# A Longitudinal Classroom Study of Inclusive Practices

*The Norwegian Contribution
to International Comparative Classroom Studies*

Berit H. Johnsen

## Introduction

How does school teach in accordance with pupils' different levels of mastery and needs for support in the learning process?

What are the recourses, barriers and dilemmas in schools' developmental process towards achieving inclusion?

This article is a summary of selected findings in response to these two research questions. It is the Norwegian contribution to the large cooperative project, *International Classroom Studies of Inclusive Practices – Comparing Teaching-Learning Processes* (WB 04/06), with studies of processes towards developing inclusive schools in six countries in the north western and south eastern parts of Europe (Johnsen, 2013a; Johnsen et al, 2020). The study follows the joint research project's main aspects as one of seven chapters. As the title implies, this is a longitudinal single case study of inclusive practices. The school has been purposefully selected based on the criteria of having a successful classroom teacher and class in a regular elementary school – with its possibilities, dilemmas and challenges (Johnsen, 2013b; 2014d).
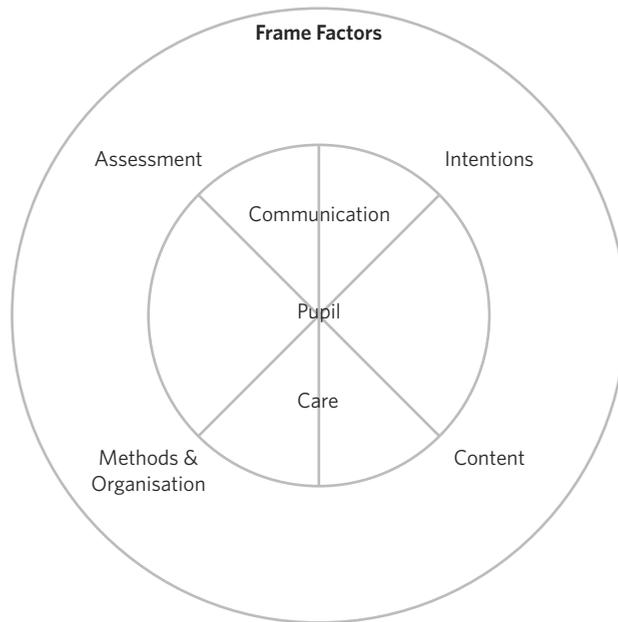
The diagram shows two concentric circles. The outer ring is labelled "Frame Factors" at the top. Around the inner circle are: Assessment (top left), Intentions (top right), Methods & Organisation (bottom left), Content (bottom right). The inner circle is divided into segments labelled Communication (top), Pupil (centre), and Care (bottom).

**Figure 1.** *The Curriculum Relation Model* revised in Johnsen (2007)

## Theory and methodology adapted from joint research plan

This study is theoretically situated in the intersection between a didactic-curricular and culture-historic approach to teaching, learning and development, as indicated in the joint research plan (Johnsen, 2013a; WB 04/06). From didactic-curricular point of view, the Vygotskyan culture-historic tradition outlines the necessary interplay between former traditional learning theories and theories of teaching, learning and development. Thus, didactic and curricular theories have deep-rooted traditions in detailed discussions of the commonplace aspects of teaching, such as aims and goals, content, methods, classroom organisation and assessment (Gundem & Hopmann, 1998; Johnsen, 2000; Klafki, 1999). The current focus on context stems from cultural-historical and ecological traditions as well as social pedagogy (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2007; Daniels, 2014b; Goodlad, 1979; Ivić, 2014; Johnsen, 2014c; Kristeva, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). The field of special needs- and inclusive didactics offers an explicit focus on com-

munication and care (Daniels, 2014a; Johnsen, 2014b; 2020a; Noddings, 1992; 2010; Rye, 2005). Thus, the areas from the different research traditions are integrated in a didactic relation approach that may be illustrated by the so-called Curriculum Relation Model.

The didactic relation approach contributes to relating the abovementioned didactic areas and applying them as a set consisting of eight research foci on the teaching – learning – developmental processes on the micro level (Alexander, 2009; Johnsen et al, 2020), paying particular attention to the individual pupil in the classroom community. Methodologically speaking, this is a longitudinal single case study (Holland, Thomson & Henderson, 2006; Stake, 1995; Thomson & McLeod, 2015), taking place from spring 2006 to summer 2010, or until, after seven years of elementary school, pupils move on to a lower secondary school. In Stake's (1995; Simons, 2015) terminology this is an instrumental case study, because there is an implicit assumption that the study is instrumental in generating an understanding beyond the particular case to inclusive practices found in other schools both in Norway and on the international scene. Subsequently, the compilation and comparison of the seven international cases in one joint report represent a further generation and joint discussion of findings (Johnsen et al, 2020). However, generalization based on similar findings is not intended in this research project; rather, it is meant to be instrumental in the sense of contributing to opportunities for further research based on the obtained findings.

