN, the need for immediate action was recognized (Gebhardt et al., 2013). In the end, some exceptionally motivated and, one must say rather brave women started an integrative classroom in 1985 in the federal state of Styria. For this integrative classroom, the official authorization was only granted retroactively while this pilot classroom project had already been ongoing. At this starting point, the non-profit association ISI (Initiative Soziale Integration – Initiative for social integration) was founded in Graz, the capital of Styria. ISI has been actively supporting social integration of people with special needs in Styria ever since (ISI – Initiative Soziale Integration, 2014).

Bearing in mind the fact that the integration movement mostly started in the federal state of Styria, one might understand the quick and determined realization (see Figure 3). Additionally, the motivated pioneers in Styria managed, by including politics, to redirect a bottom-up initiative to a top-down process. Three people were literally the engine from the starting point on throughout quite some way of the process (Gebhardt et al., 2013). More precisely, in this special case in Styria, three stakeholders turned from concerned parents or teachers into politicians themselves. How influential these people were in terms of integration in Styria can be proven by a look on the development of integrative and segregative schooling in Styria from 1985/1986 to 2013/2014 (see Figure 3).

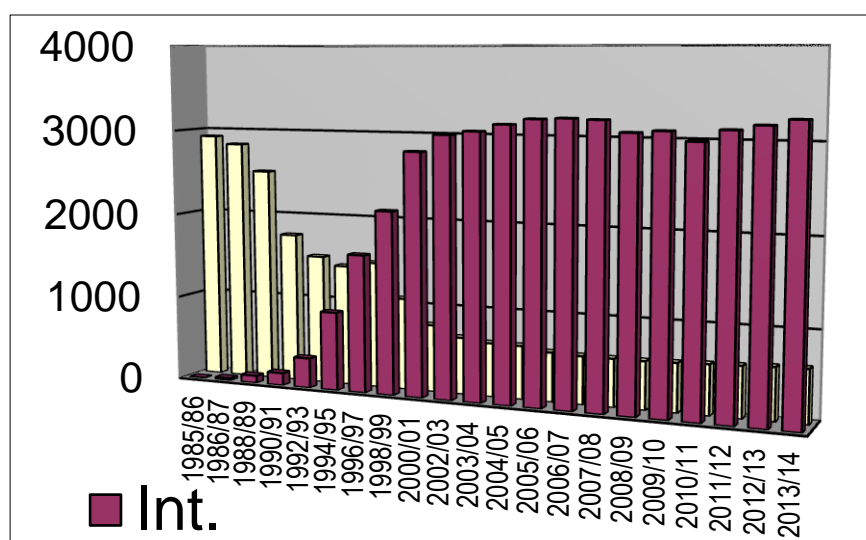


Figure 3. Absolute figures on the development of integration in Styria from 1985 to 2014 (Haucinger, 2014).

Also in other federal states (e.g. Burgenland, Vienna and Tyrol), a movement towards inclusion started in the early 1980s; however, in none of these federal states the cooperation between school authorities and other parties (e.g. teachers and parents) was as well established as in Styria. Hence, the realization of ambitious projects was harder to achieve. By the way of example, Reutte (a district in Tyrol with about 32,000 inhabitants) also already started a pilot project with an inclusive class in 1985 (Friedle, 2006).

In 1987/1988, other integrative classrooms were founded in the rest of Austria, after political stakeholders had started to take interest in the issue. In 1990, the President of the State School Board of the federal state of Styria visited the first inclusive classroom, and thereon had been supporting the movement towards inclusion. With this support on a political level, an initiative of the Federal State Parliament of Styria to completely include children identified as having SEN into regular schools was passed to the Austrian government. From that point onwards, scientific evaluation of school trials was able to take place.

In 1993, the amendment of a law was passed which officially permits an integrative schooling for children identified as having SEN. Even though this law is effective and valid throughout Austria, there are still rather big differences in the rate of integration between the individual federal states. In 1994, delegates of the World Conference on Special Needs Education (from 92 different countries, also from Austria) called “to endorse the approach of inclusive schooling and to support the development of special needs education as an integral part of all education programmes” (UNESCO, 1994). Therefore, inclusive schools are based on the principle that all children, regardless of their difficulties, study together. Schools and teachers have to acknowledge, recognize and respond to the variety of necessities and different learning styles. The framework conditions (administrative, organizational and the ones concerning accessibility) need to allow to meet the continuum of different needs (UNESCO, 1994).

