Inclusion in American and Finnish Schools: The Neglect of Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties

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Building an active and inclusive civil society is predicated on the notion that everyone, even the most troubled youth, are provided the supports necessary to participate in school, their family, the community, and the workforce.
Educational Inclusion of Youth with Disabilities

• In many developing countries, inclusion remains focused on providing students with disabilities basic access to public education (United Nations, 2019)

• In other countries, the emphasis is on:
  • Educating youth with disabilities in neighborhood schools (vs. separate school settings)
  • Educating youth in the general education classroom
  • Ensuring implementation of evidence-based interventions

• United States (U.S.) and Finland are two countries that are significant international players in the push for the latter form of inclusion (Jahnikainen & Itkonen, 2015)
Inclusion Policies in U.S.

• In the U.S., the emphasis on including students with disabilities is grounded in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2006)
• IDEA (2006) does not specifically mention “inclusion”
• The least restrictive environment (LRE) requirement (§ 300.115) ensures youth are included to the extent possible

• Nevertheless, LRE implies that for some youth, adequate supports cannot be provided in neighborhood schools and general education classrooms and youth cannot be included
Inclusion Policies in Finland

• Finland has embraced the notion of inclusion in its ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

• However, the cursory mention of the inclusion principle in the National Core Curriculum has proved insufficient to promote inclusion-related school legislation (Saloviita, 2018)

• The lack of agreed upon meaning has resulted in inconsistency across municipalities (Honkasilta, Ahiainen, Hienonen, & Jahnukainen, 2019)
U.S. Implementation of Inclusion Policy

- Half of students with emotional disturbance (ED) spend less than 80% of their school day in the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2018)

- 17.1% of students with ED are educated in exclusionary settings (U.S. Department of Education)
  - Alternative Education schools
  - Day treatment/residential psychiatric schools
  - Homebound/hospital schools
  - Correctional facilities
  - Parentally placed private schools

- Except for youth with deaf-blindness and those with multiple disabilities, youth with ED are more frequently educated in exclusionary environments
Finland Implementation of Inclusion Policy

• In Finland, intensified support can be provided in
  • Separate resource rooms
  • In the general education classroom via approaches, such as co-teaching (Jahnukainen & Itkonen, 2015)

• In 2018, 10.6% of the students received intensified supports (Official Statistics of Finland (OFS), 2019)

• 8.1% receive specialized support
  • 27% were provided full-time instruction in a separate group
  • 8.6% received full-time special support in a separate school
  • Only 21.3% of students receiving specialized support are educated fully in the general education classroom (OFS)

• In Finland, data are not disaggregated to identify the percentage of youth that have behavioral problems receiving intensified or specialized support
Implementation of Inclusion Policy

- Inclusion necessitates providing students with evidence-based support to ensure learners can respond to academic and behavioral expectations (Honkasilta et al., 2019)

- In U.S. policy, IDEA (2006) provides explicit guidance concerning the implementation of evidence-based behavioral interventions, including
  - Positive behavioral interventions and supports (e.g., Sec. 300.324(a)(2)(i))
  - Use of functional behavior assessment (e.g., § 300.530(d)(1)(ii), (f)(1)(i))
  - Developing and implementing behavioral intervention plans (e.g., Sec. 300.530(f))
Implementation of Inclusion Policy

• In Finland, **guidance** provided in the Finland Basic Education Act (Section 36, 2010) and National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (Section 5.3, 2016) **is limited to broad statements** that teachers should use primarily **reactive and punitive approaches**
  • “Disciplinary educational discussions” (Undefined)
• Written warnings
• Detention
• Physical removal from class
• Exclusion from school activities
• Suspension
Implementation of Inclusion Policy-Staffing Concerns

• Despite policy differences, U.S. and Finland have similar difficulties

• In the U.S., general educators feel unprepared to adequately support students with ED and implement evidence-based intervention to address youth behavior problems (McKenna, Solis, Brigham, & Adamson, 2019; Oliver & Reschly, 2010)

• In fact, U.S. students with ED are suspended from school at higher rates than other students (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006)

