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Succeeding in inclusive practices in school in Norway – A qualitative study from a teacher perspective

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined inclusive practices in school by studying how teachers realise inclusion in a school for all. The study was based on ten qualitative focus group interviews with approximately 40 teachers from one selected primary school. A thematic, structural analysis was used to identify the themes. The analysis was conducted using a combination of a data-driven and a deductive process. The results indicate that inclusive practices centred around the teachers' efforts to achieve inclusion by organising teaching, establishing a sense of belonging to the community, developing social competence, and facilitating academic achievement. Differentiation in meeting students' diversity appeared to be the largest challenge to success. Despite various barriers, satisfactory inclusive practices depend on close collaboration, where teachers work to facilitate equal education and foster belongingness in an enriching learning environment in which their students have experience achieving their individual goals.

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Introduction

Education for all was initiated as a global goal by UNESCO (1990), aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth, and adults. In line with this objective, ensuring inclusive education for students with special educational needs (SEN) was highlighted in the early 1990s (UNESCO 1994). This process is still ongoing internationally. Thus, the understanding of inclusive education has transcended the assumption that inclusion is only about students with special educational needs; it also concerns the inclusion of all students. In the early 1990s, it was decided that all special government-run schools in Norway would be closed, and the aim of the educational policy was that the mainstream school included all, SEN students as well (Buli-Holmberg, Nilsen, and Skogen 2019). This policy attempted to make it so that the school system valued students' unique contributions from diverse backgrounds and allowed diverse groups to grow side by side to the benefit of all. This means that all students in Norway, regardless of individual challenges, have a right to be placed in age-appropriate general education classes in their own neighbourhood schools (The Education Act 1998).

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To succeed in realising inclusion in practice in a school for all, it is important that all actors develop a common understanding of the concept. However, there are several different explanations for what inclusion entails (Artiles et al. 2006; Amor et al. 2019; Göransson and Nilholm 2014). A definition of inclusive education covering the most common aspect of inclusion is that students receive high-quality instruction and support within ordinary classes that enable them to succeed in the core curriculum (Bui et al. 2010; Alquraini and Gut 2012). This definition of inclusion is close to the understanding of inclusive education when it is defined as teaching a diverse group of students within the same classroom (Isaksson and Lindqvist 2015). In Norway, inclusion is most often defined as the placement of students with special educational needs inside the classroom context in local schools (Nes 2017). However, others have focused more on values of inclusion such as belongingness, equal participation, and co-responsibilities (Sigstad 2017).

Putting the ideal of inclusion into practice seems essential for fulfilling human rights, equity, social justice, and the fight for a non-segregated society (UN 1948). However, these ideals, values, and principles may be challenging concerning how inclusion is understood and how the demand for inclusion is followed up in classrooms. Challenges could include sufficient competence, teacher collaboration, and a satisfactory connection between special education and ordinary education, which can be related to the extent to which the school organisation has a common, inclusive understanding (Darling-Hammond 2000; Nordahl et al. 2018; Haug 2017; Bjørnsrud and Nilsen 2019). In attempts to distinguish between different understandings of inclusive practice, Mitchell (2005) differentiates between single- and multiple-oriented understandings of the relevant phenomena. Inclusion referred to a dominant value, idea, and practice, represents a single-oriented understanding. Meanwhile, inclusive education as a product of multiple values and processes refers to more multiple-oriented understandings. Haug (2017) points to how inclusion within a single-oriented approach is about a dichotomy – inclusion or no inclusion – that is often dependent on the placement of students receiving special education, more specifically on a narrow definition of inclusion. However, in view of a multiple-oriented understanding, in addition to location, conditions for social life and learning in school play a role; within such a broad definition, inclusion concerns all students and marginalised groups. In a Norwegian study (Nilsen 2020), inclusion was divided into three dimensions: 1) an organisational dimension, 2) a social dimension, and 3) an academic dimension. Such a multidimensional definition of inclusive education can thus be placed within a more multiple-oriented understanding. Inclusive practice comprises three domains, which apply to everyone, with or without special educational needs. The *organisational* dimension is a matter of physical placement and the organisation of schooling. The organisational dimension is a sense of physical placement, either inside or outside the classroom, or how the teaching is organised, like one-to-one, groups, or the entire class (Buli-Holmberg and Jeyaprabhan 2016). The organisation of schooling involves choosing various organisational efforts that the school makes to succeed in inclusion. In certain contexts, the organisational dimension of inclusion is only a matter of placement where SEN students are physically placed in the classroom (Norwich 2008; Göransson and Nilholm 2014). Most inclusive practices also either explicitly or implicitly state that inclusion refers to the placement of all students in regular schools and classrooms, regardless of their level of ability (Luciak and Biewer 2011). The *social* dimension of inclusion refers to participation, collaboration, and good relationships in both student-student relations and student-