In 1995, Special Education Centers were established nationwide.

In October 2008, Austria signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Bundesgesetzblatt III Nr.155 / 2008; for an English version see http://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXIII/II_00564/imfname_113874.pdf; Bundeskanzleramt Österreich - Austrian Federal Chancellery, 2008). However, until summer 2010, basically nothing happened to put the signed law into practice (Lebenshilfe Österreich, 2010). Thus, the Austrian organization Lebenshilfe Österreich (founded 1967 in order to pursue the interests of persons with intellectual impairment as well as their relatives) published a multi-stage-plan concerning inclusion in the educational system (Lebenshilfe Österreich, 2010). As a first step, the further construction of special schools was to be abandoned and therefore every new built school needed to be an inclusive type of school. This dialogue paper comprised steps concerning the education and formation of teachers and assistants. Also the realization of an internal differentiation within the classroom, i.e. every pupil should be addressed individually in terms of his/her needs, is another focus. Another step to be realized was the implementation of special needs experts into every school where

exists necessity, meaning that no longer the child and his/her parents needed to access the experts; rather it was them you ought to address the parents. In a medium-term perspective (until 2020), inclusive schooling in Austria should be realized, also implying that no longer barriers to higher education should exist, and that lifelong learning should be possible for everybody (Lebenshilfe Österreich, 2010).

In 2012, the National Action Plan on Disability 2012-2020 was published to summarize objectives and specific measures to achieve the aims declared by law in 2008 (Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz - Federal Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, 2012).

Graz, the capital of the federal state of Styria, and the eastern parts of Styria are declared model-regions to pilot school projects aiming at a fully inclusive education throughout Austria, as outlined in the National Action Plan (Die Presse, 2014). A transfer of know-how and experience is therefore seen as a basis for the realization of the National Action Plan until 2020. The pilot project is starting in 2015 and will be supervised and evaluated scientifically by the Inclusive Education unit, University of Graz. Future plans of three different federal states of Austria will be described in chapter 5.

The current development of Austria and its federal states, respectively, can be seen in Figure 4.

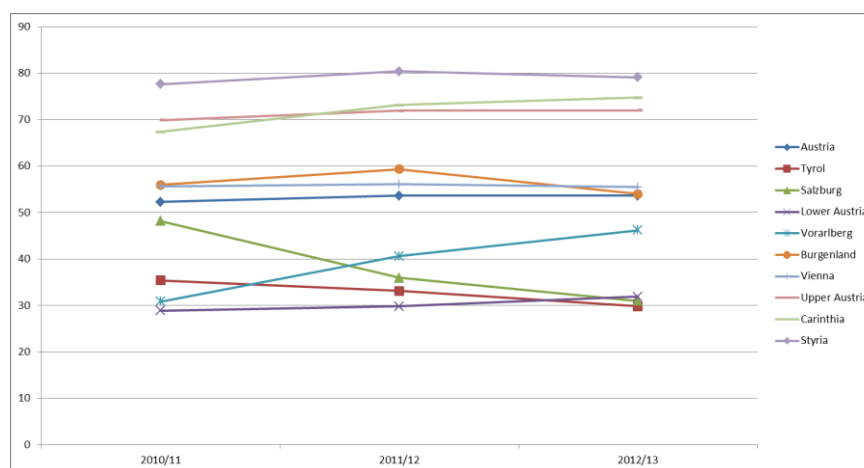


Figure 4. Current development of the inclusion rate in Austria and its federal states, respectively (based on data of 2012/2013 Statistik Austria, 2014a).

