

All the Time in the World?

Reflections on Time in the Framework of Inclusive Education at Primary School Level

Introduction – Child and World

Time is a key concept for historical learning.¹ In this chapter I will explore the concept of time in the context of inclusive education at primary school level. I begin with the assumption that connecting children's starting points for learning with the curriculum-based requirements (or levels of competencies) is essential for primary education that is child-centered.² Crucial to inclusive education is acknowledging the diversity of these starting points for learning – shaped by children's unique experiences, prior knowledge and questions.³ However, not only the children's unique and diverse starting points are significant but also the similarities among them in order to unfold the complexity and the fundamental meanings of a foundational concept such as time – and offer new perspectives on education that is centered on the child and about the world.⁴ This relationship between diversity and similarity forms the central theme of this article, which focuses on time as a topic in inclusive primary schools.

Inclusive Education

In school education there is a tension between an awareness of the uncontrollability of the individual child's education on the one hand and the institutionally anchored mandate to steer educational processes towards the individual child's educational success on the other. Teaching is about highly complex and individual educational processes involving a child's self-construction of knowledge, and it is entangled in regulatory and administrative frameworks that stipulate which subject-related competences and knowledge acquisition are legitimized by the curricula.

1 Körber 2015, 8ff.

2 Einsiedler 2005.

3 Kaiser/Seitz 2017.

4 Biesta 2022.

An awareness of this paradox and the ability to deal with it in a competent and reflexive way in their pedagogical relationships is therefore a central aspect of the professionalism of teachers.⁵ School education is not a technology that is applied to children solely in their capacity as students; it is about pedagogical relationships with children who are inevitably persons. This insight is a fundamental premise to the further development of inclusive education and the question of how primary schools can succeed in recognizing all children as individual persons.⁶

Inclusive Pedagogy

None of us exists outside of time. We all share perceptions of time, and we all have actively engaged with time since the beginning of life with our first demands for regular rhythms of care and food from caregivers. Such fundamental experiences of time are shared by all children – and of course by teachers as well – and can therefore serve as a basis for a pedagogical conception of time.⁷ This simple but radical approach to learning through ›experience‹ can be traced back to the early works of Dewey. He describes experience using the example of artistic activity, in which momentary immersion in the process of creation merges directly with the creation of the work of art itself: In experience there is »no division between act and material, subject and object, but [it] contains them both in an unanalyzed totality.«⁸ This understanding of experience applies to the perception of time (in the sense of *aisthesis*) and learning about time, because experiencing time coincides with the construction of the experience of time.⁹ This will be discussed in more detail below.

Dewey also observes that educational experiences can only be realized in communal action, because human beings can only develop as individuals by interacting with others. And the more democratic the social spheres are, the greater the opportunity for a person to grow by engaging with the experiences of their peers.¹⁰ Dewey thus sees knowledge as socially situated – which highlights the importance of creating structures of peer-based shared experiences and problem-oriented exchanges at school as meaningful elements of inclusive education.

In the 1980s, Klafki developed general didactic foundations – particularly through his concept of *Allgemeinbildung* – that later provided a theoretical and conceptual basis for the development of inclusive pedagogy. His guiding principles of democratization and humanization paved the way in German-speaking countries for innovative approaches to a general pedagogy oriented toward open teaching with heterogeneous (inclusive) groups as a whole. Klafki's concept of categorical education describes the learner-centered principle of the reciprocal de-

⁵ Helsper 2020.

⁶ Seitz 2020.

⁷ Seitz 2005.

⁸ Dewey 1925/2018, 10.

⁹ Seitz 2004.

¹⁰ Dewey 1916/2011.

velopment of ›reality‹ and subject.¹¹ His conceptualization of a critical-constructive pedagogy through interdisciplinary teaching on key epoch-typical problems focuses attention on students' individual interests when engaging in shared problems and tasks. Diversity can then be experienced as a qualitative enrichment of cooperative learning processes.¹² These ideas provide a framework for different strands of research on inclusive education,¹³ in particular in German-speaking scientific discourse.¹⁴

Research and theory-building in inclusive education has been significantly influenced by diversity education and its underlying concept of egalitarian difference.¹⁵ This approach brings together aspects of interculturality, gender and ability/disability and critically analyzes them from the perspective of the creation and stabilization of (in)equity. Conceptually, this approach was further developed into a heterogeneity-oriented education based on the equity of rights and fundamental needs. This approach was later enriched by insights from intersectionality research, post-colonial studies and critical research into ableism, classism and racism,¹⁶ significantly strengthening the inequity-critical perspective and creating a starting point for research on teaching and learning that takes a closer look at the dynamics of participation and co-determination as well as the challenges of individual learning in the classroom.¹⁷ Combining these aspects allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of inclusive teaching.¹⁸

In summary, the linking of presence and participation to foster individual learning is a central task for an inclusive education. It responds to the heterogeneity of student learning levels and life circumstances in a differentiated and participatory way, while at the same time enabling social inclusion.

