



Dancing between money and ideas: inclusion in primary education in the Czech Republic from 2005 to 2020

Denisa Denglerová, Jan Kalenda, Radim Šíp & Markéta Košátková

To cite this article: Denisa Denglerová, Jan Kalenda, Radim Šíp & Markéta Košátková (2022): Dancing between money and ideas: inclusion in primary education in the Czech Republic from 2005 to 2020, International Journal of Inclusive Education, DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2022.2134475](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2022.2134475)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2022.2134475>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 26 Oct 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 112







View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Dancing between money and ideas: inclusion in primary education in the Czech Republic from 2005 to 2020

Denisa Denglerová ^{a,c}, Jan Kalenda ^{a,b}, Radim Šíp ^{a,b} and Markéta Kořátková ^a

^aDepartment of Social Education, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic; ^bResearch Centre of FHS, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Zlín, Czech Republic; ^cDepartment of Pedagogical Sciences, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Zlín, Czech Republic

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyse the implementation of inclusion policy in primary education in the Czech Republic using the arena of discursive construction by the main actors and also the impact on the acceptance of inclusion. For this purpose, we use a qualitative research strategy based on situational analysis methods – the so-called maps of discursive arenas. The study describes two arenas of inclusive education between 2005 and 2020. The turning point came in 2015, when inclusion legislation was accepted. The study results suggest that both arenas are linked by two main opposing discourses. The Special Education Discourse argues that it is more effective when children of a similar level of abilities are educated together; the Inclusive Education Discourse strives to reduce segregation and isolation of pupils with various kinds of disadvantages. Both discourses tend to polarise the inclusion debate. One of the main reasons for this polarisation is that the state is failing to create a functional platform for communication which could help overcome the conflict.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 February 2021
Accepted 3 October 2022

KEYWORDS

Education policy; inclusive education; primary education; situation analysis; discursive arenas; stakeholders

Introduction

Inclusive education has long been considered an important goal of education policy for children with special educational needs (SEN) across most European and non-European countries (Hardy et al. 2014; Miles and Singal 2010; Symeonidou and Phtiaka 2009; Lindsay 2007). This is particularly true for countries that have had or still have a high degree of segregation of children with SEN in primary and secondary education (EADSNE 2020), and where an active inclusion policy has only just begun to take shape during the last decade. These countries include the Czech Republic (CZ).

The inclusion of children with SEN in the mainstream education system, educating them together with other children, has a number of positive effects on the adaptability and well-being of children with SEN (Macartney and Morton 2013; Turnbull, Turnbull,

CONTACT Denisa Denglerová  denglerova@utb.cz  Faculty of Humanities, Department of Pedagogical Sciences, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Czech Republic, Štefánikova 5670, 760 01 Zlín

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

and Wehmeyer 2006), as well as a positive impact on their education (Carter and Hughes 2006; Frey and Fisher 2004). It also provides several benefits to their peers, as it significantly enriches them through the experience of otherness, helping them develop tolerance, as well as social and emotional intelligence, and not usually impairing their school results (Dessementet and Bless 2013; Kalambouka et al. 2007; Ruijs and Peetsma 2009). The inclusion of talented children is also a significant contribution to the educational process (Gulová and Střelec 2020; Pyryt and Bosetti 2006).

Essential for a successful inclusion policy is *acceptance of its basic values by its key implementers* (Bhatnagar and Das 2014; de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert 2011; Macartney and Morton 2013). In this regard, it is important that the goals and tools of inclusive education are perceived as beneficial by the key actors, and that they are widely shared and supported. Stakeholders, school principals, teachers, paraeducators and parents of pupils are usually considered the most important carriers of inclusion (Downing and Packham-Hardin 2006).

An inclusion policy is subjected to discursive negotiation and construction by various actors: government departments and their organisational units, professional and civic associations, international organisations (UNESCO, OECD), the media and politicians, who influence its meanings (Hardy et al. 2014; Peters and Besley 2014). The creation of these meanings has a discursive form and represents a process of a constant negotiation and defining of a symbolic order (Keller 2012).

The complexity of this process is also related to the ways the state institutions operate. Whether a purely political-bureaucratic approach prevails in state administration, or an approach focused on communicative policy-design (Colebatch 2018) and soft-management (Carney 2012), greatly influences the inclusion legislation and its implementation. The political-bureaucratic approach assumes that the implementation of the policy is decided by those who occupy the relevant ministry based on the election results, while the latter emphasises that the implementation of any policy should be based on creating a space for communication in which the views of all decision-makers meet and influence each other. Although the political-bureaucratic approach cannot be circumvented entirely (Colebatch 2018), soft-management and a communicative approach makes it possible to cross the election cycle horizon and thus maintain the professional debate continuum.

The meanings and definitions of inclusion, which become dominant in a particular society, influence the formation of values and attitudes, and thus the very acceptance of inclusion policy, of the people responsible for its actual implementation (Donohue and Bornman 2014; Glazzard 2011; Le Fanu and Besley 2013). When the meanings are predominantly negative, it significantly reduces the chance that the value framework of inclusion will be accepted by the key actors, and, as a result, its effectiveness and positive impacts on the pupils with SEN themselves may be significantly reduced. Negative meanings begin to function as symbolic boundaries around which the identities of actors are formed (Lamont and Laurent 2000), including the relationship between regular and special schools (Danforth and Naraian 2015; Danforth 2015).

For this reason, the study presented examines the *process of implementation of inclusion policy in primary education in the Czech Republic between 2005 and 2020*. Note: When referring to 'primary' education, we reflect the situation in the Czech Republic, where primary schools (grades 1–9) are usually attended by pupils aged 6–15 years. The study is focused on three interconnected goals:

- (1) To discover the key discourses associated with the implementation of this policy – how these discourses describe inclusion and what essential meanings and value orientations they defend and promote.
- (2) To learn how the various actors involved in the local discursive arena participate in shaping the discourses. This predominantly includes key stakeholders and associations responsible for implementing the given policy.
- (3) To find out how these discourses contribute to the implementation of the local inclusion policy, whether they act as accelerators or as obstacles to its enforcement.

The analysis of the situation in CZ can also be a valuable national case study, as, until recently, the country ranked among the European countries with the highest degree of segregation of children with SEN in primary education (EADSNE 2020). In this sense, the study may serve as a convenient ‘laboratory’ for studying implementation of inclusion policy where there is a high degree of segregation of children with SEN. The results will help us determine what to avoid when implementing an inclusion policy, and what needs to be emphasised at a discursive level.

