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CHAPTER 10

SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION IN NORWAY – THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF THE FIELD

Terje Ogden

ABSTRACT

The main challenge of special education in Norway, as in other Nordic countries is to implement the inclusive school in practice. Even if there is a strong commitment to the idea of full inclusion in a one-track system, there are still several indications of segregation tendencies in the schools. The long-term goals of Norwegian school reforms to promote an inclusive school with high-quality special education and assistance do not seem to match the practical realities in the municipalities and local schools that are responsible for putting the ideals into practice. There are disagreements about how to create a good balance between the general and the specific or between adapted and special education. According to special education research, there are ideological, organizational, financial, and practical obstacles in the process of including students with special needs. One of the promising research based approaches to the inclusion of special needs students, and particularly those who are difficult to include, is the model of school-wide positive social and academic learning support and intervention. This model has

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been implemented and evaluated in Norwegian elementary schools with encouraging results.

This chapter addresses some of the main developmental lines of special needs education in Norway, a field of research and practice I have had the privilege to follow from 1970 to the present. International developmental trends have influenced policy and practice in Norway as well as in other Nordic countries, particularly the ideas and philosophy of inclusive education reflected in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which stated that children with special needs should have access to regular schools capable of meeting their needs, and regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of building an inclusive society and achieving an education for all. For the last forty years, the overarching political goal of special education in Norway has been to reduce full-time placements in special schools or classes in order to achieve full inclusion of special needs students in school. But even if the principles of inclusion, decentralization, normalization, and adapted education are embraced at the political and the policy level, the obstacles to mainstreaming students seem to be the same in Norway as in other countries. Several challenges have been encountered in the process of striking a good balance between special education and general education, including funding problems, a lack of clear implementation strategies for inclusion, and inclusive teaching methods that work (Grosche & Volpe, 2013; Mitchell, 2008). Moreover, some groups of marginal students have proven to be more difficult to include than others, particularly those who have emotional and behavioral difficulties (EBD). In order to adapt mainstream education to suit all learners and to develop evidence-based teaching strategies that are universally applicable, the implementation of a model for school-wide positive behavior and learning support and intervention is proposed. The main sources of input to this chapter have been policy documents from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, research reports, and selected articles and book chapters of relevance to the topic in the Norwegian and the Nordic context.

The Norwegian school system is mandatory for all children aged 6 to 16 and it is based on the principle of a unified compulsory school with one single national curriculum. Educational provisions are seen in a context of a coherent and continuous course of 13 school years. Primary and secondary lower education is the responsibility of the municipalities whereas upper

secondary education covering the 16–19 age group is the responsibility of the county municipalities (Norway has 430 municipalities which are further grouped into 19 county municipalities). The national government has an overarching responsibility for creating a network of special education competence covering all types of disabilities. In Norway approximately 60,000 students are enrolled in elementary school each year and most young people apply for upper secondary education. The statutory right to attend kindergarten was put into effect in 2009 (White paper No. 41, 2008–2009) and 97% of children entering school have that background. All children in Norway also have an unconditional right to attend elementary school, and if needed, to receive special education and/or assistance.

SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION IN NORWAY

The concept of “special education need students” (SEN students) is increasingly used to describe children and youth who vary in their ability to read, write, and calculate. These needs may be related to individual characteristics or risk factors, or to environmental risk in the homes and local environment. SEN students may struggle with learning or they may have psychological, relational, or behavioral problems. Also included are students who have brain injuries, mobility problems, visual or hearing impairments, physical disabilities, significant language, speaking, and communication difficulties. In other words, a number of categories of disabilities and learning problems have been transformed into special needs.

Students in primary and secondary education who do not obtain satisfactory learning outcomes from regular teaching are, according to the Education Act (section 5-1), entitled to special needs education. This kind of education is not limited by the norm and resources available in regular education and can therefore cause major extra expenses for the municipalities. The right is, however, conditional on an expert assessment from the local educational and psychological counseling service, and the assessment is used to make an individual decision on the need for special educational assistance or special education. These students are also entitled to an individual education plan describing the goals and contents of the education.

Special needs education may imply systematic regulation of the education’s scope, tempo, intensity, and structure. Moreover, the curriculum may be modified, as may the ratio between teachers and students, the academic support, and the evaluation of learning progress. The educational

needs of the students may also be accommodated by technical assistance, various teaching methods, and an adapted learning environment (White paper No. 18, 2010–2011). Norway has organized the education for students with special needs in a one-track system with the regular education as a shared arena for both mainstream students and SEN students, and permanent organization into ability groups is not recommended. Still, the Ministry of Education and Research asserts that in some cases, segregated solutions may be necessary and in the best interest of the student (White paper No. 18, 2010–2011). Even if most state and regional special schools were re-organized or closed down in the first part of the 1990s, there are still a few schools and units that are considered vital in order to secure specialized and comprehensive educational services for particular subgroups of students.

