

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON INCLUSION

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Guest Editors

This special issue of the *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* (IJCYFS) is dedicated to a most important and current subject – inclusion – as an answer of social educators and many other social agents to one of the most crucial social phenomena of our time: namely, social exclusion. We are witnessing around the world incidents of aggression and violence that are sometimes attributed to the effects of exclusion, either at an individual or more collective level. Our social and economic structures appear designed to exclude all too many from the benefits and fruits of society. The African concept of “Ubuntu” (“I am a person because of other persons”) seems very relevant here. How do we share spaces, resources, opportunities, and create a sense of belonging across our many differences and contexts?

Inclusion was the theme of a world congress of the International Federation of Educative Communities (FICE), held in Bern, Switzerland in October 2013. Most of the articles in this special issue are based on presentations made at that congress. We would like to thank all contributors for formalizing and revising their presentations with input from our editors for this special issue. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of Carol Kelly and Varda Mann-Feder to the review process. Finally, we are also most thankful to the co-editors of the IJCYFS, Drs. Sibylle Artz and Jennifer White, for inviting us to contribute this quite unique special issue related to the work and history of FICE International.

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The articles gathered together here reflect the major shift nowadays in the way professionals tend to look on these processes of social exclusion and the responses to them. We are under no illusions about the current state of affairs. All such issues and proposed solutions are actively contested and debated, with little sense of unanimity on any dimensions. Thus, the articles in this issue offer important information and perspectives for us to consider as we advocate for the active inclusion of excluded and marginalized children, youth, families, and communities throughout the world.

In the past, we have tended to focus on the inner characteristics of people suffering from the effects of social exclusion, trying to find there reasons why certain individuals and groups have not successfully integrating into society. Today, we tend to focus much more on the larger social context that has brought about tragic situations of people suffering social exclusion. In Israel, for example, this shift is reflected in a change of terminology. In the past, we referred to “weak populations” while nowadays the term used is “**weakened** populations”. The difference is very significant. The new terminology is shifting the focus to social circumstances that have caused the “weakening” of these individuals and groups, that have excluded them from the mainstream of society.

The selection of articles in this special issue reflects this more sociological understanding and perspective, and the attitude of professionals that focuses more on changing social structures (such as classrooms, living arrangements, social services, and societal responses) and empowering children, young people, families, and communities suffering from social exclusion, helping them succeed through social inclusion processes.

The first article is an overview of the history of FICE-International, and especially of its evolution and growth in more recent years. FICE was formed in response to the devastating effects of the Second World War on young people in Europe, but it has developed into a more truly international organization that now links individuals and organizations on most continents of the world. David Lane, an Honorary Life President of FICE, has made many significant contributions to FICE over his long involvement, including supporting a variety of FICE publications. We are pleased and honored that he has contributed this perspective on the nature, history, and strengths of this unique organization.

David Lane’s overview provides some context for readers new to this international organization, the only one that focuses primarily on the out-of-home care of young people, broadly defined to include all forms of residential and foster care. As Lane notes, FICE has continued to respond to the needs of young people affected by conflicts in many parts of the world, and including more recently young people affected by the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS in Africa. This unique gathering of individuals and national groups continues to expand into new countries and continents, and its networking of expertise, information, and mutual support is likely to gain even more influence as more countries in the “majority world” discover the important contributions to be made by professional social educators/social pedagogues/child and youth care practitioners.

The second article, by Arthur Limbach-Reich of Luxembourg, reviews the evidence on educational inclusion of students with disabilities, differentiating ideology from evidence. Dealing with various aspects of the inclusion concept, with special focus on its relevance to education, the analysis shows a lack of coherence in defining inclusion. Ethical principles and scientific considerations about inclusion are often mixed. The concept of inclusion gave rise to the hope that exclusion would be overcome and everyone would be able to enjoy full

participation in mainstream education and society. The article is not intending to be a pledge against inclusion, but rather a warning to be aware of the myths, pitfalls, and tensions involved in its implementation. The inflationary use of “inclusion” in recent discourse and the devaluating of “integration” in favor of inclusion are more likely to be a result of popular trends than of substantial changes in scientific analysis or educational practice.

The structural functionalist approach indicates that inclusion is a dynamic developmental process of incorporating groups or individuals into a given social system. Limbach-Reich elaborates on Luhmann’s functional system theory and especially his conclusion: “Neither can one simply assume that exclusion is bad and inclusion good nor is exclusion per se the problem and inclusion the solution”. Special focus is given to the notion of inclusion in education, addressing the Luxembourg Charter (1996). Inclusion underpins a comprehensive school approach and encourages global efforts to enhance the participation of vulnerable groups in education. A discussion is presented about the use of the term inclusion in non-English speaking areas such as French and German speaking communities. Some data are presented about attempts to evaluate the success of inclusive processes. The studies do not give a clear-cut picture. They could be summarized by stating that inclusion works but not for all, not at all times, and not in all settings.