teacher relations (Nilsen 2020). A key element is the student's experience of belonging and participating in the work and activities of the class or group (Norwich 2008; Garrote, Dessemontet, and Opitz 2017). The social dimension of inclusion is a process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities for all. It strives to create conditions that enable full and active participation of every member of the school society and participation in decision-making processes and belongingness (Prince and Hadwin 2013). The class is a social community where students learn from each other (Wenger 1999). However, equally important is membership in the self-organised community of children in the schoolyard and bilateral relationships with other children and/or teachers (Qvortrup and Qvortrup 2018). The academic dimension of inclusion concerns the extent to which the students work together on something, whether they share a certain common academic content, work with common tasks, use common working methods, and have common forms of activity and a predictable learning environment with an expected behavioural framework (Hamre and Pianta 2001; Nilsen 2020; Nordahl et al. 2018). Thus, the academic dimension of inclusion depends on adaptations of the curriculum, adapted assessments, adapted teaching, high-quality education, learning outcomes, and higher achievement levels (Mitchell 2015; Howe et al. 2019; Humphrey et al. 2006; Lovelace 2005; Vygotsky 1978).

Based on this threefold explanation of the concept of inclusion, this article defines inclusive practices as an ongoing process of respecting and responding to individual needs and opportunities for equal participation, belongingness, and co-responsibility within the learning community at the local school. The development of inclusive practices therefore consists of different steps towards equity, engaging all students' participation in creating their learning environment and fostering belongingness. The present article takes teacher's perspectives on their inclusive practices within a mainstream school context. The purpose of the study was to identify how the teachers work to realise the intention of inclusion in a school for all, with emphasis on students with special needs or those at risk of developing such needs. The study posed the following research question: *How do teachers describe their own practice to facilitate inclusion and their challenges in implementing inclusive practices?*

Materials and methods

Design and sample

This focus group study formed a part of a larger project, 'Inclusive Practices', a qualitative in-depth investigations, and a specific case study consisting of a single case: an average-sized primary school in a medium-sized municipality in Norway. In collaboration with the school's management, the current school was chosen. In the 2019–2020 school year, there were 483 students, 45 teachers, and three managers. In addition to functioning as an ordinary primary school, a reception class for newly arrived minority language students and children of migrant workers is located at this school; in 2019–2020, there were 13 students from five different countries.

The interviews were conducted in the school's teaching team (ten in total); seven teams consisting of teachers from grades 1–7, one team consisting of teachers who taught arts and crafts, one team with teachers of Norwegian as a second language, and one team of teachers in special education (there were 3–5 participants per interview, and approximately 40 participants in total, amounting to an approximately 90% presence).

Focus group interview

In the present study, we defined focus groups as a form of, but not the same as, ordinary group interviews (Stewart and Shamdasani 2014). The focus groups were intended to emphasise the interaction between the participants, with a combination of group interaction and topic focus. These interviews were held with an open-ended approach without any use of interview guides. The topic was divided into two parts: the teacher's strategies and their challenges regarding the implementation of inclusive practices. Two researchers conducted the interviews; one acted as a moderator and made sure to keep the focus of the conversation, and the co-interviewer made notes along the way. The interviews focused on the interactions among the participants, with some guidance from the moderator. The interviews were conducted at school, and each interview lasted approximately an hour and thirty minutes. The interviews were taped on a digital recorder and were transcribed word-for-word as soon as possible after the interviews were completed.

