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‘Yes it’s good, but...’ - Student teachers’ inclusion narratives
are

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Abstract

Finland is committed to inclusive education as many other countries too. In this study, we examined Finnish student teachers' attitudes towards inclusion using an electronic questionnaire. In total, 277 students participated. The open responses were studied as various teacher students', class, subject or special education students' narratives of inclusion. The results showed that student teachers' attitudes, except special education student teachers, were quite negative. The most common narratives told about lack of resources, about pupils and/or teachers suffering in inclusive settings, about good parts of segregation and about a positive attitude, followed by a but, like: *yes it's good, but*. Full inclusion was not supported, but other forms, like partial inclusion, were more seconded. We conclude that future teachers need more knowledge about and a better understanding of inclusion and diversity.

Keywords: inclusion, teacher student, narratives, views, Finland

Introduction

There is a vast amount of literature on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion; however, studies on student teachers are less frequent. While the implementation of inclusion is the responsibility of future teachers, their views, and attitudes as well as the content of their training programs are important. (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; van Steen and Wilson, 2020) As Armstrong (2017) said, special and inclusive education demand attention to psychological, cultural and political aspects of the complex systems of education. To commit people to for example democracy, it needs to be spoken out and discussed openly. Same concerns inclusion. By activating students to talk about inclusion, they are enabled to collect information, exchange ideas and get material for their views. Nevertheless, values develop and change slowly (Watkins & Donnelly, 2014), so discussing inclusion already in teacher education is crucial. Student teachers' views of inclusion are studied in this article.

There are differences in views and attitudes towards inclusion, partly because it is defined differently in different context and by different professionals (Alexiadou & Essex, 2016; Francisco, Hartman & Wang, 2020). German researchers Kruse and Dederling (2018) remained that understanding inclusion differs according to the school form, the prior experience of inclusive teaching and the function the person fulfils in school. We define inclusion as a practice as well as a philosophy (Hornby, 2015) according to which children can be taught in a local school independent of their race, gender, cultural background, language or disability. For this to happen, different educational practices and special resources are needed to create a context that values diversity, participation, collaboration and equality. (Hausstätter, 2014; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994; Watkins & Donnelly, 2014)

The development of inclusive education has been slow, and, in many countries, the remnants of the other approaches, segregation and integration, pose hurdles to progress in this area (Buchner & Proyer, 2020). Qvortrup and Qvortup (2018) write about inclusion where a child can be included in some social arenas and excluded in others. This would allow the process of inclusion and exclusion to unfold simultaneously. One crucial element in promoting inclusive education are the positive attitudes and views of teachers as well as the narratives told about inclusive education. This was noticed in a systematic review of 34 studies about Spanish teachers' attitudes. The attitudes were quite positive, and influenced by the amount of training as well as teachers' contact with students having support needs. Often special educators and those with more experience with special needs had a more positive attitude, but this was not always the case. (Lacruz-Pérez, Sanz-Cervera &

Tárraga-Mínguez, 2021) Positive narratives about inclusion are needed, they can show the way for developing inclusive education. Using students' texts about inclusion help the trainers to understand students' mindset and discussion about inclusion in a promoting manner. (Sucuoglu, Bakkaloglu, Iscen, Demir & Akalin, 2014) When the attitudes of special student teachers from three Nordic universities were compared, the Norwegian students supported inclusion and had a pupil-focused view, but Finnish students were more reserved in their attitudes and more teacher-focused, concentrating on how inclusion impacted teachers' work. (Takala et al., 2012)

In this article, inclusion concerns and is limited to the need of pedagogical support, although it is a narrow view of inclusion. The Amendments of the Finnish Basic Education Act (2010) point out that pupils must receive support as soon as they require it, support being divided into the following three categories: general, intensive and special. All teachers are obliged to provide general and intensive support, while special support is usually the responsibility of special education teachers. There are similarities to the US. response to intervention (RTI) framework. (Björn, Aro, Koponen, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2016) The Amendments of the Finnish Basic Education Act (2010) require all teachers to have some skills in providing support. However, this can be challenging in practice because not all teachers are trained in special education or have the knowledge and the skills needed to support diverse pupils (López-Torrijo & Mengual-Andrés, 2015; Takala et al., 2018).

