

History Through the Lens of Special Education

The need and call for inclusive education for all students has been a central issue in various countries in the European context not only since the Salamanca Declaration of 1994 or the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006.¹ Since the 1970s, initiatives in the field of special education have worked towards enabling all children and young people, whether they have a disability or not, to attend mainstream schools. These efforts have been based on the principle of normalisation, initially applied to adults with intellectual disabilities.² In the 1980s and 1990s, the integration movement in many countries took systematic steps to overcome a segregated school system in which children with disabilities were educated in special schools.³ However, the state of inclusion in countries around the world is extremely diverse, ranging from an almost universally implemented inclusive system to systems in which many children with special needs continue to be educated in specific special schools.⁴

Despite these heterogeneous starting points, there are few convincing arguments against inclusive education from a human rights perspective. Even the academic literature on the effectiveness of inclusive or segregated education does not provide strong evidence for the continued existence of segregated schools.⁵ While some European countries continue to argue for inclusion and against separate schools, this debate is already considered outdated in other countries. One aim of this book is to take into account the different realities and approaches to inclusion for history education. In particular, the perspectives of teachers from different countries can provide valuable insights and enable a mutual learning process.⁶

However, different normative starting points do not mean that there are no consistent definitions of inclusion at the academic level. For example, a narrower understanding of inclusion has emerged in recent debates, focusing primarily on the integration of people with disabilities. At the same time, a broader concept of inclusion is increasingly being used to include additional categories of disadvantage that can lead to social and educational disadvantage.⁷ Such categories, which vary according to social context and societal acceptance of diversity,

1 Schwab 2020.

2 Nirje 1994.

3 Ramberg/Watkins 2020.

4 Klemm 2022.

5 Lindsay 2007.

6 Engelbrecht et al. 2013.

7 Haug 2017.

include, in addition to disability, ethnicity and migration,⁸ gender and sexual identity,⁹ and socio-economic background.¹⁰

For history teaching and academic history education, the developments and challenges associated with inclusion imply a fundamental reflection on how social diversity affects historical learning. Particularly in view of the fact that school teaching is still clearly characterised by subject cultures, it is inevitable that history education will address the issue of inclusion. Furthermore, from the perspective of history education, the pursuit of inclusive education and the full participation of all students in history classes has illuminated a wide range of research desiderata. These pertain not only to the development of robust theoretical and conceptual frameworks but also to the advancement of empirical research methodologies. Furthermore, they underscore the pressing need for well-founded, pragmatic instructional approaches that effectively translate these insights into classroom practice. Looking at the research landscape, it is striking that while there is some conceptual and theoretical work, empirical evidence on the effects of historical learning in inclusive settings is particularly lacking. A few decades ago, a number of studies were conducted in English-speaking contexts, looking at adaptive instructional settings and linguistic scaffolding in the context of digital literacy. Lifeworld approaches and biographical work were also emphasised.¹¹ In recent years there has been a trend towards more empirical research, particularly in German-speaking countries. This may be related to the previously criticised systematic approach in Germany, where the school system is still extremely segregated. At the same time, this also means that there are specific professional fields at the academic level that explicitly focus on, for example, the living and learning conditions of people with so-called intellectual disabilities.¹² However, despite these initial efforts, the number of history education research dealing with inclusion is still limited.

This volume is one of the first attempts to address issues of inclusion, diversity and historical learning from an international perspective, with a focus on disability and special education, but also beyond. It grew out of a conference held at the University of Cologne in 2023 and is intended as a further step towards bringing together, at a theoretical, conceptual and pragmatic level, different perspectives that understand inclusion in both a narrower and a broader sense. This collection compiles nine contributions that critically engage with the examination of inclusive historical education, aiming to explore its theoretical foundations, empirical dimensions and practical implications.

Heike Krösche, Christoph Kühberger, Simone Seitz, and Robert Thorp on the one hand focus their attention on a deep and systematic engagement with research that is based on theories of history education to develop and apply well-founded, theoretically grounded approaches that aim to enable a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of inclusive history education. Sebastian Barsch, Susan Krause, and Jan Siefert on the other hand focus

8 Tajic/Bunar 2020.

9 Omercajic/Martino 2020.

10 Richardson et al. 2020.

11 For a review see Barsch/Barte 2020.

12 See Rein 2021; Barsch 2020.

on the investigation and analysis of empirical data and findings related to the practical implementation and challenges of inclusive history education. Maria Papadopoulou investigates pragmatic approaches and perspectives aimed at promoting inclusive history education, linked with empirical findings.

Heike Krösche discusses the continuous construction and reproduction of social differences and inequalities in historical learning processes. Therefore, she emphasizes that the diversity of students, teachers and complex inequality structures in history education cannot be captured using rigid, isolated categories. To address diversity, it is necessary to move beyond one-dimensional perspectives on social inequality and binary thinking to an intersectional approach to the interaction of social differences. For history education research, the approach of interdependent categories is crucial, as inequality relations are embedded within categories like dis/ability. Heike Krösche concludes that history education should not only open research-driven approaches to categories of difference but also consider dis/ability as an interdependent category.