Methods

The research is based on the methods of *Situational Analysis* (Clarke 2005; Clarke, Friese, and Washburn 2018), which represents one of the current approaches to the application of *Grounded Theory* (Glaser and Strauss 1967). According to Clarke (2005, 23), the situational analysis (SA) is a ‘package of theory and methods’ enabling various phenomena to be studied, without reducing them to an event and its context. For this purpose, he uses ‘cartographic tools’ – maps. Together with other Grounded Theory analytical tools (constant comparative analysis, memoing and coding) he monitors how a certain situation is constituted by human, discursive and material elements.

For the purpose of our analysis, we will use maps of so-called *social worlds and discursive arenas*. Mapping of the social worlds and discursive arenas aims to define three fundamental elements (Clarke 2005; Clarke, Friese, and Washburn 2018; Strauss 1984):

- (1) Key discourses that constitute the discursive arena. The arena is a space where meanings are negotiated between the individual and collective actors involved, and where all key discourses related to a certain phenomenon are contained.
- (2) Main social groups and their actors involved in the discursive arena (e.g. stakeholders, professionals, parents of pupils with SEN, etc.).
- (3) Organisations (e.g. government ministries, non-profit organisations, etc.) whose activities are closely related to the discursive arena.

Description and analysis of these three components enables us to demonstrate how individuals form commitments, e.g. in the form of value orientation and identities related to various phenomena, organisations and social groups; how actors negotiate the meaning of a certain phenomenon (Clarke 2005; Strauss 1984). Together they form a ‘relational ecology’ of the investigated situation (Clarke, Friese, and Washburn 2018, 104 and 203).

These constitutive components of arenas are constructed on the basis of empirical data (see data collection process below) analysed using ‘focus coding’ and ‘sensitive questions’

in three following steps. First, we determine the arena of inclusion. In this case, the analytical point is put on the delineation of the main agenda of the arena and boundary settings between the arena and social groups and organisations (Clarke 2005, 113). In the second step, the following analytical focus describes how the arena is organised and how different actors constitute its content. For this purpose, the following sensitive questions are used: What is the focus of this arena? What organisations/actors are present and active? What organisations/actors are (not) present and implicated? What are the hot issues/contested topics/current controversies in the arena's discourses? (see also Clarke 2005; Clarke, Friese, and Washburn 2018). In the last step, the analytical foci are performed on the arena's evolution across the period of 2005–2020. This task is investigated with sensitive questions focusing on change in critical issues, discourses, and groups and actors involved in the arena.

One of the main advantages of SA as a qualitative approach to the study of inclusive policy is that it is a tool that can very effectively map both the actors of inclusive education, and the individual discourses that jointly create the arena of inclusive education. This enables the preservation of elements in the national context, including its discursive specifics and unique actors (D'Alessio and Watkins 2009), and also offers a basic framework for comparison with other countries.

Data collection and analysis

For our analysis, we collected data from various sources to cover different facets of the arena of inclusion in the Czech Republic and all the crucial social groups, actors and organisation that have been responsible for its constitution and transformation from 2005 onwards. We focus on the period of 2005–2020 for two interconnected reasons. On the one hand, it helps us understand the formation of the arena in the Czech environment around 2005 (How and why did it emerge?). On the other, it covers long-term transformations and trends in the arena – preserving and changing the discourse and hot issues that are visible only from a long-term view (How and why did the arena of inclusion change?).

The following data sources were used for the analysis:

- (1) Interviews with key stakeholders of inclusion in primary education ($N = 7$).
- (2) International agreements and conventions concerning inclusion that bind the Czech Republic.
- (3) Legislation connected to inclusion, including the debate on the Inclusion Act and its individual directives from 2004 to 2020.
- (4) Annual reports of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) from 2016, 2017, 2018.
- (5) MEYS Strategy for 2016–2020 and 2030+.
- (6) Contents of media reflection on inclusion and its discursive representation in newspapers and online articles ($N = 917$). We have used a representative sample of newspapers with the broadest readership in the Czech Republic, and a specialised monthly journal focused on issues of education and schooling.

The primary sources of data for analysis are represented by semi-structured interviews (40 to 120 minutes) with stakeholders who represented the key figures in the discussion on inclusion in the period under review, and/or with individuals responsible for implementing

inclusion policy and creating the related legislation. The selection of stakeholders was preceded by a document analysis that identified important periods and key figures for the adoption of inclusive legislation. The first interviewee was Kateřina Valachová, the Minister of Education in 2015–2017, who strongly advocated for the implementation of inclusive legislation in the Czech Republic's education policy. Based on the analysis of the interview and comparing the results of this analysis with other data, we identified the following stakeholders:¹

- (1) S1 – Kateřina Valachová – Czech Minister of Education, 2015–2017;
- (2) S2 – Klára Laurenčíková – Czech Deputy Minister of Education, 2007–2009, and current chairwoman of the Czech Society for Inclusive Education (CSIE);
- (3) S3 – Martin Šimáček – director of the Agency for Social Inclusion, 2008–2014;
- (4) S4 – Jiří Pilař – MEYS Department Head, 1997–2008, and current chairman of the Czech Association of Special Pedagogues (CASP);
- (5) S5 – Vít Alexander Schorm – Czech Republic Government Commissioner for Human Rights at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR);
- (6) S6 – Petr Konůpka – Deputy Government Commissioner; hlavní koordinátor kauzy D.H. a ostatní vs. ČR
- (7) S7 – Petr Kořenek – Member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic, 2013–2017.

The interviews were analysed according to SA methods, using focused coding, sensitive questions/concepts and memoing with respect to three-step procedure described above. At the same time, legislative and strategic documents were also subjected to focused coding and memoing enabling the stakeholder statements to be understood with relation to the implementation process. Other sources of data, especially media reflections, were used to identify discourses that affect the perception of inclusion and its implementation in schools, and to supplement and triangulate stakeholder statements. In this respect, the basic analysis of discursive frames was used (Keller 2012), assisting in determining the main discourses and their relationships with the key actors and organisations. Selected tools of critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer 2001) were used to understand the internal structure of discourses (dominant meanings, narrative strategies and figures).