Prevalence

Norwegian trends show a steep rise in the use of special needs education over the last decades, and there is an increase in the scope and intensity of such measures as the students grow older. Among children in the preschool age, approximately 1–2% receive special educational assistance whereas in primary and lower secondary education a total of 8.4% of all students received such education in 2010–2011. Most of the special teaching targets students in the 10th grade, however, with 11.7% compared to only 4.3% in the first grade. In 2012, approximately 52,000 students between 6 and 16 years received special needs education (Utdanning, No. 15, 2012). Seven out of ten students are boys, most of them receiving between three and seven separate lessons a week within the school, mostly in small groups of two to five other SEN students. In upper secondary school, approximately 10% of the cohort of 60–70,000 students is each year categorized by experts as having special educational needs. About two thirds of the SEN students in upper secondary schools are boys, more than four out of five attend vocational courses, and compared to their fellow students they more often come from single parent families, have poorer grades from lower secondary school, and less well-educated parents (Kvalsund, 2004; Markussen, Frøseth, & Grøgaard, 2009). A development similar to that in Norway has been registered in other Nordic countries like Sweden (Emanuelson, Persson, & Rosenqvist, 2001), Finland (Kirjavainen & Pulkkinen, 2013), and Denmark (Dyssegaard, Larsen, & Tiftikci, 2013). During the 1970s there was an increased focus on special needs education

in Denmark, which led to a rise in special education teacher hours of 80%. This was partly due to an extension of compulsory schooling from 7 to 9 years, but the expenses to special needs education also increased with 18% from 2007 to 2009. In 2012, the Danish government established a central advisory team in order to assist the municipalities formulating clear goals and values for inclusionary measures in order to include more children in schools, daycare, and after school activities (Dyssegaard, Larsen, & Tiftikci, 2012).

The number of students who receive special education has also increased in Finland, from 5% in 2001 to 8.5% in 2010 (Kirjavainen & Pulkkinen, 2013). Students who cannot benefit from normal education receive full-time special education, and the emphasis is on early intervention during the first and second grades, with a clear drop in the amount of special education in the Finnish upper secondary school (Hausstätter & Takala, 2011). Also, the special education in Finland is focused on language problems and topics like reading, writing, and mathematics, and about 65% of all students receiving part-time special education, have problems in these areas. In Norway, speech and language problems are not to the same extent a priority, and other problems like developmental disabilities (e.g., Down's syndrome, Aspergers syndrome) and physical disabilities (e.g., blind, deaf, cerebral palsy) are more in focus here. Even if the main goal of special needs education in Finland is to reduce the number of SEN students, they do not seem to be overly concerned about the aim of full inclusion. The Finnish school system makes extensive use of full-time special needs education and about 8% of the students are segregated from the normal compulsory school. Even if Finland repeatedly has received top scores at the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test scores, it is not clear whether this is related to the way special education is organized and practiced in this country. And they have, according to Vislie (2003), the world record in the proportion of students receiving special education (Hausstätter & Takala, 2011).

The compulsory school systems of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland have much in common and all countries report an increase in the number of students receiving special education, the number of lessons, and the amount of money spent on special needs education. However, there are some interesting differences in national priorities, and Finland stands out with a focus on early intervention, special education for language problems, and more students in segregated arrangements. Whether or not this practice impacts the general achievement level in Finnish schools is still unclear.

*From Integration to Inclusion – from Special Schools to
Local Services*

The Scandinavian countries, including Norway, have contributed to the “evolution” of the welfare state and the philosophy of inclusive communities and schools, as illustrated by the principles of integration, normalization, and decentralization. One of the characteristics of the welfare state is the ideology of integration, which has social and societal inclusion of people with disabilities as its main goal (Haug, 1995; Stangvik, 1995). Consequently, the welfare state should lead to better quality of life for marginal students, and also contribute to increased welfare and equality in society. In Norway over the last twenty years, special boarding schools and residential institutions have gradually been replaced by local services in the home environment of students. In ordinary schools, special needs education is usually organized in three ways. Having an additional teacher in class is most common, followed by individual instruction outside of class, and finally small group instruction. Adding an extra teacher in class is most common in elementary schools while small group instruction is most common in middle schools (Dalen, 2006).

The challenges and demands that have been put on the school system in order to adapt to the needs of special needs students are discussed in the [White paper \(No. 18, 2010–2011\)](#) from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and research. The report acknowledges that contrary to the long-term political goals of inclusive education, special education shows a rising trend. Also registered in the paper are different opinions about the local communities’ and schools’ abilities to meet the challenges of full inclusion. The disagreements are not over the main goals of the reform, but whether the capacity of local services is sufficient to serve the whole range of students. Even if a number of measures have been implemented in order to strengthen the competence and availability of educational services in the municipalities, the decentralization process may have contributed to social isolation and poorer learning and development for some SEN students. Parents and other caregivers are present among supporters as well as opponents of the inclusive school. Thus, for some SEN students, local services have given good results, for others they have not worked as expected. Some point out that SEN students may be in need of and profit from contact with others who are in the same position as themselves, but, as will be clear from the following sections, the empirical evidence points in a different direction.