Due to aiming towards inclusive education, many classes today are quite heterogeneous, and teachers need a wide range of skills to conduct such classes successfully (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). We know from numerous studies (Hernandez et al., 2016; Lacruz-Pérez, Sanz-Cervera & Tárraga-Mínguez 2021; Saloviita, 2020a, 2020b) that teachers often have ambiguous attitudes towards inclusion and that special education teachers have the most positive attitudes towards inclusion, while subject teachers have the most negative ones. However, we do not know the attitudes or the views of future teachers – today's student teachers – towards inclusion. Therefore, our aim is to study how student teachers view inclusion.

Student teachers' attitudes and views about inclusion

The study of attitudes enables one to examine how people feel about an issue. McVittie and McKinlay (2017) stated that when an attitude is displayed by an individual, that person is providing an evaluation, and this evaluation determines whether the issue will be evaluated positively or negatively, strongly or weakly. When people expose their attitudes, they target other groups or social phenomena through their descriptions and reveal deep-rooted aspects of their inner selves

(McVittie & McKinlay, 2017). Teacher education can be crucial for identifying thinking models, promoting students' argumentation skills and causing embarrassment, in matters of inclusion amongst others (Lanas et al., 2017). In a systematic review of 23 intervention studies that aimed to improve pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, information-based cognitive interventions, as well as interventions that combined information and practical experience, led to more positive attitudes (Lautenbach & Heyder, 2019). When studying teachers rather than student teachers, experience is important. Early childhood teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are influenced by previous experiences in inclusive environments, which mostly involve personal contact with children with special educational needs (SENs) (Dias & Cadime, 2016). A study of 56 pre-service teachers from three metropolitan universities in Australia found that the pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion were positive or neutral and became more positive during their education (Goddard & Evans, 2018). Similar results were reported in a Canadian study on the attitudes of pre-service teachers: participating in a teacher education programme on inclusion resulted in more positive attitudes (Killoran et al., 2013).

In a study in Bangladesh with 1 623 student teachers, their attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with high support needs were not very positive (Ahsan & Sharma, 2018). Less favourable attitudes towards pupils with special needs were also reported in a study with 46 teacher students (Markova et al., 2016). In many Finnish studies, pupils with social, emotional and behavioural (SEB) difficulties have faced negative attitudes from teachers in both early and compulsory education (Kuula, 2000; Pihlaja, 2008, 2012), although teachers' perceptions of the pupils in their own classes were more positive than the general perceptions of pupils with SEB difficulties (Heinonen, 2021; Hirvensalo, 2018). The attitudes often include stereotypical perceptions of such pupils. It seems that pupils with certain special needs are more likely to be included than others (Moberg et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be concluded that the inclusion of diverse pupils depends on attitudes towards as well as knowledge and acceptance of the rights of children (Sunko & Kaselj, 2020).

Narratives about inclusion

The narrative approach has been used in some studies of student teachers' attitudes towards inclusion as well as for understanding social justice as an inseparable part of inclusion (Pantic & Florian, 2015). The narrative approach helps to reveal student teachers' perceptions and thoughts as well as their implications for teacher education (Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020). One obvious issue in student teachers' inclusion narratives was insecurity; Yuan and Lee (2016) wrote that

student teachers often think along the lines of ‘I need to be strong and competent’ while feeling insecure. They also pointed out that limited attention has been paid to the different emotions that emerge when teaching in inclusive settings. In a narrative study of 17 teachers, decision-making regarding diversity in instruction was based mainly on teachers’ experiences, interests and identities. The intersection of teachers’ social and professional identities was an important factor (Dion, 2020). The narrative approach has been found to help in shifting teacher training away from a diagnostic focus when preparing students for inclusion (Mortier, 2020). Therefore, the narrative approach promotes the refusal of deficit narratives and privileges, for example, positive inclusion narratives (Turner & Waterman, 2019). Narratives can provide insight into the multiple realities of inclusion and can create new understandings of inclusion (Svendby, 2016).

In our study we wanted to become familiar with the narratives student teachers wrote about inclusion and, by highlighting them, also to encourage others to reflect what kind of narratives are needed to promote inclusive education. It is possible to construct new inclusion narratives, which can contribute to enacting change at the systemic level (Calderón-Almendros et al., 2020).

