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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A conceptual analysis of inclusive education in terms of participation and agency

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Abstract

Despite ongoing development of the international understanding of the values and goals of inclusive education, attempts to implement it remain incomplete. This study's aim was to clarify how participation and agency are defined in research on inclusive education and how participation and agency might be more effectively promoted to enhance inclusive education. The research was conducted as a conceptual analysis with the concepts of student participation and agency as the main focus of the analysis. The conceptual analysis process surfaced five emergent themes: recognition of societal barriers at school; appreciation of student diversity and cultural competence; community and collaboration with various stakeholders; promoting students' engagement; and enabling learning for all students. These themes include academic, social, and emotional and collective dimensions. Inclusive education appears as an institution whose everyday modes of interaction, pedagogical solutions and power dynamics can be difficult to recognise, let alone change towards a participative direction. Promoting student participation and agency requires professionals in schools to have the ability to primarily renew their own agency so that they can enable students to foster future orientation and active adulthood.

KEY WORDS

agency, conceptual analysis, inclusive education, participation

Key Points

- This conceptual analysis aimed to clarify how participation and agency, when it comes to students' capability to control their life and make the choices, are defined in research on inclusive education and how participation and agency might be more effectively promoted to enhance inclusive education.
- Inclusive education appears as an institution whose everyday modes of interaction, pedagogical solutions and power dynamics can be difficult to recognise, let alone change towards a participative direction.
- Both pre-service and in-service teachers need to adopt professional identities that cover competencies of thinking 'differently', finding innovative solutions to meet the needs of diverse students and collectively negotiating them, often within multiprofessional teams.
- Only then will teachers be able to effectively enact the more concrete actions identified within the conceptual analysis of articles identified within this study: community and collaboration with various stakeholders, promoting students' engagement and enabling learning and participation for all students.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the findings of research which aimed to undertake a conceptual analysis (Wilson, 1963) of the use of the terms participation and agency within research literature focusing on inclusive education. The research aim arose from the observance that, in many countries, attempts to implement inclusive education have remained incomplete (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014) with Van Mieghem et al. (2020) proposing that, based on their recent literature review, further research on the nature of the participation of students with special educational needs (SEN) in educational provision is required.

Within the research project, the authors chose not to explore inclusion as a wide societal process, nor did they limit the research to academic inclusive pedagogy. While the terms inclusion, inclusive education and inclusive pedagogy remain contested within current literature, there remains a requirement to utilise working definitions of these terms for the purposes of research. Prior to undertaking the conceptual analysis of the use of participation and agency as terms linked with inclusive education, justification of relevant keywords to be used within the literature search was necessary.

Peters (2007) sees inclusive education as both a philosophy and a practice. According to Peters, 'the philosophy of inclusive education is based on the right of all individuals to a quality education with equal opportunity—one that develops their potential and respects their human dignity' (p. 99). In the paradigm of inclusive education, many researchers find participation to be a crucial factor (Edström et al., 2022; Maxwell et al., 2018). Inclusive education questions the equality of the traditional school system and how it selects students (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Instead of a deficit model of disability, the idea of inclusive education is based on the social construction of disability (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Peters, 2007).

Based on their literature review, Göransson and Nilholm (2014) proposed that there are four different hierarchically ordered definitions of inclusive education in which the intensity of student participation gradually increases. The most restrictive definition of inclusive education focuses on physically placing students in the same classrooms as their mainstream peers, and the second 'level' definition advocates that in addition to physical proximity with their peers, inclusive education also demands support for the social and academic needs of pupils with special needs. Within the third level of hierarchy, inclusive education aims to meet the social and academic needs of all students (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). Nevertheless, at the fourth level of hierarchy, many authors now advocate that inclusive education requires structural and system approaches where the general system of education is expected to respond to the needs of all students, thereby creating inclusive communities and enabling full participation (Florian, 2015; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Slee, 2019).

