

→ Band 4

# Studien zur Jugendhilfe

→ **Birgit Herz, Matti Kuorelahti** (Eds.)

## **Cross-Categorical Special Education Needs in Finland and Germany**

WAXMANN

# Studien zur Jugendhilfe

edited by  
Birgit Herz

Volume 4



Waxmann 2007  
Münster / New York / München / Berlin

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**Bibliographic information published by die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

**Studien zur Jugendhilfe; volume 4**

ISBN 978-3-8309-1768-7

ISSN 1613-9852

© Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2007

Postfach 8603, 48046 Münster, Germany

<http://www.waxmann.com>

E-Mail: [info@waxmann.com](mailto:info@waxmann.com)

Cover Design: Christian Averbeck, Münster

Print: Zeitdruck GmbH, Münster

Printed on age-resistant paper, acid-free as per ISO 9706

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Printed in Germany

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*Matti Kuorelahti & Birgit Herz*

## **Introduction: The Actuality of Special Education Needs: Research in Finland and Germany**

Since 1997 and up to the present day, Finnish and German colleagues are in research collaboration in the field of Special Education Needs (SEN). After several colloquia, meetings and in the course of the Sokrates Exchange Programme for staff mobility, we decided to publish this book.

Within the German system of General Education, heterogeneity is very often perceived not as a chance but as a disturbance. In none of the countries evaluated by OECD studies the principle of homogenous learning groups is as distinct as in Germany. As a consequence, the schools' drop-out rates are very high. What is obviously lacking is a framework, allowing learning processes in heterogeneous groups, thus ensuring inclusive education for all pupils.

The OECD study (PISA, TIMMS etc.) Finland has performed extremely well. The Finnish teachers have learned to live with the heterogeneity in their classrooms, and the drop out rate is rather low. Also the academic performances in mathematics as well as in reading and writing were significantly higher than in most other participating 32 countries. Behind the Finnish success in the comparative study there are several cultural and political factors, not only educating policy. One major argument for this success is the importance of part-time special education in mainstream school.

In the last decade, Germany's *Conference of the Ministers of Education and the Arts* (Kultusministerkonferenz) agreed upon recommendations for the promotion of Special Education in all German schools. Particularly in the field of Learning Disabilities (LD), Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) and problems in reading and writing, we are observing a growing number of pupils with "special needs" – be it in segregated school-settings *or* in inclusive settings in regular education. Prevention and intervention concerning behavioural and communication (reading, writing and speech) disorders is absolutely necessary – especially in early childhood.

We observe also, for instance, a certain tendency amongst a great number of children and adolescents towards drug-abuse and violence as well as towards bullying and criminal careers. Moreover, a growing number of pupils have severe emotional problems, while others tend to withdraw from the normative standards of society. The number of special schools for pupils with EBD in Germany in the last 14 years has increased by 130 percent. From the German pupils up to 0,5% go to these EBD schools (“Schule für Erziehungshilfe”). In a way they are being labelled as “disturbed”, “children and young people at risk“, “drop-outs” and their education is others’ job – meaning special education teachers.

The intervention strategy and tendency in Finland is somewhat different compared with Germany. The number of special schools (meaning all types of special schools, including also those for EBD children) has decreased by 54% during last 14 years. The proportion of children labelled as EBD child (meaning that their education is based on individualized educational plan) is about on the same level as in Germany 0,7% but these children go usually to regular schools. In 2005 out of these so called IEP-pupils around 60% went to special and 40% went to regular school getting support from special educational professionals. Beside of these IEP-pupils were 1,1% pupils in regular schools receiving special educational support (part-time SE) due their behavioural difficulties. In short, 1,8% from the Finnish pupils received SE either in regular or in special schools due their problem behaviour.

There is a risk of being culturally “dropped-out” of both school and social welfare system. Often the most “behaviourally disturbed” children and young people are displaced from their housing and/or unable to keep their job – if they have found any employment at all. Their poor integration into the labour market marks a huge variety of other problems.

Learning disabilities might appear with or without linkage to the EBD. Disaffected and low-motivated children, however, will have sooner or later also learning disabilities. And vice versa, low achievement in school might push the children out from the schooling track, if their disabilities were not identified and recognized early enough.

In order to comply with the “right for inclusion” as stated by the EU’s and UN’s convention for the rights of children, research in Germany and Finland is indispensable. In 2005 in Finland 7,3% of age groups were defined as SEN students (meaning official changing of their curriculum into IEP), but there were additionally 21,9% who received part-time SE. This means that 29,2% of all Finnish pupils were in touch with SE services. In Germany the relating figure was 5,3%.



