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The collaborative practice of inclusion and exclusion

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ABSTRACT
The educational field is traditionally characterized by a distinction between general and special education in educational practice, theory and research. Especially in cross-professional collaborative processes related to inclusion, it becomes evident that the professionals represent different perspectives and positions with different roles, functions and main goals.

Based on a research project in Denmark which examines how the collaboration of professionals constitutes in- and exclusion processes, we compare different understandings of aims and problems in the work with inclusion in collaborative school practice with the current models of inclusive education and special education represented in international literature. Our findings show that understandings of problems related to inclusive school development are mainly directed towards strategies targeting and compensating the needs of the student but seldom involve changing the professional practice of teachers and other educators, including their collaboration. Based on this, we argue – and present a framework to support – that inclusive school development involves a process of transforming general and special education into inclusive education, which requires changes in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures, and strategies in education. In order to succeed, classroom practice is only one sub-practice among many sub-practices in a school practice that needs to be transformed.

Introduction
Traditionally, the educational field distinguishes between general and special education in educational practice, theory and research. Students who are seen as not achieving in general school are viewed as a problem or having something ‘wrong with them’ that makes it difficult to participate in the normal curriculum of schools’ (Ainscow, 1991, pp. 1–2). As a result, school services become categorical in terms of meeting the needs of specific groups or categories of students. This is known as special education. This model of education is viewed as segregation because students are educated in separate environments (UN, 2016).

The dominant thinking in a society that differentiates between who is included and who is excluded represents, more fundamentally, social and cultural understandings of difference such as ability and disability. These understandings are reflected in the beliefs and attitudes of people but also in people’s practices in education (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Artiles, Harris-Murri, & Rostenberg, 2006; Carrington, 1999). Shakespeare (1994) suggested that the beliefs and attitudes of people are also reflected in the economic and political policies and organizations that are the contexts for differential treatment of people. One type of organization is the education system in a particular country. A ‘special’ model of education with associated professional services was created for children with ‘special’ educational needs, which draws on the medical view of disability. This special education model is informed by beliefs that highlight the problem (the disability) as a deficiency in the person and requires ‘treatment’. A medical model of diagnosis is based on assessments of individual defects that can be remediated through individual education programs. The separation of students with a disability into segregated and special places is influenced by the social and cultural expectations in a particular context and the judgements about difference. Special placement in segregated settings for children with disabilities has resulted in a marginalized population that has been institutionalized, undereducated, socially rejected and excluded from society (Biklen, 1988). These types of outcomes are not the result of the disability but are the result of social, economic and political actions such as special education. The current model of special education is informed historically by the beliefs and assumptions of the medical-based paradigm, which are submerged in the routine of work and thoughts (Carrington, 1999, Carrington et al 2017).

From special education to inclusive education
A political goal of developing an inclusive and more flexible school challenges this traditional and
categorical special educational thinking and practice. Inclusive education was initially seen as an innovation within special education (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). However, now it is understood that the development of inclusive schools is much broader than that and requires significant school and system reform. Booth (1996) suggested that the development of inclusive education requires increasing inclusion and participation of all students in mainstream schools and decreasing exclusionary pressures. From a sociological perspective, this idea of how to realize inclusion does not consider that inclusion cannot be achieved by eliminating exclusive processes. According to Deleuze, diversity is given, but differences are that by which the given is given (2004, p. 280). We therefore need to focus on how a specific learning community constructs and understands differences, and to which degree the community handles diversity without perceiving diversity as a threat to the cohesion of the community. This means uncovering the social and cultural patterns and processes that make specific, meaningful constructions of diversity possible and, at the same time, exclude other constructions as possible within a specific school or learning community. As a result, inclusive education requires teachers and other educators to challenge their understanding of difference in order to have an explicit values base that draws on a social-cultural perspective of diversity in society and is thus derived from a paradigm that is very different to that which presently informs special education. In an inclusive education model, disability can be viewed as just one form of socially constructed difference, and different societies react in diverse ways to many kinds of differences. Cultural and social constructions of difference and school success and failure are represented in beliefs, attitudes and values, and shape how teachers and educators interact with students (Carrington, 1999, Carrington & Robinson 2004, 2006). The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 4, Article 24, provides a clear definition of inclusion:

‘Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in culture, content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences (2016).’

