**Including ALL learners**

There is wide agreement that ALL learners should be included in the education system - but how often does ‘all’ really capture every learner? Learners are often grouped according to commonly agreed categories - although many learners will fit into more than one category. Florian (2010) points out that such a focus on groups of learners as a way of determining ‘all’ is problematic because of the many sources of variation within and between any identified groups of learners.

In the Agency publication ‘Reflections from Researchers’ (<https://www.european-agency.org/publications/ereports/international-conference-reflections-from-researchers> ), Cor Meijer notes that the most important challenge in education is how to deal with differences. He says: ‘*We must be aware of how we approach learners.... Unfortunately, very often we assume that learners have the same type of skills or starting points....Perceiving education in this ‘homogenous’ way is problematic*.’ (p 8)

Florian and Kershner (2009) highlight the importance of a socio-cultural perspective that assumes that ‘ *all children have much in common, including the fact that their individual characteristics and preferences are uniquely interrelated rather than neatly categorisable*’ (Florian and Kershner, 2009: 174). Individual differences should therefore be understood in terms of the interactions between many different variables rather than fixed states within individuals.

Keeping in mind that learning is social and occurs through shared activity, teachers should, according to Hart and colleagues (2004), maintain a commitment to **everybody**. Rather than planning for the majority and differentiating (providing something additional or different) according to perceived limitations, teachers must extend the options available to all learners in the classroom to accommodate individual differences and maximise the opportunities provided by working together.

In this way, the possible negative impact of treating some learners as different (such as lower expectations) can be avoided. Such practice also moves thinking on from the idea of inclusion as a ‘specialised’ response to some learners that provides them with access to or participation in activities available to the majority.

**References**

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