Adapted Education

Adapted education is authorized in the Norwegian Education Act § 1–2 and means that the learning environment should meet the individual student's qualifications and needs. The Public report (NOU 1995:18) also states that within the limits of the classroom instruction, each teacher should try to adapt the education to each of the students. From the governmental position, schools are considered to be an arena for learning together, and therefore adapted education is different from *individual* teaching adapted to the single child. Adapted education includes learning strategies, teaching methods, learning content, educational programs, or different ways of organizing the education. Examples are: (1) regular adapted education which is strengthened by resources in the form of team teaching, small group teaching and individual lessons; (2) classes with reduced number of students, team teaching or individual lessons; and (3) education in special units at the home school, in other ordinary schools, or in special units called alternative schools or special schools (Solli, 2004). The right to adapted education may be addressed within ordinary education or within special education and may include segregated, as well as inclusive, approaches. In other words, the distinction between adapted education and special needs education is not very helpful in efforts to differentiate between segregated and inclusive approaches. What should count as adapted teaching depends on the situation and the context. The aim of the adaptation is to make kindergartens and schools better equipped to include the range of abilities and backgrounds represented by the diversity of children and youth.

According to the Ministry, special education should act as a safety net when adaptive instruction fails in helping students to obtain satisfactory learning outcomes (White paper No. 18, 2010–2011). As a general rule, however, adapting the general education to student needs should reduce the need for special education. Adapted teaching in heterogeneous classes should aim at striking a good balance between individual and collective needs and teachers should introduce a variety of learning tasks, learning content, working methods, teaching materials, and grouping of students. According to the Ministry, many ordinary schools ought to be more innovative in their efforts to adapt the education before special needs education is considered. The current legal and formal statements about special needs education is the result of a historical development which is presented next.

LOOKING BACK

In a brief historical overview of the development of special needs education in Norway, the period from 1800 to 1950 was characterized by a shift in perspective from the individual to universal systems of assistance (Haug, 1998). In the period from 1950 to 1967 a large expansion of a centralized, specialized, and differentiated state special boarding school system took place. Devoted individuals with few formal qualifications dominated the field of special education, and special schools appeared as self-sufficient and rather closed environments with little contact with local communities and regular schools. A more optimistic view on the learning capacity of students with learning disabilities resulted in plans for a large expansion of the special school system. The municipalities were increasingly expected to offer education to students previously considered to be unable to benefit from formal education, and a large number of special schools and classes were established in local communities. As a consequence, the approximate number of 4,000 students who received special education in 1950 increased to about 20,000 in 1960 (Haug, 1998). The plans for the expansion of special schools met fierce resistance from the integration movement, and were consequently drastically reduced.

From 1967, new signals from the school authorities indicated that the basic principle for special needs education should be integration and normalization with a strong emphasis on local solutions and local interests: “the children should be allowed to live at home, to go to the local school, not to be separated from the class, to be accepted, to participate in exchange, to contribute, and to work with the same, though adapted, learning material” (Haug, 1998, p. 18). Still in 1970, state special schools had been established for 2,800 students with visual impairments, hearing impairments, speech problems, learning disabilities, and behavior problems. But the paradigm shift in the thinking about special education which took place around 1970 was reflected in the recommendations from the so called “Blom committee” (Innstilling om lovregler for spesialundervisning mm, 1971) for the future organization of special education. The committee introduced the idea of a broader learning concept and the concept of extended education leading to the integration of the Special Education act and the Education acts.

Starting around 1975, partly as a consequence of an economic upturn in Norway, both centralized and decentralized initiatives were developed, and large investments were made in special schools as well in ordinary schools. Special needs education was also established in upper secondary school and

SEN students were granted free choice of education within the limits set by their abilities and competence. By 1980, when integration was an established goal in special needs education, changes in the economic situation made it difficult to meet the goals and expectations raised in the previous years (Dalen & Ogden, 2008; Haug, 1998). Financial constraints clearly limited the amount of special educational services the schools were able to offer. The costs increased heavily and the expanded services created their own demand, putting a pressure on local services which was much greater than their perceived capacity and available resources. The mismatch between demand and supply resulted in an increased emphasis on formal procedures and criteria for the allocation of resources (Schiøll, 1991).

From 1990 on, the special needs education in Norway was restructured and reformed, with a strong emphasis on decentralization as demonstrated in the closing or transformation of the state special boarding schools. The local government was strengthened, but the national government still was responsible for “Statped,” The Norwegian Support System for Special Needs Education, with services covering all types of disabilities. A new educational act and a new curriculum were introduced during this decade, but the overarching goals of adapted teaching and inclusive special education from the 1970s were carried forward. In 1994, a reform for upper secondary education and training was launched (Reform 94), in which the main element was a statutory right to upper secondary education for all adolescents aged 16–19. The long-term goal of the reform was to improve the vertical flow of students and increasing the proportion of SEN students completing their upper secondary education within three years. New special needs education provisions addressed the organization and content of special needs education, and the qualifications of teachers (Markussen et al., 2009). Several individualized and inclusive-oriented differentiation measures were introduced such as time extensions during exams, technical aids, student assistants, twin-teacher arrangements, remedial teaching in small groups, individual remediation periods in and outside the regular class, work experience and the Work-Production-School course (Kvalsund, 2004).