It is proposed that inclusive education is unlikely to meet the ambitious aim of including all students if the reforms only concentrate on diverse students' access to mainstream education without paying enough attention to how their learning and relevant skills are developed (Norwich, 2013; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2017). Attention must also focus on how teachers enhance their students' sense of belonging in the school community, building effective targeted support for their students without them being stigmatised by their peers (Belfi et al., 2012). In the paradigm of inclusive education, many researchers would seem to utilise the term participation as a crucial element of their understanding of inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Edström et al., 2022; Maxwell et al., 2018). Indeed, the authors of this paper consider participation as one of the key goals of inclusive education and, as an indirect objective, students' agency when it comes to their capability to control their life and make the choices they find important.

Definitions of the term participation vary, depending on the disciplinary context in which they are being used. Multiple theories are needed to explain human actions and how communal existence is organised. Diverse theoretical ideas have been proposed to support understanding of how resources are distributed, needs are formed or how emotions influence behaviour and interpersonal relationships (Bossaert et al., 2013; Isola et al., 2017). Participation is not a structural or individual characteristic, but rather, it is constructed through interaction among individuals, understood as an experience as well as a resource. Participation refers to an individual's experiences and opportunities for psychological, pedagogical, organisational and socio-political participation (e.g., Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018; Saiz-Linares et al., 2019). According to Edström et al. (2022), participation in education requires that students have access to the academic elements of the school to ensure that their academic needs are met. Furthermore, they argue that schools must support students' learning by offering challenges at appropriate levels with Edström et al. (2022) noting that students also require to make appropriate progress in their learning within schools.

The authors of this paper understand that opportunities to participate in inclusive education may be linked to students' agency. Participation does not guarantee agency on its own but is linked to those resources required for action. Participation requires experiences of meaningfulness and belief in one's own agency to grow and develop (Isola et al., 2017). Only when a person becomes aware of their own actions and feelings or decides to act differently, do they transform into a future-oriented agent (Isola et al., 2017; Spratt, 2017). Participation is thus related to a person's

well-being and ability to act, make choices and construct a life of their own. When students are given opportunities to participate, their capacity to act independently is enhanced (cf. James & James, 2012). Students' agency is thereby developed, allowing them to utilise their social and emotional capabilities to regulate their behaviour and reflect their experiences according to feedback from the community (Vallee, 2017).

Understanding of students' well-being and agency has been considered from a range of theoretical perspectives, for example, Allardt's (1975) theory of well-being (having, loving, doing and being) and Sen's (1999) and Nussbaum's (2011) capability approaches, which analyse the capabilities individuals have and the functions they choose to embrace within their lives. Ryan and Deci's (2017) theory of self-determination also demonstrates how teaching may enhance students' inner motivation and, through that, their positive learning outcomes and engagement to their studies (Furrer et al., 2014). Bandura (2001) emphasises self-efficacy beliefs as well as intentionality, anticipation and self-regulation as they pertain to agency. Hilppö et al. (2010) indicate that developing agency can be supported at school through participatory pedagogy, in which children are active thinkers and actors. Research would seem to indicate the importance of educators' pedagogical responsibility to create a world of possibilities in which the pupils' agency is present and active.

Based on the authors' understanding of the definition of inclusive education, we propose that the key goals of inclusive education are participation and, as an indirect objective, agency. In this study, we do not delve into the students' responsibilities, but we are aware of the discussion that takes place concerning the emphasis on students' participation and agency in connection with the neoliberal pursuit of self-interest if the educational institution does not also take care of fostering students' communal sense of duty (Clark & Richards, 2017). The authors view inclusive education as an institution with certain societal objectives and established social norms and regularities (Alasuutari & Markström, 2011). Therefore, we examine education at an institutional level, not as an organisation with precisely defined procedures.

Through a conceptual analysis of previous research, the aim of the study was therefore to respond to the research question: Drawing from recent relevant research literature, how is the enactment of participation and agency viewed as contributing to the promotion of inclusive education?