4. RECENT EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON INCLUSION IN AUSTRIA

To this day, only few empirical studies investigating inclusive schooling in Austria exist. Most of them were conducted in Styria. One of these is the longitudinal study “SILKE” which

investigated the achievement (Gebhardt, Schwab, Krammer, & Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2012) as well as the social and emotional integration (Schwab, Gebhardt, Krammer, & Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2014) of students with and without SEN. Moreover, administrative characteristics of the Styrian inclusive school system were examined, too (Gebhardt et al., 2012). Regarding the administrative characteristics, the authors pointed out that the numbers of hours of students identified as having SEN varied from 15 to 30 hours a week ($M=22.6$, $SD=4.5$). Moreover, one special education teacher works on average 22.5 h / week in an inclusive classroom (Gebhardt et al., 2012).

Concerning the academic achievement of students identified as having SEN, the results of this study were similar to other findings well documented in the international literature (Blackorby, Chorost, Garza, & Guzman, 2003; Haeberlin, Bless, Moser, & Klaghofer, 1991; Wocken, 2000). This implies that a significant difference exists in the achievement scores in reading and mathematics of students with and without SEN. Students identified as having SEN achieved significantly lower test scores than students without SEN. This was true for basic arithmetic but also for reading, spelling and word decoding. The same applies for social integration, were students identified as having SEN reported to see themselves significantly less socially integrated than students without SEN (Gebhardt et al., 2012). Along these lines, Schwab, Gebhardt, Krammer, and Gasteiger-Klicpera (2014) investigated the social participation of students identified as having SEN. The results indicated that students identified as having SEN experienced also less social participation than students without SEN.

Additionally, the cooperation between the general education teacher and the special education teacher in inclusive classrooms was examined by Gebhardt, Krammer, Schwab, and Gasteiger-Klicpera (2013). The authors came to the conclusion that a small difference existed between the regular teacher and the special education teacher regarding individual education plans in the secondary level. Nevertheless, significant differences were found between teachers at elementary level and teachers at secondary levels. In fact, elementary teachers were more satisfied with the teamwork and the individual educational planning than secondary teachers. This is mainly due to the fact that in elementary school usually one teacher is assigned to a class for a wide range of subjects, whereas at secondary level usually each teacher is responsible for only one subject (Gebhardt et al., 2013).

Some empirical research was realized regarding the diagnostic procedure for identifying students with Learning Disabilities (LD). Most commonly, the discrepancy model is used internationally for identifying LD (Tung-Kuang, Shian-Chang, & Ying-Ru, 2008). In this approach, a discrepancy between the results of an IQ-test and the child's academic achievement leads to the diagnosis of a LD (Peterson & Shinn, 2002). Krammer, Gebhardt, Paleczek, Rossmann, and Gasteiger-Klicpera (2014) pointed out, that standardized IQ scores, and thus the discrepancy model, are not used for identifying LD in the Styrian education system. In fact, a diagnosis of LD in Styria is usually based on poor reading skills, poor basic arithmetic skills, behavioral problems and deficits in the German language (Krammer et al., 2014).

Summing up the results of several empirical studies, teacher's attitudes towards inclusive education in Austria were examined (Gebhardt, Schwab, Reicher, Ellmeier, Gmeiner, Rossmann, & Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2011). In general it could be shown that teachers evaluated

the inclusion of pupils with physical or learning disabilities as less challenging than including students with a mental handicap. A moderate effect differing with the field of work could be revealed as well: teachers in inclusive settings showed a more positive attitude towards inclusion than their colleagues who were not working in inclusive fields (Gebhardt et al., 2011).

As already mentioned, an inclusive setting in Austria consists of a team of two teachers. These teachers need to cooperate in order to successfully realize the idea of inclusion. Schwab, Holzinger, Krammer, and Gebhardt (submitted) were able to show this from the teachers' point of view, teamwork and a positive school climate were essential for successful inclusion. Teamwork in class is quite hard to realize, since children permanently have one teacher (or a team of teachers) only in primary school. After primary school, there are subject teachers who only spend a couple of lessons per week in the classroom. Changes in teacher education and movement towards an understanding that unites general pedagogy and education for children with disabilities would ease the process of meeting the needs of an inclusive classroom.

