



**SUPPLEMENTARY TEACHING FOR
STUDENTS WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES.
The general approach.**

Forfattere:

Gunnar Stangvik, Ann Elise Rønbeck og Ole Simonsen

Avdeling for Barnehage- og Skolefag



HiF
FORSKNING

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RAPPORTENS TITTEL

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FAGSEKSJON:

Barnehage- og skolefag (BSF)

OPPDRAGSGIVER:

Norges Forskningsråd

RAPPORTNUMMER:

HIF-Forskning 1997:6

DATO:

30.11.97

ISBN:

82-7541-159-9

SIDER:

20

ISSN:

0805-1852

PRIS:

30,-

UTDRAG:

The report consists of three seminar papers. All of them examine data from a research project financed by the Norwegian Research Council. The purpose is to distinguish recognisable patterns of teaching and organisation in the supplementary teaching activity. So far analyses indicate a code of practice in the extra hours of teaching which makes it difficult to cater for the true variation in learning differences and disabilities. Supplementary teaching seems to be locked into a rigid pattern of school-based of subject teaching. This pattern is insufficient for many pupils with specific learning needs.

BESTILLING

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ADRESSE

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Supplementary teaching for students with reported disabilities. The general approach.

Preface

The report consists of three papers. Each of them examines the same set of data from a different angle. They are under way reports, which were prepared for a special education research seminar that took place at the Institute of Education, University of Gøteborg, MøIndal College of Higher Education, 17 September 1997. Participants were researchers from New Zealand, Norway and Sweden. The main purpose of the project on which data is based, is to give valid descriptions of special education work and its functions, i.e. to describe “normal practice”. It is assumed that such knowledge is indispensable to the process of change. Presently, a reform is taking place in Norway, which reorganise state special schools into state and regional competency centres. This reform creates an important context for the research project, and a long – range goal of the project is to establish a more efficient link between these competency structures and special education in local schools. The Norwegian Research Council through the program «Special education research and program development» financially supports the research project. Data is collected from a stratified sample of all students in five municipalities who have been registered with specific special education needs, individually assessed by pedagogical – psychological services and given a number of extra teaching hours. The special education they receive has been studied by means of questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The authors approach the research material from different angles. Stangvik compares the special education model derived from data with the present Norwegian Policy model of special education. Rønbeck studies the status of interdisciplinary work – which often has been made synonymous with change in special education, and Simonsen, focuses the special education teacher as a professional actor in the process of realising long-range goals.

Finnmark College
Alta, Norway, September 1997

Gunnar Stangvik

Special education: Between dreams and realities¹

The aim of this paper

The question to be raised in the paper is: How does the special education delivery model as expressed by results from the project compare to the model expected by the Norwegian education and special education policies?

The background: The need for competence in special education practice

A reform of special education is presently taking place in Norway. The title of this reform is «Omstrukturering av spesialundervisningen (My translation: «Restructuring special education»). The long - range goal is to reform special education. The school based model of special education is judged to be restricted and should be replaced by a quality of life based model characterised by relevance, ecological validity and is culturally appropriate.² Resources, which were previously delivered to special schools, are yet to be allocated to special education in the local setting. In order to reach this goal a new concept of service delivery has been created: The competency centre. Two categories of centres are established: The State competency centre and the regional competency centre. These are planned to be supportive mechanisms and facilitators in the process of assisting municipalities in reaching the goals of special education, and more specifically to assist municipalities in the process of

¹ This paper is based on data from a research project financed by The Norwegian Research Council and taking place in the period 1995 - 1997 at Finnmark College, Alta, Norway. Gunnar Stangvik is responsible for the project and collaborators are Ann Elise Rønbeck and Ole Simonsen. A sample of 66 has been selected from a population of approx. 500 pupils who got special teaching hours in 5 municipalities. The special education of these pupils has been studied by means of a teacher questionnaire, teacher interviews and observations of teaching. Parent views on the special education of their children have also been collected as well as data about the municipalities in question. The project is not finally reported. The topics discussed in the paper are based on recurrent themes from the processes of data analysis.