The Norwegian single case study applies triangulation or multi-method approach comprised of two main data collection methods supplementing each other; 1) a combination of non-participatory and participatory classroom observations and 2) open interviews with pre-informed themes. The study is implemented through a series of daylong school visits having a combination of four lessons with classroom observations and two hours with open interview or dialogue with the classroom teacher, supplemented with additional dialogues with school leaders and other relevant informants. Typical for qualitative case studies, an ongoing analytical process takes place throughout the study until final compilation. There is a focus on balancing between meaning making, authenticity and trustworthiness of the informants' emic perspectives and the etic perspective of the researcher's theory-driven interpretations and reflections (Brantlinger et. al., 2005; Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007; Golafshani, 2003; Johnsen et al, 2020; Olive, 2014; Simons, 2015; Stake, 1995).

This summary version of a longitudinal and detailed research project like this classroom study can only offer glimpses of findings. The presentation of findings is structured in accordance with the eight abovementioned main areas or themes presented in the didactic-curricular relation approach (Johnsen, 2013a; 2014b). This is also in accordance with the structure of the joint international comparative report (Johnsen et al, 2020) with one exception. This article starts with a short contextual description in order to give the reader a summary of the background of the case school in advance.

## Context

The site of this study is a rather prototypical elementary school (6–13 years) in a prototypical Norwegian municipality containing a town and maritime, agricultural and forestry areas. It has a total of six elementary and lower secondary schools. The class in question consists of 21 pupils at the start of the study and 27 pupils at its end, by which time the school has merged with a smaller school and moved into a brand new building. Throughout the research period, three classroom teachers have had primary responsibility for this class. They are the main informants in this study together with the class[41]. Being prototypical, the school operates within the frameworks of international human rights, national educational act, curriculum and other political guidelines, as accounted for in Johnsen et al (2020). The municipality is responsible for its own employment and economic operations, albeit in accordance with national law. Moreover, all schools and municipalities have their own local characteristics within these frameworks. Thus, an area's demographics, labour market and employment opportunities as well as social and cultural aspects and mentalities have impact on school-life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2006). In this study, the local school-office have selected a highly regarded case school, -class and classroom teacher on the researcher's request for "a good case", demonstrating good practices (Johnsen, 2014a; Moen, 2004; Travis, 2014). The following sections present excerpts of findings within each of the main didactic-curricular aspects mentioned above.

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41    Contact teachers or classroom teachers, as they were traditionally called, teach almost all subjects during the first years at school, whereas the number of subject teachers use to increase over the years. This class has had subject teachers in physical education, arts and crafts and English. Other staff related to the class are special needs- and other cooperating teachers, assistants and after-school programme staff.

# Knowledge about every individual pupil in the classroom community

According to the curricular relation approach (Johnsen, 2014b), it is necessary to have comprehensive, detailed and relevant knowledge of the single pupil in order to develop individually adapted curricula and educational inclusion. What kind of knowledge about the individual pupils in the classroom community is focused upon; a) what kind of information do the classroom teachers have; b) how do they acquire it; c) whom do they share it with; and d) how does this information help them to practice inclusion?

Concerning what is considered important knowledge, repeated in-depth dialogues with the primary level classroom teacher reveal her detailed knowledge about every single pupil inside and outside school, including their personal context. At school, she prioritizes two main areas, namely a) psychosocial wellbeing and mastery; and b) academic mastery and abilities. When asked what kind of knowledge is most important, she answers:

> I emphasize wellbeing … that the child thrives…

When it comes to academic mastery levels, she points out that since she has been their teacher for several years already … "I suppose I know where each of my pupils can perform a bit more".

How does she acquire this knowledge? She tells about talking with the individual pupil, informal and formal tests, school- and homework, as well as observations of their interaction and activities both in the classroom and outside during breaks. She regularly reviews each pupil's workbooks in all school subjects. An important systematic source of information is the weekly learning plan – or class & individual curriculum. The pupils have their own "intermission book" where they write about themselves. These books tell her a lot about their interests as well as likes and dislikes. In addition, the teacher also has her own "pupil book"; a kind of logbook for everyday schooling. She reviews these books before every meeting with the pupils' parents, who also provide important information about their child in addition to their expectations of and concerns about them.

In this typical local Norwegian school, pupils are familiar with their classmates' other personal qualities beyond academics. This becomes clear through the Howard Gardner- inspired practice using *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* (Armstrong, 2. Edition, translated to Norwegian by M. K. Ofstad and published 2003), where the classmates have as homework to select and argue

for each classmate's "number one area of cleverness" or "intelligence". In the end, the majority of pupils are "labelled" according to their highest personal diligence in dancing, football, skiing, chess, etc. – only positive characteristics are presented and discussed, providing the teacher with additional information about her pupils. Observations confirm that these assignments contribute to bringing the class together into an inclusive group in their early school years. However, as the teacher points out, it is a paradox that very few of the typical school subjects are mentioned.

Through her thorough knowledge about every single pupil, the teacher is well aware of the diversity of wellbeing, mastery, interests, dislikes and concerns in her classroom. Consequently, in addition to her own individual adaptation and support, the teacher also cooperates with colleagues, headmaster and school administration as well as external services for the good of her pupils. All three classroom teachers state that the principal and her school administrators are important dialogue partners and supporters, taking co-responsibility in important and at times complex decisions. These are important sources of information and knowledge exchange as well as cooperation.