Christoph Kühberger explores the concept of inclusive historical knowledge. He builds on a broad understanding of knowledge that encompasses conceptual, factual, procedural and metacognitive aspects in an attempt to model inclusive historical knowledge based on historical and didactic discussions. He outlines a knowledge base for historical learning in schools while also examining challenges in special education when students with special needs are not inclusively considered. Using the Austrian national curricula, he analyses differences between general and special education schools in the subject History and Social Studies/Civic Education and how these differences impact the knowledge outlined in the curricula. Christoph Kühberger questions the normative foundation of inclusive historical knowledge as it aligns with diversity discourses.

Simone Seitz examines inclusive education particularly in relation to history teaching. She discusses the challenge of adapting complex historical topics to children's everyday experiences through didactical simplification. However, life and history are complex, and focusing only on children's perspectives would ignore the intergenerational responsibility of teaching, which balances child-centred and world-centred approaches. Simone Seitz argues that in difficult life situations, world education should not rely solely on children's personal experiences but also on the input from responsible adults. Teaching should encourage the discovery of new aspects of the world, co-constructed between teachers and students. Inclusive education can promote historical learning by connecting children's diverse experiences with complex issues, fostering intersubjective recognition in the learning process. Beyond that, Seitz suggests the ultimate goal is to enable children to understand and engage with the world, integrating both child-centred and world-centred learning.

Robert Thorp discusses research on inclusive history education, focusing on re-evaluating the overall objectives of history education, especially for students in special education. The existing literature on inclusive history education, primarily in English, has emphasized fostering historical thinking among learners, with significant attention given to the organization

of educational interventions. While this research is valuable, Robert Thorp argues that it is equally important to reconsider the perceived aims of history education. The chapter presents several proposed goals for history education and suggests a new perspective on inclusive history education. Drawing inspiration from Gadamer's concept of historical consciousness, Robert Thorp advocates for a broader understanding of the objectives of inclusive history education. This approach seeks to address the diverse challenges that both teachers and students face in history education.

Sebastian Barsch focuses on empirical findings on how historical learning is organized for students with disabilities in inclusive settings, particularly those with intellectual impairments. He shows that research on this topic is limited, with most studies showing that even students with severe cognitive disabilities can engage in historical thinking through biographical perspectives. However, there is little research on students with visual or hearing challenges. Inclusive projects highlight cultural participation and self-representation in history. Teachers often face challenges requiring simplified teaching methods. In addition, international studies suggest non-textual learning and direct instruction work well for students with cognitive disabilities. Barsch also concludes that project-based learning, personalized approaches and language-sensitive teaching show promise but must be used carefully to avoid discrimination.

Susan Krause presents a research report on how blind students access inner images of the past, with a focus on imaginative processes and history education. She discovered that students often mentioned childhood, family history, hobbies and current life situations, assuming that history is related to the past. However, the present became more relevant when connected to their lives. All students discussed family history, but none mentioned blindness, suggesting they consider it a normal state. The students naturally engaged with visual information, indicating that blind individuals can understand visual concepts through linguistic metaphors. Susan Krause reflects on overloading students with input and found valuable insights in open-ended tasks. Finally, the study highlights blindness as a fluid spectrum, shaped by social experiences, and emphasizes the importance of considering history education within broader social contexts.

Jan Siefert examines the role of cultural and narrative practices in inclusive history education for students with specific learning needs. He highlights the need for support in engaging with historical narratives, particularly for students lacking prior exposure. Language-sensitive history education benefits students with learning difficulties but does not fully address gaps in prior knowledge. Jan Siefert presents the genre cycle as a promising tool for inclusive history education, with teachers needing to collaborate for effective lesson planning. He stresses the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to historical education, integrating literary and language perspectives. Beyond that, he critiques the lack of focus on linguistic and cultural factors in history teaching.

Maria Papadopoulou examines the pragmatic training of primary school pupils with special educational needs in history education in Greece, specifically focusing on those with learn-

ing difficulties (LD). She emphasizes the importance of continuously identifying effective teaching methods, strategies and materials. The aim of the study was to investigate the current state of history education for children with LD in the Greek primary education system. Therefore, Maria Papadopoulou focuses on a systematic review of educational programs, teaching script and conference proceedings from 2017 to 2021. She found that only three of these programs addressed history education for students with special educational needs, and just one specifically focused on LD students. The results reveal a significant gap in relevant educational programs. The chapter shows valuable insights for educators and researchers and serves as a reference for future history education for pupils with special education needs.

A final note on the terminology used in this publication. The chapters have been written by authors from different countries and with different professional backgrounds and perspectives. The labelling of people with disabilities is often rightly part of a debate. However, we have chosen to use the terminology as it is used in different professional discourses and national contexts, but to check for discriminatory language at our discretion.

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