LOOKING FORWARD – THE RIGHT TO LEARN

The Midtlyng Committee produced the Public report *The Right to Learn* (Official Norwegian Report, 2009, p. 18) which was used by the Ministry of

Education and Research as a basis for planned improvements of the provision of special needs education. Rather than building new structures, the main strategy of the Ministry was to consolidate the present-day system in order to improve practice. The Midtlyng committee concluded that an improvement of the general schemes would be the most important measure for children, young people, and adults with special needs. Developing more specialized schemes for an ever more diversified population was considered to increase the risk of diluting the sense of fellowship and community in the Norwegian society. However, the committee members, researchers, and stakeholders in the field could not agree on how to strike the best balance between general and special education. Nevertheless, the aim of the further development of special needs education in Norway was to strengthen early intervention and to use more of the resources on kindergartens and on early stages in education (White paper No. 18, 2010–2011). Three improvement strategies were introduced.

The first strategy, *Identify – follow up*, challenged the traditional “wait-and-see” approach in the Norwegian school system (White paper No. 16, 2006–2007). The Ministry recommended a strategy of early intervention in which students who struggled with the learning process should be identified and helped as early as possible. The educational institutions should improve their routines for identifying and following up those in need of assistance and support (i.e., provide a good learning environment, adaptive education, and early intervention). Schools were also urged to focus more on the goals, duration, and results of special education. The second strategy was *target-oriented qualifications and improved learning outcomes*. The new challenges facing kindergartens and schools required new skills and expertise of preschool teachers and school teachers. Therefore, they needed more specialized and targeted competencies. Support teams should be built around teachers and should include the educational and psychological counseling services, and proper use of classroom assistance. The third strategy was *cooperation and coordination, and better implementation*. If good access to comprehensive special education assistance should be granted children in kindergartens and schools, cooperation had to be improved through information and coordination in order to prevent disconnected services. Early assessment, follow up, and effective coordination between the kindergartens and schools were required to achieve a smooth transition between the various school levels, but also for the proper coordination and interaction between the various services and resource persons. In Norway as in several other countries, the principle of inclusion was based on social political ideals and ethics rather than on empirical research. Researchers

marked the debate by being critical of the traditional perspectives and focus of special education research, but also by producing empirical studies questioning the positive implications of the school reforms for SEN students.

The Critical Research Perspective

One of the first Norwegian reviews of special education research concluded that most studies dealt with topics like diagnostics and teaching methods (Befring & Sæbø, 1993). Thus, how to classify learning problems and students, and how to compensate in order to overcome their problems were in focus (Haug & Tøssebro, 1998). Later reviews of research have also concluded that most of the research in Norway (Kvalsund, 2004) and Sweden (Emanuelson et al., 2001) focused on SEN student characteristics and deficits. The bulk of the research was described as action-oriented, with a problem solving or pragmatic approach. A battle of perspectives took place between what Haug (1998) coined the pragmatic or instrumental perspective on the one hand and the idealistic, contextual approach on the other hand. Haug (1998) described how the field of special education changed from developmental optimism, solidarity, equality, local efforts and responsibility, and participation for all to more emphasis on effectiveness and productivity. Some researchers were concerned about the gap between ideals and realities, as Stangvik (1995) was when he commented on the mismatch between the ambitious, overarching political goals and educational practice. He also questioned the extent to which the field of special education was manageable and able to implement reforms. In a later statement, Stangvik (1998) claimed that special educational reform in the 1990s was “an attempt to reduce increasing state expenditure by leaving the residual model of special education in favor of a generic model which allocates a greater part of the costs for special education to municipalities and parents” (p. 147). Another admitted shortcoming of the research was and still is the lack of evaluation studies that would identify “what works” in special education, and how students may benefit from different ways of organizing and implementing interventions. Even if the consequences of educational reforms have been studied, particularly at the upper secondary level, research-based evaluation studies with controlled designs are few and far between in Norway as in the other Nordic countries.

In their critical analysis of research on special needs education, Emanuelson et al. (2001) made a distinction between the categorical and the relational perspective in special needs education. They describe the

categorical perspective as based on individual characteristics (diagnoses or the nature and extent of disabilities). In this “psycho-medical perspective” differentiation is based on individual characteristics rather than educational needs. Research according to this perspective often addresses acute educational problems and subsequently results in ideas and suggestions for interventions or practical guidelines for educational practice. The *relational perspective*, on the other hand, conceptualizes special needs as social constructs, and tries to problematize and deconstruct the field. Rather than describing students “with” difficulties, this perspective claims that students are “in difficulties” and more or less victims of inferior education and differentiation. This perspective supports efforts at incorporating differentiation into instruction and content, and introduces ideas for the long-term development of inclusive education. Despite these differences, Emanuelson et al. (2001) conclude that even if the two perspectives represent radically different ways of understanding research and practice, they often occur simultaneously and are not necessarily incompatible.

