BOUNDARIES IN SCHOOL: EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS FOR PUPILS PERCEIVED AS DIFFERENT

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Abstract: This paper analyses the contradictions in the Swedish school organisation between the intentions of an implemented integration of pupils with disabilities, and the actual dramatic increase of pupils enrolled in special units. The study is a multiple case study of the functions and conditions of special support in differentiated educational settings (such small teaching groups, special units, co-operation classes) based on interviews with special educators and observations in three schools with such differentiated groups in the county of Stockholm. None of the studied groups were homogeneous, but most of the children in them had in common some kind of vulnerability. The potential or actual reactions of teachers and peers in the regular settings seem to be a common criterion for placement in the differentiated setting. Psycho-medical diagnoses were not always a prerequisite for enrolment in the special units; they were not always accurate and they were not sufficient to get special support. Problematic aspects that would have to be changed, in a school valuing individual differences, are the funding system, the grading system, the working methods, the attitudes towards parents and the personnel's competence regarding disability. Theoretical implications such as the compartmentalisation of values and goals are presented, and some further investigative tasks are suggested.

Introduction

The school situation for pupils with disabilities in Sweden appears to be contradictory. Although the official policy for an improved inclusion of disabled pupils in schools seems to work, in practice there are tendencies towards the opposite.

When pupils with learning difficulties are integrated into the basic compulsory school, it is not usually the inclusive integration which dominates (the child attends lessons in the regular classroom), but rather the segregating integration (the child is placed in other separated groups or units for some or all lessons) (Haug, 1998). These groups have less pupils than the regular classes have.

Inclusion is based on the concept that all human beings are unique and on an acknowledgement and appreciation of heterogeneity. These values and practices

do not appear to be widespread in the Swedish basic compulsory school, especially for learning disabled persons, in spite of the ideas of solidarity and togetherness expressed in the concept "a school for everybody".

There are two other types of schools for learning or intellectually disabled pupils, in addition to the basic compulsory schools: *grundsärskola* (special units) and *träningsskola* (training school). These schools are often placed in or near a compulsory school, being thus "physically integrated" in the same building. There are also "co-operation classes" in some municipalities, with both pupils eligible for special units and basic compulsory school. Additional resources that are available in these special units and co-operation classes are allocated according to *documented* special needs (autism, brain damage, mild to moderate intellectual disability for the special units, and severe intellectual disability for the training school). There are also other groups ("small teaching groups") in some municipalities, where pupils placed in a basic compulsory class attend lessons for periods varying from a few hours each week to almost all the lessons (Karlsson & Sandh, 1999). These pupils may have attention or behaviour problems or specific learning difficulties in some subject, and they are therefore usually not eligible for special units.

The tendencies toward segregation in compulsory school can be seen as a manifestation of the school's *normalising power*; normalisation as a coercive principle enforces homogeneity in a system with *formal equality* (Foucault, 1974/1987). According to Söder (1997), there was an emphasis on equality and conformity, rather than specificity and diversity, in the policy for social integration of disabled persons. This can be seen as one of the paradoxes of the policy of integration.

Nevertheless, in the past, the Swedish compulsory school has been accessible for pupils with mild intellectual disability. Some of them have completed their studies without being labelled disabled, according to results from the national longitudinal study (*UGU-project, Utvärdering Genom Uppföljning av elever*, Evaluation through the the follow up of students) (Sonnander, Emanuelsson & Kebbon, 1993, Emanuelsson, 1997). This gives indications to understand why the percentage share of pupils labelled as intellectually disabled was low in Sweden, compared with other countries.

It would seem that things have since changed. A greater number of pupils in basic compulsory school are enrolled in special units - from 0.61% in 1993 to 1.2% in 1999 (Skolverket, 1998, 1999, 2000). In the course of seven years the number of pupils in the compulsory school for intellectually disabled has increased by 50%. The largest relative increase of pupils is in the special units,

where numbers have increased by 62% (Skolverket, 2000, p. 20).

The criteria for placement in special units are based upon an essentially static definition of intellectual ability. Intellectual ability can be defined either in a static and one-dimensional way or in a multidimensional and dynamic way. This places an emphasis on developmental potentials, through the interaction with a stimulating environment (Bronfrenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Fischbein & Lange, 2000) and on the role that self-efficacy has in sustaining and making possible good performances (Bandura, 1997).

School has two functions in society (T. Parsons, 1959); it socialises individuals to become good citizens according to the values of that society, and it selects individuals suitable for different tasks. The increasing number of pupils in special units seems to indicate that the function of *selection* in education is more dominant than in the past. But if the *selection processes* lead to marginalisation and less opportunities for some pupils, they can also be in conflict with some of the declared *socialisation values* - democratic education, solidarity, tolerance and appreciation of diversity.