Is all information relevant? The classroom teachers point out that there may be gossip around pupils and families, and some families may be more vulnerable than others. Consequently, a teacher argues: "One has to sort out what may be relevant from what is not". She adds that sometimes what has seemed unimportant suddenly sheds light on problems a pupil might be experiencing. Thus, the classroom teachers describe their dilemmas and challenges. They also speak about their concerns, for instance about certain pupils' being socially accepted or a pupil receiving consequences for disruptive behaviour. They may worry whether planned teaching procedures will prove successful in finding fruitful ways above or around pupils' learning barriers – or not. Woven into these concerns is their hope of keeping an inclusive class mentality where all pupils have a sense of joint ownership.

The classroom teachers' awareness may be characterized as comprehensive knowledge of the whole child in the community of the class. Thus, their stance is similar to that of the educational philosopher, Nel Noddings' (1992; 2010), who argues that pupils are not only pupils, but also comprehensive and multifaceted human beings. Nodding's challenge to care in school is practiced by the classroom teachers. Similarly, the first classroom teacher's knowledge about how her pupils "… can perform a bit better …" relates to Lev Vygotsky's famous account of his concept zone of proximal, or close development, which says:

… the distance between the child's actual developmental level as determined by inde-
pendent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined
through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable
peers (1978: 86).

Three aspects of Vygotsky's discussion of this concept are related to the class-
room teacher's information and observed practice; a) that in addition to know-
ing pupils' independent mastery levels or "yesterday's knowledge", it is crucial
to be aware of their proximal, or nearest potential mastery level, or "tomor-
row's knowledge" or the ability to perform a bit better; b) that pupils have
different levels of mastery and potential development; and c) that teachers
have an important responsibility for pupils' learning and development. Is the
awareness of Nodding's challenge to care in school or Vygotsky's arguments
concerning the zone of proximal development (ZPD) acquired in the teacher's
education? This question is not posed during the many interviews. However, it
may be likely that Vygotsky's ZPD concept has been introduced in the further
education courses that the first teacher has taken throughout her career, since
his theories are considered classic, whereas Nel Noddings' arguments have
not been as well known. It seems that the teacher's arguments for caring about
and supporting pupils' attempts to perform steadily a bit better are based on
her own practice.

Observations and interviews with the second classroom teacher indicate
that main aspects of the first classroom teacher's knowledge about individual
pupils have been transferred to him. Main reasons for this assumption are a) the
professional collaborative attitude of sharing among the case school's teaching
staff b) their joint classroom teaching, as well as c) the researcher's observations
of the interactions between the second classroom teacher and single pupils –
more specifically, pupils that have some kinds of socio-emotional or academic
needs for support – strongly indicate that he follows pupils up based on the
knowledge shared with his colleague.

The third classroom teacher is new to the class except for a few pupils that
he has taught before in the school recently merged with the case school. This is
the seventh and final grade of the elementary school. Teaching is now shared
between several subject teachers in addition to the classroom teacher, who
teaches Norwegian, mathematics and physical education, consequently teach-
ing the class every day. The first classroom teacher is now retired, and the
contact between the second and third teachers provides good opportunities
for transferring their knowledge about the class. In the first interview, the third

teacher points out that … "I do too poor a job of facilitating the teaching for all the pupils". He also states that he has not yet gained a sufficient overview of each pupil's need for individually adapted educational support. However, observations show that he has held a number of informal individual conversations as well as talking to small groups and the entire class. When taken together with classroom observations, the interviews confirm that a) he is steadily acquiring knowledge about each of the pupils, and b) he regularly cooperates with the second classroom teacher, sharing knowledge about their merged classes.

## Assessment

A great deal of the knowledge about individual pupils described above is, as indicated, informal and unsystematic information gathered together to a systematic assessment of pupils' psychosocial wellbeing, academic mastery and abilities. This is an important part of assessment in the Norwegian elementary school where grading is not used the first seven years. The systematisation of relevant knowledge is an important part of assessment. What is assessment in an educational context? This study applies the following preconception (Johnsen, 2014b):

> To assess and evaluate is to gather, interpret and reflect on a variety of information in order to adjust the direction towards a future goal. Educational assessment and evaluation consist of considerations and judgements about teaching and learning environments, processes and results, and about their contextual relations. Special needs educational assessment and evaluation draw attention to specific possibilities, barriers and adaptations concerning teaching and learning environments, processes and results, and their contextual relations.