Research on Inclusion

A large amount of research has addressed how inclusion impacts students with and without special needs, and how SEN students have adapted and achieved in school. In Norway, most studies have targeted upper secondary school, particularly following the Reform 94.

Outcome Studies

Summing up research on Reform 94, Markussen et al. (2009) concluded that SEN students who attended mainstream classes achieved better grades and qualifications than students attending special classes. Markussen (2002) in his follow up study of a cohort of students in upper secondary school found that 70% achieved vocational qualifications, while 30% did not. Students who received adapted education in their own class were more likely to achieve vocational or study qualifications compared to students who were educated in special classes or groups. Grades at intake were the best predictors of qualifications along with family background and individual difficulties or disabilities. Students with social and emotional difficulties and students with learning disabilities were least likely to succeed.

In their summary report, Markussen et al. (2009) concluded that upper secondary students included in ordinary classes achieved better grades at the end of the first year than students in special classes, and other strong

predictors were high grades from lower secondary, and attending a vocational study program. The proportion of students receiving special needs education was one percent in the academic preparatory program and 10–12% in the vocational track. For students who attended ordinary classes, the amount of special education they received outside class had no impact on their achievements. Students who received all their education in ordinary classes often succeeded, but so did many of those who attended a regular class combined with much help in small groups and individual lessons. In other words, being student and belonging to an ordinary class seemed to matter. Students without SENs in vocational classes tended to gain academically when SEN students attended their classes, but only to a certain limit. The researchers estimated that a vocational class of 12–15 students was able to carry 15–20% of special students without any negative effects on their collective academic functioning. If this level was exceeded, the mean achievement level tended to be lowered, and all suffered (Markussen et al., 2009).

A strong segregating differentiation profile of exclusion following Reform 94 was also found by Kvalsund (2004) who concluded: “My evaluation of this is that Reform 94 and the ideas of special education provision based on the principle of inclusion has not influenced teaching practice in a way that can be registered by the data as inclusion” (p. 174). Kvalsund also found that approximately half of the SEN students in upper secondary school dropped out or abandoned their studies, and more than seven out of ten did not complete their courses or took longer than normal to do so. He stated that, in practice, the system may turn out to be a disguised form of exclusion (Kvalsund, 2004).

A Meta-Analysis of Research on Inclusion

A systematic review conducted by the Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research located 279 international studies out of which 43 were considered to be of good enough quality to be included in a research synthesis (no Danish or Norwegian studies met the inclusion criteria of the study) (Dyssegaard et al., 2013). In this systematic review, Dyssegaard et al. (2013) reported conflicting results, and found it difficult to conclude what kind of education was the most effective for the academic and social development of students with special needs. Young SEN students thrived in ordinary schools, but as they grew older their increased insight into their own cognitive skills and their increased tendency to social comparison made them feel more comfortable in special classes. But at the same time, attending special classes seemed to reduce the SEN students’ achievement

motivation because they compared themselves to peer-students who had similar problems and whom they did not feel inferior to. Studies also showed that the academic and social development of their peer-students were not negatively affected by having special needs students included in their class. Another important finding was that teachers with a negative attitude towards inclusion impacted the academic development of special needs students in a negative way. The authors concluded on a positive note, however, by stating that it is possible to include students with special needs in the ordinary education, and it may have a positive effect on all students' academic and social development.

In conclusion, most studies report positive effects or no differences between inclusive and segregated strategies, but the research does not give a clear cut answer to the question of what is best for special needs students (Dyssegaard et al., 2013; Good & Brophy, 2008; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006; Hattie, 2009; Markussen et al., 2009; Mitchell, 2008). There is a tendency in research to conclude, however, that students are not negatively affected by inclusion, unless, as noted by Markussen et al. (2009), there are too many SEN students in one class. Negative teacher attitudes may work the same way. A study of the social outcomes of mainstreaming SEN students indicated that attending an ordinary class prevented social marginalization and increased the opportunities of establishing social networks in early adult life for special needs students (Kvalsund & Bele, 2010). Most of all, successful inclusion seems to depend on the contextual conditions and requires that the teachers have access to continuing education, educational specialists, and knowledge of teaching methods and interventions targeting children with special needs (Dyssegaard et al., 2013). Markussen, Brandt, and Hatlevik (2003) also stress the importance of a high level of pedagogical and didactical reflections in the schools and the close monitoring of SEN students.

Students Who Are Difficult to Include

Despite the ambitions of having inclusive schooling in Norway, a significant increase in the number of students who receive their education outside ordinary classrooms is registered. In a survey performed by journalists in the Norwegian teachers journal "Utdanning" (in English, Education) more than 5,000 students in compulsory school received their education outside ordinary classes in 2012, as compared to 2,000 students in 1992 (Utdanning, No. 15, 2012). The journalists found that 479 schools pulled

students out from ordinary classes and placed them in strengthened classes or alternative school arrangements. Twice as many students were placed in alternative segregated schools as a special education measure in 2010 as compared to 1991 (Jahnsen, Nergaard, & Flaatten, 2007). Generally, the efforts to include students with sensory and learning disabilities have been relatively successful, but students with EBD and students with attention deficits and hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) have been more of a challenge (Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut [EVA], 2011; Dyssegaard et al., 2013; Markussen, 2002).