• Finnish teachers have limited training and knowledge of positive and proactive behavioral interventions due to a lack of training (Honkasilta, Sandberg, Närhi, & Jauhnikainen, 2014)

• As such, it is unsurprising that Finnish teachers regularly rely on detention to respond to student behavior problems (Saloviita, 2018)
Implementation of Inclusion Policy-Staffing Concerns

School-based mental health services

• In the U.S., most students that receive mental health supports, do so through school-based programs (Lipari, Hedden, Blau, & Rubenstein, 2016)

• However, only about one-fifth of youth that need services, receive them (Young et al., 2015)

• In Finnish schools, concerns remain that there are too few psychologists and their work is primarily reactive (Ahtola & Niemi, 2014)

• The Finnish education Minister recently noted, "One single school counsellor can have between 700 and 2,000 pupils as clients at present, or be responsible for up to 12 different locations" (Yle, 2019)
Exclusionary Schools-Teacher Quality

- **U.S. teachers in exclusionary schools** (e.g., alternative education schools (AES), day treatment/residential psychiatric facility schools, juvenile justice schools) are less qualified than teachers in neighborhood schools (Mason-Williams & Gagnon, 2017)

- In Finland, there is a requirement that reform school teachers have an M.A. in special education

- However, due to a shortage of teachers willing to work in this setting, not all reform school (RS) teachers that are hired have met this qualification (Talaslampi, Jahnukainen, & Manninen, 2019)

- RS teachers (and psychologists) are often unprepared to provide evidence-based mental health and behavioral interventions (Hästbacka, & Pekkarinen, 2018)
American Alternative Education Schools (AES)

- Alternative education schools (AES) are commonly used as an approach to addressing problems with youth behavior (Gagnon & Barber, 2015) and
  - 57.0% of students in behavior-focused AES have disabilities (mostly ED, LD, OHI/ADHD)
  - 19.7% of students in academic-remediation focused AES have disabilities (Perzigian et al., 2017)
  - Many youth have “at risk” indicators (e.g., truancy, drug abuse) and at risk of dropping out (Porowski et al., 2014)

- Most research on the services provide in AES are over a decade old.
- There are concerns regarding the lack of appropriate academic and behavioral supports provided, as well as the lack of governmental oversight (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr et al., 2009)
- Secondary-level AES had alarmingly low graduation rates (DePaoli et al., 2017)
American Psychiatric Facility Schools

• Deliver 24-hour therapeutic care wherein a multidisciplinary team provides support to addresses youth psychiatric, behavioral and education/special education needs (Gagnon & Barber, 2015)

• The most recent data indicates that there are almost 900 programs throughout the U.S. (Gagnon, Van Loan, & Barber, 2010)

• About 90% of these youth are classified as ED and many have difficulties with reading and mathematics

• Problems include a lack of
  • Governmental oversight
  • Student access to the general education curriculum
  • Evidence-based reading and mathematics instruction
    (Gagnon et al., 2010; Maccini, Gagnon, Mulcahy, & Wright, 2013; Wilkerson, Gagnon, Melekoglu, & Cakiroglu, 2012)

• There is no long-term education-related outcome data on youth served in psychiatric facility schools
Finnish Reform Schools (RS)

- In Finland, the most troubled teens are educated and supported in one of seven RS.
- The use of the RS placement is quite rare, accounting for only 1.5% of the 18,000 youth placed outside of their home (Pekkarinen, 2017)
- Within RS, there are also small “special care units” for more volatile youth where the doors are locked and youth have limited freedom (Pitts & Kuula, 2005)

- Overall, RS youth are most likely placed due to problems with running away (primarily from other facilities), drug abuse, law violating behavior, and other psychiatric disorders (Hästbacka & Pekkarinen, 2018; Pitts & Kuula)
- About half of RS youth have a learning disability in reading or mathematics (Kitinoja, 2005; Lehto-Salo, 2011; Lehto-Salo, Närhi, Ahonen, & Marttunen, 2009)

- Many RS youth have experienced traumatic events, including witnessing domestic violence, parental drug abuse, and parental law violating behavior (Lehto-Salo)
Finnish Reform Schools