Accordingly, assessment focuses on the learning process, level of mastery, abilities and need for educational support of every single pupil as well as the whole class. Similarly, it focuses on whether and how educational intentions, content, methods, class organisation, care and communication as well as contextual factors contribute to meaningful learning – or function as barriers to the learning processes (Johnsen et al, 2020). The classroom teachers in the case school use a combination of informal and formal assessment tools. An important and much used approach is the combination of teaching and assessing, or appraising teaching – also called formative assessment in didactics – where the individual encounter between teacher and pupil is central. Several pre-constructed assess-

ment tools of different kinds are also used. As an example of an early screening test of pupils' wellbeing at school, the first grade pupils are asked to fill in a form crossing over smileys or brows in answer to questions read by the teacher. Several such tests of different relevance and quality exist for very young pupils in the country, even examples compromising ethical principles. The teachers describe a number of constructed assessment tools they use:

- Word- and reading tests accompanying the ABCs
- Locally constructed reading skill tests for every grade levels
- National reading tests

Similar assessment tools are reported for arithmetic skills. As indicated above, the first classroom teacher compiles a holistic assessment of each pupil's psychosocial and academic status based on informal and constructed, daily and long-term assessments before scheduling meetings with parents. This information is also important when the school applies for additional resources due to pupils' special education needs in accordance with the Norwegian *Education Act*. It states that schools may apply for extra resources in order to give individually adapted education to pupils who need additional teaching that are not fully covered through ordinary resources. During the longitudinal classroom study, this was the case for three pupils. In these cases, the municipality's educational-psychological service (EPS) is responsible for further assessments and any recommendations for special needs educational resources. Special needs educators and psychologists at EPS apply a battery of assessment tools. In many cases, the *Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children* (WISC) is part of their assessment. WISC is a standardized assessment tool that may indicate general levels of mastery and any causes of learning difficulties, for instance dyslexia.

The last few decades, there is increasing attention paid to broad international assessment programmes that measure selected areas of education, such as the Global Monitoring Report measuring quality in UNESCO's *Education for All* (EFA) programme and OECD's *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA). This demanding attention on measurement has a far-reaching impact on national Norwegian educational discourse, including individual schools such as the case school. Thus, the headmaster states that:

"… assessment is something that we are weakest at and must do something about. … We are planning to spend the upcoming school year developing assessment forms that will be easy to use at every grade level".

Here, the principal points to the tradition of how the school cooperates every year on a selected educational area of, as mentioned in the section on educational intentions below.

When it comes to international assessment discourse, there is growing criticism of what is perceived to be the general and delimited kind of information produced by strictly controlled programme measurements, including the PISA and EFA programmes (Alexander, 2015; Sutoris, 2018). It is argued that these tests lack cultural sensitivity and educational flexibility. Alexander (2015: 254) asks: "Why no pedagogy …?"

## Educational intentions

Educational intentions are situated at the intersection of a) public intentions for education as stated in *Educational Act* and *National Curriculum*; b) pupils' own intentions; and c) the school's assessment and knowledge of pupils'level of mastery and learning potential (Johnsen, 2014b; Johnsen et al, 2020). Interviews with the principal and the three classroom teachers show that they have knowledge of general and subject-specific official intentions on each grade level and take part in discussions of new educational white papers when published. The first classroom teacher is appointed member of a cross-municipal working group to facilitate new national intentions to local schools. The case school is well aware of the principles of individually adapted education and rights to special needs education when needed. On a school level, practices on developing specific educational intentions take place on two levels:

a)  Teacher staff and school management work together to formulate annual educational intentions that are integrated in every subject on all grade levels. This is formulated in an annual educational activity plan and presented to families with children enrolled in the school.

b)  Every week, classroom teachers present a joint work plan for their classes with possibilities for adaptations. An example from third grade illustrates how i) the vast majority of pupils learn in accordance with these weekly goals; ii) two pupils who need more detailed step-by-step goals, learn in accordance with an adapted plan; and iii) special goals are made for one pupil who is following the same school subjects with adapted learning conten.

# Educational content

Educational intentions and content answering the didactic question of *"what"* content education should contain. How does the case school select educational content so that all pupils are able to participate in a meaningful teaching-learning process within the community of the class? Focusing on what may be characterized as the everyday micro level, three aspects are found to be of main importance, namely a) flexible use of the content of the weekly work plan mentioned above, b) access to a large amount of teaching- and learning materials on different mastery levels, and c) the inclusive and cooperative mentality between the teachers.

a)  As described above, even though the class mainly has the same weekly work plan, the teacher adapts the plan's content in accordance with the diversity of pupils' assessed educational needs and makes agreements with individual pupils.

b)  A diverse arsenal of teaching- and learning materials is fundamental for individual educational adaptation. This is especially important at the first four grade levels, when basic reading, writing and arithmetic acquisition is established for the vast majority of pupils. Traditionally, there is a combination of classical, grade-based textbooks and additional materials. In the case school there is a special storeroom full of systematically labelled additional materials, whereof most have been designed by teachers through the years. Every teacher adds new material – for training, repetition, additional ways of understanding phenomena, learning through play and special challenges for advanced pupils; for individual learning tasks and for peer cooperation. The classroom teacher selects relevant material in accordance with the needs of their pupils and places them in the classroom.

c)  The material arsenal is both a documentation of teachers' extra work beyond regular working hours during many years and an indication of their awareness of the diversity of pupils' educational needs. It demonstrates not only a tradition of individual adaptation but also an attitude of inclusive cooperation and sharing.