Results: arenas and discourses of inclusion in primary education

Data acquired through these processes were used to construct two discursive arenas (see also Clarke 2005; Clarke, Friese, and Washburn 2018). The first arena was typical for the early phase of the establishment and development of the inclusion policy implementation in the Czech Republic between 2005 and 2015; the second characteristic of the period from 2015 to the present. Maps of both arenas are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

The data analysis identified two main discourses that significantly influenced interactions between the actors. One is the *Inclusion Education Discourse* (IED), with reference to international documents. This discourse emphasises the right of every person to an education that maximises their potential, and seeks to eliminate segregation trends in the Czech education system. The other is *Special Education Discourse* (SED), which emphasises the need to maintain the system of special education on the

grounds that a significant number of pupils with SEN can be provided optimal care solely in this type of schools. In general, this discourse uses the belief in the benefits of early selection of children in education and separation of children with SEN.

Arena of inclusion 2005–2015: ‘connected by money’

The system of primary education in the Czech Republic is characterised by a high decentralisation and autonomy of schools, which are established and funded by the state, but

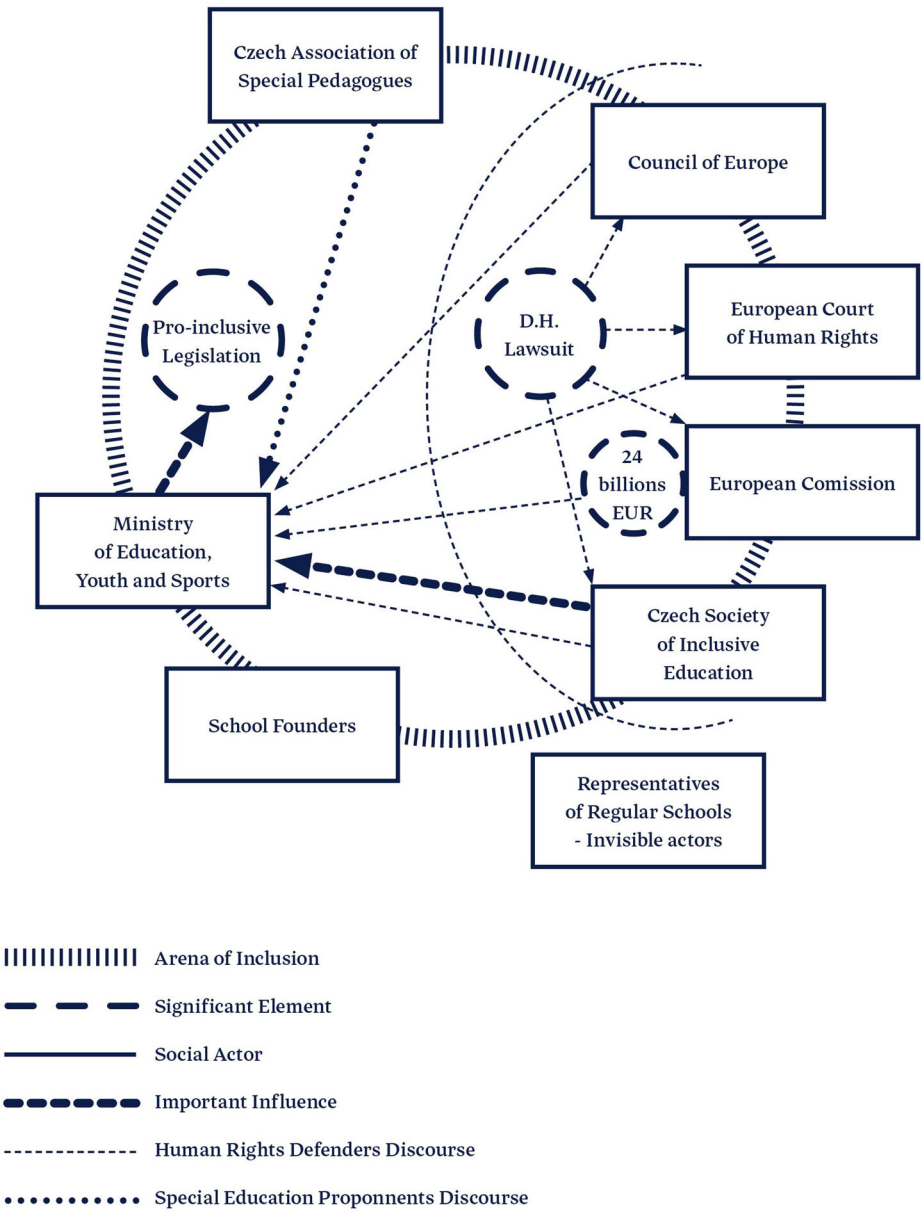


Figure 1. Arena of Inclusion 2005–2015.