Mintzberg's study of the configurations of power in organisations can be useful when looking at the school system. Organisations work towards different and often contrasting goals. Mintzberg (1983) describes different types of goals in organisations, such as mission, operational and systems goals. The *goals* are defined as intentions behind decisions and actions. The *mission* of an organisation describes the basic function of the organisation in the society. If the educational system has two main functions in society, socialisation and selection, then we consider these as coexisting missions. There can be a discrepancy between the declared official goals and the goals that become visible in the decisions taken within the organisation. The mission can be a goal for the organisation but it need not be that, according to Mintzberg. The mission of socialisation is concretised in the new curriculum in the formal goals of education for democracy, respect, and autonomy. The mission of selection is pursued through the goal of achievement, concretised in operational goals of achievement in different subjects, where the 'core' subjects are particularly important.

The system's goals are pursued to some extent within all organisations. They are survival, control, efficiency and growth. A system's goal that is important for our analysis is *efficiency*. Efficiency ('do things right'), which is not the same as effectiveness ('do the right things'), "...means the greatest benefit for the cost" (p. 268). Though efficiency seems at first a perfectly neutral, value-free concept, Mintzberg shows how it is in practice associated

with the *economic* system of values: "An obsession with efficiency can mean a dominance of economic goals over social ones that drives the organisation beyond an economic morality to a social immorality" (p. 272).

Organisations deal with and reconcile all goals with different strategies. (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 263). Maximisation occurs when one goal is treated as primary and is perpetually pursued, while all the other goals are treated as constraints, i. e. if a school trying primarily to attain high results in achievement, consequently refuses admission to pupils who might perform poorly. When making decisions in an organisation that treats goals as constraints, only minimum levels need to be attained. Organisations attend multiple goals sequentially (p. 259) when attending different goals at different times, trying to solve one problem at a time. A school might try to keep costs down one year, and then try to keep standards up next year. The alternating attention to goals can often build a cyclic pattern (p. 261).

The Swedish schools are funded by the local municipalities, but they follow a common national curriculum. Control of the schools and municipalities is the responsibility of the National Agency for Education. The decentralisation of the school's steering system, more weakly controlled by the state, leads to increased influence by local administrators. This typically may direct the school organisation to run the systems goals (i. e. efficiency), overriding the specific mission goals of the organisation (displacement of mission goals by systems goals). The decentralised school system may thus be more like a Machine Bureaucracy as a 'closed system', (p.312) impenetrable to the control of central authorities and not concerned with the mission, when the most powerful internal 'influencers' are administrators and bureaucrats at the local level, who think of the employers essentially as "unskilled workers" with limited discretionary power, and tend to neglect dispersed external 'influencers' (e. g. parents). The schools may also function as a Meritocracy in its two forms: it may function as a Professional Bureaucracy, if the personnel has professional influence, or as an Adhocracy if the personnel with different competencies co-operate to pursue a common goal.

Skrtic (1991) has used some of these conceptualisations in an analysis of special education in school organisations. The processes of marginalisation and specialisation, for example, have been described as modalities in a Professional Bureaucracy to resist external pressure and avoid a substantive *change* in the organisation of activities (Skrtic, 1997).

Schools have to deal with multiple and conflicting goals, but they also have to deal with fragmented authorities. The *fragmentation* (Meyer & Scott) has to

do with a lack of co-ordination and integration and is a common characteristic of the fragmented rationalised world environment (p. 51).

Foucault's (1982) analysis of power in the state's political structure as a *combination* of "individualization techniques, and of totalization procedures" (p. 213) can also be useful in understanding the processes leading to an increasing number of students being defined as intellectually disabled. The *totalising* form of power *ignores* the individuals and their rights, and looks only at the interest of the totality; the individualising form of power *categorises* the individuals through a "scientific or administrative inquisition which determines who one is" (p. 212).

An institutional analysis (Scott & Meyer, 1994, Skrtic, 1995) is concerned with the relations and conflicts between the normative system and the material structure of organisations. The contradictions identifiable in our analysis of the school organisation are found at different levels:

- Goals: democratic ideals and goals of inclusive education vs. selection through curriculum goals and national assessment procedures;

- Values: appreciation and evaluation of all human beings vs. hierarchical classification and exclusion;

- Rights and interests: personal rights and interests to adequate education and support vs. "common management interests" and reduced personal power (e.g. priority of communal vs. specific areas of intervention, or priority of community vs. individuals interests);

- Change: the school has to change to meet the child's experiences and conditions, or the child has to change, being placed in a specialised and segregated group;

- Distribution of resources: uniqueness and flexibility vs. homogeneity and standardisation;

- Definition of intellectual ability: definition based upon an emphasis on developmental potential or upon a static view of ability.

These contradictions represent the theoretical framework of this study. It is important to take into account that these can have different meanings for those concerned (children, parents, sometimes teachers), by decision makers (team professionals, heads, local administrators), or by those who are influential in taking resolutions, creating opinions, or making analyses (policymakers, handicap organisations, researchers, etc.).

Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate the boundaries between the "normal" and the "different" at school by analysing differences between ordinary and differentiated school settings. The boundaries between these groups and their meanings are not directly observable, but they are supposed to emerge and to be understandable when looking at educational settings which are differentiated and - at least to some extent - segregated from the regular (such as special units, co-operation classes, small teaching groups) in the compulsory school system, and answering the following questions:

- What are the functions of differentiated educational settings (special units, co-operation class, small groups) in the school organisation?
- What are the criteria and conditions for getting special support in these settings?
- What are the differences between regular classes and differentiated educational settings with regard to the working methods and practices?
- What are the relations between teachers working in regular classes and teachers working in differentiated educational settings?