5. CURRENT DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: MODELS IN THE FEDERAL STATES OF TYROL, CARINTHIA AND STYRIA AS EXAMPLES FOR THE INCLUSIVE PROCESS

In the following chapter, the future plans of three federal states are presented. The federal states are chosen to represent different initial situations as well as different developments. Therefore, each federal state aims at achieving different goals. The federal state of *Carinthia* represents an example of recent growth in the inclusion rate. In 2006/2007 the inclusion rate ranked in the middle field with 58.5%. Due to the latest developments, *Carinthia* has reached an inclusion rate of 74.8%. The federal state of *Tyrol* got chosen to depict the situation and the development from a rather low inclusion rate (35.8% in 2006/2007 and just 29.8 in 2012/2013); however, the high differences within the federal state of *Tyrol* need to be kept in mind. In both *Carinthia* and *Tyrol*, the movement towards inclusion and the strategy planning was triggered by changes in the federal government, as political support of a more progressive educational approach eases the process of changes. The federal state of *Styria* had shown an upward trend over many years. However, the inclusion rate has declined a little recently (from 82.4% in 2006/2007 to 79.1% in 2012/2013). The following part is supposed to answer the central questions of the third subject of interest.

In order to depict Austria's general development, the country's segregation ratio from 1990 to 2000 and from 2009 to 2013, respectively, are shown (see Figure 4).

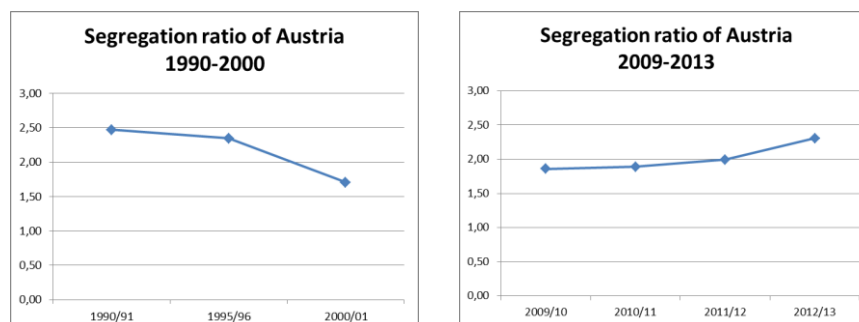


Figure 5. Segregation ratio of Austria 1990-2013 (adjusted from a figure published by Flieger, 2012; based on data of Statistik Austria, 2012, and 2014b).

5.1 The model of flexible management of resources in the federal state of Carinthia

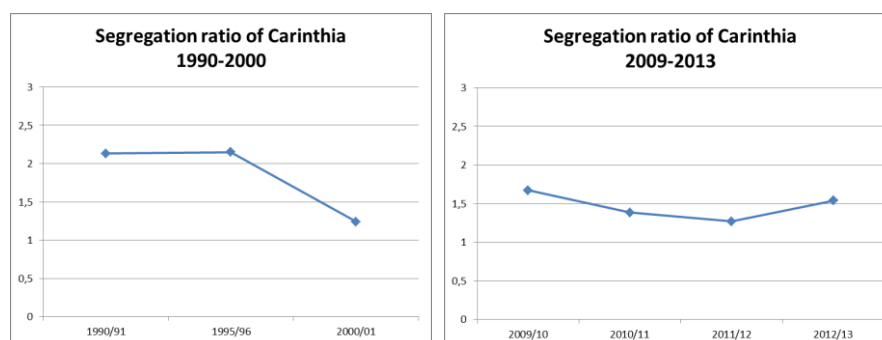


Figure 6. Segregation ratio of the federal state of Carinthia from 1990-2013 (adjusted from a figure published by Flieger, 2012; based on data of Statistik Austria, 2012, and 2014b).

At present, the resources for children identified as having SEN are divided into two parts and the distribution in Carinthia follows two parallel tracks. On the one hand, special schools are financed and each child identified as having SEN gets his/her learning possibilities there. On the other hand, integrated education is offered within a parallel system. Nevertheless, the resources for each child in inclusive classes are much lower than those in special classes. This situation has led to the parent's and teacher's conviction that the special school offers more resources for children identified as having SEN. The integrated setting, however, is seen as the more cost-effective version, which offers less resources and opportunities for children identified as having SEN. Therefore, special schools are still regarded as a very attractive option. Currently, parents are rather skeptical, as many of them have experienced that inclusion does not receive the same resources as special schools. They are concerned that their children identified as having SEN would not get the attention they need and would just run along in mainstream classrooms.