Inclusive Subject-Specific Pedagogy

Comparatively little attention has been given to subject-specific pedagogical issues in inclusion-related research to date.¹⁹ However, there has been an increase in research in various pedagogical disciplines on the conceptualization and empirical validation of inclusion-related subject teaching, which directly contributes to inclusion research,²⁰ as this volume exemplifies for historical learning.

11 Klafki 1985, 43ff.

12 Klafki 1994, 583.

13 Feuser 1995.

14 Seitz 2017.

15 Prengel 1993.

16 Boger 2023.

17 Ainscow 2005, 15.

18 Dexel 2022.

19 Seitz 2004; Seitz/Simon 2021.

20 E.g. Pech/Schomaker/Simon 2019; Barsch et al. 2020; Seitz/Simon 2021.

At the primary school level, two strands of educational research on subject teaching have been established, which investigate child-related (world) knowledge, experiences and forms of learning. In the first strand, a pedagogical reconstruction approach brings children's heterogeneous perspectives into an iterative analytical and reflexive comparison with specific professional ways of thinking that characterize adults. In the second strand, research on the format of conceptual change focuses on the successful transition of children's ways of thinking, which are regarded as a preliminary stage to »expert« ways of thinking.²¹ However, inclusion research has remained largely neglected.²² In this context, there is wide recognition of the importance of the social situatedness of learning and cooperative forms of learning.²³ Further research has also been done into the theoretical foundations of the complementary relationship between sociality and individualization.²⁴

Complexity is added to discursively produced subject matter when an openness for children's diverse perspectives is linked to the children's points of reference and experiences. Hempel describes the consideration of the children's diverse perspectives on an issue and the complexity of the issue as a »double heterogeneity«.²⁵ Alavi and Barsch argue in a similar way that societal diversity necessitates diverse approaches to history.²⁶ In doing so, they provide a critical-reflexive approach to diversity and social inequity and raise the question of how historical narratives are produced discursively. This approach assumes a principle of double-subject orientation as a theoretical foundation for inclusive history teaching, which opens up related narratives and fosters connections to social plurality.²⁷ It does not imply a naïve endorsement of diversity, but rather a conceptual merging of (in)equity and diversity dimensions in a critical analysis of the production of difference in the classroom.

Dimensions of Inclusive Education on Time

In a previous study I showed that shared approaches to understanding time are held by a highly diverse sample of second-grade primary schoolchildren including children that had been assessed as »highly gifted« as well as those who were seen as »severely handicapped«.²⁸ Traditionally, time has been structured in primary school teaching materials on the basis of a cognitive understanding of chronological and measured time, positioning it to prefigure historical learning. However, a far more promising way of structuring time pedagogically for inclusive teaching and learning at primary-school level is its pedagogical structuring using

21 Günther-Arndt/Sauer 2006.

22 Seitz 2005.

23 Seitz 2017.

24 Scheidt 2017.

25 Hempel 2007, 23f.

26 Alavi/Barsch 2018.

27 Barsch et al. 2020.

28 Seitz 2005.

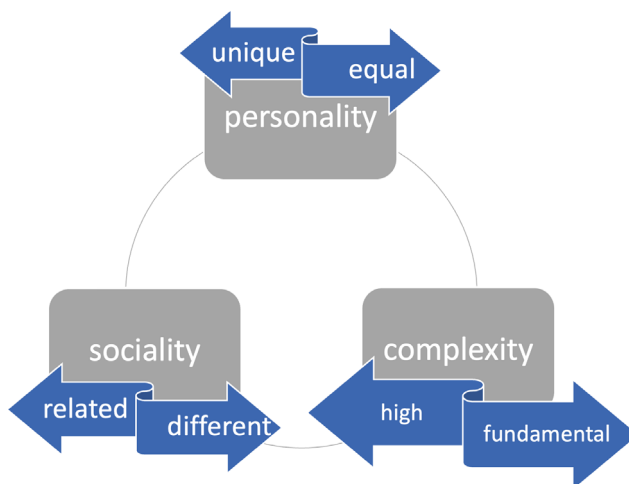


Fig. 1: Three dimensions of inclusive education.

the concepts that even very different children share.²⁹ Specifically, children experience time as an aesthetic perception or as a biographical element of life. As every child has a perception of time and a biography, these two approaches serve as promising starting points for the participation of all children in an inclusive classroom. Moreover, these two aspects of children's perspectives on time point to the philosophical and – following Klafki – fundamental dimensions of time, which means nothing other than that key societal concepts like time can be taught in an inclusive way when we first look for fundamental similarities in children's concepts *before* looking for diversity and difference.³⁰

These considerations have been used to develop a three dimensional model conceptualizing inclusive education, which serves as a starting point for further reflection on time in primary school education.