What are the relations between children in regular classes and children in differentiated educational settings?

These observations and their analyses are be used to argue about how regular school should accommodate the conditions and experiences of all pupils.

Method

This is a multiple case study (Yin, 1994) of functions and conditions of support in differentiated educational settings, based on observations of the activity in three of these and interviews with the special educators working in them (small teaching group, STG; co-operation class, CC; and a special unit's class, SU) in different municipalities in the Stockholm area.

The special educators are participants in the ESV project (*Elever i Specialpedagogisk Verksamhet* - Pupils in special educational activities) (Fischbein et al., 1997). They form part of a network of special educators and researchers who have been meeting regularly since 1996, to discuss issues from practice and research and to share their different experiences. The ESV project follows the school situation of pupils who are receiving special support. This project has an interactional approach whereby the characteristics of both the pupils and of the school environment and organi-

sation are taken into account. An interactional view of disability implies that the disability arises through interactions between individual and environmental factors, including socio-cultural ones, in a complex course of events over time. This study explores some differentiated educational settings in the school organisation, intended for pupils with intellectual disabilities, brain damage, autism and communicative disorders, to find concrete examples of meanings and contents operating in the differentiated educational settings. We have then interpreted and structured these meanings and contents from our own observations.

The schools under observation are located in the county of Stockholm. Two schools are in low SES multicultural areas, and one is in a middle SES, culturally more homogeneous area. Two groups consisted of pupils aged between 7 and 12 and the third was a group of 13- to 15-year-olds. There was a special educator and an assistant working in the special unit SU, a special educator and two assistants in the co-operation class CC, and two special educators in the small teaching group STG (often not working at the same time). The groups consisted of 8 to 10 pupils. In the group for older pupils (STG), some pupils only had some of their lessons in this small group with the special educator. They spent the other lessons in other small groups with subject teachers.

Two groups were observed twice (STG, CC) and the third group was observed once (SU), for at least four lessons. Texts written by the pupils about their school have also been investigated (Westling Allodi, submitted). The same researcher also gathered information by means of semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with the special educators. The areas of interest included the *boundaries* between normal and different, the marginalisation processes and the interaction between agents, but we began with open questions about the group activities. This allowed the interviewees to talk about situations and problems based on their own experiences and not (too much) on the researcher's formulations or understanding. If the special educator did not address an issue spontaneously, more specific questions about it were asked.

The special educators answered with openness and trust because of our previous participation in the network of special educators in the ESV project. The interviews took place in available rooms at the schools in two cases, and in the classroom after lessons in the third. The interviews were from 45 minutes to 2 hours, and they were taped and transcribed.

The cases in this study are considered to reflect particular situations that are related to the institutional theory with its interest for the contradictions between normative system and material

structure (Skrtic, 1995), configuration theory on the modalities of reconciliation of contrasting goals in organisations and configurations (Mintzberg, 1983), and to the theory of interaction between child and educational environment (Fischbein et al., 1997) through an *analytical* generalisation (Yin, 1995, p. 36). The validity of this study resides in its connection with the theories and in its contribution to the theories such as confirmation, development or change.

The fact that this study has a *multiple* case design improves its validity; if the results obtained from the cases are similar, the replication is said to have taken place (Yin, 1995). This study is grounded also on multiple *sources of evidence* consisting of interviews, direct observations, texts and documents. The *key informants' review* of a draft of the study has also been carried out. This procedure has been identified as "a way of corroborating the essential facts and the evidence presented". (...) The informants and participants may still disagree with an investigator's conclusions and interpretations, but these reviewers should not disagree over the actual facts of the case" (Yin, 1995, p. 144). The informants' review can be considered a validating procedure, which also compensates a possible weakness of the design, namely the fact that the observations and the interviews were carried out by only one investigator.

Special educational research has to handle ethical questions and practical problems in gathering information about practices and pupils.

> *A general problem in special educational research is to get access to pupils who receive special educational support. This type of information is often confidential, and teachers, parents and pupils are naturally suspicious and afraid of misuse. Investigating pupils is therefore a time-consuming and dedicated job, to ensure the participation and co-operation of everybody involved. A traditional approach to educational research is often not feasible, and ideally a person who has a close and continuous relation to the pupil and parents should be responsible for the introduction, data collection and interpretation of results* (Fischbein et al., 1997, p. 48).

In this study the participation of pupils, parents and teachers was voluntary and all these persons had the option of refusing to participate.

The functions of the differentiated educational settings

One of the interviewed special educators has observed that the number of pupils in special units is increasing. This tallies with the observations made by the National Agency for Education

(Skolverket, 1999). According to the special educator, children are more frequently being placed in special units after having been in a basic compulsory class for a considerable period.