Students with EBD

Students with EBD are often not welcomed in regular schools and classes. Neither do they seem interested in attending school any longer than necessary, evidenced by high truancy and dropout rates in secondary school (Kvalsund, 2004). Academically these students are often described as underachievers or low achievers, and they are often acting out by engaging in bullying, fighting, and vandalism. A closer look indicates a reciprocal relationship between academic and behavioral difficulties in these students, and their problems may also be moderated by contextual risk factors at home or school (Gustafsson et al., 2010). Some EBD students qualify for special needs education, particularly those who have a diagnosis of Conduct Disorder, with or without ADHD. Rather than receiving help and assistance, EBD students are typically subject to punitive reactions like being held after school or being taken out of class. In upper secondary school, students with EBD are usually offered support lessons in school subjects like mathematics, Norwegian or English, while an analysis of the learning situation and conditions are rarely carried out (Kvalsund, 2004). Among the 479 schools contacted in the study by “Utdanning” (No. 15, 2012) 80 had units or departments exclusively for students with behavior difficulties or social and emotional difficulties. Moreover, 44 were so far from the school that the students had no opportunities to meet with their classmates at breaks during the day.

The Messages from Research

So what can be done in order to improve school policies and practice to successfully include students with EBD? Four lines of research may give some indications about how such improvements can be made. The first line of research which started in the 1970s identified effective schools and

teaching and claimed that school matters and that schools make a difference. More recently, Hattie's (2009) mega-analysis of more than 800 meta-analyses highlighted the positive impact of school-wide approaches with good school leadership, a positive learning climate across classrooms, good relations between teachers and students, and little student disruption. Mainstreaming was not found to impact student academic achievement negatively and little seemed to be gained from grouping students according to ability. These findings strengthen the assumption that heterogeneous classes usually do not interfere with learning outcomes (Hattie, 2009). The limitation of the review, however, was its exclusive focus on what contributed to student achievement and grades at the expense of impacts on social and personal learning outcomes.

The second line of research deals with inclusion. The previously mentioned meta-analysis of Dyssegaard et al. (2013) looked particularly at characteristics of schools that successfully included students with ADHD, behavior problems, or social and emotional difficulties. They found that successful inclusion of these students in school required positive teacher-student relations and positive behavior support, evidence-based teaching, team work, adapted and goal-directed teaching, and student involvement. Additionally, the review emphasized the importance of early interventions targeting younger students (Dyssegaard et al., 2013).

A third line of research addresses mental health promotion and positive behavior in schools. Weare and Nind (2011) reviewed 52 systematic research reviews and meta-analyses of interventions that contributed to positive mental health and behavior in schools. The most successful interventions were universal, but high-risk students profited most from a combination of universal and individual approaches. According to the authors, an ideal model for the promotion of mental health and positive behavior in school had the following characteristics: (1) positive behavior support, (2) a school-wide approach and implementation, (3) a focus on skills training and competence development, (4) differentiated and adapted to the students' abilities and needs and with a good balance between universal and individual interventions, and (5) mental health and behavioral interventions integrated in the teaching rather than treated as a separate topic (Weare & Nind, 2011).

The conclusions from Weare and Nind (2011) were challenged in a recent evaluation study of the English Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) program by Humphrey, Lendrum, and Wigelsworth (2013). SEAL was a comprehensive program which was implemented nationally in England. In line with the conclusions from Weare and Nind

(2011) the program recommended a whole school approach and direct teaching of social and emotional skills in whole class context and was supported by specific guidelines and relevant literature. According to Humphrey et al., the program failed to meet its intended objectives and they claimed that its impact was greatly overstated in previous evaluation reports. A national implementation was launched by the government before the pilot evaluations were completed, and schools were encouraged to explore different approaches to implementation according to their own priorities. In order to achieve a greater local buy-in, a variety of interventions should be used to match the program to the local context even if that increased the challenges of implementation (Humphrey et al., 2013).

The last line of relevant research is represented by a meta-analysis of studies of social and emotional learning (SEL) in school. Durlak, Weissberg, Schellinger, Dymnicki, and Taylor (2011) evaluated 213 school-based, universal primary prevention programs that demonstrated a number of positive outcomes, both behaviorally and academically. The most successful programs were well designed and implemented with an explicit focus on skills, social skills learning, (inter)active teaching and learning, and high implementation quality. The review concluded that teachers who got the best student results managed to integrate the program in their daily practice and found, in line with other publications (e.g., Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Mitchell, 2008), a reciprocal influence between social and academic learning.

As can be seen from these review articles, several indicators point at possible ways of including students with EBD, as well as students with other disabilities and learning problems. The research also indicates that even if some SEN students need specific teaching strategies and extra assistance, they mostly require good teaching, as do all students (Mitchell, 2008). Among the common indicators of effective as well as inclusive education identified by research are (1) school-wide positive behavior support, (2) matching interventions to the students' risk level, (3) emphasis on the learning of skills and development of competence, (4) well designed and implemented interventions, (5) a combination of academic and social interventions, and (6) integration of interventions in teachers' daily practice.