- Data vary across studies
  - 57-90% have a psychiatric diagnosis
  - 75% of girls and 50% of males have co-morbid psychiatric diagnoses
  - 26-80% have a substance use disorder
  - 30% have a conduct disorder
  - 30% have ADHD
  (Koivukangas, 2018; Lehto-Salo; Lehto-Sal et al.; Pekkarinen, 2017)

- It is unknown if RS youth have access to
  - The national curriculum
  - Evidence-based instruction and behavioral supports
  - Mental health screening/evaluation and evidence-based treatment
Finnish Reform Schools-Outcomes

• 77% of RS youth only complete compulsory education (vs. 17% in the general public) (Talaslampi, Jahnukainen, & Manninen, 2019)

• As adults, former RS youth have a seven-fold overall risk for premature death, which is commonly associated with suicide, drug use, or external causes (Manninen, Pankakoski, Gissler, & Suvisaari, 2015)

• Former RS youth are 18 times more likely to commit a violent crime as an adult than peers in the community (Manninen et al., 2013; Manninen, Suvisaari, Marola, & Aaltonen, 2017)
American Incarcerated Youth

- In the U.S., over $48,000$ youth are committed to a juvenile justice facility (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, Charles, 2014)

- About $47\%$ of incarcerated youth have ED

- These youth are three times more likely to have a mental disorder than youth in society, about half are diagnosed with a substance use disorder, and another $50\%$ with conduct disorder (McClelland et al., 2004; Mulvey, Schubert, & Chassin, 2010; Shufelt & Cocozza, 2006)

- Compared to youth in the community, incarcerated youth also more commonly have
  - Attention deficit hyperactive disorder
  - Anxiety disorder
  - Depression
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder
  - A history of physical or sexual abuse

(Baglivio & Epps, 2016; Dierkhising et al., 2013; Fazel, Doll, & Langstrom, 2008; Shufelt & Cocozza; Wasserman et al., 2005; Weiss & Garber, 2003)
American Incarcerated Youth

• There is overwhelming evidence that these youth receive, “a subpar education and special education services, minimal mental health services, harsh punishments and exclusion that could cause additional trauma, minimal career and technical education, and uncoordinated transition supports” (Gagnon & Barber, 2019, p. 2)

• Up to 75% of incarcerated youth reoffend within three years (Mendel, 2011; Schubert, Mulvey, & Glasheen, 2011)
Finnish Incarcerated Youth

• In contrast to the U.S., Finland utilizes the child welfare system until the age of 15. At that point, the criminal justice may become involved (Rikosseuraamuslaitos, 2017)

• While positive in some aspects, there are concerns with a “shadow” juvenile justice system in which youth are involuntarily committed to exclusionary settings, including reform schools, without proper due process procedures (Pitts & Kuula, 2005)

• The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has repeatedly criticized Finland for failing to separate youth from adults in prison (Muncie, 2013)

• In 2018, 5 youth 15-17 years-old and 78 youth 18-21 years-old were incarcerated (Rikosseuraamuslaitos, 2018)
Finnish Incarcerated Youth

• There is **little information** on the services provided specifically to youth incarcerated in Finnish prisons

• There are serious concerns with the **lack of oversight** and availability of **mental health** services (Törrönen, Vornanen, R., & Saurama, 2016)

• Access to education is **difficult** for inmates and they consist mostly of short term programs, rather than a comprehensive academic program (Mertanen & Brunila, 2018)

• There are almost **no coordinated aftercare** services provided to youth following incarceration and the services that do exist are plagued by a lack of resources (Harrikari & Hautala, 2018)

• Of youth that are released between the ages of 15-21, the recidivism rate is **75%** (Rikosseuraamuslaitos, 2018)
Yellow = Finland: National studies on regular school exclusionary classes & all reform schools
Blue = Finland: Studies on all reform schools
Orange = Finland: National studies on regular school exclusionary classes & all reform schools; U.S.: National studies of juvenile justice Case Managers and Correctional Officers
References


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