> *It's not the first year pupils who come. (...) They start off at compulsory school and then when they're not getting anywhere there, they come here. And then you've got to start all over again. By then the damage has already been done. (...) And then the kids have already had time to become failures.* (SU)

This seldom happened before, when the children who were eligible for special units were usually identified at an earlier stage. The special units now also have to accept pupils who have a less evident developmental impairment compared with before, but who are unable to fulfil basic compulsory school requirements. These pupils cannot match the increased 'pace of life' (Wendell, 1996) in regular school nor can they meet the higher expectations of 'normal' social and/or intellectual performance at school.

> *I've thought a lot about my three oldest pupils. And asked myself, what are the limits and what's gone well...(...). They should be able to attend regular classes, it shouldn't really be impossible. These children are incredibly friendly and nice and ... And at the same time I've thought, sure, but this kid finds things so difficult.. (...) Our children aren't given the time they need at school. (CC)*

> *I wonder if in fact they* (the pupils in the group) *haven't become a bit more clever. I think...yes...they are so clever! And then perhaps I take a look at a compulsory school class and notice that, oh, whoops!.. (SU)*

It is difficult to say what the three small groups had in common; the special educators described none of them as homogeneous. *Lower achievement* was a characteristic of most children in the groups, but it was not a common criterion for all the pupils. There were some pupils in each of those special groups who attained the necessary achievement level for the basic compulsory class for their age group.

Each group also had some pupils with problematic or very problematic family situations. Other pupils had problems with relationships, communication and/or attention. Many pupils who come from a regular class to the small group show a fragile self-confidence, according to the special educators.

Teachers and peers in the regular class may have regarded pupils who actually were in the differentiated setting as *different*, i.e. *weak*, *odd* or *slow*. The principal problem in one case was that the child, who otherwise performs within norms, 'looks retarded' (school physican statement, reported by the spesial educator).

The children in those groups seem to need *support in instruction,* but also **or** sometimes only *protection from their peers.*

One special educator was concerned that theoretical demands in the school were too high, with a corresponding devaluation of other human qualities. The pupils in the small group are indeed competent in many ways. They are not 'wholly disabled', in the special educator's eyes, but those who don't attain the required performance level and the marks needed to be admitted into high school, feel that they are generally bad and worthless. They have resources and qualities that could be appreciated in the society, but society (through school) signals that they are neither wanted nor useful.

> *Many of my pupils will be good at lots of other things (...) They get good grades in practical and artistic subjects. They* (the grades) *don't count when you want to go further. Then you have to manage the core subjects (Swedish language, English language, Math). (...)*
>
> *These pupils (...) would be able to manage the work really well. They are very hard-working/competent. (...) I believe you have to work so much more with the* (their) *strong sides. (STG)*

Criteria and conditions for special support

The boundaries between *normal* and *different* cannot be defined as absolute, instead they are negotiable. Some pupils in special units have not yet received a *medical-psychological diagnosis* which should be a condition for the enrolment in special units[1]. In one group there is a seven-year-old girl who has not received a diagnosis yet. It will take at least three years before an investigation is made into her situation, since the policy of the psycho-medical team is to give priority to children still at regular school. In this case, the investigation and the diagnosis are therefore not a prerequisite for the support and the placement. Her parents have requested an investigation to get an explanation of her behaviour and some possible treatment.

If the official diagnosis does not coincide with the educators' observations in the class, they try to suggest that a new investigation be carried out. A boy placed in the special units at age 9 showed very good learning results after a while, and the special educator suggested that another placement would be better for him. The special educator believed that his previously low results were due to the fact that he was bullied and threatened by some children in the regular class. This prevented him from performing well. The diagnosis and the decision for placement in special units were founded primarily on psycho-

logical tests showing poor performance, but not on a deeper investigation into its causes in interaction with the social environment.

A common criterion for placement of most of the children may be that they can be seen as *different*, which often makes them *vulnerable* and/or *troublesome*, and for all the children, the potential or real *reactions* (i.e. rejection, impatience, aggression, misunderstanding) of teachers and pupils in a regular class. The vulnerability accounts for the *support*, received in the differentiated groups, and these reactions account for the *separation*. Placement in the differentiated groups seems to derive from both.

These two criteria for placement in a small group were in evident contradiction in one case: a physically bigger boy, showing aggressive and dominating behaviour at school, was partially assigned to the differentiated group, despite the fact that he might start bullying the pupils there. The special educator noted that the presence of this "big boy" made some of the other boys nervous and afraid. There were thus pupils in the differentiated groups, who could be defined not as vulnerable, but rather troublesome.

Some resources (the special after-school recreation centre and school transport) are allocated according to the registration into special units, not according to the psycho-medical diagnosis *per se*. The diagnosis alone is *not enough* to get some kind of support, but it is a condition for enrolment in special units. Support is thus not given to the children for their individual disability, but as, and if, they are enrolled in the school organisation for intellectually disabled (the special units). As some parents choose to avoid the stigma of having their children registered in the special units, they lose some of the opportunities for resources which would otherwise be available for their children. The registration in special units gives in fact the right to support, but it comports also future restrictions in educational and work opportunities. The special educators point out that other parents see the resources as their children's rights and are positive to registration in the special units organisation.