In the fifth grade there is a success story showing how an advanced education course for two cooperating colleagues in the case school arouses the joy of learning in a pupil who has fought hard to train reading skills without quite succeeding, in spite of conscientious schoolwork and additional support received in former grades:

> The two teachers attends a course in the Scottish *Storyline* strategy for active learning, taking pupils' interest and level of mastery as the point of departure (Mitchell-Barrett, 2010). They integrate the majority of the school subjects in a long-term project selecting as main content focusing on trees and what they can be used to. Running through a semester the project is concluded with a large exhibition of pupils' drawings, stories and woodwork, documenting great progress for the mentioned single pupil – not only in reading and writing, but all subjects integrated in the project, namely mother tongue, math, social science, nature and environment, arts and crafts.

This is an example of systematic and flexible adaptation of learning content within the community of the class.

Fifth grade marks a practical technological turning point due to the introduction of teaching with laptops. In the beginning, the teacher uses it together with the blackboard; soon, the laptop and whiteboard (with a flip-over) are the main teaching medium. In seventh grade, the use of laptops with internet access has become incorporated practice. Specifically two advantages are observed from using this new technology; a) the teacher does not turn the back on the class, but has eye contact with the pupils, and is therefore better able to adapt the teaching; b) a considerable amount of teaching material, further explanations and examples, as well as learning tasks, are accessible through the internet. Are there any downsides? Laptops and flip-overs do not manage to replace everything that the blackboard offers. After admitting this fact, the school reinstalls blackboards along with laptop boards in several classrooms.

As mentioned, seventh and last grade of elementary school contains subjects taught by a higher number of subject teachers. In the case class, pupils with reading difficulties are now fluent readers. A new pupil from abroad has Norwegian language as main subject. One pupil still receives daily extra support. An important task this school year is to prepare the pupils for their next educational step; lower secondary school.

## Educational methods and organisation

While educational intention and content are called the educational what, educational methods and class organisation are frequently characterised as the educational *"how"* (Johnsen, 2014b; Johnsen et al, 2090). It is a theoretical-didactic question whether methods and organisation should represent one or two main aspects. The reason why they are merged in this report is that there are exceptionally many grey zones between the two; a method may be realised

through a certain kind of organisation. How can educational methods and organisation support individually adapted education and inclusion? Applying a diversity of methods is a fundamental part of individually adapted education; and plurality in teaching-learning organisation facilitates opportunities for using a diversity of methods as well as content. Observations and interviews in the case school show rich, deliberate and sustained diversity of organisation on all levels; permeating long-term, weekly and daily activities. The long-term organisation consists of semester plans with specific focus-themes. For example, reading and writing are focused upon in grade four with an emphasis on diversity of methods – which is of great importance for pupils who need alternative support. As described above, the weekly plan connects pupils within the learning community while at the same time facilitates individual agreements with the teacher. A number of organisational arrangements are applied during the five years of the longitudinal study; some of these are used in special situations and for specific subjects or themes, while others become traditions. One daily organisational arrangements that has developed into a tradition is for pupils to spend the first 10 minutes of the school day reading a personally selected text of any kind. The first classroom teacher describes how this organisation came about:

> I noticed that the children were annoyed and stressed on Monday mornings and I thought it might be because the weekend had been busy and with late evenings. Consequently, I thought of starting the day organising something that could help them relax and redirect their attention toward school. So, I organized a combination of relaxation and reading. I asked the children to place their heads on their desks and just relax, or find a text they could look at or read. Meanwhile, I played quiet music. It turned out that the pupils appreciated this, and we started beginning the school day with ten minutes of reading texts of their own choice.

Observations made during the longitudinal study show great individual variations in choices of texts – ranging from Donald Duck and other comic books to newspapers, textbooks, children's books and adult novels. On the first school visit to the fifth grade classroom, it was a surprise to find the whole class quietly reading their individually selected texts when we arrived with the classroom teacher five minutes into the first lesson. Reading at the beginning of the school day has become a tradition shared between the classroom teachers and their classes.

Traditional teaching has tended to concentrate on conveying subject content and logic to the class. Less focus has been on pupils' individual differ-

ences. Teaching has focused on a single method directed towards the whole class in so-called "class teaching", catheter- or "podium teaching", expecting pupils to be active in the learning process by listening, writing notes and making drawings. Several research teams in the *International Comparative Classroom Study* criticise this tradition. The Sarajevo team states: "It is quite obvious that the use of a single teaching method is outdated …" (Johnsen et al, 2020). Organisational pluralism is applied at the case school in a flexible manner with regard to a) time perspective b) combination of class, group and individual focus c) educational scenes and locations, and e) educational resources. All of these organisational aspects make pluralism of methods possible. For example, reading acquisition is a topic with a large collection of different methods that are connected to an array of teaching and learning materials, as mentioned in the section on content. The two pupils who started out having difficulties 'cracking the code' of reading, reached fluency within the five first grades thanks to their readiness, determination and learning activities in interaction with the plurality of material, methods and organisation through differentiation and individual adaptation provided by their teachers and school.