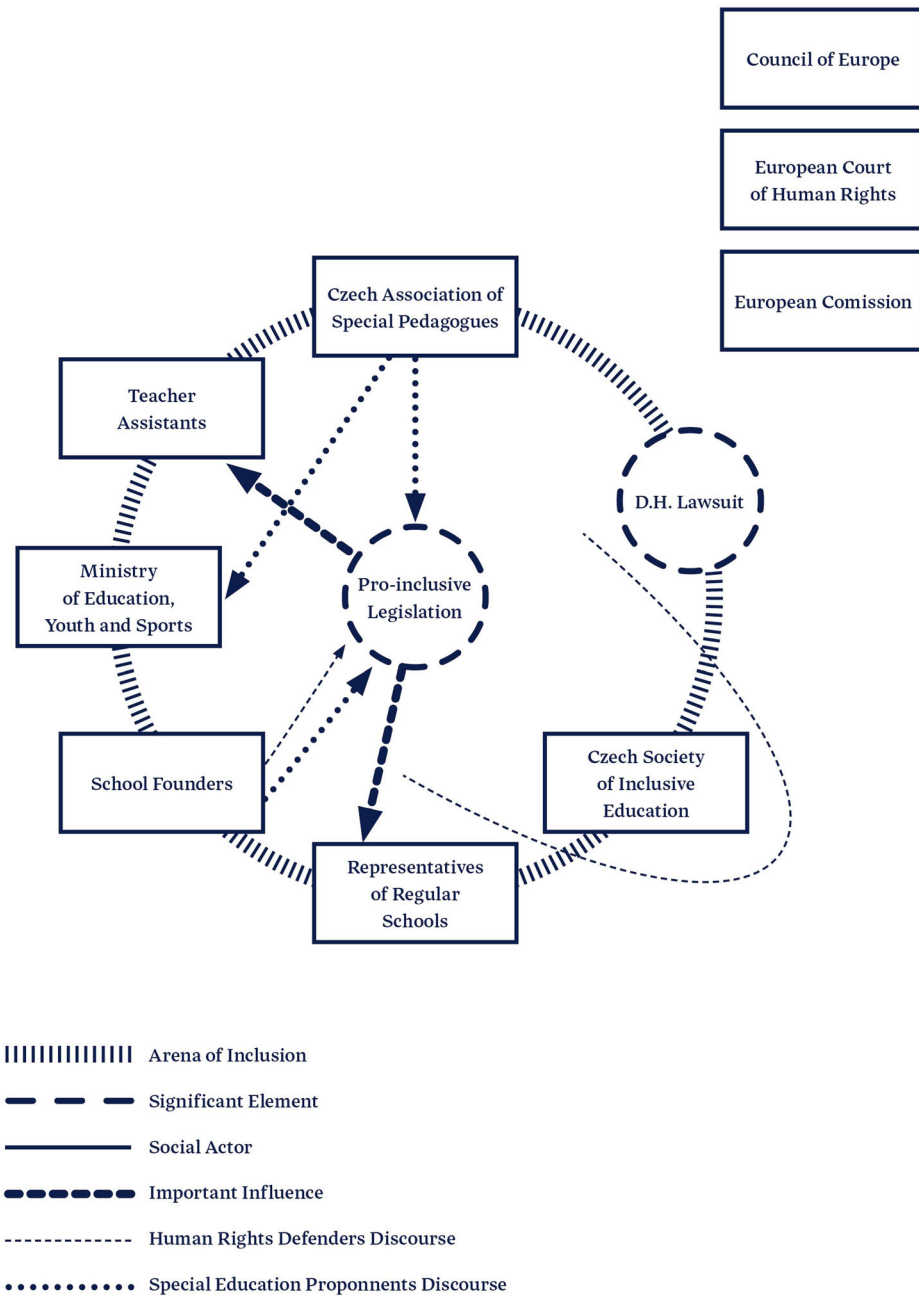


Figure 2. Arena of Inclusion 2015–2020.

have considerable autonomy in their internal processes and approaches to education. In this system, children with SEN were traditionally educated separately from other children, in so-called special schools. The issue of inclusion of children with SEN has, therefore, long been out of the spotlight of the education policy. It was only after 2004, when the number of pupils with a foreign native language in regular schools escalated, that the topic began to be discussed more extensively.

On this institutional basis, the initial discursive arena of inclusion in primary education began to be constructed, with the entry of new actors, contributing to the creation of its content. These were partly organisations providing primary education (MEYS, regional founders of primary schools and the schools themselves), and partly international actors (e.g. the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights and the European Commission), which gradually put pressure on the local state apparatus to implement inclusion policies. Last, but not least, a third group of actors began to emerge in the arena – associations and professional societies (CASP, CSIE), which began to defend their partial interests and promote the meanings of inclusion in response to the state's approach to the issue, and the pressure from international actors to implement inclusion policy (see also [Figure 1](#)).

In agreement with the principles of SA (Clarke, Friese, and Washburn 2018), we continue by describing the actors and their relationships with either one of the main discourses of inclusion.

MEYS. MEYS became the first key actor in the inclusion arena; it began to address inclusion because of the growing diversity of pupils in mainstream schools. For that reason, the ministry began to define the approach to inclusion. From the start, however, MEYS was not too invested in resolving this issue, as it was facing different challenges. Moreover, the ability of MEYS to effectively implement any tools of inclusion policy was limited both by its internal fragmentation into individual departments with insufficient communication, by its lack of unifying leadership, and by the frequent changes in the position of the minister. Ten people took their turn in the office between 2005 and 2015.

Because of that, the position of MEYS in the issue of inclusion kept changing depending on the current minister's beliefs. As a result, the ministry either downplayed and ignored the issue of inclusion, or it sought ways to address it, and leaned towards either the SED, or the Inclusive Education Discourse.

Pro-inclusion thinking prevailed at MEYS first from 2007 to 2009, and then from 2014 to 2015, when the ministry came under pressure from the EU. This was connected with the negotiation of the 'Partnership Agreement 2014–2020' between EU and CZ, which laid the foundation for drawing money from EU funds in the amount of 24 billion EUR. Implementation of inclusion legislation in primary education was one of the conditions for drawing from the funds. In this case, the external pressure compelled the national political representation to agree on the form of inclusion legislation in a short time, to favour inclusive education discourse, and to support its creation at a rapid pace. However, the content of inclusion and the need for it in the education system were discussed neither with the representatives of SED nor with its implementers.

School founders. In CZ, schools are founded by the local administration of regions or cities. They represent the second important actor in the national arena; in the decentralised system of primary education, they seek to defend their own interests, particularly concerning the financing of schools. In this regard, the founders may use the finances allocated by the state for purposes other than those planned by MEYS. Because the introduction of pro-inclusion measures was a financial burden for them from the outset, they never supported it. They were cautious about the issue of inclusion and the funding of measures contributing to inclusion was unsystematic and dependent on the value beliefs of individual officials at the regional level.

Council of Europe and European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Both of the multinational organisations significantly affected the development of the local implementation of inclusion through the so-called ‘case of D.H. et al v. CZ’ (hereinafter referred to as the ‘D.H. case’), ongoing since 2007. In this court case, 18 complainants of Roma ethnicity filed a lawsuit with the ECHR against the Czech Republic claiming they were denied the guaranteed education in a regular primary school due to discrimination and that, as a consequence, they were prevented from receiving secondary education. The lawsuit challenged the frequent practice in the education system at the time, when Roma children were assigned the label of ‘mental retardation’ at an early age on the basis of prejudice and insufficient diagnosis, and, based on this, their special education in separated institutions outside mainstreams schools was deemed to be an ‘appropriate’ educational path. SEN [special educational needs] stemming from a different socio-cultural environment have been systematically confused with reduced intelligence or behavioural problems and Roma pupils have not received adequate support in mainstream education. This is why the preparation and adoption of an inclusive education policy in the Czech Republic is linked to the issue of Roma pupils.