METHODS

This study utilised a conceptual analysis approach for defining the hyponyms participation and agency in the context of inclusive education. In our study, conceptual analysis helps to understand the meaning of inclusive education and its differences from other collateral concepts (Puusa, 2008). Concepts can be regarded as means of thinking, and they help us communicate with one another by construing the surrounding reality (Flew, 1956; Puusa, 2008).

Analysis of concepts can be conducted using various methods. Formal concept analysis is a way to analyse meanings and relationships between the central concepts (Beane, 2007), such as in mathematics. Concept research refers to all research focusing on concepts, whereas conceptual analysis relates specifically to concept identification, distinguishing terms and analysing understandings (Nuopponen, 2009). Conceptual analysis is based on the research of written bibliographies and references, meaning there is no requirement for empirical data collection (Puusa, 2008).

Conceptual analysis is a theoretical research method without absolute or restrictive rules (Puusa, 2008). The content of the analysis depends predominantly on choices made by the researchers undertaking the analysis. According to Wilson (1963), one of the fundamental designers of conceptual analysis, the research entirely depends on selecting the right concepts of interest for the analysis and ensuring that the chosen terms are rigorously interrogated.

In our study, we applied the eight-step conceptual analysis process based on Wilson's (1963) design. The initial stage of the study involved consideration of the varying definitions of inclusive education reported in the first section of the paper: its development, values and intentions. Based on increased familiarisation with the phenomena under study, the authors identified student participation and agency as key themes in literature focusing on inclusive education. A conceptual analysis of how those terms were being used within research papers was deemed beneficial to understand in more depth the processes contributing to both the effective and non-effective implementations of the varying definitions of inclusive education within recent research projects and associated literature.

Data collection

The authors collected the research data in autumn 2021. The following international online databases were selected for the article search: the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) (from ProQuest and EBSCO) and Academic Search Elite (EBSCO). Relevant articles were found using the following search phrases: 'inclusive education' OR 'inclusion' AND 'student participation' OR 'student agency' AND 'primary education' OR 'secondary education' OR 'elementary education' AND 'pedagogy'. Articles were included for this conceptual analysis based on the following

criteria: (a) they were written in English; (b) they appeared in a peer-reviewed journal; (c) they were published within 15 years prior to this study; and (d) they were related to student participation or agency, as defined in this paper.

The search process yielded 27 articles which met the study criteria from ProQuest and EBSCO. The data collection in ProQuest resulted in 24 articles with the selected keywords, as did the search in EBSCO. The search results differed by three articles, as the Academic Search Elite database was added to the EBSCO search. Therefore, there were 21 duplicate articles.

All 27 articles were reviewed in the initial screening in order to determine whether their title, abstract and journal matched the abovementioned criteria. A preliminary screening of these articles was performed, and six did not meet the selected criteria. Within the six articles not included in the subsequent stages of analysis, it was deemed that the focus of the articles was not on pedagogical elements but on, for example, teachers' self-efficacy when instructing diverse students (e.g., see Reyes et al., 2017). As a result of the screening process, 21 articles were identified as being relevant to the conceptual analysis. Of these, 18 were qualitative and three used mixed methods. The articles were published in 17 different journals. The list of articles used as research data is presented in [Appendix 1](#), and the list of articles excluded is introduced in [Appendix 2](#).

Conceptual analysis as a method

As previously explained, the first phase of the study's conceptual analysis took place prior to the data collection. This process led to the identification and justification of the terms participation and agency as keywords, which could then be used as criteria and search phrases for our literature search. The authors divided the 21 selected articles, and each conducted a preliminary analysis on their allotted articles. All 21 identified articles were read with a view to identify salient elements from the perspectives of student participation and agency. The authors then compressed the main content of the articles into a table with three columns, showing the citation information, main content and reduced content. An example of the reduction can be seen in [Appendix 3](#).