² cf. Stangvik, G , Rønbeck, AE & Simonsen , O. «Prosjektet "Omstrukturering av spesialundervisningen. Prinsipper og metoder» (The project Restructuring Special Education. Principles and methods)». HIF - forskning 1995:2 p 15 discuss what they denote as «quality of life didactic» in terms of relevance, intensity, ecological validity, and cultural appropriateness.

educating low frequent and challenging categories of special education students. Stangvik³ asserts that this reform is based on a concept of change, which is too restricted. «The expert becomes a voyeur looking from behind his curtain observing and evaluating without really participating in practice». The goal of social inclusion demands that special education is based on the specific educational needs of the person in the local setting, and resources ought to be allocated to this process. Presenting municipalities with a menu from a category-based cafeteria of services is a centralised specialist model, which may actually interfere with social inclusion by separating students from the mainstream. This is one main dilemma of the reform project: In order to create meaningful special education programs special education has to become an integral part of the generic services in the community. Specialist services are developed which are not sufficiently related to these services. By means of data from the research project the paper attempts briefly to show that more basic reforms of the process of special education are needed. Reallocation of resources to regions and flagging out experts are insufficient measures. The basic didactic of special education has to be changed if the Norwegian policy of special education is ever to be realised.

Special education service delivery in the context of social inclusion: A systems approach

Stangvik⁴ argues for a holistic approach to special education, i.e. the whole life space of the person has to be taken into account when educational needs are defined. Such needs have to be subjected to transactional understanding. They cannot be determined on the basis of disability per se, but have to have external reference to social goals and to the settings in which they are discovered. This approach is contrary to an individualistic and clinical approach, which attempts to base the process of special education primarily on individual parameters. Transactional understanding implies a systems approach in which the educational delivery systems(s) are focused. When social inclusion and quality of life is taken into account the education domain should be broadened to include all relevant social domains and not restricted to traditional schooling.

³ Stangvik, G. «A critical - theoretical analysis of a reform project» In Peder Haug (ed.), *Theoretical perspectives on Special Education*, Norwegian Academic Press, Coming

⁴ Stangvik, G. « Conflicting Perspectives on Learning Disabilities. In: C. Clark, A. Dyson & A. Milward *Theorising Special Education*. London: Routledge. In Press, discusses the theory basis for different special education models

Dimensions of the reform model: Goals and means

Special education should be based on valid definitions of educational needs. Assessment of these needs cannot be based only on mastery of traditional classroom practices, but has to be comprehensive, i.e. need assessment should include all quality of life domains and all relevant social networks.

Comprehensive need assessment implies that special education has to include broad spectre of goals, i. e. special education has to give adequate room for education for social competency. And, according to Norwegian policy this work should take place within a context, which favours social inclusion.

For special education to become comprehensive, accountable, based on specific needs and social inclusive it has to be interdisciplinary. Without a professional and parent networks ecological need assessment and planning are unattainable. In order to maintain a long - range individual focus in a context of social inclusion a new didactic is needed. The purpose of this is to maintain this focus across space and time. For this to happen a model of professional work is needed in which the activities of need assessment, individual planning, implementation and evaluation and follow-up form a meaningful gestalt and do not dissolve into unrelated activities. The barriers for the implementation of such a model may be perceived as overwhelming⁵. Delivery of special education services is often made dependent upon a complicated organisational infrastructure with no common denominator and which consists of corporate cultures with the self attributed right to be selective and to define their problems and solutions. This doesn't always create the best conditions for an individual focus. Hence, in order to broaden the scope of special education has to be changed in order to give room for comprehensive need assessment, flexible resource allocation and interagency planning, implementation and evaluation.