The case was decided by the ECHR in 2007 against CZ. The ruling confirmed indirect systemic discrimination, which affected not only the complainants, but all Roma children in a similar situation. The ruling also emphasised that this social segregation of Roma children had been taking place at an early age. Following the verdict, the CE Committee of Ministers assumed the supervision of corrective measures in the Czech Republic. This increased the pressure on the government to commence correction of the identified systematic discrimination of Roma pupils.

European Commission. The European Commission joined the arena after 2014 and accelerated the implementation of the state inclusion policy. The European Commission emerged as a stabilising factor in this issue, as it required a solution to the problem that had long been impossible to find due to long-term instability at the MEYS. A significant factor in the European Commission proceedings was its effort to finalise the resolution of the case of D.H., as the Council of Europe efforts to speed up the Czech government’s response had not met with success. The EC activities became official during negotiations of the new Partnership Agreement between the EU and CZ discussed above. The agreement had a precondition of adopting the inclusion legislation. Under this pressure, the Czech Republic decided to resolve the case of D.H. by adopting inclusion legislation. Therefore, according to the statements of stakeholders, who often represent opposite positions on the issue of inclusion, the case of D.H. and subsequent interventions by the European Commission played a crucial role in implementing local inclusion legislation.

Czech Association of Special Pedagogues. The Czech Association of Special Pedagogues (CASP) was a key player that entered the arena in 2012. While it does not represent all special educators, it is a professional association with a prominent role in this discursive arena. The discourse it has been advocating since day one is tied to the rhetorical figure that ‘inclusion is a forced process that forcibly pulls pupils out of special schools and harms them’. In this respect, it takes a position in opposition to the IED and against implementation of inclusion policy in the given arena. In 2014, the association launched an intensive campaign for this purpose against inclusion legislation in several media outlets, where it very often used a strategy aimed at reducing the expertise and validity

of the inclusive approach: ‘we, people from practise, vs. those theorists who do not understand the basic matters’. This discursive strategy had a strong reception in the media and, in particular, was quickly adopted by many populist politicians, who began to use it systematically, thus helping to legitimise the special education discourse.

Czech Society for inclusive education. In many aspects the opposing actor to CASP, the CSIE is an association of people and non-profit organisations (such as organisations of parents of children with SEN and some special educators). Its foundation in 2012 resulted from a departure of pro-inclusion personnel from the MEYS. This network of individuals was seeking options to keep the ideas of the IED alive in the professional discourse, as they had not managed to apply them in the education system, which was changed in 2014 under the pressure of international actors. In the arena, CSIE began to advocate for spreading the ideas of the IED. It has declared the goal that ‘every child in school should experience acceptance and success and should be able to fully develop their educational potential’ This actor sees diversity in schools as a real solution that cannot be replaced by segregation.

Representatives of regular schools – the invisible actor. The last key actor on the map are representatives of regular schools. Interestingly, although it is primarily the regular schools where the changes related to inclusion take place, their representatives have not been involved in the arena and have not participated in the communication and creation of the discourse of inclusion. During the period under review, regular schools faced other day-to-day problems – the instability of the education system and the underfunding of education at many levels. For this reason, they had neither the time nor the energy to engage in the debate on inclusion policy; they saw it as one of many intended reforms that would eventually ‘fade away’ anyway.

What were the key characteristics and impacts of the interactions between the various actors of the discursive arena on the implementation of inclusion policy? First of all, individual actors typically had very little meaningful communication. Rather than explaining and motivating, they often tended to force *their opinions upon* each other. The aspect of power and money prevailed over the pursuit of mutual agreement, reflected by the clash of the two key discourses, which began to intensify after 2012. Usage of conflicting and oppositional discursive figures did not allow for a real dialogue. As a result, the entire arena lacked consensus and was highly unstable.

One of the main positive consequences of the adoption of inclusive legislation in 2015 was the emergence of so-called supportive measures (involvement of teaching assistants, pedagogical support beyond teaching, purchase of compensatory resources and aids, etc.) and their funding by the state. Eventually it became clear that teaching assistants played a key role among these measures² and, therefore, became an important actor in the next arena (see below). Financial resources for supportive measures were directly linked to the specific needs of a pupil, regardless of the school where the pupil was educated. This created a fairer environment with balanced funding between special and regular schools. The schools able and willing to work with children with SEN began to draw adequate, state-guaranteed funds. Among other things, this led to at least partial adjustment of the disproportion in funding for inclusion in various schools, which was previously caused by the decentralisation of the school system. Another significant, though admittedly negative consequence of the accelerated adoption of the legislation, is that neither politicians nor the lay or professional public thoroughly considered the meaning of

inclusion for society, or the core values of inclusion. As a result, inclusion remained a topic of primary education and a tool for gaining EU resources, but it did not become a goal shared by society.

Arena of inclusion 2015–2020: ‘optimisation’

Figure 2 shows that after the introduction of pro-inclusion legislation in 2015, the position of some actors in the arena shifted. Particularly, the role of multinational organisations was diminished; new collective actors also joined the arena and became more involved in the discussion regarding the direction of inclusion in the Czech Republic. As in the previous period, they related to the two main, already institutionalised discourses (Special Education / Inclusive Education), which they used to argue and convince others of their vision of implementing inclusion policy.

MEYS. Despite the fact that at the beginning of this period, MEYS tried to create a concept on which the new education policy would be built, which included inclusion, from the moment money was drawn from EU operational programs, MEYS repeatedly faced pressures from national and regional politicians to compromise the established inclusive principles.

After the departure of the pro-inclusion minister from MEYS in 2017, efforts to create the above-mentioned concept slowed down considerably. Since then, MEYS has moved to the practice of ‘optimising’ the Education Act, attempting to save money in the short term, or possibly systematically and deliberately reduce inclusive measures for ideological reasons. The practice is executed through partial directives, which, for example, in 2019 limited the number of teaching assistants in one classroom. A year later, a draft of another directive appeared, seeking to reduce other supportive measures. In terms of position in the arena, MEYS is gradually becoming more and more enclosed, unmotivated to provide the data on which it bases its decisions, and to communicate with other actors and ministries, evoking negative attitudes of other actors.

School founders in primary education. After 2015, they have typically continued to promote their own interests. The founders often purposefully redraw the catchment area borders in order to preserve the potential of ‘better schools’ without children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, where many children with SEN come from (Straková, Hůle, and Habart 2019; Vorlíček 2019).