In the following, we will describe some differences in Special Education Needs (SEN) in Finland and Germany.

### Differences in SEN in Finland and Germany

<b>Finland</b>	<b>Germany</b>
<i>Different policy toward inclusion</i>	
Multi-track approach	Two-track approach
Variety of services in mainstream school	Pupils with SEN are mostly placed in special schools or classes
<i>funding system</i>	
Funds are allocated to the municipalities	Funds are tied to the pupil (pupil-bound budget)
<i>Curriculum</i>	
Curriculum-framework should cover all pupils with and without SEN	Special schools work with specific curricula, skills and competencies
Individual educational system for all pupils	Pupils with SEN in regular schools have specific curricula
<i>Teacher and Special Needs Education</i>	
Support: mainly provided by a specialist teacher working as a staff member of the regular school	Support: mainly provided by a specialist teacher in a special school;  In some of the Länder, support includes joint educational activities in regular schools between special and regular teacher, while the special teacher is not a staff member of the regular school
A pupils' welfare team is established involving the pupils, their parents, all teachers and any other experts involved in the preparation of an individual educational program to be implemented in regular school	The co-operation between different supporting systems does not function well; the schoolchildren' and young peoples' welfare system often are not working "hand in hand"

The central research concept of the joint research focusses on the question: "How to promote inclusive education?"

Inclusion is a commitment to educate each pupil and to bring supporting services to the pupils. Inclusive Education is the key to promote equality of all citizens not only in schools but also in their life courses. These positions, elaborated in the Salamanca Statement (1994) accept diversity and heterogeneity as a

reality to be valued. Some important conditions and prerequisites for inclusive schools are:

*Inclusion depends on the teachers' attitudes towards special needs, on their capacity to enhance social relations, on their view on differences in classrooms and their willingness to deal with those differences effectively. Teachers need support from inside and outside school. Teachers need a perspective of skills, pedagogical approaches, adequate teaching methods, materials, and time, if they are to address diversity effectively in their classrooms. Handling or dealing with diversity, like*

- special education needs,
- gifted children,
- intercultural differences

*require a certain kind of support from inside and outside school. Governments should express a clear vision on inclusion and provide adequate conditions.*

Teachers in regular as well as in special schools are one of the most important keys for inclusion – or exclusion.

**Matti Kuorelahti** asks: “*How to understand more about the Special Educational Needs? Any help from research?*” He gives an international overview over the diversity in research in the field of SEN. The methodological approaches include observing pedagogy in natural settings, analysing learning difficulties as close as possible, assessing learning outcomes and individual experiences, and studying the functionality of the educational system. As a conclusion he demands multifaceted and multilevel research from individual’s and society’s perspectives.

“*Between the burden of tradition and one step forward – the tightrope walking in the development of a supporting concept for speech and language impairment*” from **Alfons Welling** draws heavily the situation in Germany. He starts with a look back to the history of the terminology concerning speech and language impairment. After an overview concerning the statistical data, he explains the developmental disorders of children’s language. A case study allows it to concretize that speech and language production is a complex form of action. Therefore, his theoretical approach depends on related theories and is based on social constructs.

Social relationships in inclusive classes are the issue of **Rainer Benkmann’s** contribution. His research question is: “*Are the Social Relationships in Inclusive Classes a Developmental Resource or Risk for Learning Disabled Children?*” He concludes the international research results and argue for more research in

the field of school and class community, class atmosphere, cooperative learning, peer-tutoring and peer-modelling.

**Markku Jahnkainen** presents a study in Finland: “*After the Reform School. A follow-up of two cohorts of young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties released from residential institutions in Finland.*” His contribution is based on a Finnish longitudinal study, where the post-adjustment of the students of the state-owned residential institutions for maladjusted young people is followed-up. The results indicate that young males are in high risk of cumulative risk behaviour during the next years after leaving the institutions. However, in general, the life situations have stabilised during their early 20’s, in particular for those young people who have committed a supporting partnership.

A research teacher training group for young people at risk and drop-outs is the issue from the article of **Birgit Herz**: “*Qualifying teachers: Standards required in teacher training for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties*”. She criticises the school system in Germany with its homogenous classrooms, overburdened teacher and a reduction of personal and financial support. Her contribution shows new avenues for teacher training at the University, for example with action research and supervision within practical projects.