Ethical consideration

The study was conducted per the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki (2018) and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). The planning of the main project, 'Inclusive Practices', was done in collaboration with the municipal management, who picked out the case school, and the management at the school confirmed their participation on behalf of the staff. Based on this, it was especially necessary to provide thorough information to each participant in advance, where the right to free expressed consent was emphasised. In the present article, the participants' statements were anonymous in terms of names, dialects, positional information, and other recognisable characteristics.

Data analysis

The analysis was conducted using a combination of a data-driven and a deductive process, with a view towards the theoretical categories in the field: organisational/physical inclusion, social inclusion, and academic inclusion (Nilsen 2020). The primary material consisted of the interview dialogues with the participants. A thematic, structural analysis was used to identify themes (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). By using condensed descriptions from the interview transcripts, attempts were made to capture the essential meaning of lived experience. The meaning units were further condensed into subthemes (practice and challenges) and then assembled into themes with specifications according to the current theoretical categories (see Table 1).

Results

The below presentation of this study is based on the qualitative thematic analysis of the teachers' own descriptions on a level of self-understanding (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). These results primarily reflect the teachers' own practices or facilitating inclusion and the challenges to implementing inclusive practices, and overall represent a great deal of agreement between the participants internally in the different focus groups. The

Table 1. Example of thematic, structural analysis (teacher interviews) (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015).

Meaning unit	Condensation	Subtheme	Theme with subthemes (Practice, Challenges)
We are very inclusive and thinking inclusion in everything we do because we have four children with special needs. It constitutes a large pot and affiliated special need educators and child counsellors; then, we have to think all the way holistically.	Inclusion is understood in a holistic context. It is about the distribution of resources to achieve the best for everyone.	Use and	distribution of staff resources
<i>Organisational inclusion – Practice</i>			

Table 2. Analysis of the focus group interviews. Inclusive practice.

Organisational inclusion	Social inclusion	Academic inclusion
<i>Practice</i>	<i>Practice</i>	<i>Practice</i>
-Organisation within the classroom	-Belonging to the community	-Meeting the goal of diversity
-Organisation outside the classroom	-Developing social competence	-Common competence goal
-Resources and collaboration	-Relationships	-Teacher collaboration to promote academic achievement
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
-Differentiation in the organisation	-Facilitation for students with special needs	-Assessment of each student's academic level
-Appropriate use of the staff resources	-Collaboration and group division	-Facilitation of diversity within the class
-Information flow	-Self-esteem	-Balancing academic and social issues

descriptions can be categorised based on three themes: organisational inclusion, social inclusion, and academic inclusion (see Table 2). Quotes are used to exemplify the themes. (Table 2) below shows the analysis consisting of themes and subthemes. The subthemes are also categorised into practice and challenges. The term 'Practice' is intended to describe what the teachers actually do to achieve inclusion, and the term 'Challenges' describes what the teachers experienced as challenging in achieving inclusion.

Organisational inclusion

Within the teachers' practice regarding organisational inclusion, three subthemes seemed essential: organisation *within* the classroom, organisation *outside* the classroom, and *resources and collaboration*.

Organisation *within* the classroom was about succeeding in organising the classroom in a way that worked for everyone. This required both *logistics and flexibility*: 'We spend a lot of time on logistics to make the schedule stick together, considering that each individual child with special needs should feel part of the class . . . as a natural member on an equal footing with others'. The organisation was not only about subjects but also about *the students' physical place* in the room. Regardless, one of the goals was to make classroom teaching work best for everyone and, as far as possible, *include all students* in the classroom *most of the time*.