Council of Europe, ECHR, European Commission. All multinational organisations have taken the back seat in the national discursive arena. After the inclusion legislation had been accepted, the European Commission ceased its interest in the topic and left its supervision to the Council of Europe, which provides the supervision of corrective measures in relation to the D.H. case ruling. In this regard, the Council of Europe has accepted the implementation of inclusion legislation as a means of complying with the 2007 ruling.

Czech Association of Special Pedagogues. The actor continues to run an anti-inclusion campaign based on the belief that children with SEN placed in regular schools suffer; it also emphasises that mainstream schools are not ready for inclusion. This is reflected in public statements of the main representative of the CASP. The Association supports current MEYS efforts to reduce supportive measures.

Czech society for inclusive education. For this actor, it is typical to focus on supporting and upholding the pro-inclusion legislation. It has become the most important supporter of the IED in the Czech Republic, promoting non-segregated education in various areas of society. It monitors MEYS efforts to reduce measures supporting inclusion, and is able to mobilise individuals and other organisations that promote inclusion.

Representatives of regular schools. As the inclusion legislation of 2015 particularly affected regular schools, their voices have become prominent in the arena. Representatives of regular schools are being heard both on the level of their principals and teachers, as well as through cooperation with the Association of Primary School Principals, founded in 2016. At first, schools expressed a predominantly sceptical or even negative view of the pro-inclusion act, and adopted rhetorical figures of the SED. However, over the years many of them have turned around. The reports by the Czech School Inspectorate show a shift in the perception of inclusion by schools that have experience with educating pupils with SEN (Zatloukal 2020, 68–71). They begin to appreciate the benefits of the new legislation and the necessary administration, as it helps them secure adequate and stable funding to support an inclusive environment in schools and meet the needs of individual pupils. As a result, the money was also received by smaller, regionally peripheral schools, which were previously unable to secure other forms of financial support from the state, thus improving their operation.

Teaching assistants. Teaching assistants became a completely new collective actor in the arena, gradually emerging during this period as a result of the introduction of supportive measures and the definition of this job position in the new legislation. While the representation of this profession in primary schools increased sharply in the first years after the amendment of the law, the growth has since slowed considerably. The number of teaching assistants increased by 130% between 2015 and 2019 (MEYS 2020). The benefits of this profession are gaining appreciation in regular schools, and attention is focused on fine-tuning communication and cooperation between teacher and assistant (Zatloukal 2020, 70). Although there is still no Association of Teaching Assistants, the profession is positively received in schools and the actor is rising in power in the arena.

What is characteristic for interactions and implementation of inclusion policy in the Czech Republic after 2015? In many respects, similar forms of interaction can be detected to those in the previous period, as an extensive dialogue between conflicting discourses is still lacking and no broad consensus on the vision and goals of inclusion policy has been reached. Its absence consequently threatens the quality of the implementation of inclusion legislation adopted in 2015. Comparably to the previous period, MEYS does not provide sufficient expert platforms to which actors outside the ministry would be invited to offer relevant expertise. Inclusion measures, a verified part of many schools' internal culture, are still at odds with the populist political discourse used by some actors in the arena, blaming external, transnational institutions for forcing inclusion on the Czech Republic.

As soon as funds from the EU had been secured, efforts emerged to revoke or at least undermine the Education Act Amendment. Even in this period, the idea of inclusion was not discussed at the society level; this was used by some politicians to secure votes by pointing to the negative aspects and consequences of inclusion. Attempts to restrict the Amendment of the pro-inclusion law began to intensify, especially after 2017, but

have not yet been successful, as they actually triggered integration of various pro-inclusion actors, who began to coordinate their actions with the CSIE. Some significant changes also took place at the level of regular schools, which began to appreciate to a greater extent the benefits of pro-inclusion legislation. Notwithstanding the efforts of schools to implement pro-inclusion strategies, Roma children are still excluded from joint education. The more general and complex concept of inclusion in this particular case diverts attention from the specific problems of this minority and its education.

Discussion and conclusion

Research goal 1

Our analysis detected two strongly opposing discourses, IED and SED. These discourses have opposing views on the process of education of children with SEN. Their conflicting ideas form a discursive field in the Czech environment that creates pressure to which all the actors must respond. In the process, the actors adopt the vocabulary and agenda of these discourses, and either adapt to them or define themselves against them. Consequently, the space of problems associated with inclusion is narrowed down to just a few topics, namely to the (non)existence of special schools, thus polarising its actors into conflicting ideological camps (Lamont and Laurent 2000).

Danforth and Naraian (2015) describe the situation in the USA as being similar to our reconstruction, which we based on the statements of stakeholders in the Czech Republic. The first discourse has a longer tradition and is, therefore, more deeply rooted in the education system. The latter is newer and, therefore, not easy to assert. When the latter discourse entered the MEYS environment, the discursive dispute gradually escalated, making the actions of all its actors more intense, and limiting the possibility of adopting shared inclusion goals (Donohue and Bornman 2014; Glazzard 2011; Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2011).

Due to pressure from international actors, international human rights documents and national strategic documents prepared by proponents of the IED could easily become the basis for fulfilling the precondition of the Partnership Agreement between the Czech Republic and the EU, and the IED thus, for a short time, prevailed. This enabled the discourse to become an accelerator for the adoption of inclusion legislation. However, as the pressure from international institutions eased, the importance for the discourse diminished. Simultaneously, SED has again intensified and was subsequently used by some politicians in an effort to dismantle or significantly weaken the inclusion legislation. Under these circumstances, the inclusion policy expanded only in the education system and the inclusive ideas were not reflected in the remainder of society.

Research goal 2

From the very beginning, various actors entered both of the monitored arenas, including multinational organisations. The international actors had significant influence here between 2007 and 2015, when they participated in the enforcement of inclusion legislation. Thanks to their work, the otherwise divided political scene was able to unite and adopt a pro-inclusion legislation. However, after the pressure from international

organisations weakened, the political scene became divided again, and since then we can observe a growing clash of pro-inclusive and anti-inclusive tendencies. In the meantime, however, there has been a financial stabilisation of support for inclusion. After the first two years of implementation, regular schools began to appreciate its positive effects – particularly the fairer funding and the creation of a stable environment, in which it is easier to support pupils with SEN. For them, inclusion has ceased to be a distant topic that concerns mainly special education professionals (Štech 2021) and has become an everyday reality of school life. This is gradually changing the importance and power of new actors entering the arena and gradually gaining importance in 2015–2020: representatives of mainstream schools and teaching assistants. While between 2005 and 2015 representatives of regular schools were ‘invisible actors’ in the inclusion debate, the second period saw their importance increased. Similarly, teaching assistants entered the discursive arena after 2015, as they proved to be one of the most effective tools for implementing inclusion in the day-to-day life at schools.