In search of new initiatives to successfully mainstream special needs students, in general, and students with EBD, in particular, the Norwegian Center for Child Behavioral Development (NCCBD) searched for an approach that matched the empirically supported principles of inclusive education. The best match was the Positive Behavior Support model

(Walker et al., 1996), which also appears in adapted models like the School-wide Positive Behavior Support model (Sprague & Walker, 2005) and the School-wide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS, Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008).

School-Wide Positive Learning Support – The N-PALS Project

Based on the principles and procedures of the School-wide PBIS model N-PALS was introduced as an adapted Norwegian model for inclusive education in primary schools (grades 1–7). N-PALS is an acronym for “Norwegian positive behavior, supportive learning environment and interaction in school” (Arnesen, Ogdén, & Sørli, 2006). In line with the original model, the Norwegian approach combined comprehensive and intensive strategies targeting serious behavior problems with positive behavior support and preventive interventions aimed at the majority of well-behaved students. The general idea behind N-PALS is to replace reactive and punishing approaches to problem behavior with proactive strategies that influence students through teaching and learning activities, generous positive support, and the quality of the learning environment. N-PALS has a school-wide approach to teaching and learning and to the prevention and management of problem behavior. The flexibility of the model lies in the application of a multiple gating assessment procedure and in matching interventions to the students’ needs and risk level (Walker & Severson, 2002). The model allows for an early intervention approach in primary school, combining modifications of the social learning environment with academic and behavioral interventions implemented by the school staff, rather than external interventionists. One of the main innovative contributions from the N-PALS model to special needs education in Norway is the explicit emphasis on implementation quality and intervention fidelity. In Norwegian schools, the awareness and understanding of accountability and factors influencing the transferability of evidence-based interventions has been low. The core components of educational interventions are seldom described in handbooks or manuals, and hardly any attempts have been made at evaluating the model, program integrity, or implementation fidelity.

A Three-Tiered Intervention Model

In N-PALS, evidence-based three-tiered interventions to promote positive behavior and social competence are implemented depending on assessment

of the students' risk level. The principle of matching interventions to student needs is also more broadly referred to as "response to intervention" (RTI, Clark & Alvarez, 2010). RTI is one approach to prevention and early intervention that provides evidence-based instruction to all students. It facilitates inclusion of students by having a structure that addresses learning and behavior problems before significant deficits develop, and allows for monitoring and support within the regular classroom (Grosche & Volpe, 2013). The model consists of three tiers of intervention with increasing intensity and uses a combination of a standard treatment protocol and a problem solving approach in order to make decisions and adapt interventions to student needs. Based on the principles of school-wide positive learning and behavior support and RTI, the main components of the Norwegian PALS model were formulated and implemented as follows.

Universal Interventions – Tier 1. Academically, all students are entitled to adapted teaching and learning tasks, competent classroom management, clear and realistic academic goals, and formative feedback. Socially, all students are taught social skills (e.g., Second Step; Beeland, 1991) and locally defined school-wide rules and expectations are emphasized during the two first weeks of each school year. The staff provide systematic supervision and immediate acknowledgment, encouragement of appropriate student behavior, and predictable responses to inappropriate student behavior across all school settings.

Targeted Group Interventions – Tier 2. The students who do not profit from interventions at tier one are identified and provided inclusive interventions based on their particular needs. Academically, these students receive increased learning support, and small group instruction together with other students who had common needs, challenges, and interests. Behaviorally, schools select interventions based on school discipline data and available resources. Examples are the First Step to Success (Golly, Sprague, Walker, Beard, & Gorham, 2000) and the behavioral education program Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) (Todd, Campbell, Meyer, & Horner, 2008) which met students' needs for positive support and feedback efficiently. At this level, there was increased contact and cooperation between home and school.

Intensive Individual Interventions – Tier 3. For students who did not respond to tier 2 interventions, individual education plans were produced and individual support teams were established. Based on assessment of the students' academic competence and achievements, support teams planned,

implemented, monitored and evaluated the progress made. The students were provided with an individualized, functional, assessment-based behavior support plan. The intervention most often used for improving the students' social skills was the cognitive behavioral program Stop-Now-And-Plan (SNAP) (Augimeri, Farrington, Koegl, & Day, 2007).

The universal interventions target all students in school, and for approximately 80% of them, these interventions were expected to be sufficient in order to motivate positive behavior and academic achievement. The targeted group of students was estimated to amount to 15% of the student population. The indicated or high-risk group is estimated to be 5%, based on assessments of the behavioral and academic problem level at each school (Grosche & Volpe, 2013). In schools with high rates of behavior problems, the targeted and indicated groups are expected to be larger than these estimates (Arnesen et al., 2006).