Differences between regular and differentiated settings

One special educator described her pupils' former school situation as unsatisfactory. There was often *inadequate educational interaction* between family and school. Teachers put great demands on or may not accept the pupils and may also mistrust and criticise the parents. Professionals at regular schools often do not recognise and accept the differences i.e. in autistic children's behaviour, as an effect of impairment. They tend to make parents feel guilty about it, assuming that the

child's behaviour depends on the parents being over-protective or lacking moral qualities.

In the differentiated groups, the special educators put great emphasis on a good relationship with the parents. Trust and participation, respect and collaboration between teachers and parents are considered necessary to start a positive learning process for the child.

The special educators individuate other differences between the differentiated groups and the regular class; one difference concerns *time* and *pace*.

> *I don't believe there is any great difference, it's just that it goes much slower (...) They need a lot more practice. (SU)*

> *What I can give them is time. Time is essential and it's important that they have time to really ... well, learn to understand. That's one thing that I can see as being vital and which they don't have in school ... there's an extremely clear boundary there, in my opinion, that they don't give our children time, no, the time they need.... (CC)*

Another difference concerns *responsibility*; pupils in the regular class have to take a lot of responsibility for their schoolwork and results. In the special unit, for instance, the teachers take more responsibility and are more directive, i.e. in the assignment of schoolwork.

> *School has definitely changed (...) There is much more responsibility, a great amount of responsibility is placed on the pupil. They have to plan their work themselves, that, and then it has to be done during the week, and it's up to the pupils themselves to do it. And not all of them can, not all of them are able to shoulder such responsibility.(SU)*

The special educators work to achieve a personal relationship with each child and his/her parents, and they actively stimulate and comment on the children's work.

> *I become a sort of model as an adult, and then it's like this: yes, adults can be like this too. That there is someone you can totally trust, someone who is there for me (...) Then at least you have something else, if it's been difficult to trust other adults who have just yelled at you and said you were no good. (CC)*

They play a very active role in class management and are always aware of the children's relationships to one another. They analyse what is going on in the group, form an interpretation and then react (active leadership).

> *(...) I'm a rather clear leader for the group (...) the very sensible ones*

think that's good. The ones just leaving the nest aren't so keen about it. (STG)

The regular-class teachers feel obliged to follow the schoolbooks' curriculum subjects closely, while a special educator works with long-term projects which are initiated and shaped through listening to the children (curriculum: from above/from below, more discretion).

You abide by ***the book****; you simply don't dare let go of it* (teachers in compulsory school).
(...) I hadn't worked in the (compulsory) *school so I didn't feel any demands being made on me, that I had to be like the school, instead I contemplated and felt my way forward a little. Most of all, I listened a lot to the children about what they wanted to work with.(CC)*

Another aspect mentioned by a special educator is the life perspective of the pupils in the group compared to the school perspective in much of the schoolwork.

The collaboration with families and the project work can be characteristic of an 'adhocratic' organisation dealing with new problems that require new solutions (Skrtic, 1991).

Boundaries between teachers

Another important boundary is the one between the regular teachers and the special educators. The separation of pupils who are "different from the others" is reflected in the separation between their teachers. One special educator said that colleagues (teaching practical and arts subjects) showed interest in collaborating on projects, but the special educator in the special unit spoke about difficulties in collaborating with regular class teachers. This happens mainly because these teachers give priority to other 'more important' things on the curriculum, rather than collaboration with the special units, which come last ('then that as well').

There seems to be two kinds of collaboration between the regular and the special education teachers and activities: spontaneous, free collaboration, which takes time to develop, and collaboration enforced from above, authorised by the school head.

We didn't have time to plan it during the spring, and then quite suddenly the heads noticed that nothing had happened. So they simply gave orders, or the head of the compulsory school ordered the teachers there; now it will be "the pupils' choice" and we'll do it like this (with a combination of special unit pupils and regular school pupils). *(...) It works really well in that we saw that the children were*

> *happy together, that none of them said 'I'm not working with those children' but we saw that in fact it works fine. (...) It doesn't feel good when you know that the head has forced this through, when it didn't come from the teachers themselves.(...) This* (the difficult co-operation) *is not up to the pupils then, but up to the teachers. (SU)*

The problem of non-existing collaboration between regular teachers and teachers in differentiated groups (according to the latter and their heads) was also found by Karlsson & Sandh (1999).

The special educators were usually not alone in their daily work with the group; they could act as a supervisors/ tutors for the assistants, or, in one case, work together with the assistant as a team. They could liaise with colleagues in other differentiated groups in the school or with specialist teachers. The special educators were therefore used to working together with other teachers or professionals.

Two of the groups (CC, STG) were not physically located in the 'heart' of the school, but in its periphery. The special educators in these groups decided themselves to have classrooms which were more to one side. All the three groups were however expected to move to other premises during next year, because the actuals would be required by other classes. It seems therefore that these groups have to adjust to general interests. If the differentiated groups are a *frontier zone*, there is no consensus in the school about what kind of frontier it actually is. The teachers who work there feel that they do a good job, make an important contribution and believe that the regular settings could learn something from their experiences. They try to define their field of action as an *avant-garde*. However, it seems that the regular class teachers tend to regard the differentiated groups as a *rearguard* (a defensive or conservative element in the organisation).

