

Students with Severe Learning Disabilities in Mainstream Classes: A Study of Comprehensions amongst School Staff and Parents Built on Observations and Interviews in a Phenomenological Framework

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Abstract : Ingress: Focus in the study is directed towards phenomena and concepts of segregation, integration, and inclusion of students attending a special school form in Sweden, namely compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities (in Swedish 'särskola') as an alternative to mainstream compulsory school. Aim: The aim of the study is to examine the school situation for students attending särskola from a historical perspective focussing the 1980s, 1990s and the 21st century, from an integration perspective, and from a perspective of power. Procedure: Five sub-studies are reported, where integration and inclusion are looked into by observation studies and interviews with school leaders, teachers, special and remedial teachers, psychologists, coordinators, and parents in the special schools/särskola. In brief, the study about special school students attending mainstream classes from 1998 takes its point of departure in the idea that all knowledge development takes place in a social context. A special interest is taken in the school's role for integration generally, and the role of special education particularly and on whose conditions the integration is taking place - the special school students' or the other students,' or may be equally, in the class. Pedagogical and social conditions for so called individually integrated special school students in elementary school classes were studied in eleven classes. Results: The findings are interpreted in a power perspective supported by Foucault and relationally by Vygotsky. The main part of the data consists of extensive descriptions of the eleven cases, here called integration situations. Conclusions: In summary, this study suggests that the possibilities for a special school student to get into the class community and fellowship and thereby be integrated with the class are to a high degree dependant on to what extent the student can take part in the pedagogical processes. The pedagogical situation for the special school student is affected not only by the class teacher and the support and measures undertaken but also by the other students in the class as they, in turn, are affected by how the special school student is acting. This mutual impact, which constitutes the integration process in itself, might result in a true integration if the special school student attains the status of being accepted on his/her own terms not only being cared for or cherished by some classmates. A special school student who is not accepted even on the terms of the class will often experience severe problems in the contacts with classmates and the school situation might thus be a mere placement.

Keywords : integration/inclusion, mainstream school, power, special school students

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