The third article by Jennifer Davidson presents a challenging question: What has changed in the last ten years in the situation of children’s and young people’s rights? The author does not give a direct answer; however, she elaborates how important changes at the international policy level, namely the 2009 United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, have the potential to engender lasting effects on the most vulnerable children and young people placed in out-of-home care facilities. As one of the leaders of the “Moving Forward” project, aimed at enhancing the implementation of these guidelines, Davidson presents an informed and broad perspective on this topic.

The underlying assumption of her article is that proper implementation of these guidelines should enhance social inclusion processes for young people who need alternative care. This is closely related to the de-institutionalization movement that considers every institutional placement as negative. Some proponents even go further and claim that institutional care is a kind of exclusion by itself. On the other hand, the guidelines acknowledge that family-based settings, and good quality residential care facilities, could respond optimally to children’s needs and, in particular, to their desire of being socially included. The U.N. Guidelines remind us that children need stability for their healthy development; so frequent changes in care settings must be avoided. For stability to be achieved, the range of options must first be available, then thoroughly assessed against the child’s needs, and reviewed as the placement progresses.

The fourth article, written by a multicultural group of experts from Germany and Canada – Wassilis Kassis, Sibylle Artz, Stephanie Moldenhauer, Istvan Geczey, and Katherine Rossiter – deals with aggressive behaviors of children and young people in a comparative study between several countries. This cross-sectional study on family violence and resilience was done with a large sample of 5,149 middle school students from four European countries (Austria, Germany, Slovenia, and Spain); 34% (1,644 students) reported that they had experienced violence in their families, with 23% reporting physical abuse by parents, and 17% reporting that they had witnessed physical spousal abuse. The basic assumption of the authors is that environmental exposure of children to violence in the family home has long-term consequences. Therefore, the study of resilience among children who were raised in violent families is of great importance. The study proposes a new

theoretical framework for resilience, namely, resilience as a non-dichotomous concept. Kassis and colleagues suggest that resilience should be categorized in terms of levels, based on differences in the severity of violence that individuals have been exposed to. The three levels of resilience proposed are: “resilient”, “near-resilient”, and “non-resilient”. The authors also expand their definition of resilience to include the absence of problem behaviors in adolescents who have been exposed to violence in their families. The ultimate conclusion of the authors is that the level of family violence burden and accumulation of risk factors are central to resilience status and should therefore be the prime target for prevention and intervention planning. The finding that children who had been exposed to domestic violence are at risk of being violent themselves might, in turn, contribute to their exclusion from mainstream society. Therefore, their resilience status becomes a crucial element in their opportunities for inclusion.

The next series of articles describe ways social care agencies in different countries are using their resources to help young marginalized youth cope successfully with the challenges of inclusion.

The article by Isa Guara and Dayse Bernardi outlines important recent developments in FICE-International’s newest national section, FICE-Brazil. The government and non-governmental organizations in Brazil have been dramatically re-fashioning the legislative and policy context for out-of-home services for children and adolescents in that country, and NECA (Nucleo de Estudos da Crianca e do Adolescente – Center for the Study of Children and Adolescents) has been playing a key role in linking policy and practice in service of the rights of children and their best interests. Guara and Bernardi outline the complex changes underway, focusing especially on new social and familial integration policies, procedures, and practices.

Among the major violations of the rights of children and adolescents who are in a vulnerable situation in Brazil are the fragility of the support and security on the part of family and community and the low education level of children and adolescents, which is detrimental to their future social and economic inclusion and negatively impacts their emotional and social development. Many children and adolescents still live in environments in which they are subjected to different forms of domestic and sexual violence and are in a state of material and emotional abandonment. Many are on the streets.

Social and familial inclusion has become the heart of the social welfare and protection system in Brazil. All efforts and legal measures seek to strengthen biological families in regaining their protective capacity so they can take back the children who have moved away from their space of affection and protection. The challenge now is to develop new education and training programs to prepare social educators and agencies to more effectively align with the espoused principles of children’s rights and well-being.

An article written by a group of experts from Switzerland, Clara Bombach, Renate Stohler, and Hans Wydler, deals with Farming Families as Foster Families. They present the findings of an exploratory study on “Care Farming” in Switzerland. Care farming in Europe is heterogeneous and many aspects have not yet been researched. In Switzerland, the first studies examining the practice of placing children and adolescents with farming families, which originated in the 19th century, were published only a few years ago. The quality of family placement organizations (FPO) has been a matter of concern for some time now, as there are no national quality standards.