Aim, methodology and methods

In this section, we address the attitudes of Finnish student teachers towards inclusion. The aim of our study was to examine what student teachers (class, subject and special education student teachers) write about inclusion and how they view it. More specifically, our research focused on (1) what kinds of narratives student teachers tell about inclusion? (2) Are there differences in inclusion narratives among various student teacher groups, and, if so, what these differences are?

A teacher’s degree in Finland is a five-year university degree (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). A three-year bachelor’s degree (180 credits) and a two-year master’s degree (120 credits) is required for all teachers. Studies for special education teachers can also be undertaken after completing the five-year teacher’s programme by undergoing one more year of studies. (see Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006; Study Info, 2020). Early childhood special education teachers were excluded from our study because we were interested in compulsory education.

Methodology

An electronic questionnaire was delivered to all student teachers at three Finnish universities (Oulu, Helsinki and Turku) in spring 2019; two reminders were sent within the following six weeks. The

email addresses and permissions to conduct the study were provided by the institutions. The respondents remained anonymous throughout, with only their institutions being identified. Demographic questions about the area of study and respondent age were asked. Inclusion was briefly defined in the questionnaire as follows: ‘All children, including those who need support, are in the same class in general education. The support is brought to the child.’ The students were asked to write what they thought of inclusion and to argue in support of their views. The question in our query was as follows: ‘What is your attitude towards inclusion? Please provide reasons for your attitude.’

Participants

Each year, a varying number of students are accepted to universities, with approximately 120 class teachers, 20 - 100 special education students per year and 120-550 subject teacher students per year in one university (see Higher Education Statistics, 2021). Nevertheless, some additional groups are taken in with extra financing each year, so the exact number is not easy to trace. In total, we received 277 responses (see Table 1) from class, subject and special education student teachers, which represents about a quarter of the student teachers who received the invitation. The mean age of the student teachers was 28 years, with a standard deviation of 7.8. For the analysis, the respondents were grouped into the following three categories: class student teachers (CTS), subject student teachers (SuTS) and special education student teachers (SeTS). The SeTS category included students from both five- and one-year programmes as well as CTS who had chosen special education as part of their studies.

Table 1: Participants ABOUT HERE

The length of the respondents’ answers to the question varied from a few sentences to a short story. The shortest response was five words, the longest 239 words. On average, the responses were between 30 and 50 words.

Methodological basis and analysis

Our aim was to go beyond individual students’ responses and to identify what kinds of narratives exist and how they are related to the discussions that appear in research or public debates on inclusion. We looked for both powerfully expressed narratives and those that were expressed more subtly, even tacitly.

Narratives include insights into the past, the present and the future (Hyvärinen, 2004). Bruner (2004) pointed out that a narrative always includes insights into two landscapes, the landscape of action and the landscape of consciousness. The former offers a view of what the narrator thinks has happened or, as in our research, what respondents say about inclusion. The landscape of consciousness reveals the narrators' relations to the issue: what the respondents hope, believe, fear, want and imagine. Both landscapes were considered in our analysis when interpreting student teachers' responses. What the student teachers said could not be understood simply as what happens or as a fact regarding what the student teachers think about inclusion but had to be interpreted within the frames that structure their relations to inclusion.

We began by reading the responses from the three student teacher groups (CTS, SeTs and SuTS), examining the narratives in terms of how the students saw inclusion and its effects. In the first reading, which was done separately by the two first authors, we identified several themes, some of which appeared repeatedly and others more infrequently. Once all the responses had been read, we studied the themes and read the texts again to consider the sense or the meaning behind the actual words. We combined the themes by grouping similar elements into broader categories and found powerfully expressed narratives as well as those that were expressed more subtly. All these narratives were discussed by the author team: what the students wrote about most often, which narratives were dominant and which narratives were weak but still present. A consensus was established unanimously.

Results

The analysis showed that some narratives were common to many student teachers, while others appeared in just one or two student groups. It was also obvious that various forms of inclusion were suggested, seldom full inclusion.