The generality of the model

Special education needs may be judged to be of different degrees of specificity and severity and in demand of different degrees of intervention. Some are specific and in demanding of minor adaptations in the traditional school setting, like additional teacher support and minor changes in content and methods. Other needs are more general and affecting both the selection of methods, content as well as the selection of space and time for teaching and learning. The special education model has to be able to do a valid assessment of special education needs and to cater for all of them.

⁵ cf. Stangvik et al., op. cit. p22-23 reports results from research which has attempted to implement a problem and need oriented didactic in special education

The observed model

The following sections describe briefly the main characteristics of the general intervention strategy inferred from the collected data.

The intervention strategy

Watering down the school curriculum

A factoranalysis of adaptations to special education needs was performed. This shows that adaptations by teachers may be meaningfully divided into three categories of intervention: Adaptations to individual differences by means of changes in content, methods and support; Adaptation of space and time for teaching; And adaptation of locations for teaching and utilisation of external competency. Results indicate that interventions are mainly of a school - type. For the bulk of the subjects their special education needs are defined in terms of teacher perceived mastery of school subjects, and special education is operationally defined in terms of somewhat different ways of teaching those subjects. Offering special education to students with specific needs in other settings and adaptation of content and methods to those settings is virtually non existent.

Special education and need assessment: In control of individual teachers

For most of the students there is virtually no interagency communication. The special education teacher develops individual special education teaching plans - to a certain degree in collaboration with teachers at the school unit. For app 15 - 20 % of the sample an interagency model of planning is utilised. The greater part of the special education activities is controlled and monitored by the individual teacher. In order to change this standard operation procedure and in order to seek assistance from external partners there has to be some kind of «force majeure». The student may be judged «uneducable» in the traditional school setting, or may be judged to suffer from too severe disabilities to be educated in ordinary school settings. In this way special education become an important basis for school differentiation. Results indicate that for students with a school career the schools do these judgements of needs. In this way they are offered the opportunity to be selective. In these processes the relationship of parents to special education seems to be of an informational character. Generally spoken, they do not feel to be participating in the special education of their children.

The special education process: Rhetoric and reality

The process of special education was studied by means of teacher ratings, interviews and classroom observations. The purpose was to compare the actual process to a recommended process of special education which systematise teaching processes into a number of successive stages from need assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation and follow-up. As pointed out earlier special education resulted only in minor adaptations for most of the students and lacks a comprehensive management approach to learning disabilities. This is in accordance with previous results. However, policy formulations, theoretical debates and external pressure for accountability create an important context for practitioners. This creates a dilemma. On the one hand they want to fulfil expectations. On the other hand the teaching - learning context is too restricted. Creating the rhetoric may be one way of solving this dilemma. Individualisation becomes synonymous with individual educational plans, formative evaluation becomes synonymous with half-year reports to authorities, segregation of children from ordinary classes becomes a tool for mainstreaming, etc., etc.

Social inclusion: The politics of special education

Our data shows that the far greatest part of our subjects is taught alone outside their ordinary classroom or in small groups. Trapped between a school model favouring subject oriented knowledge at the cost of long - range social goals and the ideology of a school for all children special education becomes a convenient solution which is not put on the political agenda. By attributing learning disabilities to individual dispositions exceptions may be made from the overriding goals of Norwegian public education. It doesn't seem very likely that one will get out of this goal trap by teaching special educators new tricks of the trade - even if this is necessary, too. The most acceptable way out seems to be to broaden the concept of ordinary education and bring this education in better accordance with the public goals set for this education. This, however, would move special education into the political agenda. Respondents were asked what kind of adaptations that were initiated in ordinary classrooms. Our result, however, do not indicate that this a primary consideration in their schools.