The Carinthian model of flexible resource management aims at improving the support offered in an inclusive setting. Special schools are not developed any further. Instead the available

resources are used to improve the quality of support in inclusive settings. Classrooms with few pupils only are established within compulsory education (primary schools and new secondary schools). These small classrooms offer the necessary infrastructure to support children identified as having SEN. Each child is supported in a school near his or her home. Within the integrated classrooms with small number of children, each child gets as many resources as it has been the case in special schools. Through cooperation with the welfare department, additional out-of-school care is organized. Children can get afternoon care and all necessary nursing requirements are provided. Additional support, which has been only possible in special schools, is possible in inclusive settings to assure the parents that the inclusive classroom can offer the same resources and opportunities for children identified as having SEN as special schools.

Parents have the opportunity to decide whether their child is educated in an integrated classroom or in a small group with other children identified as having SEN. Either way, the two options take place at the very same location.

Critical voices may argue that there is not a lot of change compared to former special schools. Though, the children are still educated separately and inclusion will just happen during music or physical education lessons, occasional encounters during breaks and at school events (e.g. celebrations). This might be true in some aspects; yet, this model represents a huge positive step in the right direction, i.e. inclusion. In a scenario where children with and without SEN are educated side by side, at least it can be hoped that prejudices will diminish and this, in its turn, may lead to further inclusion into the mainstream classroom in future.

5.2 The model of Education Counseling Centers in the federal state of Tyrol

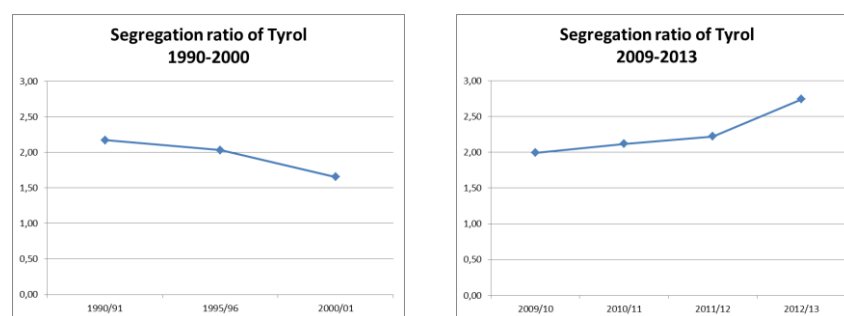


Figure 7. Segregation ratio of the federal state of Tyrol from 1990-2013 (adjusted from a figure published by Flieger, 2012; based on data of Statistik Austria, 2012, and 2014b).

Special Education Centers, in accordance with Article 27a of the School Organization Act (Republik Österreich, 2008a; Federal Law Gazette, BGBl. III No. 155/2008), have so far been treated like special schools. Reutte, a district in Tyrol where the last special school was closed in 1997, has been stressing already for a long time the contradiction of an institution

incorporating both a special school on the one hand and a support center for children identified as having SEN in the mainstream schools. Finally, the Tyrolian model of Education Counseling Centers aims at changing the role and functions of the Special Education Centers. Special Education Centers have been responsible for assessment and diagnosis of special educational needs, consulting parents concerning their decision whether they prefer an inclusive setting or a special school for their child, allocation and distribution of resources, as well the management of their own special school. As already mentioned, an obvious conflict of roles and interests has been the consequence. The compatibility of the tasks needed in a Special Education Center (coordination, assessment, and leadership) and the tasks necessary to be the director of a special school is questionable in two ways (Specht, Pirchenegger, Seel, Stanzel-Tischler, & Wohlhart, 2007). Firstly, the question of time occurs. How is one person supposed to manage and cover both areas? Secondly, also content-related conflicts may occur. It is obvious that consulting the parents where to enroll their child identified as having SEN and supporting the parents in their decision cannot be seen to be neutral in this double-bind situation (Klicpera, 2007). Additionally, the link between the allocations of resources and the dependence concerning the assured existence of one's own school may well turn out to be somewhat critical.