Found narratives

A total of eight narratives, some of which overlapped to a certain extent, were found in all three groups. Of these narratives, four were common to all teacher groups, namely *lack of resources*, *suffering*, *segregation* and *yes, but* narratives. In addition to these, there were also narratives shared by one or two student groups. These narratives were *compassion*, *lack of training*, *flexible arrangements* and *human rights* narratives. The student teachers' attitudes appeared to be a

combination of heard, read and discussed views, and not all students had lived experiences of inclusion.

The most common narrative was about a *lack of resources*: the students pointed out that there are not enough resources for teachers to provide proper education to all pupils in a large class. It became clear that ‘when there are too many pupils in a class, it is challenging to support all those pupils’ (CTS 36). This was one of the most common narratives, which the respondents used to indicate a problem and a hindrance to inclusion. In a large group, a teacher had the impossible task of helping everyone in need. According to this narrative inclusion was often defined as it should realize in a large class with a big number of pupils. According to the student teachers, school assistants, resource staff members, special educators, smaller groups and extra training and materials were missing. Parallel to this narrative was the discussion that inclusion in municipalities is understood as a money-saving principle. The respondents mentioned the decreasing number of special schools as a sign of this trend. The *lack of resources* narrative included complaints about things that were missing as well as anxiety in relation to this, but it also involved reasoning about making inclusion possible with appropriate resources.

The idea of inclusion is brilliant, but it has been made into a reality very badly in Finnish schools. The challenges or problems in inclusion are not in the disability or in the diagnosis. It is a question of money and resources. Do we get skilled special teachers into classes to meet the pupils? (SuTS 41)

I believe that with the current education investments, there are not enough resources. (CTS 40)

I do not believe that those who can make decisions take care that there are enough resources to organise support for inclusion. (SeT 24)

Another common narrative was *suffering*. The respondents pointed out that someone always suffers in inclusion: the teacher due to a heavy workload that involves pupils with varied needs, the pupils with special needs who do not receive the support that they need and are entitled to or the ordinary pupils who miss out on teachers’ attention while it is directed to pupils for example with SEB difficulties. This was seen as a negative situation, a true story of suffering. Nevertheless, sometimes, the respondents wrote not about suffering but about being anxious and worried regarding the pupils’ unsatisfactory situation. They said that some groups of pupils did not get what they needed. This was a narrative that involved dimensions from suffering to milder anxiety, and also irritation.

Teachers suffer when they have to take care of ordinary teaching in addition to the needs of the SEN pupils. Thus, the biggest price of this policy is paid by ordinary pupils. This is not fair to the teacher ... nor to the pupils, both the 'ordinary' and 'special' pupils. ...

Forced inclusion is wrong for all parties. (SuTS 38)

Some pupils suffer in a large class. (CTS 10)

The teacher is overloaded, and other pupils' learning suffers. (CTS 55)

This narrative was close to the *segregation* narrative, which revealed that a small group of the respondents thought that specialised teachers or a special school would be much better for many students compared to a big group in a mainstream school. In this narrative, pupils in basic education were divided into 'normal' and 'special' pupils, and special schools or classes were needed for special pupils. Some student teachers mentioned that different placements and strategies were needed for diverse pupils. They also stated that experienced teachers at schools had explained the difficulties of inclusion to them, which made them believe that to segregate was 'true', they wrote that special classes were best for some pupils. Doing this some of them repeated what they had heard or what had been told to them. Some students narrated that inclusion was good in theory but did not work in practice and that segregation-based solutions were preferable. This narrative contained the voices of experienced teachers or the media, which described inclusion as unsuccessful and underlined segregated solutions. Also frustration can be heard here. The segregation narrative was regularly present in the SeTS' responses in which the two landscapes were present.