## Communication

> There can be no education without communication, no matter how qualified and relevant the adaptation of intentions, content, methods and organisation seems to be. (Johnsen, 2014b: 163)

Two main aspects of the curriculum relation approach, communication and care, represent an extension of the traditional didactic main aspects – assessment, intentions, content, method and organisation. They are taken from current special needs and inclusive didactics. The didactics of communication consist of two main aspects, communication technology and relational communication, whereof the relational aspect is focused upon in this case study. How does the human relation aspect of communication appear in the case school? Self-evidently, communication is primarily about teaching – about mediation of knowledge; however, it also has many other qualities. A summary of relational aspects of communication between teacher and pupils in the report of the international comparative studies of inclusive practices (Johnsen et al, 2020) contains characteristics that are also found in observations of the Norwegian case school and confirmed in interviews:

- Showing acceptance and appreciation of every individual pupil and the whole class
- Giving ample time for conversation with the pupil
- Waiting for the pupil's reaction
- Appreciating reciprocal information
- Trying to resolve misunderstandings
- Using verbal and nonverbal communication in general and facial expressions in particular
- Striving for insight
- Recognising and accepting the pupil's feelings, needs and individual learning strategies
- Repeating and clarifying instruction in accordance with assumed individual needs
- Giving positive feedback and praise in oral and written form
- Mediating the classroom dialogue in order to support the understanding of all pupils in general and pupils with hearing impairment and other disabilities specifically (Johnsen et al, 2020)

On request, one of the classroom teachers sums up what communication means to her:

- To understand the pupil
- To communicate on the pupil's level
- To try and see all pupils equally well
- To consider pupils' different possibilities to thrive both inside and outside of school
- To communicate academically means to adapt dialogue to each individual pupil

In the everyday schooling, communication is partly systematically planned and partly "automatic" and tacit. This is the case for the three classroom teachers. They tell about informal and planned individual dialogues. The flexible organisation of schooldays creates opportunities for communication with the whole class, groups and individual pupils. The typical arenas for communication with groups and pupils are mainly when they work in groups or individually. Pupils with special educational needs of some kind get more attention than others. The three classroom teachers are observed using a combination of different approaches in the communication with the whole class in order to adapt to their pupils' different levels of understanding and mastery. Each teacher does this in their own style and adapted to pupils' ages and interests. During the first years of schooling, informal talks with single pupils are observed in several situations, such as in the

classroom's doorway as the teacher greets the pupils by shaking hands. Individual talks take place in connection with adaptations of weekly plans. The majority of pupils like to work in pairs or groups, while a few work individually; the classroom teacher is observed giving the latter group special attention. Disagreements and quarrels among pupils occur on all age levels, and all three teachers use a combination of individual talks and joint dialogues in such occasions. The first teacher states that "… it is necessary to follow up each pupil individually concerning their wellbeing at school". The teachers' dialogues with their pupils also serve as relational models. Educating the pupils in communication is an important interdisciplinary part of schooling, starting in first grade and continuing throughout school. It prepares the pupils to present information, discuss, search for clarification as well as participate and cooperate with their peers and others. It educates them in the nuances of dialogue such as turn taking and the crucial component of dialogue that Rinaldi (2001) describes as the pedagogy of listening.

Thus, according to the teachers, relational communication is a professional educational aspect of high relevance when interacting with all pupils, and of special importance when interacting with pupils who have difficulties, disabilities and special needs. When discussing this topic, they often characterise positive relational communication as 'care'.

## Care

Given the close connection between communication and care, why establish care as another main aspect of the curricular relation approach? Similar to communication, care represents an extended professional understanding compared to traditional narrow discipline- or knowledge focused education. It emphasises that positive learning depends on the satisfaction of basic human needs (Rye, 2005), including a sense of belonging, love, acceptance, recognition and respect. Therefore, we need to be aware of not only the pupil, but the whole child – and adolescent – within their social and cultural context. We also need to be aware of the joint cultural heritage and conditions that we share with our pupils – with their potential for joy as well as barriers, disappointments and traumas. Having knowledge about and caring for pupils' personal living conditions and the whole range of their developmental potential and needs is a challenge for educators (Johnsen, 2020a; Johnsen et al, 2020). How is care manifested and discussed? Caring relations between educators and pupils fall under the following categories:

a)   focus on the whole child/adolescent
b)   a sense of belonging
c)   recognition
d)   supporting pupils' experience of mastery
e)   supporting expression of feelings
f)   sharing personal experiences
g)   encouraging peer cooperation and care
h)   having awareness of the pupil inside and outside the classroom and school
i)   participation in developing coping and mastering strategies

These categories, which are taken from the international comparative studies (Johnsen et al, 2020), are also found in the Norwegian case. The teachers point to the importance of knowing every single pupil well, and they tell about their "working principles" supporting their awareness of care; a) the prevention or precautionary principle; b) the principle of flexibility; and c) of seeing all and leaving nobody behind. They both inform about and show results of awareness campaigns for care between peers, for instance anti-bullying and peer cooperation campaigns as well as "wellbeing rules". However, care is accompanied by concerns – for different reasons. Some concerns lead to cooperation with external professional partners, including cooperation with child welfare services. The school principle tells:

> A few years ago, cooperation with external caring professions was rarely considered necessary, but it seems that the conditions for an increasing number of families have become difficult for different reasons. Consequently, today we have regular meetings in a group of national and municipal welfare agencies in child- and social welfare as well as health, working towards achieving coordinated support.