Resource allocation and accountability: Differentiation or intervention

Distributions of special education teaching hours and years in special education were correlated with teacher ratings of need, age of students, and severity of the problems. These studies show that allocation of resources is best explained as some kind of «muddling through» where the internal demands of the school play as an important role as the learning problems of students. The length of stay in special education for many students underscores the important role of special

education in the process of school differentiation, and it also clearly indicates that the role of the student as special education student in school is mainly defined by the schools themselves. This differentiation model where special education works as a cul-de-sac for many student with learning disabilities may be contrasted to an intervention model of special education which is intensive and competency oriented and measure its own success in terms of students permanently returned to their ordinary classes.

Discussion

Special education is in desperate need of reforms in order to gain credibility. To establish a new organisational infrastructure which allocates competency resources closer to learning disabled students than the traditional special school model is a necessary step in the right direction. This measure alone, however, is insufficient. To reform special education in the local setting is a necessary adjunct to this organisational change. The dominating model of differentiation should be substituted for a model of intervention, which makes it possible to capitalise on external competency. Presently, external competency plays a minor role in the every day life of special educators, and its individual focus mainly serve to reinforce a differentiation model of special education. Such competency ought to join daily special education practice in the municipalities with the common purpose of establishing a systematic, didactic model oriented towards social inclusion.

Ann Elise Rønbeck

Interdisciplinary Special Education: Necessary, but virtually absent⁶

The purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to make some brief evaluations of the status of interdisciplinary work in the special education field by means of data from the project. A new reform of Norwegian special education is based on interdisciplinary work and consumer participation. The idea is that interdisciplinary work should make it possible to support more need - relevant special education and enhance quality of life goals. We have tried to answer the following questions by means of data from the project:

- What is the amount of interaction between professionals and consumers?
- What is the nature of this interaction?
- Who are the participants of interaction?
- What is the function of interdisciplinary work?
- How is interdisciplinary work organised?

A goal - oriented network

The Norwegian reform of 1991 - the so-called «reconstruction reform» - dismantled special schools and/or changed these schools into State or regional «competency centres»⁷. The general idea is to build networks of experts, consumers and local professionals for the support of a need oriented special education. The master plan being not only to implement administrative and

⁶ This paper is based on data from a research project financed by The Norwegian Research Council and taking place in the period 1995 - 1997 at Finnmark College, Alta, Norway. Gunnar Stangvik is responsible for the project and collaborators are Ann Elise Rønbeck and Ole Simonsen. A sample of 66 has been selected from a population of approx. 500 pupils who got special teaching hours in 5 municipalities. The special education of these pupils has been studied by means of a teacher questionnaire, teacher interviews and observations of teaching. Parent views on the special education of their children have also been collected as well as data about the municipalities in question. The project is not finally reported. The topics discussed in the paper are based on recurrent themes from the processes of data analysis.

⁷ This was clarified in blue papers. (St. meld. nr 54 (1990- 91); St. meld. nr 35 (1990- 91); and Innst. S nr 160 (1990 - 91).

organisational changes, but also to foster fundamental changes of special education in the local setting. In brief, the policies of the reform may be described in the following way: Special education students should have comprehensive programs based on their specific needs in their local environment. Such programs should be inclusive and improve the quality of life for the student.

The policy of interdisciplinary work

In order to improve the quality of life of disabled students it is necessary to intervene on many levels and in many quality of life domains⁸. This is the basic reason for interdisciplinary work, which demands interaction between different categories of people for the purpose of planning and implementation of special education. The relevant partners are all public services relevant to planning and practical education of the student. They should participate in interdisciplinary work - not only sector - wise, but in a true multidisciplinary way. It is necessary to collaborate through the whole process of special education, i.e. in assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation.

⁸ Stangvik, G, Rønbeck, A E and Simonsen, O. "Prosjektet omstrukturering av spesialundervisningen. Forutsetninger og konsekvenser. Prinsipper og metoder." (The project Restructuring Special Education. Principles and methods). HIF-forskning 1995:2 p 15 discusses what they denote as " quality of life didactic" in terms of relevance, intensity, ecological validity, and culture appropriateness.