Introduced by an overview of care farming in Europe and Swiss foster care, the results of a study are presented on the context and importance of care farming and the

attitudes and working methods of child and adult protection authorities and FPOs. The child's well-being and fit with the foster families is considered important for placement but explicit indications for an agricultural setting were not considered. Interest on the part of farming families is considerable but only some are considered suitable by the FPOs. The skills required of foster families were not assessed as qualitatively better or more frequently present in agricultural settings than in others, and a possible lack of supplementary services and sources of danger in rural areas, amongst other factors, were mentioned. The authors make the argument that more research on foster care and care farming in Switzerland is needed to ensure its quality, including systematic analyses of experience-based knowledge and the perspectives of the children and adolescents concerned.

Andrea Rácz contributes a discussion of social exclusion in Hungary from a child protection perspective. Poverty, number of children, educational attainment, limited access to quality educational opportunities, ethnicity, stress-related psychosomatic symptoms, and a lack of positive social relations on the part of children seem to be interrelated, with the education system further increasing social differences. Of all children, 10% are considered at risk and not quite 1% are in long-term care (60% foster care, 40% residential care homes). Aftercare is provided for young adults raised within the protection system, including counselling services up to age 30. Those leaving foster care show higher educational attainment and thus better chances for employment than those from residential care. Integration is hampered in both cases as ties with the family of origin often have not been maintained. Many of those in institutional care show symptoms of anxiety; 30% of those in residential care and 10% of those in foster care having considered suicide. Of all care leavers, 40% are unemployed.

The author emphasizes that more research is needed, as professionals find themselves without methods for preparing children for an independent life that would make their inclusion possible. She recommends improved support for families and a modernization of residential institutions to be more therapeutic and effective regarding education, citing necessary competencies for professionals and relevant topics for training curricula. She strongly advocates protagonism, describing the Children's Home Children's Parliament run by FICE since 2011, and concludes with a call for reducing poverty, eradicating extreme forms of child exclusion, and fundamentally changing services which today still contribute to poverty and reproduce exclusion.

The contribution of Susanna Hoikkala and Martti Kemppainen focuses on the phenomenon of running away from children's residential care in the Finnish context. The article begins by contextualizing the children's residential care system in Finland and the study carried out. The second part focuses on empirical findings and the final section discusses the implications and offers concluding remarks. Reasons for out-of-home placements are manifold. They are quite often related to the problems of coping in everyday life, parenting skills, and parents' substance abuse and/or mental health problems. On the other hand, some issues can be related to the child's own behaviour and/or psychological well-being, such as self-endangering behavior by substance abuse. A child may have difficulties at school and/or problems with friendships. In some cases, a child's absconding from a familial home is the main reason for a placement. In such cases children have a history of multiple runaways before entering alternative care.

In the Finnish welfare system, residential care is understood as a last-resort form of alternative care and its aim is to secure children's well-being, development, and safety. The authors emphasize the need to implement more inclusive and consistent practices as well as more explicit cooperation between authorities. The importance of children's peer relations

also needs to be taken more seriously within residential care services. These findings are discussed bearing in mind the following critical question: What is the point of child welfare if it fails to serve children and safeguard their well-being and health during the out-of-home placement?

The concluding article, written by Renate Stohler and Milena Gehrig, focuses on young adults who do not have stable accommodation or a daily structure, and whose transition to a self-sustained, socially integrated adulthood is at risk. Framed by a literature review on education, employment, and housing, they present an evaluation study of one out of just a few institutions of its kind in Switzerland: a home for young adults without stable accommodation, who can neither live with their family nor independently and do not want to live in residential care or in a foster family. They find that most of its residents have unstable biographies with regard to housing and education, as well as a history of psychological problems and substance abuse. The programme is successful for those who have a daily structure and are independent and willing to change their situation, but fails those who do not strive to change their situation, suffer from psychological problems or drug addiction, have never worked before, have hardly any social network, or have repeatedly dropped out of other programmes.

The authors recommend a combined approach of independent living and integration in the labor market, individualized programme duration, the strengthening of self-competence and social networks and inter-institutional cooperation in the areas of education, employment, and social assistance. This article raises the fundamental issue of matching services, even to those who may resort to strategies that do not agree with the rules of the institution, thus stimulating thinking about what constitutes services that are truly accessible and inclusive.

In conclusion, the editors believe the diverse set of articles in this special issue has much to offer to those interested in expanding their appreciation of the notions, processes, opportunities, and challenges of inclusion within an international and historical perspective. Overcoming exclusionary policies and practices and implementing inclusive programmes is of critical importance to today's children, youth, families, and communities. It is also vital to creating a future characterized by equity and social justice for all.