Earlier research in inclusive school development supporting how to realize Article 24 focused primarily on identifying dilemmas, barriers and opportunities in relation to inclusive school development. The emphasis has been on developing new knowledge about how different disciplines, professions, practices and forms of knowledge can be integrated and linked in various ways (Avramidis & Norwich, 2010; Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Clarke, Dyson, & Millward, 1998; Erten & Savage, 2012; Farrel 2001; Florian, 2005; Haug, 2010; Jensen, 2017; Schmidt, 2016; Molbæk, 2017). While the necessity of transforming both general and special education to support the student (to learn) to be a part of the learning community is underexposed.

Transforming general and special education – and not just integrating and linking the two disciplines – is required to ensure new understandings and constructions of difference, to support new possibilities for all students to participate in the learning community.

Collaboration

Inclusive schools represent a high degree of personal, academic and social heterogeneity among the students. To develop inclusive schools, there is a need for several different specialist approaches, forms of knowledge, skills and competence, which is more than qualified teachers are generally able to provide. Teachers cannot be expected to possess as much knowledge, as much varied competence and such a variety of different experiences as are needed to develop inclusive learning environments (Friend, 2007). Friend asserts that inclusive schools must move towards an approach consisting of many different professionals with various educational backgrounds, knowledge, skills and competence who collaborate to realize the common goal of inclusive education. Actually, cross-professional collaboration is in general the main strategy required to develop inclusive schools.

Research in collaboration shows that different kinds of specialists enter into and around the teaching practice in many ways, in many different roles and functions, and in many different forms of collaboration (Hansen, Andersen, Højholt, & Morin, 2014). In this way, collaboration is organized very differently, but can be roughly split into two main types:

The direct form – the specialist works directly with the child in different ways. The resource person has a supportive function in the teaching, in relation to individual or several students, and the consultant primarily contributes to the teacher being able to continue carrying out individual teaching in relation to the class. Working directly with the child also takes place outside the classroom, e.g. as social training or special education.

The indirect form – the specialist works as a consultant, counsellor or tutor helping the teacher and, as a result, works indirectly with the child by working directly with the teacher and his or her practice, which in turn benefits all students. The goal is to have the specialist’s specialized knowledge and experience contributing to the development of new strategies in relation to the education and development of each student (Gottlieb & Rathmann, 2014; Hansen et al., 2014; Jensen, 2017). This form of collaboration normally
takes place at meetings but also in more informal ways, e.g. during lunch breaks.

In general, the indirect form of collaboration spans a broad area of good advice and tips, mediation of new and specialized knowledge, collective brainstorming, support and guidance, and questions and dialogue, which supports reflection and analysis in relation to existing practice. Gottlieb and Rathmann (2014) point to four different approaches to working as a consultant. The advisory function directs itself at providing answers to solving concrete problems based on knowledge about specific methods and tools. The consultative function also directs itself towards providing answers to solving concrete problems but also contributes with new interpretations and perspectives of a given problem, which emphasizes various possible solutions. The inspirer contributes with new knowledge, new insights and new responses, which in collaboration with the teacher is meant to inspire the teacher to find new perspectives and approaches to comprehension and managing the teaching practice. Finally, it is the task of the sparring partner to support teachers in relating themselves analytically and reflectively on their own practice.