The next phase of the conceptual analysis involved applying the techniques of model and contrary cases (here: research articles) (Wilson, 1963). Initially, the authors roughly divided the articles into two opposing groups, according to whether they applied teacher-led or student-oriented approaches while acknowledging the latter is considered to better enhance student participation (Norwich, 2013). The coding of the data made it easier to process the data into interpretable parts. The electronic whiteboard, Flinga, was used as an aid in this work. For example, codes such as 'appreciating diversity', 'encouraging students' participation', 'flexible teaching methods and learning environments' were detected. At this point, it was noticed that some of the articles relied on a wide context, drawing attention to the value base of inclusive education, and added a third group to our preliminary analysis.

The third step was to create imaginary dialogues by asking questions and answering them (Wilson, 1963). This informal dialogue took place in a joint, two-day workshop. As this phase is one of the most important elements in the procedure outlined by Wilson (1963), extensive research of the material was required (Puusa, 2008). We discussed different research articles, including border studies, contradictions and examples of misusing the concepts of participation and agency (Bosch, 2016). For example, significant time was spent interrogating the Gilmore (2012) study, in which a school tried to reduce their rate of excluded misbehaving students (those sent home) by instead sending them to 'an inclusion room'. Although this arrangement improved the rates of exclusion, the authors made the decision to remove the article as it was considered not to meet the criteria for including students but instead appeared to be segregating the misbehaving students in a stigmatising manner (Belfi et al., 2012).

Examples of contradictions where interventions that might have led to enhanced inclusive practice were unsuccessful included Vetoniemi and Kärnä's (2021) study in which it was proposed that inclusive education did not always materialise when some students with special education needs (SEN) felt support from their teachers and tutors was insufficient and felt their participation was limited. In another example, the researchers reported that, in spite of having two teachers in a class to support the pupils, teachers' actions and negative attitudes caused students to drop out or fail in math lessons (Straehler-Pohl & Pais, 2014).

In the fourth phase, the features and qualities of the interventions aimed at facilitating enhanced inclusion within educational processes were subject to further abductive analysis. This process occurred collaboratively via several virtual meetings with the analysis process being long and multi-phased. Throughout the process, the researchers were aware that they possessed both theoretical and empirical knowledge of the phenomenon, which influenced their interaction with the data. This abductive analysis included further interrogation of the emergent themes, combining some and finally reducing them to the five themes written up in the fifth and sixth phases of the process (Puusa, 2008).

The five themes were divided into two groups. The first group included those themes related to values, knowledge and understanding required to effectively enact participation and agency for all students in ways that enhance inclusive education. Within this first group, the first theme was *recognition of societal barriers at school*. The second theme

within this group was appreciation of *student diversity and cultural competence*. The second group included themes that describe a range of interventions made to meet all students' social and cognitive needs in order to enhance their participation and create capabilities to act and make choices (cf. Nussbaum, 2011). These remaining themes were identified as follows: (3) *community and collaboration with various stakeholders*; (4) *promoting students' engagement*; and (5) *enabling learning and participation for all students*. These five themes are outlined further and illustrated with examples in the following section of the paper.

RESULTS

This section of the paper is the penultimate step of the conceptual analysis. In this section, the five themes are described in more detail with exemplification from the articles identified as contributing to our understanding of the role that participation and agency have in promoting more effective inclusive education. It should be noted that in our conceptual analysis, the 'negative cases', those studies that reported interventions that somehow failed, were nevertheless considered as useful as the positive ones. Both supported the identification of issues requiring to be considered when reflecting on inclusive education in terms of participation and agency. The themes are summarised in [Figure 1](#).

Recognition of societal structural barriers at school

The analysis process identified that enhancing participation and agency in inclusive education required identification and recognition of the societal structural barriers that could prevent the full realisation of student participation and agency in schools.