Implementation

The implementation of N-PALS avoids some of the pitfalls reported in the evaluation of the English SEAL program (Humphrey et al., 2013). The model is introduced and tested on a small scale by the NCCBD in four schools before the implementation is scaled up. The ministries are only indirectly involved by funding in the implementation process. The schools are encouraged to prioritize activities based on a local assessment of risk and protective factors, but still the model emphasizes a strong common core of intervention components and activities. In the N-PALS schools, high-quality implementation is ensured through staff development and external support. A representative PBIS-team at each school should plan and implement interventions based on data-based decisions, develop the schools' own handbook, monitor the progress and outcomes, organize school-wide assessment of risk and protective factors, and introduce N-PALS to parents and staff. The PBIS leadership team further plans, develops, and implements a system of support for the high-risk students. Each N-PALS school also has an external PBIS coach who provides training and coaching at the universal level (tier 1) to each school's PBIS-team during the school year. When schools reach an acceptable level of implementation quality at the universal level and student data indicate the need for additional levels of PBIS, they can require training in Tier 2 and Tier 3.

Evaluation of the Norwegian PBIS Model (N-PALS)

In the first year of implementation the teacher-based assessment of student behavior in the N-PALS schools showed an increase in the percentage of

low risk students (students with one or no serious incidents reported) from 78.5% to 87%. The proportion of moderate risk students (between 2 and 5 serious incidents reported) had decreased from 11% to 8% and the percentage of high-risk students (6 or more serious incidents reported by staff) from 10% to 5% (Arnesen & Ogden, 2006). Next, the N-PALS model was evaluated in a quasi-experimental design in which four intervention schools were compared to four matched schools. The comparison schools also initiated selected school improvement interventions, but these were different from those implemented in the N-PALS schools. Two years after the introduction of the model, the N-PALS schools reported a significant reduction of student problem behavior and increased social competence compared to the comparison schools (Ogden, Sørli, & Amlund-Hagen, 2007; Sørli & Ogden, 2007).

Program implementation quality was measured by The Total Implementation Quality Scale (TIQS) (Horner et al., 2004; Sugai, Horner, & Todd, 2000), which consists of 46 teacher-rated items of annual assessment of implementation quality at the school and classroom level. A significant and inverse relationship between the TIQS and teacher reported problem behavior in classrooms and in the school environment (in unstructured settings like hallways and recess areas) was demonstrated in the evaluation study. The reductions in teacher-rated problem behavior were significantly related to how well the N-PALS interventions were implemented, particularly at the classroom level (Sørli & Ogden, 2007). The encouraging results set the stage for a large-scale implementation and evaluation project with an increased number of schools and a more advanced research design. A longitudinal evaluation study is underway with a total of 65 participating schools (Ogden, Sørli, Arnesen, & Meek-Hansen, 2012). By 2012, a total of 218 Norwegian schools (grades 1–10) have implemented the N-PALS model.

The longitudinal N-PALS study is in progress, but preliminary outcomes indicate that the intervention schools were more successful than the comparison schools in their efforts to include problem students. Across the 65 schools, the principals reported that 0.56% of all students received parts of their education outside the ordinary class due to behavioral difficulties in 2007, and four years later, this figure was almost the same; 0.51%. As could be expected, a very small proportion of the students were excluded from class at this level, but these are probably among the most challenging children, and strong candidates for prolonged special educational careers in segregated arrangements. The number of students in the N-PALS schools being educated outside class was reduced from 0.87% in 2007 to 0.60% in

2011, a decrease from 56 to 35 students. The corresponding numbers for the control schools were an increase from 0.38% to 0.69%, that is from 17 to 37 students. Even though these are small numbers, they indicate a rising trend of inclusion in the PALS schools as compared to a decreasing trend in the comparison schools (Sørli & Ogden, unpublished).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The documents from the Ministry of Education and Research signal that the Norwegian government is committed to the idea that an inclusive school with diversity of students will provide the best framework for each student's opportunity to learn. In general, the needs for assistance and support should be met within regular kindergartens and schools, which should be able to understand, appreciate, and handle diversity in the best possible manner (White paper No. 18, 2010–2011). The change of focus in national policy, from integration to inclusion, signals that special needs students, in addition to attending their local school, should belong to an including learning community and face challenges adapted to their needs and qualifications (White paper, No. 30, 2003–2004).

Inclusive education is as much a social as an academic challenge, and future models should emphasize both social and academic inclusion of students. Among the promising approaches to establishing inclusive practice is a school-wide positive behavior and learning support and intervention model, which is implemented and evaluated on a rather large scale in Norwegian elementary schools. This school-wide model builds on norms and values central to an inclusive school system, it applies a broad perspective on learning and evidence-based interventions in order to prevent and reduce academic and behavioral student problems. Interventions are matched to student needs and promote skills and competence among staff as well as among students. The short- and long-term effects on educational practice, especially for subgroups of children, remain to be demonstrated, but the preliminary outcomes appear promising. The innovative approach of positive academic and social learning and intervention support in the PBIS (N-PALS) model is being evaluated at several levels to examine its impact on student behavior and achievements, and on organizational practice. The model aims to increase the number of students receiving universal adapted education and to reduce the number of students being taken out of their ordinary classes and transferred to full-time special groups, classes, or

schools. Each of these is believed to be central for a best possible academic and social adaptation in school and life.

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