According to knowledge on indirect forms of collaboration, working as a sparring partner for the teacher seems to have the greatest effect on the development of inclusive learning environments (Hansen et al., 2014). This means that the resource person supports the teacher’s reflections on, and analysis of, the teaching practice and underlying understandings, in this way, supporting the teacher in gaining new understanding and solutions, which might contribute to developing and qualifying the inclusive teaching practice. Co-teaching is another example of collaboration supporting new understandings and strategies that serve to qualify inclusive teaching practice (Friend, 2016; Hansen, 2019; Murawski & Lochner, 2018). Co-teaching means that the consultant is teaching together with the general teacher in the classroom instead of supporting and guiding the teacher, thus developing the teaching practice.

These types of collaboration, based on reflections and the implementation of new knowledge, draw on assumptions underlying inclusive education, highlighting the cultural and social constructions of difference represented in the beliefs, attitudes and values of teachers and other educators, and determines whether students’ specific needs create barriers to learning (Hansen et al., 2014; Jensen, 2017; Molbæk, 2017).

In summary, collaboration between teachers and other educators can have a beneficial effect on developing inclusive learning environments, depending on which assumptions it draws on and the form of collaboration. An interdisciplinary approach does not solve the challenge of developing inclusive schools. Moreover, collaboration based on a model of inclusive education and focused on the beliefs, values, practice, curriculum content, pedagogy, assessment and structures of teachers and other educators seem to have the greatest effect on the development of inclusive learning environments. Other educators refer to all kinds of specialists, educators and assistants, both with and without formal teaching qualifications. They all represent specialized knowledge, dependent on their educational background and occupational experience, and are defined here as a professional whose task is to support the development of inclusive education.

**Understandings of problems**

In a Danish context, collaboration is organized in both a direct and indirect form. Good advice and tips, collective brainstorming, providing answers to solve concrete problems based on knowledge about specific methods and tools dominate the indirect form. Findings from the research project Approaching Inclusion (2016–2019), which is studying how collaborative processes between teachers and other educators have an impact on inclusive school development (Hansen, Jensen, Lassen, Molbæk, & Schmidt, 2018; Molbæk, Hansen, Jensen, & Schmidt, 2019; Schmidt, Hedegaard, Jensen, & Molbæk, 2018), show that guidance does not ensure the needed changes in culture and practice. In this context, we focus on the tendencies that the model of special education dominates cross-professional collaboration in Denmark.

Analysis shows that understandings of problems related to inclusive school development are directed mainly towards strategies targeting and compensating the needs of the student but seldom involve changing the professional practice of teachers and other educators. Figure 1 illustrates these tendencies and is based on data that show what is in focus when professionals in and affiliated with the school discuss intervention strategies at meetings.

Figure 1 shows that the use of individual interventions to address student deficits or difficulties in relation to learning and participation dominate in collaborative processes in public schools in Denmark. Data show examples of, e.g. social training outside the classroom, tools to keep the students calm and focused, individual play schedules for breaks, individual training in reading or writing, school pedagogues taking care of a specific student in the classroom, testing and diagnosing, a special school offer, individual guidance, and meetings with the family. The strategies seldom involve a change to the teachers’ didactic practice or the teachers’ way to organize their teaching practice. These data show a tendency to compensate for students’ special needs if they are unable to (learn to) adapt to the learning community or to the social practice in the classroom, making it necessary to draw on a special education model of thinking and practice. Consequently, the model of special education is not challenged or
transformed, and school culture and practice in general is not becoming more inclusive, which means that the underlying assumptions are not changed or challenged.

School communities and collaboration as social practice

To analyse these tendencies and mechanisms, we are inspired by social practice theory. The idea is to move from understanding inclusive school development as a question of pedagogical and didactic strategies, to take into consideration the importance of the constitutive mechanism of communities and the underlying assumptions that separate the models of inclusion and special education in relation to establishing inclusive schools. By only understanding inclusion as a pedagogical and didactic concept, inclusive school development is reliant on teachers and other educators learning and understanding about inclusive practice, while the importance of how to handle the constitutive mechanism of a school practice is not adequately considered. Consequently, the needed fundamental transformation in general and special education fails and school culture and practice are maintained.