Institutionally viewed, various organisational educational settings produce different kinds of social structures, norms and practices. As an example of this, Herz and Haertel (2016) investigated pupils' experiences of the social integration of their class, pupils' academic self-concept and school and learning climate. Their focus group consisted of pupils experiencing difficulties in their emotional and social development (SEBD), placed in inclusive or segregated educational settings, in special schools. They found out that in segregated settings, the pupils with SEBD ($n=47$) were not as satisfied with their school and the class social climate and were not as enthusiastic about their learning as did those pupils with SEBD ($n=62$) in inclusive settings. However, the study did not include an in-depth analysis of what caused the differing experiences.

Greenstein's (2014) argues that as education cannot be changed without reforming societal structures, it is crucial to recognise the link between social inequality and educational inequality. Knowledge and attitudes are incorporated into the curriculum and educational relationships in order to prevent injustice. Related to this, Vetoniemi and Kärnä's (2021) research showed that the legislative changes aiming for inclusion had not changed the pedagogy in the schools that participated in their study. The experiences of social inclusion among the students with SEN in mainstream education were negative. They experienced fear, anger, frustration and loneliness; they were less popular and felt their participation was limited. These experiences shaped their views of themselves as individuals and group members. In addition, in O'Connor and McNabb's (2021) study post-primary teachers identified pedagogical and implementation challenges in enabling the participation of students with SEND in PE classes. According to the teachers, the challenges were, among others, due to limited pre-service training on special educational needs.

According to Kuyini and Abosi (2011), teachers and other professionals need to actively enhance the participation and agency of various vulnerable groups of students. To support students to become critical thinkers, it was proposed that teachers should design and implement inclusive and democratic practices in their classrooms, such as listening to students' perspectives, giving them opportunities to discuss issues and teaching collaborative skills (Sanahuja et al., 2020).

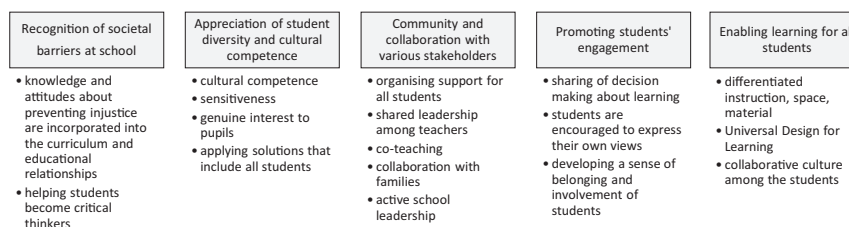


FIGURE 1 The themes of inclusive education in terms of enhancing participation and agency.

Teachers' appreciation of student diversity and cultural competence

The research data showed that, in many cases, awareness of students' diverse needs and cultural diversity, as well as cultural competence, plays a major role in promoting student participation and agency.

According to our findings, a teacher's belief in a student's competence is communicated to the student. When a teacher's attitude is positive, the student will trust the teacher to be genuinely interested and will be more sensitive to relevant activities (Florian & Beaton, 2018). Furthermore, the evaluation and recognition of one's heritage are important in applying inclusive education (Sanahuja et al., 2020). For example, Munns (2007) found five important factors which encouraged student participation including the key factor of respect for the student's origin. It would seem that appreciating students' different backgrounds heightened their engagement in participatory actions. This was especially true among refugee and newly arrived immigrant children, when no mutual language exists and interrelations between students can be enhanced by applying solutions that include all students, such as play-based musical activities (Marsh & Dieckmann, 2017). Another example comes from Kuyini and Abosi (2011), who promoted street children's inclusion in regular schools.

Community and collaboration with various stakeholders

Moving to the concrete actions identified as contributing to enhanced participation and agency to promote inclusive education, community and collaboration with various stakeholders in enhancing participation and agency were present in most of the studies. On the other hand, these elements were quite implicitly intertwined in inclusive education in a number of different ways.