Personality

Viewing children as unique personalities is a promising starting point for considerations of pedagogical inclusion. Their uniqueness encompasses not only their basic human similarities, but also the specificity of each child's personal development and thus their interpersonal differences – because all children share the characteristic of distinctiveness. The recognition of personhood – the unique individual child among other individual children – cannot be conceived without this ambiguity.

²⁹ Seitz 2005.

³⁰ Seitz 2006.

The primary challenge for teachers is thus to ›see‹ each individual child in his or her specific life situation. That is, to see a child first of all as a person, without relying on, and thus reproducing, prefabricated constructions of difference that inferiorizes them in relation to a concept of normalcy.³¹ The view of a child as a distinctive personality is needed in order to do justice to biographically formative dimensions of development, which in turn rely on a reflexive return to the normalcy-related concepts and orientations implicit in pedagogical action.

Recognizing the child as a subject therefore implies moving away from a narrow view of educational planning for individual children and moving towards a participatory form of lesson planning. In this way, methods of observing open learning situations³² can be used to construct the ›topic‹ from both those perspectives that children share or are similar and those that are unique and distinctive, making the topic accessible to communication between the children and between children and adults. In this context, offering learning objects that open up questions can be fruitful. Individualization in inclusive lessons is then not a top-down pedagogical measure in the sense of a structurally enforced directive, but rather a democratic process in a pedagogical relationship between adults and children. In concrete terms, this could mean that a child who is constantly under time pressure will have different experiences than a child whose everyday life is characterized by monotony. Both may develop a different relationship to empty or filled time but they will both share the fundamental significance of the experience of time and the shaping of this experience through an inner attitude and the aesthetic experience.

To summarize, children should be seen in the classroom as unique individual personalities who are also equally similar to each other in precisely this respect. This distinctiveness thus refers both to basic human similarities that can create a connection between all children, as well as to the uniqueness of each child and thus to their interpersonal differences – the unique individual child among other individual children.

Sociality

The idea that equal treatment of all learners cannot be achieved by providing everyone with the same program at the same time, but conversely by addressing all children equally in their differences, has been described as an ›antinomy of differentiation‹ in professional action:³³ Equal access to time-related topics is thus only ensured by taking individual learning differences into account. Moreover, it is crucial that differences between children are not narrowly understood as differences in achievement, but rather that the variability and mutability of starting points for learning are accepted as an expression of the infinite diversity of human personalities – ambiguity is therefore also inscribed in the dynamic of difference and relatedness.

31 Riegel 2016, 53; Machold/Wienand 2021.

32 Kaiser/Seitz 2017, 63ff.

33 Helsper 2020.

This ambiguity refers to the social dynamics of creating difference and relatedness in inter-subjective relationships. Sociality, in the sense of dependence on intersubjective recognition, is an anthropological constant³⁴ and represents a fundamental basis of school education and the pedagogical actions practiced there. Children at primary school are first and foremost children who are deeply dependent on the experience of social belonging and friendship, as their most important motivation is to meet friends, build on friendships and feel related to each other as peers.³⁵

Differentiation in inclusive classrooms should therefore not lead to students being isolated by individualized ›treatments‹, but rather to their having equal access to learning objects in open learning environments supported by strengthened subject-related communication between students.³⁶ These structures allow scope for social integration and subject-related communication or dialogue-based learning. Students themselves can develop differentiation in inclusive lessons by using self-differentiating task formats³⁷ that enable research-oriented, creative and playful approaches and experiences, in the sense of Dewey.

For example, one small stimulus object like a photo showing the different ice layers in a glacier in the Alps or Dolomites,³⁸ together with a small piece of ›real‹ ice that can be touched by the children and melts in their hands, may open up a rich project on historical events and processes (e.g. the glacier mummy Oetzi) or on current societal questions around climate change or arguments about ski tourism on glaciers in the Alps from the perspective of natural and cultural heritage. Children are thus encouraged to develop questions and plan concrete tasks together in a participative way.³⁹ When concepts, questions and ideas about complex issues come up *through* learning processes, they offer the possibility of collaboration among children with diverse learning capacities. However, it should be noted that these issues can only be anticipated to a limited extent by the teacher, which has important consequences for lesson planning.⁴⁰ Observation and diverse discourse-initiated learning activities include research by children on short-term aspects of time (e.g. objects found in glaciers), debates on controversial topics, lyrics on the aesthetics of glaciers and texts on their potential to help us experience ›deep time‹ in their constant and slow-changing movement. These activities can easily involve an interplay of enactive, iconic and symbolic modes of knowledge representation⁴¹ for all children, encouraging communication among diverse learners on a topic. Inclusion-related reflection on teaching strengthens the focus on the pedagogical dimension of teaching and on enabling the experience of social belonging as well as in-depth learning among the children.