Organisations *outside* class were mainly about *the students' individual need for support*. Some teachers emphasised that teaching outside the classroom could be helpful for some students, but they were still concerned that *the organisation should be flexible*. Nevertheless, not all teachers were equally positive when new learning strategies were taught in small groups outside the classroom. They underlined that such a form of learning should occur within the classroom, with a diversity of students and support to the individual. In this respect, an appropriate *distribution of resources and collaboration* between teachers seemed to be essential. Thus, efficient utilisation of staff resources was mentioned as an important tool: 'We are very inclusive and think [about] inclusion in everything we do because we have four children with special needs. It constitutes a large pot and associated special needs education teachers on the site and child assistants. If we are to make it work, we must think holistically all the way'.

All staff resources were utilised to meet all the individual students' needs. For these teachers, inclusive practices were also about collaboration with the teachers in between. Thus, the lesson's purpose was described as *joint ownership; a united team of all teachers* at the same level acted as a force for achieving such ownership. Regarding *challenges in succeeding in inclusive organisational practices*, three subthemes seemed essential: *differentiation in the organisation, appropriate use of staff resources, and information flow*. Although teachers had high ambitions for organising the best possible teaching strategies, occasionally, adequate differentiation within the classroom could be challenging. At the same time, it could have the unfortunate consequence of choosing to take students out of the classroom: 'One of my students was taken out for a whole year in all English lessons. Because it was then scheduled for those lessons, right?'

Social inclusion

Within the practice of social inclusion, the following themes seemed essential: *belonging to the community, developing social competence, and relationships*.

Belonging to the community was formulated both as an ideal and as a goal. Establishing and securing a continuing feeling of belonging to the community was an important part of the teachers' practice. The teachers talked explicitly about belonging to a community as belonging to the school and belonging to the class. One strategy used to build communities was *to give the students common experiences of belongingness* in the class. By collaborating in groups, the students were encouraged to help each other with the difficult tasks. Another approach was leaving the classroom to shift learning experiences for all students outdoors. Sharing culture and being aware of all the students' different cultural identities seemed essential for establishing belongingness and building a learning community.

Developing social competence might be a way towards full inclusion for all students. The teachers talked about social competence as a kind of competence that must be learned. Thus, building social competence was part of all school activities. Talking with the students about the importance of being generous and accepting each other had a special focus.

According to the teachers, positive *relationships* were the key to well-being and social inclusion, and relationships seemed to be on the teachers' mind all the time. In order to work with development of relationships, the school had established a buddy system to

include new students and provide a sense of well-being. Outdoor schooling was seen as a successful way to build positive relations through students' common experiences: 'It is very constructive for inclusion, even though they are under stumps and bushes in the woods, so it is a very common arena to create a social inclusive community for everyone'.

Regarding challenges in succeeding with social inclusion, the following subthemes arose: *facilitation for students with special needs, collaboration and group division, and self-esteem*. Facilitation for students with special needs could pose especially difficult challenges. Many of the students had a background as cultural and lingual minorities. Some of them were mastering Norwegian in everyday interactions with peers, but were struggling with the requested language competence in school and to keep up with what was being taught.

Student activities, collaboration, and group division could also entail different kinds of challenges: 'The most common situation is that some students are very keen to start on the group activity, while others lean back and relax'. To ensure that all students were included in the group, the composition of the groups had to be planned and not left to the students' own choice.

Some teachers were also deeply worried about individual students' self-esteem. Therefore, they stressed the importance of everyone being generous to each other. According to the teachers, basic social inclusion ensures the students' well-being at school, but as we understood the teachers, social inclusion was not an automatic effect of students being together at the school. Therefore, social inclusion always had to be considered when planning teaching and other activities at school.

Academic inclusion

Within the practice of academic inclusion, the following themes seemed essential: *meeting the goal of diversity, common competence goal, and using teacher collaboration to promote academic achievement*.

The teachers explained how *they differentiated their teaching* to meet the various mastery levels in the student group. To develop a high level of academic achievement for all students, they emphasised a variety of different teaching strategies and working methods: 'We have great freedom of method, and in relation to the tasks, we choose which methods are suitable. We have great opportunity to adapt to each child; according to their needs (...) that's part of inclusion'.