**Walter Spiess** asks “*How to optimize the effectiveness of intervention?*”. His contribution is a *meta-theoretical and practical comment on the construction of intervention models*. Today’s scientific community has come to accept comparison group designs for evaluating the effectiveness of intervention methods as a methodological standard. But is that research approach also useful for improving or even optimizing the effectiveness of intervention methods? – The more complex intervention methods get in terms of their procedures the more apparent the practical limitations in doing that kind of research become. An alternate approach is being outlined: By that way those procedural components can be identified that contribute most to the overall effectiveness of an intervention model – without the need of comparison groups.

“*An Age Groups’s Nine Year long Change in educational and employment Position: How students with EBD have managed after finishing their comprehensive school*” is a ten-year longitudinal study from **Kristiina Lappalainen** and **Risto Hotulainen**, Finnish students (n=143), who had been identified as having Special Support Needs (SSN) in the end of the comprehensive school, were assessed again against their peers who have assessed to not have such needs. In 1995 (grade 8), the SSN was assessed by using the answers given by the students themselves, their teachers and school welfare group. Because various people make their own definitions there seem to be lot of need of special support. In grade 8 in comprehensive school, over half of the target group

needed special support. A particular group with SSN are the students with EBD (Emotional and Behavioural Disorders). Together pupils themselves, their teachers and school welfare group estimated that about twelve percent of the students need support because of EBD. According to the results especially EBD students were found to have higher rates of the secondary education drop-outs and unsuccessful career choices. Nine years after comprehensive school over one fourth of EBD students haven't taken a degree in secondary or tertiary education. It seems evident that transition from school-level to another and employment is more problematic to the students with EBD than to the students who have had other SSN needs. All the SSN students, but especially the students with EBD would benefit transition plans and special support and guidance also after the comprehensive school.

Teacher education ranks on the top on the agenda in Germany as well as in Finland. Finland's success in the OECD studies is as remarkable in positive terms as the social and cultural discrimination of German pupils is in negative ones. It is evident that a bilateral research co-operation can help finding better ways for the inclusion of all pupils. What are the differences and the reform potential of these differences between the two nations?

A better understanding of the attitudes, behavioural patterns, the social skills, learning competencies and biographical backgrounds within these two cultures can provide for establishing successful inclusive schools.

Social relationships between pupils and teacher are a prerequisite for achieving in school. Research comparison between Finland and Germany showed that better programmes for teacher training are to be developed, implemented, and supported. Such programmes can help to reduce the drop-out rate in schools. The interdisciplinary approach in this bilateral collaboration acquires expertise, new ways and strategies for making school a place to be for all pupils.

All pedagogical action and all democratic education ought to be based on the idea of human dignity. Inclusive Education aims at awareness, recognition and respect of heterogeneity. Diversity of all children and youth in schools should be the "normal case".

Jyväskylä and Hamburg, October 2006

Matti Kuorelahti & Birgit Herz

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## **How to Understand More about the Special Educational Needs?**

### **Any Help from Research?**

#### **1. Introduction**

Who is deviant or different or special? Basically the question refers to philosophical and especially ontological issues: what is human nature originally? What makes every person a unique case? As one Finnish singer Veikko Lavi used to put it: Every human is worth of a song.

The question concerning ‘who is special?’ can be answered not only from philosophical but also from other perspectives like medical, sociological, psychological, pedagogical, psychosocial viewpoints. It was very typical to classify children in certain categories based on their academic abilities. There were “educable”, “trainable”, “learning disabled”, “behaviourally disturbed” etc. etc. categories to describe children with special educational needs (SEN). It was in England, where the multilevel categorization in education was given up already as early as in 1980’ s as one practical result of the Warnock report.

In Finland the terms like “apukoulu” (Hilfschule, remedial school) and “tarkkailuluokka” (observational class for children with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties) were given up in 1985. The first was replaced with “EMU/mukautettu opetus” (adopted teaching), and the latter with “ESY/sopeutumattomien opetus” (teaching of maladjusted). Teaching of children with mental retardations was named as “EHA/harjaantumisopetus” (training). Since 2003 all these categorizations have been given up, and it is simply talked about “individualized teaching”, which is neutral in that sense that basically every child needs individual treatment and approach.

Changing the namings and terms functions as signal of new policies and approaches in educational policy. It’s based on new interpretations from human and individual diversity. Sooner or later the classifications will carry also some-