Research goal 3

It is the changes described above that are causing two opposing trends to grow in the arena. On the one hand, the anti-inclusion rhetoric used to popularise politicians is creating pressure on MEYS that is trying to ‘optimize’ inclusion (i.e. reduce its support). Reduction of costs has become one of the main arguments in advocating the ‘optimisation’ of legislation (Denglerová and Šíp 2021; Directive 2019; Directive 2020). On the other hand, the stabilisation of the situation in mainstream schools is slowly but steadily increasing support for inclusion from school management and teaching staff. The Czech Republic is thus in a state where the outcome of inclusion efforts is undecided. Nevertheless, it seems that pro-inclusion processes can be weakened but not completely reversed.

Analysis of the data yielded further findings. It is, above all, insufficient discussion at many levels: (1) Within MEYS; (2) Between MEYS and school founders; (3) Between MEYS and schools; (4) Between MEYS and professional and lay public. This is likely why, today, MEYS is a place of discursive clashes in which either one or the other discourse triumphs in different periods.

We believe that this situation reflects a more general tension between the political-bureaucratic approach to the implementation of state policy and the approach focused on communicative policy-design (Colebatch 2018) and soft-management (Carney 2012). In the democratic milieu, state institutions should, above all, create communication platforms where the key professional discussions could take place, at the same time guaranteeing their rationality and ethics. Only after such discussions would it make sense to take long-term decisions, thus eliminating the situation when legislation is adopted, only to be ‘optimised’ too soon and without a proper concept. The state institutions should also initiate communication with the general public and provide it with quality information so they can make relevant decisions. In both arenas studied, MEYS fails.

The essence of a communication-oriented approach to policy implementation is the participation of actors in joint work. It is, therefore, no coincidence that some state/regional institutions responsible for education now attempt to resolve the discursive

dispute between special education and inclusive education by framing the entire discursive field with the idea of participation and co-responsibility (e.g. Graham 2016). The idea brings a peaceful resolution to the dispute. It does not question diagnostics or special education as whole, nor has it forced anyone to give up the narrative of social justice (Danforth 2015; Slee 2001). Both approaches enter a mutual dialogue. Moreover, pupils with SEN and their parents are becoming a part of it.

The finding is more general and may apply to other countries. In the absence of a clear vision of inclusion, widely discussed and eventually shared by most of the actors, implementation of inclusion may have a short life span, because individual actors do not internalise the inclusive values (see e.g. Ainscow 2020; Peters and Besley 2014). The fate of even the best of inclusion legislation is then uncertain because inclusion as a society-wide phenomenon cannot permeate only one segment of society (in our case, education).

Notes

1. Stakeholders have consented to the use of the data for research purposes.
2. Teaching assistant's scope of work is determined differently in the policies of different states (Butt 2016). In the Czech Republic, it ranges from strictly supporting the pupil to whom it is assigned to a more inclusive notion of supporting the teacher and the whole class. However, this issue goes beyond the horizon of the text, as the text focuses on the role of different actors in the process of adoption and implementation of inclusive legislation in the Czech Republic.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Czech Science Foundation [grant number GA19-13038S].

Notes on contributors

Denisa Denglerová is an assistant professor at the Department of Pedagogical Sciences of the Faculty of Humanities, TBU in Zlín. Her research focuses on a pro-inclusive environment in schools and how this environment enables the full development of students' cognitive and social abilities.

Jan Kalenda is an associate professor at the Research Centre of the Faculty of Humanities, TBU in Zlín, where he coordinates research in the field of social and educational sciences with a special focus on adult education and learning.

Radim Šíp is an associate professor at the Research Centre of the Faculty of Humanities, TBU in Zlín. He focuses on the research on the social-cognitive dimension in teaching and implementation of inclusion.


Markéta Košťalková is an Assistant Professor at the Social Education Department of the Faculty of Education. Her research focuses on the educational needs of students from different socio-cultural backgrounds, applying her findings to developing training strategies for teachers in diversity-sensitive education.

ORCID

Denisa Denglerová  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5354-3445>

Jan Kalenda  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4871-4753>

Radim Šíp  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9131-7403>

Markéta Košťatková  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6964-3440>

References

- Ainscow, M. 2020. "Promoting Inclusion and Equity in Education: Lessons from International Experiences." *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy* 6 (1): 7–16.
- Armstrong, D., A. C. Armstrong, and I. Spandagou. 2011. "Inclusion: By Choice or by Chance?" *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 15 (1): 29–39.
- Bhatnagar, N., and A. Das. 2014. "Regular School Teachers' Concerns and Perceived Barriers to Implement Inclusive Education in New Delhi, India." *International Journal of Instruction* 7 (2): 89–102.
- Butt, R. 2016. "Teacher Assistant Support and Deployment in Mainstream Schools." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 20 (9): 995–1007.
- Carney, P. 2012. "Complexity Theory in Political Science and Public Policy." *Political Studies Review* 10 (3): 346–358.
- Carter, E. W., and C. Hughes. 2006. "Including High School Students with Severe Disabilities in General Education Classes: Perspectives of General and Special Educators, Paraprofessionals, and Administrators." *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities* 31 (2): 174–185.
- Clarke, A. E. 2005. *Situational Analysis. Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Clarke, A. E., C. Friese, and R. S. Washburn. 2018. *Situational Analysis. Grounded Theory After the Interpretive Turn*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Colebatch, H. 2018. "The Idea of Policy Design: Intuition, Process, Outcome, Meaning, and Validity." *Public Policy and Administration* 33 (4): 365–383.
- D'Alessio, S., and D. Watkins. 2009. "International Comparisons of Inclusive Policy and Practice: Are We Talking the Same Thing?" *Research in Comparative and International Education* 4 (3): 233–249.
- Danforth, S. 2015. "Social Justice and Technocracy: Tracing the Narratives of Inclusive Education in the USA." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 37 (4): 1–18.
- Danforth, S., and S. Naraiian. 2015. "This New Field of Inclusive Education: Beginning a Dialogue on Conceptual Foundations." *The Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability* 53 (1): 70–85.
- de Boer, A., S. J. Pijl, and A. Minnaert. 2011. "Regular Primary Schoolteachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education: A Review of the Literature." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 15 (3): 331–353.
- Denglerová, D., and R. Šíp. 2021. "Optimalizací inkluze k prohlubování nerovností ve vzdělávání [překlad]." *Pedagogika* 71 (1): 126–130.
- Dessemontet, R. S., and G. Bless. 2013. "The Impact of Including Children with Intellectual Disability in General Education Classrooms on the Academic Achievement of Their Low-, Average-, and High-Achieving Peers." *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability* 38 (1): 23–30.
- Directives (Vyhláška) n. 248. 2019. Sb. [on-line]. <https://www.psp.cz/sqw/sbirka.sqw?cz=248&r=2019>.
- Directive (Vyhláška) n. 606. 2020. Sb. [on-line]. <https://www.psp.cz/sqw/sbirka.sqw?cz=606&r=2020>.
- Donohue, D., and J. Bornman. 2014. "The Challenges of Realising Inclusive Education in South Africa: Voices of Teachers and Teaching Assistants." *South African Journal of Education* 34 (2): 1–14.