Practice theory states that a practice produces and reproduces norms, rules, meaning and routines through social processes, creating a social order that represents both individuality and a collective social identity (Bjerre, 2015; Giddens, 1986; Latour, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 2004; Schatzki, 2001). The constitution of social order is the result of negotiations between individuality and collectivity and thus are negotiations on how much diversity a social practice can accommodate (Laclau, 1996; Latour, 2005). The constitution of communities presupposes the establishment of a collective social identity, which individuals need to adapt to in different ways to be included. The point is that society reflects the differences of the individuals to a certain degree and, at the same time, individuals reflect a collective social identity to a certain degree. In relation to inclusive school development, the professionals must find a way to balance between individuality and collectivity. Teachers and other educators must both ensure the right of students to participation and support students’ ability to participate. These processes are fundamental to all kinds of communities, making inclusive school development a question of both rights and obligation. As a result, student rights ensure a high degree of diversity and individuality, but at the same time students need to adapt to the social order in the classroom – teaching practice, rules, traditions, norms and meaning – thus making them obligated to (learn to) be able to participate to avoid exclusion. Some students need to be supported to be able to adapt to the social order. At the same time, the community needs to ensure its own cohesion, and some students might be at risk of being unable to participate.

Depending on the perspective, exclusion can be understood as a consequence of students not being able (to learn) to adapt to the social order or a consequence of not receiving sufficient support. Firstly, the conclusion might be that the students are responsible for their own exclusion, i.e. that it would be better for the child to be in segregated settings or the child does not benefit from the teaching practice. Secondly, the teachers and other educators need to improve their pedagogical and didactic practice to make it more inclusive.

From a social practice perspective, inclusive education is a question of being able to handle the constitutive mechanism of communities, and inclusion becomes a question of supporting all students (to learn) to be able to adapt to the social order in the broadest sense, thus ensuring their right to inclusion. At the same time, this involves changing the social order to be able to include all students. From this perspective, the transformation of general and special education is essential.
because special education traditionally offers treatment or compensation for students’ special needs. Supporting students (to learn) to be able to participate and to gain a feeling of belonging and of being a part of the learning community, however, is not a part of the strategy. Consequently, the students’ right to participate is not ensured and specific differences or individualities are not given space in the learning community.

In short, focusing on the constitutive mechanism of communities is different from understanding inclusion as a question of educational or didactic arrangements. Consequently, inclusive school development is not a question of eliminating exclusion through new ways of organising and collaborating on different forms of disciplines, skills and professions. Inclusion requires the students’ right to participate obtained through the way the community handles a high degree of diversity. At the same time, the process of inclusive school development needs to consider how the community claims the individual’s obligation to participate by supporting and guiding the individual to (learn to) be able to participate. From this perspective, the model of special education needs to be challenged and transformed so that it considers how specialist teaching for students with a disability can become more inclusive. This requires consideration and understanding of how inclusive education and special education are different in the underlying paradigms that inform each approach and how this influences beliefs, values, school culture, curriculum content, pedagogy, assessment, collaborative teaching approaches, structures and support for student aspirations. In other words, a transformation of the social practice and not only of teaching practice.

**Professional positions in collaborative processes**

With inspiration from Feldman’s concept of sub-routines (Feldman, 2003), we assume that school practice consists of several sub-practices, which are interrelated and interdependent. From this point of view, it is not possible to change one of the sub-practices without changing or influencing other sub-practices.

In cross-professional collaborative processes, the professionals represent different sub-practices, perspectives and positions. These sub-practices contain different roles, functions and main goals, which the professionals focus on in their specific and different sub-practices (Feldman, 2003). The teachers’ main function is to teach, and their main goal is to ensure that all students learn as much as possible. To develop inclusive schools, consultants and supervisors have a main function of supporting and guiding teachers. In a Danish school context, teachers and other educators, e.g. consultants, do not work together in the classroom. Normally, the teacher works alone and receives advice and new ideas from the consultants at meetings outside the classroom. Sometimes the consultant does observations in the classroom before supervising the teacher. Sometimes the teacher describes the challenges in the classroom to the consultant. Thus, the consultants’ function is to supervise the teachers, and the goal is to support the teacher in developing inclusive education. The school psychologist also serves as a consultant but mostly does assessments, helps identify the students’ special needs and individual problems, and recommends various strategies. The goal of this consultative function is also to contribute to inclusive school development but normally the strategies are ‘treatment’, remedial teaching strategies and compensation for the students’ special needs or individual challenges. It does not change the school practice and the different sub-practices.