> *(...) The teachers who had worked for 25 to 30 years didn't consider me, a special educator, to be one of them ... well, what is it that you actually do? What do you do? Because we weren't doing the traditional things. And I didn't feel accepted either. ... You can have these pupils so that we can get a bit of peace and quiet; that's how it felt. When I am working with socially difficult pupils, they accept it much more than when I am working with intellectually weak children. (...) (STG)*

At some schools, teachers of the differentiated groups run the risk of being contaminated themselves by their pupils' stigma, at least in the eyes of some regular class teachers. In a Finnish study of special educators roles (Ström 1996), it was also found that the special educators in some schools identify themselves - or were identified

– with their pupils, in relation to regular class teachers.

Boundaries between children

The relationship between children in differentiated groups and children in regular classes could be of different kinds. One type of relationship was *oppression*. The 'weak' or deviant pupils were not accepted in their peer group and they risked being bullied, according to the special educator.

> *The worst one can be at this school is to have an impairment or to be different. Then it is tough, very tough. This is quite evident... at the secondary school too. (...) To be deviant... it is hard to accept going in the small groups. (STG).*

The texts where pupils describe this school also describe their fears about being threatened and bullied:

> *I'm scared of big boys and they hit someone else and they are tough, spoil things for us when we are playing football.* (Child from STG).

Such a relationship occurs in a school situated in a very poor area with increasing violence and criminality among young people.

> *These kids who already started last year have formed a lot of gangs, where they are grouping themselves, (...) one is supposed to be scared of them, they call themselves Mafia. (...) They blackmail and such things and they are 16-17 years old (...) They are often big guys, they are not afraid of beating or threatening somebody, because they have already been successful in this. It is that way they are accepted. There is a strong connection with our pupils in junior high school. Their brothers are members of these (gangs), then they form 'junior gangs' (...) they say 'if you don't do this... **then!**' and they* (the pupils) *are scared by these* (gangs). (...) *They commit robberies (...) They assault adults and break into houses; these are very serious crimes, (they have) a lot of weapons.* (STG)

The processes of *oppression* that groups of pupils can exert (bullying, scorn, threats, violence, exploitation) towards physically or mentally weak or different pupils can also be seen as (surely more violent, more explicit) parallel processes to the *selection* processes which the school, as an organisation, and society itself maintain, but also based on other "weaknesses". It is hardly a coincidence that these phenomena occur in a marginal area, where alienation, in its different senses, is an experience shared by many people.

Another kind of relationship could be *interest*. In this case, the children's spontaneous play which was observed by the researcher can be considered as a

'celebration' and an 'enjoyment' – if one may call it that – of her and her diversity, which seems to interest the children. This kind of relationship was observed among younger children and in the school located in a socially quiet area, and is also referred to by the special educator.

> *The girls in the (regular) primary school class took care of the little 'Down's syndrome girl' here, because she is just... it was fun to play with her, because...well, she is so sweet. And they ...so to speak... it was such a kind of mascot thing (...) they were playing in a big ring of* (regular class-) *children and then she was in the middle and then...that was how they played together. (SU)*

Children in the regular setting can defend or protect the children in the differentiated educational setting, as this episode referred by the special educator illustrate, where a boy in a regular class defended the children - and particularly a boy - in a special unit from other children offending him:

> *He stood up and started to defend these children* (in a special unit) *and said 'I know for sure that they are really OK, and they know this and that. And I know that he is OK because I have worked with him'.* (SU)

Some relationships occur in organised forms in the special units for one lesson each week. The pupils in regular classes and special units can choose a course together from a number of different subjects (called 'pupils' choice'). Another *collaboration* and *support* relationship was organised between older pupils in junior high school and the special units. The pupils from the higher courses were "excellent" with the children in the special unit's group, who liked meeting the older pupils very much. However, since the regular teachers did not support and encourage this, it came to an end.

There are examples which illustrate that other kinds of relationships between children with different abilities occur.

> *You can see this here on the breaks (...) that our children, they don't seek out compulsory school children and compulsory school children don't seek out our children. It happens sometimes, sometimes it happens.*

> *It works well to collaborate at primary school courses, but the higher they get in the grades, the more difficult it is, because (...) it is just that they become more different as special unit students.*

It seems that the special educators tend to question whether authentic communication and relationships with peers are really possible, particularly where there is a wide gap in intellectual ability.

Implications for an inclusive school recognising and valuing differences

The special educators express mistrust, based on their experience, about the actual capability of the regular schools system to take adequate care of pupils like their own. An inclusive school would be able to accept children as they are. This means that school has to change, to permit the students to develop and learn at their own pace.

> *Inclusion... I think it's necessary that the schools start to change. (...) I believe you have to think along new lines, and think more about individual development plans and somehow link this together ... if it takes two years for a child to learn what another child maybe learns in six months, then that just has to be accepted, it's all about this basic outlook on people. (CC)*

The expression accept "as *different* rather than reject them as *defective*" (Wendell, 1996, p. 29) can be referred to as a similar standpoint.