These structural inequalities have led to the fact that, unfortunately, parents have not always received wide-ranging and comprehensive support. Hence, children are likely not always to have received the best support and care. Therefore within the process of parent counseling, systematic errors occur which counteract the idea of inclusion as well as the opportunity for self-determination of parents and children.

To avoid this conflict, the transformation of Special Education Centers into independent institutions for counseling is a necessary precondition for a further development towards inclusion. Until today, this change has failed since in Austria, the School Organization Act is a law of constitutional rank and changing it requires a two-thirds majority in the Austrian Parliament.

The central idea of the Tyrolian model is to fundamentally change the role and tasks of the Special Education Centers. The educational department of the Tyrolian government has worked out a model to reorganize the Special Education Centers. They are transformed to Education Counseling Centers which are independent of special schools. The director of such a center can truly concentrate on the center's tasks without being responsible of a special school, too. The purpose is to allocate resources more efficiently and to achieve a qualitative improvement of inclusive education. The centers are seen as a coordinating tool to allocate resources flexibly and in time wherever they are needed.

The responsibility of the Education Counseling Centers is to support and counsel all schools within a certain region, to cooperate with the school administration, support teachers who are working in inclusive settings, team development and conflict management, parent counseling and the organization of quality improvement as well as teacher training and supervision. Another area of responsibility is the networking with school and out-of school institutions and experts within the regions as well as beyond the regions. Networking creates the possibility to support children and adolescents especially at the transition from

kindergarten to school and from school to vocational training which provides support beyond institutional boundaries.

5.3 The development of inclusive model-regions in the federal state of Styria

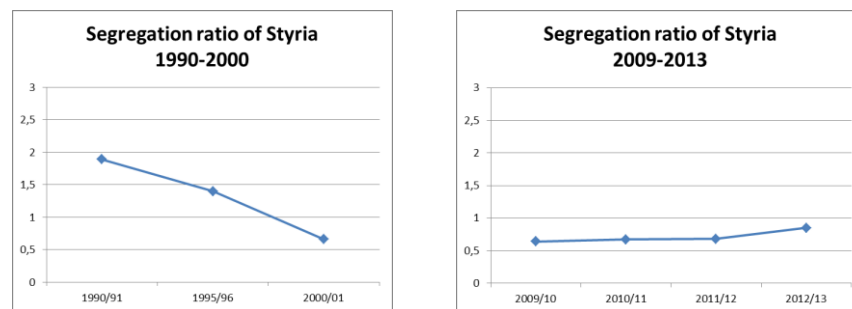


Figure 8. Segregation ratio of the federal state of Styria from 1990-(adjusted from a figure published by Flieger, 2012; based on data of Statistik Austria, 2012, and 2014b).

The most extensive and most comprehensive project is planned in Styria. It comprises the development of whole model-regions. In these model regions, all children ought to be educated in inclusive settings, and there should no longer be the need for special schools altogether.

The concept is based on lots of preliminary work and discussions between representatives of the Austrian Ministry of Education, the Federal School Inspectorate, of the schools as well as representatives of the colleges of teacher education and universities. Working papers specifically focusing on the inclusive model-regions have been presented and aim at developing an inclusive school system (Gasteiger-Klicpera & Wohlhart, 2012). Moreover, their purpose is the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Republik Österreich, 2008a; Federal Law Gazette, BGBl. III No. 155/2008) within the existing educational system.

The process began in 2011 and is aiming at developing an inclusive school system where all the children get the opportunity to study together. Each child should be perceived with his or her individual possibilities and should be fostered, supported and encouraged. To achieve these goals, there is an urge of a significant further development of the whole educational system and to enhance its inclusive quality.

Gasteiger-Klicpera and Wohlhart (2012) stressed in their working paper the necessity of an educational system in which heterogeneity, individual development referring to personal interests and abilities, cooperation and team work are not only permitted but seen as a fundamental condition.

The development of an inclusive education system is closely linked to quality of learning and the concepts of individualization and orientation towards competences and resources. Therefore, the idea of inclusive schooling is not an isolated concern of special education. It enhances the quality development of the whole school and educational system. Against this

background, various aims come together here, such as the inclusion of persons with an immigration background, fostering highly talented children and adolescents, prevention of early school leaving, support of lifelong learning and ensuring of key-competences, etc.