RESULTS AND EXPERIENCES FROM THE PROJECT

Interdisciplinary work: Supporting the «non - educable»

Multidisciplinarity has become extremely important in Norwegian special education to- day. The reason for this is that all pupils have access to ordinary education according to law and regulations⁹. As earlier mentioned special education students may have problems in several domains of life. This makes it necessary to establish an organisation in the municipalities, which makes comprehensive planning possible. Data from this project indicate that multidisciplinarity is a severely restricted concept in practice. Collaborative planning and teaching of pupils with handicaps and learning disabilities are mainly concentrated to a rather small group of pupils; that is, the group with specific handicaps and the most complicated learning problems. The group is approximately 25 % of the total group of students with learning problem. For these students there are a municipal infrastructure that consists of different services: The school; kindergarten; social services; psychological-educational services; health services; competency centres; psychiatric services and parents.

The work-model: Sector - wise interdisciplinary

The public purpose of the work in a multidisciplinary group is to secure relevant planning and monitoring of planned programs. In reality planning and monitoring are not the most dominant activities in these groups according to our results. The concentration is primarily on exchange of information. In order to establish an effective collaborative model a system approach to learning disabilities and handicaps is needed. Such a model should embrace resource co-ordination between the collaborating services; formalised responsibilities between the collaborating partners; and a systematic professional model for planning, implementation and follow- up. Such a model has been supported by Norwegian education policy for several years¹⁰. However our results clearly indicate that such a model has been very difficult to implement. In practice teacher-related work with students is still a solitary activity. As regards of interdisciplinary it seems like each sector works on its own without any real co-ordination with other sectors.

⁹ This is legally sanctioned by the Norwegian School Laws: (Skoleloven av 1994 og St. meld. nr 54 (1989- 90): Om oppl ring av barn, unge og voksne med s rskilte behov og St. meld. nr 35 (1990 - 91): Om oppl ring av barn, unge og voksne md s rskilte behov

¹⁰ Such a model has been previously recommended for pupils with behaviours difficulties: (NOU 1985:3: Tiltak for barn og unge med adferdsproblemer.

The external expert: An «accidental» visitor

A basic purpose of the reform of special education in Norway is to develop a network of experts. Approximately half of our respondents' report needs for external support. However it seems like there is little use of external competencies in spite of the reform which has put this effectively on the special education agenda. State and regional centres have been established, the purpose being to support municipal special education. In addition there are municipal counselling services with the same purpose. The observed efforts of these services are, according to the Norwegian policy, far below expected levels. As a part of the project teachers were interviewed. These interviews may explain why this is the case. One of the informants says:

«It is difficult to access experts, and when they are there, they are only on short visits. They make diagnosis, but do not behave like real participants in the process of education. I need much more concrete and specific support»

The expert role: Primarily a diagnostician

According to the reform ideology experts should participate in the total process of special education. This would include participation in assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation. Generally spoken, our results indicate that this process is aborted after the process of planning. The concentration on assessment is accentuated by a pronounced tendency to institutionalise clients into the expert domain for the purpose of assessment. Afterwards experts easily become informers in stead of participants in the practical process of education.

Consumer participation: The parent as an «alibi»

The participation of students and parents in practical planning of special education is of utmost importance both as a democratic right and in order to develop reasonable and relevant programs. Results show no participation of students in the planning processes. As far as parents are concerned approximately 30 % of them participate. Studies of the type of participation show that it is mainly information exchange between teachers and parents. And this exchange is selective and oriented towards parents with the most disabled students. There are also indications in the data material that the amount of interdisciplinary work is also dependent on parent efforts.