The teachers *adapted their working methods*, giving each student the possibility to work differently, for example, by *using different learning strategies and styles*. They also helped those who struggled with the assignment and supported those who needed help to finish their activity: 'He cannot do this task unless I go and help him a little. I want him to go home with the task that the others have finished'. The teachers described how their support was based on the different needs either by providing help directly or facilitating the students to help each other. They also highlighted the use of dialogues during the students' learning process by asking the students questions about how they understood and solved the task.

To achieve academic inclusion, the teacher strived to *base their work on common competence goals for all, even if not everyone was able to reach the same level*. However, with increasing age, the teachers often experienced students' tendency to compare

themselves with each other and therefore became more critical. The teachers experienced that the students were struggling to achieve their learning goals and therefore needed breaks from academic activities. Teaching outside seemed to be positive for all students, regardless of academic goal and mastery level: 'In outdoor schooling, the students who might not have the greatest performance in the classroom can get a little breathing room'.

To identify the students' different mastery levels in relation to the subject's competence goal, teachers used the results from tests to get an overview of the achievement and sorted the results to find the exact level of achievement and facilitate the different levels and needs of the class. Through *academic collaboration*, the teachers developed a common understanding of the goals of the different subjects and an openness to different approaches to reach the goals based on their expectations of the students' achievement levels: 'We work together a lot to achieve a common goal, even though there are different paths to the goal'.

The teachers explained that collaboration with academic goals and students' achievement were connected and seemed to be important for them in their practice. *Challenges* in teachers' academic inclusion practice included *assessment of each student's academic level*, *facilitation of diversity within the class*, and *balancing academic and social issues*. Assessment of each student was important to be able to meet each student's different mastery level, and this was especially important for students struggling with academic tasks.

However, the challenge was assessing and meeting each student's different mastery level and adapting the learning activities and assignments to everyone's educational needs. The challenge teachers described concerning the facilitation of diversity within the classroom was to adapt the assignment to everyone in the class. The teachers also highlighted their challenges to balance social and academic aspects: 'Working with the students' social competence sometimes may be at the expense of the academic activities. Very much has to do with time.' The teachers' challenges were especially related to students who did not follow the norm of expected behaviour in class and struggled academically.

Discussion

In the present study, the 'within versus outside' problem seems to be a triggering point and a dilemma regarding the success of inclusion within or outside the classroom. Basically, this was about placement (Göransson and Nilholm 2014). In line with the intentions about 'education for all' (UNESCO 1990), all students should have access to education within the mainstream classroom. Nevertheless, the practice often involved teaching several students in groups outside the classroom. This usually applied to SEN students or students in need of extra Norwegian language education. In many cases, teaching outside the classroom was intended to prepare for better classroom inclusion in the long run. The overall goal was to ensure that all students were included in a physical, social, and academic sense (Nilsen 2020). Further, organisations within class required both logistics and flexibility so that each student could obtain a sense of mastery and, at the same time, belong to their class. However, the teaching organisation, both inside and outside the classroom challenged the class's distribution of resources and the internal

collaboration between the teachers. Previous national research has pointed to how an inclusive practice may be affected by critical factors such as sufficient competence, teacher collaboration, and an overall understanding of inclusion as a philosophy in the school's organisation (Bjørnsrud and Nilsen 2019). In this case, an inclusive understanding, a so-called complementary understanding of teaching, seems central (Haug 2017). This means that there is a mutual relationship between special education and ordinary education. When ordinary training works, it also positively affects the extra measures and vice versa, and the two forms of training are thus interdependent. However, in some cases, the implementation of special education in Norway has been criticised for excluding some students, and the connection and coordination of special education and ordinary education have been too weak, both in terms of content, working methods, and the exchange of information (Nordahl et al. 2018). Such problems are reflected in this data as well, in that the connection between ordinary teaching in the classroom, special education, and other forms of group training outside the classroom seems to be a crucial point in terms of success.