Sanahuja et al. (2020) stated that a collaborative school culture fostered students' critical citizenship as well as the sense of belonging when they noticed that their opinions mattered. These capabilities and experiences arose from democratic participation, collaborative culture, shared leadership between the teacher and other actors (students, families and experts), and their continuous reflections, discussions or consensus-building in the research classes. Furthermore, according to Sanahuja et al. (2020) these ways of working 'generated a collective identity, a social cohesion which enabled the creation of emotional and affective bonds, as well as the experience of feeling valued' (p. 123).

On the other hand, co-teaching did not support students in a German high school, where the prevailing teaching culture of the school (i.e., based on crediting) reflected on the co-teachers' attitudes and resulted in students dropping out of their class (Straehler-Pohl & Pais, 2014). Angelides et al. (2009) pointed out the need for multiprofessional staff, but one negative aspect was that, for example, the presence of paraprofessionals sometimes resulted in students' further exclusion of the class.

Promoting students' engagement

The conceptual analysis approach surfaced students' sense of belonging and autonomy as preconditions for participation. Florian and Beaton (2018) point out that inclusive pedagogy is about considering the differences among pupils so that exclusion does not occur, even when the pedagogical activity is very individual-centred. In addition, they found that genuine sharing of decision making about learning resulted in an increase in participation. Also, McAnelly and Gaffney (2017) accentuated recognising children as experts on their own life and trusting them to make the right decisions for their individual learning journey in order to support their participation.

Many studies were carried out as case studies, in the context of various minority groups, focusing on the school's respecting students' origins. Through acknowledgement of these different origins and the richness this can bring to educational processes, the students developed a sense of belonging and involvement in their studies. Munns (2007) developed practices to engage students who lived in poverty, reporting on a project in which a conceptual framework was implemented to develop students' long-term engagement with the sense of 'school is for me', students' understanding of the meaning of knowledge and students' sense of self-efficacy. Other studies focused on involving students in school communities with, for example, Indigenous peoples (McCarthy & Stanton, 2017), students on the autism spectrum (Qi & Wang, 2018) and immigrant pupils (Marsh & Dieckmann, 2017).

The analysis process also highlighted articles that we considered as border cases. One of these was research by Hulme et al. (2011), in which teachers found it difficult to find ways to enhance their pupils' participation. However, they understood that participation was an attempt to move towards active and enquiry-based learning. Hattingh et al.'s (2017) study revealed four concerns of teachers while teaching international students. Among others, there were feelings of unpreparedness; issues of curriculum implementation and student participation; and the need to increase intercultural competences. Also, in Manca and Grion's (2017) study, in spite of teachers' efforts, students did not dare

express critical opinions due to unbalanced power relations between teachers and students. Similarly, in Carrim's (2011) research on South African education, students felt that teachers see students as being too homogeneous a group and that the teachers do not listen to them. Participation was mentioned in legislation but was only realised as a formal representation in student associations. Straehler-Pohl and Pais (2014) reported teachers' actions based on a credit system and found that teachers' negative attitudes caused students to drop out of or fail math lessons. Their teaching was controlling and stigmatising instead of supporting and creating study opportunities for all. Although reported as a negative result within the original article, if viewed from a lens of what to do differently in the future to enhance students' participation, this would mean that teacher–student relationships need to be based on safety and trust, with students being encouraged to express their own views.

Enabling learning for all students

The research articles reviewed here indicated that teachers need to make in-depth practical analysis of their teaching (Florian & Beaton, 2018) and actively develop situations where learning for all students is possible (Qi & Wang, 2018).