Currently a project group is working on the realization of these ideas and purposes. The concept of inclusive model-regions will be implemented soon. Different working groups with experts from various areas are trying to establish plans reaching from further development of teaching methods to resource management. The project development happens in a participatory way. Beside the project management, the local special needs centers have an important coordinating role to play. Within this task, the centers can be prepared for their pending key-role in an inclusive school system.

For developing an inclusive educational system, the cooperation of various structures and systems is necessary: schools, parents, communities, social services, health services, local associations, etc. are involved. Thus, establishing models of cooperation, involving local associations and institutions seems useful and sensible. Inclusive model-regions can be seen as one step towards an entire inclusive system. In this way, the challenges will be experienced, solutions can be worked out and conditions under which success is possible will be explored. Drawing consequences from this experience will allow a further implementation within the whole Austrian educational system.

Some thematic aspects are of central interest and will be addressed during this process:

Inclusive education ought to be realized in all schools. Closing special schools is not the only challenge for developing an inclusive school system. Especially technical colleges, universities and higher secondary schools as well as vocational trainings need to be highlighted and stressed. Ways of realizing inclusion also in these facets of education need to be found, too.

Inclusive school- and teaching development will lead to a higher inclusive quality in schools.

Individual diagnosis and individual support need to be provided for each child in an inclusive school system. Measures will vary in terms of intensity: Perhaps the concept of response to intervention can be a way to realize adequate support for all children. Firstly, preventive measures for all children in the daily classroom will support all pupils. Secondly, special supports for those who need it within a certain period of time need to be provided as well. These supports need to be provided quickly and in a timely manner. Additionally, the children's development needs to be monitored constantly and support can be withdrawn when not needed anymore. Thirdly, children with multiple and severe impairments need to be supported permanently.

Within the framework of individual support, accessibility needs to be guaranteed. This includes, besides physical accessibility, the recognition of freely accessible learning for children with sensory impairment (use of sign language, braille, etc.). Moreover, multimedia educational tools need to consider children with learning difficulties. This includes a new conception of the diagnostic process, a rethinking of the decision regarding necessity of support, as well as new methods of resource allocation. The *allocation of resources* is a central aspect of an inclusive school system. Therefore, we need to move away from a "rucksack-principle"

towards a more flexible way of support. Of high importance is the planning ahead when allocating resources, especially those which are not well used in a two-track system as it exists currently.

Regional inclusive centers as places for quality development. In Styria, special education centers are planned to turn into inclusive centers. These inclusive centers will take a key role in the inclusive education system. Like in Tyrol, the former special education centers will be disconnected from special schools. A multidisciplinary team will be responsible for planning and management of resources. Important to mention is the neutrality of the teams (in contrast to current). This group is responsible also for crisis intervention. It can react in a professional, responsive and competent way, monitor special educational support and thus is able to provide support for schools rapidly.

Independent experts need to accompany and monitor the development and the implementation. As the implementation of inclusive regions is a process where few experiences exist already, this process must be seen as a learning one. Within this learning process, experiences need to be gained, international experiences need to be considered and critical reflection of these experiences is needed in order to have an efficient flowing back and reconsidering. In order to guarantee this critical learning process, the project needs scientific supervision which can be provided by universities and teacher education colleges. Here, international as well as national coordination is necessary.

6. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

As long as there is such a huge variety in the inclusion rate within Europe and even within a single country (i.e. Austria), the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNESCO, 2006) is still not sufficiently implemented. Inclusion is clearly a topic that needs to remain focused on at various levels: politically, socially, scientifically, educationally and individually. In future, monitoring of the various approaches in implementation will be necessary in order to gather information about best practice examples. Evaluated models need to be well documented and distributed. Hopefully, this will be the case with the Austrian approaches outlined in this paper. And hopefully, too, they will contribute to the further development of an inclusive education system.

Once the idea of inclusion has been truly realized, the inclusive system should be a self-sufficient one, as the definition suggests, i.e. a system completely suitable and appropriate for every individual and his or her very individual specific needs.

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