For the teachers in our study, belonging to the community was important as part of *social inclusion*. The teachers tried to safeguard the individual students' belonging to the class and the school in different ways: through activities in the classroom and the schoolyard and by communicating with every student (Norwich 2008). Belonging to the community may be understood differently and refers to both the social, organisational, and academic aspects of inclusion (Nilsen 2020). Individual students' lack of social competence and challenging behaviour could be threats to belonging and community. A different challenge was related to the teachers' worries regarding students from cultural and lingual minorities not mastering the Norwegian language. However, the social community is not only about individual students but also about uniting all students. Dealing with social and cultural diversity is part of inclusion, and teachers seemed to believe in the importance of belonging and community as an important aspect of inclusion. Building relationships was understood as part of the realisation of social inclusion (Garrote, Dessementet, and Opitz 2017). Student-student relations are an indirect result of teaching and organisation at school. The school and the teachers made good relations possible, but they could not teach relations in the same way as they taught, for example, maths. Another aspect had to do with different positions and lack of equality. The teachers in the present study were preoccupied with their relationships with the students, but they did not reflect upon the difference between teachers' and students' positions or how those different positions affected the quality of these relationships (Qvortrup and Qvortrup 2018). In the present study, the students' self-esteem was not frequently articulated as a challenge, but when it was articulated, it was very clear. Low self-esteem caused by experiences at school is not in accordance with the principle of inclusion. If the school can promote social inclusion and be a school for every student, it may also take responsibility for the effect of student-student relations. Regarding social inclusion, teachers were experiencing challenges related to different 'groups' of students: SEN students, cultural and lingual minorities, students of different ages, and students at different levels of social development and competence. One consequence of the diverse diversities is that different groups and students have different social inclusion challenges. In addition, we need to be aware of the problem of categorisation (Morken 2015). It may be relevant to ask why we still practice categorising students and why we do not simply look upon students as

different individuals with different social and academic needs and challenges. The teachers in the present study were aware of both diversity and individuality and had a goal of creating a diverse community with acceptance of differences. This seemed to be what social inclusion was about for them and why they found social inclusion so important.

Academic inclusion occurs when teachers succeed in meeting each student's diverse needs by using different methods adapted to the individual needs, thus contributing to their students' improvement of academic achievements (Humphrey et al. 2006; Lovelace 2005). Through dialogues with each student during their learning process, the teachers obtained insight into how students solved academic problems, representing the first step in identifying the students' knowledge and helping them further their learning achievements (Howe et al. 2019). However, teachers might need other approaches to obtain deeper insight into the students' actual development zone and adapt the teaching to each student's achievement level (Vygotsky 1978). The teachers highlighted the need to compare competence goals with the students' levels of abilities to bring forward the students' prior academic knowledge as a basis for their teaching and achievements (Darling-Hammond 2000). Furthermore, they pointed out the importance of common competence goals at the students' grade levels and development levels and the need to adapt learning goals to their individual academic needs and achievement levels (Mitchell 2015). The teachers underlined the importance of making conscious choices about academic content and using methodical approaches that complied with students' learning methods to secure performance improvement. Developing a common understanding of the competence goals and the different paths that could lead there was essential in teacher collaboration for promoting academic achievement, especially in the collaboration between teachers responsible for special education and ordinary education (Nilsen 2017). Collaboration between professionals promotes the quality and innovation of inclusive practices and produces a sense of satisfaction and commitment (Somech and Drach-Zahavy 2011). Collaboration is especially important when providing services to students with special educational needs (Hernandez 2013).

Teachers faced challenges to academic inclusion concerning the assessment of each students' academic level when applied to meet all students' diverse needs in a classroom setting (Mitchell 2015). This is a question raised in earlier studies where the findings show that in teaching, a lack of assessment and adaptation to the students' academic achievement level often exist (Nilsen 2017). A last and important challenge was to maintain the balance between academic and social inclusion. This raises questions about the necessity of building a predictable learning environment with an expected behavioural framework working with academic inclusion (Hamre and Pianta 2001). It seems important that the teacher needs to develop a learning environment with positive relationships and motivate students to work together with academic tasks.