We really have to understand that general education is not suitable for all. Closing down all special classes is idiotic. (SeTS 36)

If the child cannot study in general education, he or she should not be forced to go there. ... Pupils with severe intellectual impairment do not benefit from regular education if their goals are very different from other pupils' goals. ... If a child with autism becomes distressed, a big class is not the right place. (CTS 99)

There is a special school in my city, which has been a good model. Teaching can be more effective, and there can be more peace to study. (SuTS 15)

The common *yes, but...* narrative had an ambivalent tune. In this narrative, inclusion was seen as a positive idea that was not being realised in Finland. The neighbourhood school and the possibility for all to attend a local school were cited as good ideas, yet always with a 'but'. This 'but' referred

to conditions that should come true: if inclusion is the policy, there must be a suitable group of (not too difficult) pupils, a competent teacher, enough resources, good facilities and support. The reasoning for approaching inclusion positively was ideological, but the practical side was regarded as impossible to fulfil. Due to these conditions, this narrative was named as *yes, but-narrative*. The name reveals that inclusion was neither unconditionally approved nor disapproved:

In principle a good idea, but it seldom functions. (SuTS 64)

I am familiar with inclusion and the ideology. The practical implementation does not function, but inclusion itself is excellent. (CTS 94)

The idea of inclusion is fine, but in practice, based on my experiences and what I have read, it is not realised as intended. (CTS 3)

Variation in student teachers' narratives

The *compassion* narrative was not common to all groups; it was most typical among the CTS respondents, many of whom were concerned about their pupils when they noticed that not all pupils received what they needed. Pupils with additional needs were seen as requiring support, but the respondents underlined that such pupils were also part of general classes without any support. The student teachers' attitudes towards pupils with special needs were based on understanding and support. At the same time, there was the concern that 'these pupils are forgotten in a general class (CTS 18) and the worry that there was not enough time for teachers to offer sufficient support or that 'pupils with special needs in a class might be tossed out' (CTS 31). In this narrative, participation was seen as an important value: 'pupils with special needs should not be shut out' (CTS 40). This narrative had some similar features as the suffering narrative, but the tune was positive:

We should not leave a pupil with special needs alone. (CTS 38)

It is important that all the pupils feel that they belong and are welcome to be full participants in class. (CTS86)

If there is no support available in a group, this doesn't promote the wellbeing of the children. (CTS107)

The *lack of training* narrative was common among the CTS and SuTS categories, with participants pointing out that, as they were not trained in inclusion, they were not competent in teaching pupils with special needs. This has elements of lack of resources-narrative also, while education can be

seen as a resource. Some respondents even pointed out that they had not wanted to become special educators but were forced to deal with diversity in schools. The lack of competence narrative reveals that class and subject teacher education in Finland hardly touches on special education or inclusion. 'I am not trained to be a special teacher' is a sentence that gives the impression that only special teachers could or should teach pupils who need additional support. In this narrative, teachers' need for more training was strongly present:

In class teacher education, pupils with SEN are not taken into account, so I feel that I'm not prepared to ensure a safe learning environment and provide the best possible education and individual support. (CTS 97)

I wonder how I can offer the best possible education for those in need of support without special teacher education. (CTS 43)

Teacher education does not prepare you to work as a teacher in inclusive settings. (CTS 115)

Class teacher education has three credits of special education unless you choose to take more. In other words, teachers need to get the skills somehow if they want to manage. (CTS 80)

The skills of subject teachers are insufficient. Student groups are too big, and individualisation is difficult and challenging. A subject teacher does not always recognise support needs. In the worst case, a subject teacher is not interested in special issues or in pupils in need of special support. (SuTS 41)

The *flexible arrangements* narrative was very different from the segregation narrative and was conveyed by SeTS respondents. They claimed that both large and small groups would be appropriate at different times. With the right resources directed to education, inclusion was possible to implement, but it required flexible arrangements that consider individual needs. However, the respondents also suggested that a small group could be part of a regular school and that attendance could be temporary and flexibly arranged:

Inclusion cannot be a straightforward goal for all pupils. Depending on the individual, for some pupils, a small and peaceful group is better for learning and well-being. The best part of inclusion is participation and the acceptance of difference, but, of course, participation cannot be realised if there is not enough support in class. (SeTS 20)

The support must be well planned, and it has to make flexible special arrangements possible in order to make being and learning possible for every pupil. (SeTS 31)

There was also a weak but discernible *human rights* narrative, according to which inclusion was a human right; inclusion was designed to reflect equality principles and depicted society as it is, with diverse people. According to this narrative, inclusive education should offer possibilities to all students to meet different people. While this narrative was used mainly by SeTS respondents, there were signs of it among CTS respondents' narratives, though not among SuTS respondents' narratives. The right to participate was emphasised in this narrative; indeed, some students who espoused this narrative did not express any doubts about inclusive education. In this narrative, 'belonging' was cited as part of human rights:

I think it is a good idea from the perspective of social equality and grouping. No pupil needs to leave the group repeatedly, but all can get to know each other and practice working together. This, nevertheless, included the idea that those in need of more support are not left alone with their tasks but can be offered the support they need in separate classes. This demands determined planning from the school and making the most of multi-professional collaboration. (CTS 38)

A child has the right to attend the nearest school and to experience participation. We have to enlarge both the concept of difference and the possibilities to act, for diverse pupils have to be included in society. (SeTS 12)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine various teacher students' narratives about inclusion. The research focused on the kinds of narratives that student teachers conveyed about inclusion and the existence and nature of the differences in these narratives among the various student teacher groups.

The results reveal that student teachers in Finnish universities have many reservations about and face obstacles when implementing inclusive education. The landscapes of action and consciousness were present in the narratives. In the written responses the focus was on where and how the education of the pupils is organized and who is for example better to educate in special settings. This can be interpreted as the landscape of action. These responses also include the landscape of consciousness, students' relation into their interpretations of inclusion. The respondents expressed fears of future work challenges, fears of their own incompetence and concerns for pupils. The demands at school, such as providing support, caused anxiety, focusing on pupils' right to learn and

receive support. Some answers could be interpreted to include student's irritation and frustration, when thinking inclusion as something that makes both teacher's and pupil's life hard. It was amazing, how little there was hope. These views reveal the image of inclusive education that student teachers have; not what inclusive education is or should be. The image of inclusion that the student teachers relayed was of something that had to be realised in a large group with a high number of pupils and with minimal resources and no training. This was especially seen in class and subject student teachers' narratives, who did not mention flexible arrangements or methods such as co-teaching, which constitute some of the ways of promoting inclusive education (Takala & Wickman, 2021). The picture of inclusion was somewhat narrow and did not include the different ways of implementing inclusion, and the possibilities in the inclusive dimension. The surrounding society and culture were present in the narratives and provided students with a multivoiced orientation (as discussed also in Bruner, 1986, 2004; Hermans 2001). The multivoiced narrative could be heard in two different ways. The first issue was the surrounding context, consisting of factors such as social media and other people's opinions, which have had also an effect on student teachers' narratives. The other was the narratives of the different student teacher groups. There were shared elements, such as the lack of resources and the weaker narrative on the human rights perspective. The student teachers gave the impression that they knew about the problems related to inclusion, although the respondents had little experience of inclusion. Student teachers' thinking about inclusion is not monolithic but consists of different approaches to the phenomenon. Individuals' personal narratives were multivoiced.

Student teachers with special education as their major appeared to have more positive attitudes towards inclusion than the other student teachers. They also offered other form of inclusion, like a partial or cumulative inclusion. (Qvortrup & Qvortup, 2018) Several well-known challenges concerning inclusive education appeared in the narratives discussed in our study. The lack of resources and training was also identified in a Head Start survey of 41 teachers performed in the US (Yu, 2019). In a study by Saloviita and Schaffus (2016), German teachers were especially worried about the extra work that inclusion demands of teachers. This was also mentioned by several SuTS respondents in our study. A large study of Finnish teachers ($n = 1\ 764$) showed that subject teachers ($n = 575$) had the most negative attitudes towards inclusion, far below the mean. Class teachers were also below the midpoint but not as far below as subject teachers. Only the special education teachers ($n = 365$) had attitudes above the midpoint (Saloviita, 2020a). Our results with student teachers partly confirm these results. Regarding the implementation of inclusion, the importance of resources and support networks was pointed out in a Finnish study of 4 567 teachers; without the

right tools, like collaboration and co-teaching, teachers were less positive about inclusion, seeing it as something that causes extra work (Saloviita, 2020b), just as many of our respondents did. In a German study, the attitudes of student teachers were quite positive, but there was a lack of personal contribution to inclusion and an absence of a deeper understanding of inclusion (Baar, 2016).

With regards to the four core values of inclusion (Watkins & Donnelly, 2014), valuing learner diversity as well as the need to support all learners were mentioned in several responses.