Problematic and concrete aspects, which the special educators mentioned, include the different characteristics in the grading system in regular compulsory school and special units, the working methods and the attitude towards the families. People at regular schools also lacked basic knowledge about disabilities and about pupils in special units (similar results are referred to by Mattson, 1994).

These aspects would need to be changed if school wants to become an inclusive organisation which recognises, accepts and appreciates differences, including differences in intellectual and social ability. It seems very important to make teachers in the regular classes and headmasters aware of these issues.

Discussion

School, normality and difference: some considerations

It is not enough to *declare* that schools have to look at the unique situation of each child and recognise and accept heterogeneity in each group. This view has to lead to extensive and revolutionary changes in the school organisation and power relationship, in educational decisions and practices and in people's attitudes towards difference and variation.

Democratic rights of participation and of satisfactory instruction would also weigh heavier in the school organisation than they do nowadays. But the fact that special education resources are often divided equally between classes (Persson, 1999) indicates that the school organisation is still based on *homogeneity*. If the school presumed *heterogeneity*, it would be possible to adapt the organisation (number of pupils in the class, number of teachers, other facilities) to the demands of teachers, parents and pupils, without requiring an official certification for the

pupil's uniqueness *and* the enrolment in a special organisation. This placement can also become an explicit stigma for the pupil who is *defined* as deviating from normality. But, if the school always has a maximum number of pupils in each regular class, with a minimum of qualified resources and is not *truly* concerned with the fact that pupils have experience and ability differences, then this reveals that the economic and bureaucratic aspects of the organisation are overriding democratic educative ideals and individual rights.

This also shows that 'a school for everybody' is not a school for *everybody and each one* but rather a school for those who can *conform*. The school as a normalising institution cannot easily adapt to new demands and changes, failing sometimes even to recognise such demands. The children are often expected to adapt and change in order to be allowed to stay in the regular organisation. Deviation and differing from the 'norm' are still troublesome to the organisation. There seems to be a binary concept of deviation and normality; one is like everybody else, or is deviant. According to this concept, the 'normal people' has to be a homogeneous group. This can explain why differences in a normalising organisation give rise to reactions such as denial, resistance, rejection and segregation.

Overcoming dichotomies in the school organisation

This study confirms some of the contradictions between the norm system and the material structure of the school organisation. It found another contradiction at the level of the connection between teachers. There is in fact an emphasis on collaboration at the normative level and evident difficulties and resistance to do that at the practice level.

The definitions of intellectual ability operating in school could not appear clearly in the investigation; the definition seems to be quite operational and related to the achievement of curriculum goals. It is also important to point out that the general democratic educational values of the normative system are not completely absent (cf. the mission as goal of organisation, Mintzberg, 1983). These ideals seem to be allowed to reappear at the *end* of the school organisation. The special educators working in the differentiated groups argue for democratic ideals and values in society, for appreciation of differences. They assert that these principles inspire their work. Since the differentiated educational settings are relatively isolated in the school organisation, their values and practices do not appreciably affect the rest of the organisation. This fact can be interpreted as a sort of *compartmentalisation* of values and goals and theories of practice within the school organisation. The metaphor of *compart-*

ment is used here to emphasise the presence of tight boundaries between the elements within the organisation. The *compartmentalisation of values* would correspond at other levels to the modality of classification and selection of pupils and also to the separation of disciplines.

The dominant modality to work with contrasting goals (socialisation vs. selection), to refer back to Mintzberg (1983), seems to be a sort of *maximisation*, one in which each part (or *compartment*) of the school organisation works towards *one* of the conflicting goals. Within these parts, the maximisation of one goal seems possible - selection in regular, and socialisation in differentiated settings. But this is an illusion, because the modalities of classification and distribution of students to different groups are themselves in contradiction with the declared goals of socialisation.

Moreover, in this analysis of functions of differentiated groups in the general school organisation, other goals and norms emerge which inspire the decisions and form the organisation, more than the democratic educational ideals. Those goals and norms are covert but powerful in determining the practical solutions taken in the school organisation in the management of "different" pupils. The specialisation among teachers and the supposed homogeneity within groups, are expressions of conventional - and apparently rational - management goals and principles of division of labour, which can be brought back to the system's goal of efficiency. A great part of the school organisation seems to be run with the "business firm" as an uncritical model. Here goals and methods may be "rational" and "functional" in such *profit* organisations, but they are in *severe conflict* with the expressed educational goals which the compulsory school has as a *non-profit* organisation.

To summarise, the conflicting goals seem divided between different sections in the school organisation; the differentiated groups are given the task of living up to the *socialisation* goal, while the regular classes work towards the *selection* goal, which seems more important. These goals were still hierarchically subordinate under the overriding - but not openly expressed - goals of "rational" and "efficient" management of schools.

An important task of further investigations could be to identify and describe examples of alternative methods appropriate to a non-profit organisation, which are *really* effective *and*, above all, in agreement with the declared general goals of school in society, and not in conflict with them.