## Interrelations, dilemmas and challenges

This article is a brief summary of how the case school teaches in accordance with pupils' different levels of mastery and needs for support within the community of the class. The selected examples concern social and academic inclusion. The findings are structured in didactic-curricular areas or categories. Self-evidently, an article of this limited size only refers to a small number of examples. The focus is to describe and discuss activities that contribute to individually adapted teaching, learning and development within the community of the class and thereby to inclusion. The study also reveals several dilemmas and challenges in the process of developing inclusion, such as the following:

- In the process of getting to know a pupil, there may be many dilemmas when sorting out what is important, what might be useful to keep in mind and what is irrelevant and should be forgotten.
- A main dilemma and challenge in assessment is finding and confirming a realistic level of mastery and learning opportunity without causing negative labelling. This dilemma also applies to the use of special content and methods.
- There are dilemmas connected to organising workshops and courses outside the classroom. In the case school, intensive training workshops of specific skills, such as in reading or arithmetic, are practiced. They are as a rule initially fascinating and popular and fellow pupils compete to join their classmates. However, after a while the pupils who need the extra teaching go alone out of the classroom – sometimes reluctantly, as confirmed in observations. The dilemma is that the workshops clearly provide important support in the learning process, as indicated by the progress made by the three pupils attending the workshops, all of whom acquire excellent reading skills. On the other hand, pupils says that leaving their classroom is sometimes uncomfortable. The question about why they have to leave their classroom is often asked in the inclusion discourse. A counter question is why is organisation in individual, pairs and groups with out-of-classroom tasks used so seldom for different kinds of tasks and pupils on all achievement levels?
- Several dilemmas are identified between national policies and the school's needs for individual flexibility. This happens even though Norwegian national curriculum is a framework curriculum that has a certain amount of flexibility including opportunities to make exceptions. The teachers point to increasing national demands concerning learning content. They argue that national and international assessment programmes, specifically OECD's PISA programme, direct the attention on national and school competitions while the emphasis on pupils' well-being is fading.
- Practicing resource-based communication and care is an ever-present professional challenge. The three teachers show in their practice that it is possible to practice professional care and resource-based communication alongside academic quality; seeing and hearing every single pupil in the community of the class. One teacher argues:

  "It is not for nothing that teaching is called a caring profession, but care and neutrality do not go comfortably together. Professionalism lies in striving to care even-handedly."

# Trustworthiness and authenticity of the case study

Qualitative studies seek to uncover detailed data about the circumstances, activities and contexts of a phenomenon. "The quality of qualitative studies" depends on every part of the study being subjected to an examination of possible deficiencies or bias and that these are described and discussed in the research report. As mentioned, the longitudinal classroom study of inclusive practices is an instrumental single case study where selected practises are described in detail. Moreover, these practises are evidence-based through non-participatory and participatory classroom observations and open interviews based on pre-informed themes with classroom teachers and principal (Simons, 2015; Stake, 1995). Several scholars have discussed and refined methodological aspects of qualitative research, such as Stake (1995), Denzin (2009) and Creswell & Poth (2018), to mention three outstanding scholars. Different scholars emphasise slightly different evidential criteria. However, most of the mentioned criteria are covered by the two complementary main concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1986/2007), which are used in the following quality check.

**Trustworthiness** is evaluated via credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability.

*Credibility* concerns "the truth value" of a phenomenon, or if a study is perceived as being "true", or valid, from preparation to presentation by researcher and participants, who in this case are the classroom teachers and school administration. Thus, the following steps evaluate the truth-value:

- Preparation phase: Research plan, selection of case, information to stakeholders, who are 1) the municipal school office, 2) the three classroom teachers, 3) all teachers at the case school, 4) all parents pupils in the case class; and 5) securing anonymity.
- Explicit theoretical foundation: Special needs and didactic-curricular relation approach concerning individual adaptations in the community of the class (Johnsen, 2014b) together with culture-historic theory of teaching, learning and development, as discussed in research plans (Johnsen, 2013a; 2013b).
- Implementation phase: A set of research procedures is applied in order to omit biases and strengthen joint perceptions of the study's truth value or credibility: a) prolonged engagement in the field in the longitudinal study (four years); b) triangulation of method: participatory and non-participatory

observations, open interviews with pre-informed themes, material and text gathering and analysis; c) observations and interviews about focus topics and context; d) thick descriptions of individually adapted teaching-learning processes within the community of the class (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Geertz,1973; Guba, 1981; Moon et al, 2016; Northcote, 2012; Tracy, 2010).

*Confirmability* is about whether reported findings are answers to the research issue or the result of research bias. A set of "control mechanisms" are constructed in order to account for possible biases: a) revealing underlying assumptions of the research issue; b) ensuring that interpretations and conclusions are grounded in evidence by reporting the classroom teachers' experiences and views; c) the emic perspective of the classroom teachers are strengthened by their internal auditing or member checking. Thus, researcher's notes from selected interviews are checked by the first teacher and revised accordingly. Member checks of the two other teachers are until now limited to clarifications and discussions, d) methodological descriptions such as these are intended to minimise or, at best, avoid biases (Gill, Gill & Roulet, 2018; Guba, 1981; Moon et al, 2016; Northcote, 2012).