³⁴ Todorov 1996.

³⁵ Petillon 1993; Biffi 2011.

³⁶ Seitz 2020.

³⁷ Seitz 2012.

³⁸ Kaiser/Seitz 2017, 69.

³⁹ Kaiser/Seitz, 2017.

⁴⁰ Klafki et al. 1982.

⁴¹ Bruner/Oliver/Greenfield 1966.

Complexity

Building on the recognition of children as social creatures, it is now important to ask how personally meaningful experiences can be linked to complex issues.⁴² This implies starting from the individual child's specific experiences with a phenomenon or an issue. Reflection on the children's shared experiences or similarities in their approaches to time should be further developed as they can open up the view towards anthropological constants and the recognition of children as children, which is central for considerations of historical learning.

For example, a child who has had an experience with cancer in early childhood may have a particularly vivid and reflected relationship to biographic time through this unique experience – but a biographical approach to the phenomenon of time rests on the experience of time, which is shared by all children regardless of their social situation or whether they are seen as highly gifted or cognitively impaired.⁴³ These experiences can be linked directly to philosophical questions about the meaning and value of life. This approach thus represents a decisive turning point, as the focus on complexity also enables teachers to take a fresh, sensitive look at the ›object‹ of their teaching.

The project initiated by a photo of glacier ice clearly shows that focusing on the experiences of children does not necessarily lead to reduction, trivialization or simplification, but instead can open up the inherent complexity of an issue, making it accessible for communication in the classroom.⁴⁴ Questions such as »What does eternity mean?« and »How can we save our planet?« can be linked to questions like »What did the glacier look like when I was born?« or »How can we perceive and describe very slow changes in nature?« – all of which show the ambiguous character of complexity.

This means nothing less than directly linking universally meaningful aspects of time with individually meaningful bodily experiences of temporalization,⁴⁵ such as very slow movements, the experience of waiting, or the fundamental phenomenon of growing in childhood as experienced when a child meets relatives who have not seen them for a long time or when they notice that some clothes no longer fit.

Implications: Time as a Possible Link Between Child-Centeredness and World-Centeredness

Some approaches to special needs education reduce complex questions, issues and relations to children's everyday life and to what they already know. The pedagogical structurings of historical contexts and phenomena then consists to a certain extent of bringing them closer

⁴² Klafki 1994.

⁴³ Seitz 2006.

⁴⁴ Seitz 2005; 2006.

⁴⁵ Rein 2021.

to the children by ›miniaturizing‹ them. However, life does not provide miniaturized problems but instead presents complex problems that are embedded in contexts. The complexity of such problems can be seen in the question of a child »Where is time when I sleep?«

A one-sided reference to children's perspectives on aspects of time is therefore ill-suited for inclusive education, as this would mean that teachers withdraw from their intergenerationally structured responsibility as a mediator between (constantly changing) world knowledge and the child. Instead, child-centeredness needs to be complemented by world-centeredness.⁴⁶ Particularly with regard to children in difficult life situations, it would be problematic to develop world knowledge solely from children's personal experiences. Instead it requires a double reflection on what the children bring with them and on what adult educators can offer them in terms of stimulation. In other words, pedagogical reflection is reliant on reflection on aspects that may not be immediately apparent to the child, so that teaching and learning allow children to discover new dimensions that are then co-constructed in the classroom. The ›content‹ of teaching and learning is therefore not an unchangeable amount of material, but a construct that is produced discursively and actively between teachers and students⁴⁷ and which needs inequity-related reflection to ensure that marginalized aspects are not overlooked in the process.⁴⁸

To summarize, a key part of the innovative potential of an inclusive pedagogy for historical learning may be found in the possibility to develop open assignments dealing with fundamental phenomena and issues through communication between adult teachers and children – which ›lend‹ complexity to the discursively produced issues of historical learning by linking them to the children's diverse *and* shared references and experiences. Recognizing children as persons and as subjects of education dependent on intersubjective recognition thus means shaping processes of world interpretation in a communicative way without negating the generational responsibility of teachers for its success.

Like no other concept, inclusive pedagogy offers opportunities to build on anthropological commonalities and, by incorporating such universal experiences, to foreground profound questions of meaning about world knowledge. It is the simple recognition of all children as children that is expressed in the concept of inclusive pedagogy.

Thus, the question about time goes to the heart of historical learning and, insofar as the relation between child and world is reflected on critically, to the heart of inclusive education. Opening up historical learning to inclusion therefore entails an approach to time that is child-centered *and* world-centered, allowing students to experience how to live *with* the world and *in* the world.

⁴⁶ Biesta 2022.

⁴⁷ Reich 2014.

⁴⁸ Barsch et al. 2020.

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