The special education organisation: Prolonging segregation

An interdisciplinary educational organisation has to be based on the needs of the student and seen in relation to the long - range - goal of Norwegian education. These are the two legs of such a planning model. In this model of special

education social inclusion becomes a decisive factor. What seems to happen during the Norwegian reform is that the new competency centres support the dominant model of non-inclusive special education in the municipalities. At least they do not contribute to change in this matter. They seem to adapt to the dominant model of special education. The relevant partner for the competency centres in Norwegian municipalities is the pedagogical - psychological services. Our data do not indicate that these services favour an inclusive policy as the bulk of students in our material get their special education outside ordinary classrooms and at their own.

The professionals: Supporting the establishment

Data indicates a rather high degree of satisfaction by teachers. It is difficult to trace any basic critique of the present working model. It seems like parents exert a greater degree of critique of programs. It doesn't seem like teachers have any great ambition for changing their procedures and methods. The main reason for this may be that in order to change their present approaches to special education in the direction of a more comprehensive a need oriented model of education and organisational changes are needed.

The size of the municipality is a decisive factor:»Small is beautiful«

It seems reasonable to believe that size of the municipality is an important constitutive factor in the process of interdisciplinary work. People know each other in small communities and it is easier to get an overview of the situation of a student, and public servants may interact in an informal manner. Results support this view.

- More students in small communities were referred to teams of professionals
- There were a greater utilisation of external experts in small municipalities
- Parent participation was more frequent in small municipalities
- A greater amount of individual education programs were produced in teams in small municipalities

These results are particularly interesting due to the fact that all municipalities in the data material are small. The largest municipality has only 16 000 inhabitants. Results indicate that comprehensive special education targeting the quality of life of students may become extremely difficult in large communities without organisational changes.

Discussion

The idea to restructure special education is based on a wish to establish comprehensive programs in local communities. These program aims to improve the quality of life and the social inclusion of persons with specific needs. Results tend to show that these goals are rather far away. In order to achieve these overriding goals several categories of intervention are necessary. Both administrative, economic, organisational, and educational factors and values have to be focused. An effective intervention model has to be interdisciplinary and characterised by interagency communication in order to utilise relevant competence to the fullest extent. A forum for interdisciplinary decisions about programs, which are based on valid definitions of needs, is necessary.

Consumers have to participate in such a forum. In this forum programs should be developed which are comprehensive, relevant, have continuity, and are effective. Effective intervention is dependent upon interagency teams, or responsibility groups, which are able to take action at the best time, and in the right setting for solving problems. This team should have a formal character to assure responsibility and progress. The actual process of special education has to be focused more strongly. Assessment and diagnosis are important, but not sufficient. The whole chain of necessary special education work has to be monitored, from assessment to evaluation of results.

Ole Simonsen

Special education: Teacher perceptions and school reality¹¹

Introduction

According to the goals of Norwegian education, education should be directed towards long - range goals¹². These goals apply to all students in Norwegian education without exceptions. The overriding goals to be achieved by all schooling are of a social nature. This is extremely important to take into account when social inclusion is discussed.

1. Students with disabilities should be participating and valued members of our society
2. To restructure special education means to decentralise professional and economic resources as close as possible to users in order to prepare the ground for a higher level of fulfilment of these goals

These goals ascribe important roles to professional actors in the school system. It seems correct to say that goal realisation is dependent upon competent and goal oriented professionals. However, for professionals to work efficiently towards these goals a flexible system is needed. Flexibility is needed in order to adjust; educational work to different categories of student needs. However, this should not put the goals of inclusion at stake. In order to achieve the goals of special education it is mandatory that teachers change their present practices. The aim of the present paper is to show how teachers perceive their role in the process of special education, and to compare these perceptions to what ought to be expected from an analysis of the intentions behind the on- going reforms in Norway. One basic question is: To what degree is the special education practice of the teachers in accordance with their perception of ideal practices? In order to

¹¹ This paper is based on data from a research project financed by The Norwegian Research Council and taking place in the period 1995 - 1997 at Finnmark College, Alta, Norway. Gunnar Stangvik is responsible for the project and collaborators are Ann Elise Rønbeck and Ole Simonsen. A sample 66 has been selected from a population of app. 500 pupils who got special teaching hours in 5 municipalities. The special education of these pupils has been studied by means of a teacher questionnaire, teacher interviews and observations of teaching. Parent views on the special education of their children have also been collected as well as data about the municipalities in question. The project is not finally reported. The topics discussed in the paper are based on recurrent themes from the processes of data analysis.