To succeed in inclusive school development through collaborative processes, collaboration needs to focus on all the sub-practices in a school practice. Instead of collaborating on changing a single sub-practice, because it is not possible to develop only, e.g. teaching practice without changing the other sub-practices in a school practice. The consultant practice also needs to change, as do the psychologist’s practice and the principal’s practice.

At the same time, changing sub-practices is highly challenging. Feldman (2003) argues that all professionals are loyal to their own sub-practice and have an interest in maintaining it and avoiding changes. In collaborative processes, the professionals therefore position themselves differently and represent different understandings of inclusion, because of their various functions, educational background, knowledge, interests and goals (Hansen et al., 2018; Molbek et al., 2019; Schmidt et al., 2018).

The positional map (Clarke, 2018) of the different positions in Figure 2 illustrates the different understandings of inclusion in collaborative processes.

**Figure 2** shows the major positions identified in the analysis of collaborative processes (Hansen et al., 2018).

In a narrower perspective and focusing on individuality, the professionals focus on the individual student’s special needs and how to compensate for these needs, e.g. individual social training outside the classroom. This position generally does not support the students’ rights or obligation to participate because the problem (the disability) is understood as a deficiency in the person and requires only individual treatment.

Focusing on collectivity in a narrower perspective means that the professionals focus on groups of students and their specific challenges. For instance, the teacher divides the students into groups according to their, e.g. academic level, gender and ethnicity to meet the group’s specific needs. In the school, professionals most often group students according to their academic performance, making it possible to allot additional time to explain the curriculum again to a specific
group or to give a group of students separate tasks. This is one way to support the students’ ability to participate, but it might lead to stigmatization, depending on how the students are grouped and on how flexible the grouping is.

In a wider perspective with a focus on the individual, the professionals focus on both the community and the individual’s needs. They differentiate to meet all students’ individual needs and right to participate by supporting and developing a learning environment with a large variety of ways to participate. This position is taken, for instance when a teacher spends time talking about different reading and spelling strategies and lets a student with dyslexia talk about and show classmates how he or she works. Or, when professionals prepare activities that provide individual and different options for student engagement in equitable ways that simultaneously ensure the learning communities. Even though this position may be the most inclusive, the professionals need highly practical guidelines to put words into actions in the classroom.

Focusing on collectivity in a wider perspective means that the professionals emphasize the community without differentiating the level of their attention. They presuppose that all students can adapt to the social practice, which means their primary focus is on all students’ rights and obligation to participate without necessarily supporting each student’s ability to participate. In practice, an example of this position is when teachers plan activities in or outside the classroom where all students must participate regardless of their specific needs. Paradoxically, this position does not differentiate in the amount of attention given and may end up supporting exclusion processes when a student’s needs are not seen or met. An example of this is when the students play football and a physical disability prevents a student from participating but no other forms of participation are offered besides socializing with the other students.

All positions are represented in the collaborative processes and in the different sub-practices. The positional map shows the various positions, but the position primarily focusing on the students’ special needs dominates overall. This means that collaborative processes neutralize or eliminate the positions that challenge the existing and underlying social and cultural assumptions, as well as differences concerning ideas, values, beliefs and meaning. The understanding of inclusion as a question of compensating for the students’ special needs is highlighted in collaborative practice, which means that the model of special education frames collaborative processes and the understanding of problems and strategies addresses the student and not the teachers’ teaching practice, other sub-practices, curriculum, structures or culture. Consequently, general and special educational practice are not transformed, nor are the underlying assumptions of school culture and practice, or the construction and understanding of differences. As a result, the students are not offered new possibilities of participation and the balance between individuality and collectivity remains.