An example of such a pedagogical approach was found in Flood and Banks's (2021) examination of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Irish education policy. They concluded that the components of the UDL can help teachers identify curriculum principles that support students' commitment, participation, choice and flexibility of learning contents. In Petrie et al.'s (2018) research, the physical education lessons involved all the students in planning, reflective exercises, creating a positive attitude towards diversity. The students were given options as to how to practice the skill with opportunities for students with physical impairments to participate. Sanahuja et al.'s (2020) findings advocate the following teacher actions: differentiated instruction as well as spaces, material and personal resources, promoting collaborative culture among the students and shared leadership among teachers. Berry (2006) proposes that many pedagogical approaches, implemented in special small groups, can be realised in inclusive settings. He analysed several co-teachers who taught in heterogeneous classes including students with SEN. He noticed the co-teachers adjusted the students' tasks so that all students could participate and reduced the task demands by revising students' contributions on their behalf using techniques that brought students with disabilities into the whole-class conversation. Florian and Beaton (2018) note that when students are given the opportunity to self-assess, they gain a clearer idea of their own progress by comparing their current work to their previous work, instead of to others' achievements. Additionally, our analysis process highlighted that hearing other students' opinions enhances all students' learning having multiple formal and informal opportunities to express themselves as part of the learning process (McCarthy & Stanton, 2017; Sanahuja et al., 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

In the last stage of our conceptual analysis, presented in this section of the paper, we return to the various definitions and theories of participation and agency seeking to reflect on them in light of our findings in response to our research question: Drawing from recent relevant research literature, how is the enactment of participation and agency viewed as contributing to the promotion of inclusive education? Prior to discussing the implications of the results of the study, it is important to acknowledge that participation and agency are both aims of inclusive education but also considered processes which enhance the promotion of effective inclusive education. Therefore, it is important that inclusive education discovers the barriers of participation and identifies the effective ways to promote student agency while they appear in different forms in distinctive contexts and for various students. Heterogeneous students may have unique learning needs, but what unites them are that the capabilities (cf. Nussbaum, 2011) they need and to be taught gradually with their learning goals always be at such a level that they do not become discouraged. The educator's task is to challenge and inspire the students as well as teach them to make life choices (Sen, 1999).

It should be noted that some of the research articles reported cases where barriers to participation for all students had not been successfully removed. In some articles, participation was viewed as a social and attitudinal phenomenon where institutional practices and norms either hindered or promoted students' participation and the development of agency. For example, there were cases where the whole school supported students' critical thinking and collective responsibilities; or cases where, in spite of legislation aiming to inclusive education, the pedagogy of a school had not been renewed; or in special schools where the students with SEN were not so satisfied with the school social climate and classroom atmosphere as did their peers in mainstream schools. In some of the identified research articles, the facilitation of participation and agency was viewed as a concrete resource issue or a successful pedagogical intervention. Related to the complicity of participation and agency, Sen (1999) aptly describes the multidimensionality of agency when he explains how the person's capability and the functions they choose to do are related to other dimensions, such as emotions like fear or joy. Acknowledging both the positive and negative

cases reported in the identified articles highlights the complexity of the terms participation and agency, which may contribute to ongoing challenge of facilitating their enactment within educational settings as a means of promoting inclusive education.

An early decision within the study was to approach education as an institutional phenomenon, referring to established social norms and practices that are reproduced and maintained in society (Alasuutari & Markström, 2011). As inclusive education requires student-oriented pedagogical solutions (Norwich, 2013), certain of the studies in our research data pointed out how difficult it may be to acknowledge some of the customary practices at school or how difficult it is to change them. Therefore, one of the essential aspects of promoting participation and agency would seem to be both the teacher's and the student's capacity for reflection on their own activities. Teachers need to analyse their actions, attitudes and power relations. Students need to consider their actions, attitudes and behaviours. As the theories of agency accentuate, only after a person becomes aware of their own actions and abilities to influence their actions, are they able to develop as agentic beings (Clark & Richards, 2017; Isola et al., 2017). The conceptual analysis process undertaken within this study has once again highlighted the need for both pre- and in-service teachers to revisit their knowledge and understanding of the societal barriers that may be impeding students' participation in educational opportunities and ability to enact their agency. As society changes around schools, it is also key that teachers are given the opportunity to reflect on the cultural and linguistic diversity that students bring to schools, taking time to consider their attitudes to this diversity and considering how this diversity might enrich learning in educational provision.