*Dependability* concerns the stability and consistency of findings in qualitative studies. Qualitative or naturalistic studies are not suitable for direct replications of the kind that are used in controlled quantitative studies, since contexts are crucial aspects of qualitative research. However, logical, consistent and approximately similarly perceived processes and findings are hallmarks of trustworthiness. Armstrong (2010) applies the concept of accuracy in her arguments for recommended steps to verify findings and interpretations, including triangulations, stepwise replications and internal audits, mentioned above (Gill, Gill & Roulet, 2018; Guba, 1981; Moon et al., 2016; Northcote, 2012).

*Transferability* concerns whether results of a study can be transferred to other contexts, and hence the truth-value of replicating. Transferability depends upon thick descriptions, meaning description of the case in context. This has been compared to external validity in quantitative research, or the validity of applying the conclusions of a scientific study outside the context of that study. In other words, it concerns the extent to which the results can be generalized to and across other situations, people, stimuli, and times. Some scholars within qualitative research indicate (Stake, 1995) or argue explicitly for techniques for generalising from a single case (Simons, 2015). The stand in this article is

that qualitative case studies are not generalisable in traditional sense, but may be transferable if they meet the requirements mentioned above; that they are presented as thick descriptions and meet requirements of trustworthiness; that is, fit to be replicated in other contexts. Only after a considerable number of replications the question of generalisability is relevant for case studies such as this (Anney, 2014; Gill, Gill & Roulet, 2018; Guba, 1981; Johnsen, 2020b; Johnsen et al, 2020; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Moon et al, 2016; Schwandt, 2007; Shenton, 2004).

**The authenticity perspective** of quality draws the attention to a dimension that is unique for ideographic, qualitative research characterized by its "… relativist ontology and an interactive, value-bounded epistemology" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986: 20). While conventional experimental methodologies are based on value neutrality, naturalistic, qualitative methodology is based on value awareness. How is it possible to account for the authentic value position of a qualitative inquiry? Lincoln and Guba (1986) introduce five criteria that followers are in the process of developing further. These are a) fairness, b) ontological authenticity, c) educative authenticity, d) catalytic authenticity, and e) tactical authenticity (Johnsen, 2020b; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Manning, 1997; Schwandt, 2007; Shannon & Hambacher, 2014). The question of evidence in this case study is attempted answered through examining these aspects in addition to trustworthiness.

*Fairness* concerns the argument that qualitative studies are constructed in accordance with value systems that are accounted for (Johnsen, et al, 2020) in this case study, as discussed in the following:

- The theoretical pillars are "cultural-historical" approach to teaching, learning and development in context (Vygotsky, 1978) and the didactic-curricular perspective on inclusive practices (Johnsen, 2013a; 2014b)
- The classroom study is based on international values stated as the universal declaration of human rights (UN, 1948), children's rights (UN, 1989), the rights of persons with disabilities (UN, 2006), and the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) introducing the principle of the inclusive school, and also the Norwegian Education Act (1998 with amendments) and Curriculum for the 10-year compulsory school in Norway (L 1997).

The second main aspect of fairness concerns that participants and other stakeholders have a voice in the inquiry. Thus, as mentioned above, parents and all teachers at the case school have been informed and given their consent to the study. During the longstanding or prolonged engagement in the case study, the classroom

teachers and headmaster have participated in open interviews and dialogues. Key information has been peer debriefed and subjected to member reflections in the dialogues. The full draft of this article will be sent to the key informants for internal auditing. Theoretical basis has not been discussed in the case school, but questions of school policies together with pupils' rights and needs have been frequently commented on. The case study has been presented at an international conference. The draft is sent to peer reviewers for external auditing. In spite of the limited article format, contextual aspects are connected to descriptions. In this way, the construction and value system of this qualitative classroom study are shared and discussed to a certain extent with main informants, and research colleagues.

*Ontological and educative authenticity* occur when the participants gain a) increased experience with a phenomenon's complexity; in this case the classroom study, and b) an awareness that the inquiry and cooperation has led to increased understanding of different value systems. The open interviews with the three classroom teachers and headmaster have taken place as dialogues which shared information exchange accompanied by increased awareness of the practitioners as well as the researcher; i) by the teachers about the value of individually adapted teaching and inclusion; and ii) by the researcher about the complexity of everyday teaching and learning processes and wellbeing of all pupils.

*Catalytic and tactical authenticity* concerns the innovative power of qualitative research. Thus, assessment of catalytic authenticity focuses on examining if and how the inquiry process stimulates stakeholders' engagement. The criterion for tactical authenticity is whether the findings lead to participants' empowerment or impoverishment. A fair answer to the four authenticities might be that the dialogues throughout the longitudinal classroom study have gained attention and awareness of participating teachers as well as school administration. However, assessing the authenticities using systematised questions has not been submitted to the informants. This may, however, take place in conjunction with the presentation of the study and its findings (Geertz, 1973; Johnsen, 2020b; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Manning, 1997; Schwandt, 2007; Shannon & Hambacher, 2014; Simons, 2015).

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