

European Meeting of Independent Education (EMIE) 2017 on “Right to Education: Freedom of Parental Choice”

The following was presented by Anne Charrière as a representative of the European Forum for Freedom in Education (effe) to the British MP Andrew Lewer as part a hearing on the issue of school autonomy.

Abstract

To show how autonomy and pedagogical choice can work in school and what it brings, a concrete example, based on a study of 3 inclusive schools, is given.

For inclusive school to function properly, autonomy is needed at all levels : class level, school level, structural level, space and time organisation.

Results are academic, emotional, social, societal and very encouraging.

At the same time, by signing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, EU states commit themselves to have their schools become inclusive. This can be a powerful lever for implementing school autonomy and free pedagogical choice.

Address

Mr. Andrew Lewer, Good afternoon

First of all, thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk to you briefly about an important aspect of autonomy and free pedagogical choice in public and private schools. To do so, I will take a concrete example¹ : the inclusive school.

First, what is an inclusive school ? Inclusive school has been described by several international texts as the Declaration of Salamanca (1994) and lately by the UNCRPD (2006). Inclusive school has not to be confounded with integrative school. Both schools aim to teach all children, whatever their differences, be they in language, social background, culture, origin, handicap, or academic results.

Both can be characterized with 3 features :

In the integrative school,

1. each child is admitted in the school of all,
2. has to *adapt to class* and lessons or else comes into a special class,
3. is considered of deprived of something, *that is he is seen negatively*

In the inclusive school,

1. each child is a full member of the class of his age group,
2. lessons are *adapted to him*,
3. on the basis of his needs, capabilities and potentialities, *that is he seen positively*.

To achieve the high requirements of inclusive schools, 10 conditions can be pointed out :

1. The difference of integration and inclusion is clearly understood
2. Inclusion is at work at the level of the whole school
3. Benevolence and goodwill is the leading attitude (in adult-child relations as in adult-adult relations)
4. Teachers work not alone, but in a team in the class
5. Teachers are adequately trained for inclusion
6. All children of an age group are taught together
7. All children meet regularly in a class counsel
8. High variability of all structures : programs, spatial and time arrangements, time schedules
9. Constant innovation
10. Attention based on each child's competences and potentialities

In the schools I observed, research showed following results :

on intellectual level :

children with disability achieve a far better academic level

children without disability achieve at least as good if not better than in usual school

on emotional level

¹Based on a study I conducted in 3 german inclusive schools.

children learn to manage their emotions and resolve conflicts
on social level
deep understanding of the other's difference and ability to deal with,
not seeing anyone minor, only different,

and the paramount result :
potentialities of each child are blossoming, flourishing

Thus inclusive school is an excellent preparation for an inclusive society

But inclusive school is only possible if schools have wide autonomy at all levels : management, recruitment, pedagogical choice, programs, time planning, space planning, aso.

The beauty of it is that inclusive school is now compulsory or on the way to become so in most EU countries, because of their signing the UNCRPD.

So we have in our hands a powerful lever to have inclusive school implemented in european countries : the law, each country's Education Act.