To develop inclusive settings, all four positions need to be in play, depending on the specific situation and context. Sometimes compensation provides support to enable the student to participate. Sometimes teachers need to group students to improve their learning. In other situations, working with culture and social order is relevant, as well as differentiating the teaching practice. In other words, transforming special education is not a recipe or specific strategy. It is built on specific principles about the right and obligation of all students to participate and to be supported to (learn to) be able to participate and realize their rights, and at the same time on changing culture and social practice. Handling this task will differ depending on the specific situation and context and depending on understanding diversity as a problem to solve or as a condition to manage. In other words, considerations and reflections of both inclusion and exclusion processes or inclusive and
exclusive strategies and practices are continuously needed in the professionals’ practice and collaboration.

Comparing models and positions

In the following, we compare and analyse the four different positions with the different models of special education and inclusive education. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of how and if the different positions support inclusion and of how they represent underlying assumptions of special education and/or inclusive education. We also aim to discuss and reflect on how this has an impact on supporting inclusion and exclusion processes in inclusive school development in Denmark.

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the assumptions that underlie special education are strongly represented in a Danish collaborative school practice. The current model draws on the medical view of disability and is based on assessments of individual defects that can be remediated through strategies and programmes targeting the individual student. This means that this special education model highlights the problem as a deficiency in the student that requires treatment. Data from the Approaching Inclusion project provide several examples of these tendencies.

One example describes Isabella, who is in second grade and, according to the teachers, is struggling with personal and social issues. She disturbs the other students; she cannot concentrate, and her social skills are weak. After several meetings, the teacher and the consultants decide to give her a sensory toy called a tangle twister to help calm her and help her concentrate.

Another girl, Sandra, is given a weighted vest, which helps her feel embraced. Also, the professionals make play dates for breaks to coordinate who she is playing with to avoid problems, fights and discussions during breaks.

In another school, Owen, a seventh grader who also has a hard time concentrating during class because the high level of noise challenges his concentration. As a solution, the teacher offers him a study area outside the classroom.

Lulu, who is in eighth grade, has personal difficulties because her mother is sick with depression and her father is unable to take care of Lulu and her younger brother. She is seldom in school and when she is, she mostly sits alone in a corner and does not participate in the teaching activities. Her difficulties are a result of what is going on in the family, and the social department in the municipality has a responsibility to help the family. The school has been waiting for three months to meet with a social worker. In the meantime, the school offers Lulu a reduced schedule, which means she does not need to be in school or do her homework full time.

These examples show that special education does not appear to have been transformed in order to develop inclusive education. According to the special education model, the examples show that the teachers and other educators highlight the problem more than the students’ strengths and that they understand the problem as an individual defect requiring individual treatment or compensation. As a result, the students are not necessarily supported to (learn to) participate or to adapt to the social order. The tangle twister and the weighted vest are used based on the expectation that they will help the students to be able to calm down and thus fit into the idea of the ideal student (Hansen et al., 2018). These strategies might remediate the students’ defects, but they do not allow them to experience how to be able to adapt to the collectivity, besides to become more calm. Similarly, Owen’s concentration problems might be remediated by moving him away from the noisy classroom, but the strategy does not include changes in the classroom or help him learn how to concentrate or how to adapt to the learning community. In the example with Lulu, she might be compensated for not thriving well, but the reduced schedule does not help her to be able to participate in school activities while waiting for the family to receive support and help. In short, the examples show that the special education model does not necessarily support inclusive school development.