Our conceptual analysis points out that the preconditions for implementing inclusive education are set at the whole school as well as the individual professional level. Teacher education should, above all, give pre-service and in-service teachers the competence to reflect on their actions and continuously develop during their studies and years of teaching (Blömeke et al., 2015). Beaton et al. (2021) refer to a new kind of teacher identity when they suggest that teacher education would need to offer a strategy for teachers to search for and reflect on their own solutions to dilemmas with their colleagues' assistance. In the future, pre-service teachers need to adopt professional identities that cover competencies of thinking 'differently', finding innovative solutions and collectively negotiating them, often within multiprofessional teams (Lakkala et al., 2021). Only then will teachers be able to effectively enact the more concrete actions identified within the conceptual analysis of articles identified within this study: community and collaboration with various stakeholders, promoting students' engagement and enabling learning and participation for all students.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The research data consists of published journal articles.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical review and approval of an institutional board were waived for this study, due to reason that the research procedures and practices followed All European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities' instructions.

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APPENDIX 1

ARTICLES INCLUDED AS RESEARCH DATA

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APPENDIX 2

ARTICLES EXCLUDED FROM THE RESEARCH DATA

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APPENDIX 3

AN EXAMPLE OF REDUCTION OF DATA

Article	Description	Reduction
<p>2. *Florian, L. & Beaton, M. (2018) Inclusive pedagogy in action: getting it right for every child. <i>International Journal of Inclusive Education</i>, 22(8), 870–884. Qualitative methods</p>	<p>Focusing on students' individual differences can be problematic if some pupils' work differs so much that they cannot participate in classroom activities with others. (870) Inclusive pedagogy is about considering the individual differences of students but avoiding the exclusion that can arise if pedagogical activities are designed only for individual needs. (870) Through self-assessment, students gain a clear idea of their own progress by comparing their current work with that of the past, rather than comparing themselves to the achievements of others. (871) Seeing self-assessment as an important part of assessment means that students are able to assess their abilities, and their thinking about the progress of learning is strengthened. (871) Genuine sharing of decision making about learning can increase the experience of participation, but understanding professional development is a long-term task requiring long and in-depth analysis of the practice of teaching. (882) Modifying a formal assessment method alone will not automatically lead to the desired outcome; implementation is crucial. (882) When a genuine belief in a student's competence is conveyed in words and deeds, then students are able to trust that teachers will listen and they are able to participate in genuine and meaningful activities, thereby giving meaning to the concept of inclusion. (883)</p>	<p>Engaging pupils in the evaluation process increases the experience of participation and develops self-evaluation skills, seeing one's own progress and meta-cognitive skills—comparing progress with one's own previous competence, not with others</p>
<p>13. *Berry, R.A.W. (2006) Teacher talk during whole-class lessons: engagement strategies to support the verbal participation of students with learning disabilities. <i>Learning Disabilities Research & Practice</i>, 21(4), 211–232. Qualitative methods</p>	<p>This analysis examined engagement strategies used by two general education teachers in whole-class interactive dialogues in the context of writing instructions in order to reveal how they supported all students' verbal participation, including students with learning disabilities. The author sees learning as a social process</p>	<p>Learning as a social process; co-teaching enabled diverse ways of teaching and participation. The two teachers could be seen as using procedural strategies (naming and modelling; overlapping/repeating and directing/next steps) as well as involvement strategies (encouraging, sharing ownership and scaffolding). The teachers enabled the heterogeneous class to participate</p>
<p>*Reyes, M. E., Hutchinson, C. J. & Little, M. (2017) Preparing educators to teach effectively in inclusive settings. <i>SRATE Journal</i>, 26(1), 21–29.</p>	<p>The research investigated teachers' experiences concerning teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings. The in-service training had positive effects on teachers' sense of self-efficacy</p>	<p>Excluded because the study investigated teachers' in-service education, concentrating on the participants' learning results in one course</p>