Nevertheless, these were attached to the lack of competence, and as such, difficult to fulfil. The need for collaboration, the third core value, was also recognized, but difficult to implement, while a partner in class was seldom a reality. While the respondents were still students, they saw that with more professional development, which is the fourth core value, they might be able to handle the diversity. The responses showed that it can be a challenge to realize the core values of inclusion at school education if the attitudes do not change.

Our study had certain limitations. Some of the participants had more work experience than others and having worked at schools may have influenced their attitudes and views. This was an element that we could not control for. In addition, as pointed out in a study by Ewing, Monsen and Kielblock (2018), participants interpret concepts such as inclusion and disabilities very differently. The results could also have been affected by students having different groups of pupils in mind when conveying their attitudes about inclusion (Lübke et al., 2019). Also, our definition of inclusion in the questionnaire may have directed participants' ideas too much and, consequently, narrowed their thinking. In addition, we did not ask the student teachers about their year of study nor their personal experiences with diversity. Nevertheless, our results resemble those of several previous studies and offer an understandable way to make students thinking visible (Desombre et al., 2019; Saloviita, 2020a).

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Dotger, B., & Ashby, B. (2010). Exposing Conditional Inclusive Ideologies Through Simulated Interactions. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 33(2), 114-130.

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[Article information](#)

point out that it is important for future teachers to be able to argue the beliefs about inclusive education, but also to describe how these beliefs relate to classroom practices. Nevertheless, in their study with two kind of teacher student groups, under pressure some teachers said: “Let’s see how it goes” showing hesitation with regards to inclusion and underlining the fact that knowledge of inclusion is not the same as putting it into action (Dotger & Ashby, 2010, p. 124). Lewis, Corcoran, Juma, Kaplan, Little and Pinnock (2019) underline that no quick methods or training can promote inclusion, but sustainable changes to education systems and cultures are needed. They present four important aspects: 1) Do not expect over-night change. 2) Provide experiential learning opportunities. 3) Empower teachers with critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. 4) Do not work on in-service training in isolation from pre-service. They say that all actors working on inclusive teacher education need to document their work from a critically reflective perspective. They also emphasise that training for inclusion is not easy, it is not something everyone can do (Lewis et al. 2019). European Agency’s (2010) report *Teacher Education for Inclusion* underlines working collaboratively and reflecting critically one’s own practice in promoting inclusion. These are similar issues what Lewis et al. (2019) listed, and which are mentioned also in Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 2018).

Teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion are often studied with quantitative methods and the results show much homogeneity, was noticed in a large meta-study (Lacruz-Pérez, Sanz-Cervera & Tárraga-Mínguez, 2021). The authors comment that deeper and qualitative research is needed. However, although our research is qualitative, it cannot tell why the different teacher categories differed in their attitudes. It could be good to study also teachers’ self-efficacy in relation to attitudes towards inclusion. In a study by Saloviita (2020) a crucial issue was the availability of support services. When support was available, the attitudes were more positive. Perhaps contact theory (Allport 1954) could at least partly explain why special education students had more positive attitude towards inclusion. They have often more contacts and relationships with people with special needs than other teacher students. This has been noticed with children having contact to peers with special needs and consequently, having more positive attitudes towards disability (Armstrong, Morris, Abraham, Ukoumunne & Tarrant, 2016). Similar results were received with

university teacher education students (Kunz, Luder & Kassis, 2021). The study program for special teacher students includes issues related to diversity, special needs, inclusion and the value of difference. These are not so central in the curriculum of other teacher students (Author et al. 2019; e.g. University of Helsinki, 2022; University of Oulu, 2022).

Inclusive education has been accepted at the policy level in many countries. Unfortunately, attitudes towards special needs have hardened in Finnish education policy (Bourassa, 2021; Ketovuori & Pihlaja, 2016). Based on our results, inclusion may not have a rosy future. Perhaps the unknown causes fear and uncertainty. (Hettiaarachi et al., 2018) We conclude that, in the era of inclusion, it is important to emphasise special education in university curricula and offer future teachers experience diversity during their studies. Some weak though positive signals were detected: there were narratives in which inclusion was seen as an ideal and as a human right in a well-designed framework. This is something that we, as educators and as researchers, can focus on and commit to in the future, and perhaps, promote changes in inclusion narratives.

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