How collaboration positions support inclusive education

As pointed out above, the cultural and social constructions of difference and school success and failure are represented in school practice, beliefs, norms and attitudes shaping how teachers and other educators place limits to inclusion. We therefore need to analyse the underlying assumptions of the teachers’ and other educators’ practice in order to help them avoid constructing limits to diversity. This means identifying the social and cultural patterns and processes that make specific constructions of diversity possible or not possible. From this perspective, inclusion is based on explicit values and ideas that draw on a social-cultural perspective of diversity in society as a condition and not as a problem to solve.

Today’s special educational model must be transformed because the understanding of problems and strategies is too simple, only drawing on the medical view of disability. Compensation or treatment can of course provide support to enable students to participate, but often students need to be both compensated and supported to (learn to) be able to participate through pedagogical and didactic strategies. At the same time, these strategies must ensure that students are not stigmatized because they receive special, individualized treatment or because their peers are
expected to be especially considerate of their special needs, actually making it easier or more appropriate, at the end of the day, to exclude them. In other words, focusing only on individual special needs or on the cohesion of the community – according to the positional map – might lead to both segregation and stigmatization. The special education model does not support inclusion, but the opposite strategy – to neutralize individuality and presume that one size fits all – is not the answer either. If the teacher and other educators do not take into account individual and special needs, they fail to support the individual student to (learn to) be able to participate. Consequently, the student is expected to take independent responsibility to adapt to the social order. Combining the two positions and considering both the students’ special needs and how to support the student to adapt to the community would be more productive in developing inclusive education.

At the same time, the teacher and other educators need to examine if the culture and social practice need changes and adjustments to ensure the participation of all students. Applying differentiation to meet all students’ special needs is an example of balancing individuality and collectivity and, in many ways, this position coincides with the inclusive education model. It is important to be aware of the point, however, that differentiation is not the same as individualizing. Differentiation refers to balancing between individuality and collectivity, while individualizing might eliminate taking collectivity concerns into account. Grouping students is one way to differentiate, but it must be done in a variety of ways over time. Grouping students alone does not support the inclusive education model, but it can be one way to realize the ideas and values of the model.

In short, the inclusive model requires, on the one hand, continuously considering how to differ between and combine the different positions to ensure the obligation of all students to (learn to) be able to participate and thus to ensure their right to be included. On the other hand, to analyse and reflect the underlying assumptions of social practice – rules, norms, beliefs, attitudes and meaning – is necessary in order to understand and handle diversity in a more inclusive way and to place new limits on inclusion. This might involve adjustments or changes in the teaching practice, other sub-practices, structure and culture. Figure 3 illustrates the major positions and compares the model of special education and inclusive education.

Figure 3 shows how major positions represent underlying assumptions that focus on different elements from the model of special education and from inclusive education. To develop inclusive education the teachers and other educators need to challenge their own positions and those of their colleagues and reflect on how they ensure supporting the needs of all student to help them (to learn to) participate and to belong and thus realize the students’ rights. The answer depends on the specific student and his or her special needs, as well as on the situation and context, but the main task is to understand diversity as a condition and not as a problem to solve in inclusive educational practice. This figure also shows that inclusive education includes both individual and collective considerations, but the more the teacher and other educators focus on compensating individual needs and the less they focus on the collective and differentiation, the more they move away from realizing inclusive education.

**Discussion**

From a sociological point of view, the limit to inclusion is situated and dependent on contextual negotiations of how much diversity the community can tolerate before