Methodological limitations

A sample size limited to only one single primary school may be a methodological limitation, which could have contributed to the weakening of these results. However, the present study had a qualitative depth design that was not intended for generalisation to all primary schools but rather was meant to elaborate on and refine other findings from the same field by using this case. In this respect, the sample size is a strength. With some

exceptions, the current sample included all teachers at the school, amounting to a 90% presence. In these focus group interviews, it was important to the interviewers not to inhibit the interactions between the participants. The moderator only provided follow-up questions when needed. Three researchers conducted the study from implementation via transcription to analysis. Thus, both transcription and interpretation have been validated within the research group. However, the most important methodological objections to the results of this study seem to be about the extent to which the teachers talked about their own inclusive practice or whether their responses primarily were about their intentions for practising inclusion and, to a lesser extent, referred to what they were actually doing. In this regard, observations could help to strengthen the validity of the results from the interviews. Nevertheless, the teachers' descriptions of their roles in inclusive practices show several practical examples that confirm they also acted with good intentions. Their efforts were based on a multiple-oriented understanding of phenomena involving inclusion (Mitchell 2015), which also entailed a critical look at their own practices. Further research is needed. These findings provide examples of some key issues that may form the basis for new questions within research studies on the same topic area.

Conclusion

The present article focuses on teachers' strategies for realising inclusive practices within a mainstream school context. The purpose of the study was to identify how teachers understood and worked to realise the intention of inclusion in a school for all, with a special focus on students with special needs or those at risk of developing such needs. Within a multi-oriented framework of established theoretical dimensions of concept inclusion, ten focus group interviews were analysed. The themes were aimed at teachers' efforts to succeed with inclusive school practices and what characterised challenges to make it happen. Although we cannot conclude whether the teachers' descriptions were more about intentions for successful inclusion, inclusive practices were nevertheless described as what the teachers actually did to facilitate the best possible inclusion of everyone, organisationally, socially, and academically. The teachers were positive and eager to realise the idea of inclusion, but were also aware of organisational and practical challenges. The organisational aspects of inclusive practices were primarily about what teachers did to facilitate social and academic conditions, and their pedagogical anchoring to succeed with inclusive practices within the classroom. In terms of learning outcomes, an alternation between teaching inside and outside the classroom could still sometimes be the best solution for some students. However, the teaching organisation required extensive planning and logistics in terms of resource allocation and close teacher collaboration across the board. An important goal for the student's inclusion was their well-being and the extent to which they were socially included. The teachers described how they sought to strengthen students' belonging to the community by providing a sense of belonging to the school and their own class. Developing social competence was thus an overriding objective of teachers' efforts. To succeed with the students' inclusion academically, the teachers were concerned with meeting the diversity of needs among the students. The teachers worked as much as possible within the various subjects based on common competence goals, although they often took different steps to achieve those goals. However, such a form of inclusive practice depended on close

teacher collaboration, where the goal was the academic achievement of the individual student. To improve the quality of inclusive practices, the teachers still experienced that the variation in student diversity was particularly challenging. Not least, it could be challenging to capture the students' actual academic level, to help strengthen the students' self-esteem, and to be able to balance their academic and social needs satisfactorily. The inclusive practice also demanded an appropriate use of the staff resources and information flow between the teachers, which could be difficult to achieve.

Inclusive practices in the present study are defined as a process built on respect for students' individual needs and capacities within the context of the learning community. With the help of close and binding teacher collaboration, one of the most important goals for inclusive practices is facilitating equal education and fostering belongingness in an enriched learning environment, and giving the students experiences of achieving their individual goals. The findings in the present study highlight the teachers' values and ideas behind how they practice inclusion. In the teachers' statements, location and conditions for social life and learning in school emerge as successful factors in line with Mitchell's (2005) multiple-oriented understanding of inclusion.

This study was conducted based on the teachers' point of view. However, to what extent and how teachers' practice is inclusive can best be evaluated by the students themselves. In the end, students' own perceptions of inclusion are considered the most important indicators of success. Inclusion as a multi-oriented concept and inclusive training is about holistic education, where the students' experiences of mastery depend on their perceptions of meaning and coherence. Coherence must be experienced by the students themselves (i.e. the extent to which they feel that school education is holistic and inclusive).

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