- Downing, J. E., and K. D. Packham-Hardin. 2006. "Inclusive Education: What Makes it a Good Education for Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities?" *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities* 32 (1): 16–30.
- EADSNE. 2020. *European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education: 2018 Dataset Cross-Country Report*. <https://www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/european-agency-statistics-inclusive-education-2018-dataset-cross-country>.
- Frey, N., and D. Fisher. 2004. "School Change and Teacher Knowledge: A Reciprocal Relationship." *Teacher Education and Special Education* 27 (1): 57–67.
- Glaser, B., and A. L. Strauss. 1967. *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Glazzard, J. 2011. "Perceptions of the Barriers to Effective Inclusion in One Primary School: Voices of Teachers and Teaching Assistants." *Support for Learning* 26 (2): 56–63.
- Graham, L. J. 2016. "Reconceptualising Inclusion as Participation: Neoliberal Buck-Passing or Strategic By-Passing?" *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 37 (4): 563–581.
- Gulová, L., and S. Štřelec. 2020. "Inclusion of Talented Children (Pupils) In the Current Czech Education System." *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal* 12 (1): 54–68.
- Hardy, I., S. Woodcock, M. Falkmer, A. Sim, M. Scott, R. Cordier, et al. 2014. "Inclusive Education Policies: Discourses of Difference, Diversity and Deficit." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 19 (2): 141–164.
- Kalambouka, A., P. Farrell, A. Dyson, and I. Kaplan. 2007. "The Impact of Placing Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools on the Achievement of Their Peers." *Educational Research* 49: 365–382.
- Keller, R. 2012. "Entering Discourse: A New Agenda for Qualitative Research and Sociology of Knowledge." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 8 (2): 46–75.
- Lamont, M., and T. Laurent. 2000. *Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Le Fanu, G., and T. A. C. Besley. 2013. "The Inclusion of Inclusive Education in International Development: Lessons from Papua New Guinea." *International Journal of Educational Development* 33 (2): 139–148.
- Lindsay, G. 2007. "Educational Psychology and Effectiveness of Inclusive Education/Mainstreaming." *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 77 (1): 1–24.
- Macartney, B., and M. Morton. 2013. "Kinds of Participation: Teacher and Special Education Perceptions and Practices of 'Inclusion' in Early Childhood and Primary School Settings." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 17 (8): 776–792.
- MEYS. 2020. *Statistická ročenka školství – výkonové ukazatele. [Annual Statistical Report on Education]*. Praha: MŠMT, Odbor školské statistiky, analýz a informační strategie. <http://toiler.uiv.cz/rocenka/rocenka.asp>.
- Miles, S., and M. Singal. 2010. "The Education for All and Inclusive Education Debate: Conflict, Contradiction or Opportunity?" *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 14 (1): 1–15.
- Peters, M. A., and T. A. C. Besley. 2014. "Social Exclusion/Inclusion: Foucault's Analytics of Exclusion, the Political Ecology of Social Inclusion and the Legitimation of Inclusive Education." *Open Review of Educational Research* 1 (1): 99–115.
- Pyryt, M. C., and B. L. Bosetti. 2006. "Accommodating Gifted Learners in Regular Classrooms." In *Including the Gifted and Talented*, edited by C. M. M. Smith, 141–160. London: Routledge.
- Ruijs, M. M., and T. T. D. Peetsma. 2009. "Effects of Inclusion on Students With and Without Special Educational Needs Reviewed." *Educational Research Review* 4 (2): 67–79.
- Slee, R. 2001. "Social Justice and the Changing Directions in Educational Research: The Case of Inclusive Education." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 5 (2-3): 167–177.
- Štech, S. 2021. "Výzkum, experti a politici - podivuhodný život ideje inkluzivního vzdělávání v ČR [překlad]." *Pedagogika* 71 (3): 403–420.
- Straková, J., D. Hůle, and T. Habart. 2019. *Sociální aspekty vzdělávání dětí na ZŠ. [Social Aspects of Children's Education at Primary Schools]*. [On-line]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEsA-gC_xbY.

- Strauss, A. L. 1984. "Social Worlds and Their Segmentation Processes." *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 5: 123–139.
- Symeonidou, S., and H. Phtiaka. 2009. "Using Teachers' Prior Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs to Develop in-Service Teacher Education Courses for Inclusion: Teacher and Special Education Perceptions and Practices of 'Inclusion' in Early Childhood and Primary School Settings." *Teaching And Teacher Education* 25 (4): 543–550.
- Turnbull, H. R., A. P. Turnbull, and M. L. Wehmeyer. 2006. *Exceptional Lives*. Columbus: Prentice Hall.
- Vorlíček, R. 2019. *Jak se daří inkluzi u nás a na Slovensku [How Inclusion is Doing in Czechia and Slovakia]*. Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart.
- Wodak, R., and M. Meyer. 2001. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Zatloukal, T. 2020. *Kvalita a efektivita vzdělávání a vzdělávací soustavy ve školním roce 2019/2020. Výroční zpráva České školní inspekce [Quality and Efficiency of Education and the Education System in the School Year 2019/2020. Annual Report of the Czech School Inspectorate.]*. Praha: MŠMT.