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**Figure 3.** Positions and underlying assumptions related to inclusion.
its existence as a community is threatened. All communities need to place limits on what can be included and what must be excluded to ensure their own existence (Bjerre, 2015; Hansen, 2012; Hansen & Bjørnsrud, 2018). In other words, how to balance between individuality and collectivity and thereby establish a collective social identity that individuals need to adapt to in different ways to be included. Therefore, no social practice could ever be limitless (Laclau, 1996; Hansen, 2012, 2016, Hansen et al 2018). On the one hand, all communities are characterized by some degree of diversity and, on the other, there needs to be a limit to how much diversity a community can support without it posing the idea or feeling of a threat to the cohesion of the community. A collective social identity gives a feeling of belonging together as well as of having something in common that is different from other communities (Anderson, 1983; Jenkins, 1996; Laclau, 1996). The cohesion of communities depends on this idea and the feeling of ‘a we’, different from ‘the others’. In a school context, we group students in classes, which should support a sense of ‘we’ and belonging. We also group students in different grades or in different schools, and every class, grade or school construct ‘a we’ different and limited from ‘the others’. Classrooms, grades and perhaps schools may have different limits to inclusion, which affects the culture and practice and influences how much diversity can be supported without threatening the cohesion of the community. These limits to inclusion are of course movable but not avoidable. Inclusion and exclusion are therefore both necessary processes in the constitution of all communities, and exclusionary processes will always be a fundamental part of the existence of an inclusive school practice in order to construct a common social identity and to ensure its cohesion.

Consequently, inclusive school development necessarily requires both the individual’s right to participate, obtained through the way the community handles a high degree of diversity and the individual’s obligation to participate by adapting rules, norms, routines and meaning to construct ‘a we’, a common social identity. It is important to emphasize that the student is not responsible for the obligation to participate, which is why inclusive schools need to consider how the students are supported and guided to (learn to) be able to participate and thereby to realize their right to participation.

If students are only compensated, they are not supported and guided to (learn to) be able to participate. An inclusive practice both compensates and supports the student, as well as makes the necessary changes in the learning environment, which influences the changes required to happen in the underlying assumptions. This requires that the various positions, functions, roles and goals of teachers and other educators are discussed, reflected upon and challenged in order to transform general and special education into inclusive education. These processes help to change the boundary between inclusion and exclusion in order to give more students possibilities of participation.

Conclusion

Cross-professional collaboration is the main capacity-building strategy in relation to inclusive school development in Denmark. The idea is that cross-professionalism supports complex sensitive and holistic solutions. Analysis shows that cross-professional collaboration does not necessarily support inclusive school development. Analyses from the Approaching Inclusion research project show the importance of the professionals’ loyalty and interest in protecting and maintaining the sub-practice, which teachers and other educators are a part of, as well as their own role and the main goal that they are expected to realize. Consequently, the underlying assumptions, the structures and cultures are not challenged, and the existing general and special educational practice remains.

We conclude that collaborative processes mostly contribute to maintaining the existing social practice and the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion remain in place. Following, understandings of problems related to inclusive school development are mainly directed towards strategies targeting and compensating the needs of the student but seldom involve changing the professional practice of teachers and other educators.

We have argued that inclusive school development involves a process of transforming general and special education into inclusive education, which requires changes in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education. Although the positional map (Figure 2) shows various positions represented in collaborative processes, the positions that challenge the limits to inclusion – and thus the existing social and cultural assumptions – are neutralized or eliminated, but also the differences in ideas, values, beliefs and meaning. Innovation or changes in the dominant understanding of problems and strategies are avoided, leaving the special education model to continue dominating general education.

The overall goal is to continuously challenge the boundary between inclusion and exclusion to the benefit of all students’ opportunities to participate. In order to make the transformation to inclusive education, collaborative processes need to more heavily support challenging underlying assumptions, existing practice and dominant positions. Disagreements can be a resource to transform the existing practice and underlying assumptions and to support new learning and innovation. Teachers and
other educators must find an interest in other and different perspectives and positions instead of trying to eliminate or neutralize differences and disagreements to reach consensus (Albæk & Trillingsgaard, 2011; Allan, 2008; Iversen, 2018; Murawski, 2003).

**Note**

1. The analysis is based on seven case studies where professionals collaborate on developing opportunities for students who experience barriers to participation. We focused on the meetings to identify understandings of the problem(s) and causes behind student barriers to participation in the social practice. Of the 72 meetings, 18, or a quarter of them, were chosen to achieve maximal variation in focus, participants and length. After coding 10 meetings, we reached an inductive thematic saturation. Figure 1 shows the distribution of themes at the 18 meetings.

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