¹² In «Læreplanverket for den 10-årige grunnskolen» (The Curriculum for the 10 - Year Elementary School), KUF, Oslo, 1997, p14 it is said (My translation): «The goal of education is to prepare children, youth, and adults to meet the tasks of life and master challenges together with others ... and to develop their abilities, experience, compassion, expression and participation».

change the situation it is also of great interest to attempt to understand why dysfunctional practices are maintained.

Teacher ideology and practice: The teacher as a «system mechanic»

Data from the project indicate that teachers are captured by the system, i.e. they seem more to be controlled by different aspects of the school system than by the needs and characteristics of students with learning disabilities. Norwegian education policy underscores the importance of taking into account the quality of life of the disabled. Information from the project shows that teachers agree ideologically with this policy. In order to build a more relevant and effective education for many of these students several changes and accommodations are needed, in changes in organisation, methods, content, and resource allocation. In practical teaching, however, teachers are strongly governed by traditional school subjects. The special education system has a high degree of stability and continuity. Observations indicate that there is a conflict between the way the system works and the needs of the students with learning disabilities and handicaps. In order to fulfil these needs teachers almost have to fight the system. Teachers give a high degree of priority to social goals of teaching. They find it difficult, however, to implement these goals.

Special education didactic in a bureaucratic setting: The teacher as a «resource mobiliser»

The general goal of special education is to develop a didactic, which contributes to the realisation of long - range goals for students with disabilities. Assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation have to focus these goals. In practice such activities become imbedded in a resource allocation setting. Plan and assessment are demanded from the system in order to have access to resources, and resources are frequently allocated according to system needs in stead of according to individual needs of students. Critique of special education from the special education system is more often directed against the amount of allocated teaching hours than against content, methods, and educational setting. Analyses of teacher interviews show that assessment and planning have not become a functional part of their practical education, but, still, these elements are very important in the process of applying for resources.

The process of special education: The reduction of long - range goals to classroom - related practices

Interviews, ratings and observations were planned to describe the teacher's perceptions and evaluations of special education goals and practices.¹³ The point of departure for raising these questions was the Norwegian official policy of special education. The main question was: To what degree do these perceptions and evaluations compare to the official policies? Results indicate that the policy language has been adopted. However, results also strongly indicate a high degree of rhetoric. Teachers assert that their goal is to improve the quality of life of their student and to develop functional skills. In practice only skills which are functional in a classroom setting are given priority.

The special education rhetoric: The separation of language from practice

Change of practice is dependent upon a valid education discourse. New concepts have to be created and adopted in order to understand the practical consequences for special education of the goals of social inclusion and quality of life. It seems like language has been separated from educational practice and have become a tool for teacher survival in the school system, e.g. the concept of evaluation has little practical meaning, but is necessary in an official report system about the status of special education in the municipality. Results indicate that special teacher practices which should be governed by the educational need of the disabled students and expressed in relevant assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation in fact seems to be governed by school traditions and traditional school curricula. It is a problem for researchers to penetrate this language fog in order to understand what really is going on in special education. How to explain this dilemma? Great demands are put on the teachers for realising long - range goals for students. The system, however, is based on a traditional model of teaching, which is not well adapted to the needs of learning disabled students.

¹³ (Stangvik, G., Rønbeck, AE & Simonsen, O. In the report «Prosjektet Omstrukturering av spesialundervisning. Prinsipper og metoder». (The Project Restructuring Special Education. Principles and Methods), HIF - forskning 1995:2, Finnmark College, Alta, Norway, 1995) a model of special education is described and discussed which is developed in order to take these goals into account in practical special education.

Teacher collaboration: «Chatting» about problems

In order to realise a new model of special education in accordance with the specific need of students with learning disabilities collaboration is needed both internal in the school system and with external partners. Results indicate that teachers perceive collaboration as an important tool in special education. In practice, however, the amount of collaboration does not correspond to the need for collaboration indicated by the goals of special education. The greater part of the registered collaboration is of a school internal character and on a low level of formalisation and specificity. The content of the collaboration activity is mainly on the assessment and explanation level with minor consequences for special education practices.

Ambitions and the perceptions of results: High goals, but weak results

Efforts are great in special education as regards the amount of teaching hours and resources. Teachers are setting high goals for their work and express wishes to give students with disabilities a relevant special education. When they are asked about the degree of goal fulfilment somewhat below 20 % say that goals are reached. Thus the situation of the teacher seems to be characterised by a state of conflict and frustration. They want to do something, but are unable to do it. Thus, a change in the direction of new methods of work also has a psychological dimension.

Integration, but outside the classroom

Results indicate that teachers give priority to the integration of students with learning disability. In practice, however, over half of our subjects are taught alone or in small groups outside their classrooms. Teachers explain this social segregation as a tool in the service of integration. Paradoxically, the outdoor special education activities are judged necessary in order for the students to master the indoor activity. Results indicate, however, that chance of return to the ordinary classroom in special education hours is extremely limited. It seems like special education for the great bulk of students means to be segregated from their classrooms for a substantial number of teaching hours.

Special education: A set of disintegrated activities

In order to create an effective program it is necessary work systematically through different stages of a work process: Assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation and follow-up. Each of these stages has to be

based on the preceding stage. In reality assessment stages are separated from planning stages and may have no real function for the classroom activities, but may be extremely important in a process of resource mobilisation. Our results do indicate that a systematic special education model is very difficult to implement in the ordinary school system. Paradoxically, this model seems to be better implemented in a segregated system. Hence, fundamental changes in the ordinary school system are needed in order to realise effective programs based on the goals of inclusion and the true educational needs of these students.

Discussion

The reform of special education is primarily of a top-down type. It is mainly focused on system needs and to a much lesser extent to student needs. One result of this is that needs and goals do not become sufficiently functional in the teaching practices. It secures however a more systematic control of resources and a better official documentation which purport to show that students have got special education according to their need even if this is not the case.

In order to truly restructure special education a more thoughtful approach to special education is needed. It is necessary that experts participate in the processes of special education at the ground-level in order to implement changes in assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation which make it possible to create a special education which is more in accordance with the needs of students. Teachers often interpret goals and concepts, like interdisciplinary work, collaboration, assessment, planning, methods, evaluation, etc. according to traditional school practices. In this way concepts lose their change potential inherent in the ongoing special education reforms and become legitimisation of existing system and practices.

SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The general model of special education observed is heavily school-based and offers little room for variations in specific learning needs. The rationality of special education seems mainly to reside in the rationality of the regular school system. The strategy of subject-based ad hoc organisational and educational solutions to complex learning needs is best understood in terms of the present model of classroom management. These ad hoc solutions should, however, be regarded as a well-established code in the process of catering for special education students, which seems difficult to overrule in the present system. Data indicate that teachers give priority to long-range social goals. This easily is turned into rhetoric when compared to practice. The present model of special education offers too little room for implementing such goals. A holistic approach to special education seems rather far away. Basic changes of special education is needed in order to implement a holistic model which caters for the whole range of needs of disabled students within a frame of long-range social goals. There are rather few indications showing that schools are using external partners and special education resources in efficient ways. However, in order to develop adequate programs problems have to be externalised and objectified and regarded as a joint venture of professionals and significant others.