The increasing number of pupils enrolled in special units seems related to changes in the educational system. The intention of the new curriculum to allow higher achievement levels,

together with its standardised assessments, leads to a perceived supremacy of the selection on the socialisation mission. The democratic ideals of acceptance and integration are actually more weakly enforced in the school system. The decentralisation of authority to the local administrators and to their central organisation (*Kommunförbundet*) leads to the increasing importance of the system's goal of efficiency, instead of the specific mission goals of the school. Concern about *efficient* use of special education resources can enforce, in a big enough municipality, a re-centralisation of these resources and expertise to a particular school district, and an increasing specialisation of the services. Both of these processes can counteract the real opportunity, for parents and children, to choose a general or less restrictive school environment (cf. SFS 1995:1249), and for the school to develop local special educational experience and preparedness.

This study confirms the existence of several conflicts between the declared goals and their applications, or between goals which *are defined* as competitive ("individual rights" vs. "community interests") But it also individuates the task of investigating and conceptualising these contradictions in other *non-competitive* ways, i.e. in ways that can guide changes in the school. These changes benefit all the pupils - and the whole society - *and not only* the disabled children. Recognising and evaluating our differences and peculiarities can be seen as one necessary condition for democracy, benefiting the *whole* society *and each* citizen in it.

The interaction between the child and the educational environment is manifested in the criteria for placement in the differentiated settings, where the perceived *vulnerability* depends both on characteristics of the child's experience as well as on the often inadequate reactions and interactions within the regular educational environment. The need of protection justifying the more segregated setting seems to arise because the regular settings are often difficult to adapt or actually impossible to change, for example to guarantee a more safe or calm environment to pupils who need that.

On the other hand, the label or categorisation of a diagnosis or of a placement in special units would be avoided by some parents who are trying to demonstrate that there is nothing wrong with their children. In other cases, the child's difference could be not recognised and acknowledged as a consequence of impairment by the personnel in the regular setting. In both cases, a sort of *denial* of the difference may occur. Some parents try to *hide* the difference, or parents and professionals have *contrasting explanations* of it, its consequences and the kind of treatment or support that is appropriate. The decisions about support and placement could often imply a great amount of

struggle and negotiation between contrasting explanations of the child's difference. Both the *categorisation* and the *denial* of the difference by the teachers could have harmful consequences for parents and children.

The denial or ignoring of the child's identity and individuality in the regular setting can be defined as an expression of the "totalizing form of power" (Foucault, 1982, p. 213), *ignoring* who we are individually; the categorisation and labelling as condition for support can be seen as an expression of the "individualizing" form of power, *determining* in a constraining way, who we are (Foucault, 1982). The combination of these forms of power manifests itself in the difficulties in the regular setting to take account of students' different experiences, characteristics and of their individual rights, and in the criteria for getting support in the special units, requiring a *definition* of the individual in a category. The conditions for overcoming the dichotomy between denial or ignoring in regular settings, and recognition - but also labelling - in segregated settings should be an area for further investigation.

A study on integration in 14 European countries (Meijer, 1998) indicates that the funding system can inhibit integration processes.

"In some countries, funding is not linked to the pupils, but to the location they are educated. In practice, this means that a referral to a special school is rewarded. Maintaining pupils with special educational needs in mainstream school (...) is insufficiently encouraged. Thus, within such systems of financing a bonus is put on segregation, whilst integration is discouraged" (p. 167).

A more pupil-bound funding system or financial rewards to schools with inclusive educational settings could have thus an important role to prevent further increasing segregation.

An interaction between the work modality (e.g. direct instructions, more teacher responsibility in work planning, close follow-up) in the differentiated groups and achievement corroborates Fischbein's interaction model (1997), where more restrictiveness in educational settings reduces the individual variation and also increases stimulating possibilities for everyone.

The interactions between children in regular and differentiated settings reflected the ambivalent attitudes of school and society. The children in differentiated settings risked being bullied, maybe because of their supposed - or even sanctioned by the differentiated placement- 'weakness'. But one of them could be also 'celebrated' as Oliver (1996, p. 31) suggested. There are also examples of acceptance and appreciation, collaboration and support. This indicates that children

could be able to break the boundaries existing between the regular and the differentiated educational settings in the school organisation.

Summary

The functions of the differentiated educational settings are ambivalent. One function is to take care of the child's vulnerability (giving *support*) and also to avoid bad reactions (*rejection*) in the school environment (*protection*). Another function is to bestow the child with *well-being* (more time, slower pace), but a placement in a differentiated group also exposes the child to the risk of *labelling* and *stigmatisation*. A third function could be seen as representing *opportunity* and the *rights* of the parents and child. In some cases, however, the parents have *no control* over decisions about special support.

The boundaries determining whether or not *a child* is eligible for attending the differentiated groups were not absolute or unequivocal, but negotiable and ambiguous. Sometimes the support and adaptation seems to be given, not purely on the basis of the children's needs (i.e. recognised disability) nor of their individual rights to an adequate education, but through registration in the special school organisation which allocates resources. The boundaries between the regular and special school *organisations* were more clear-cut.

Financial cutbacks in school, together with changes in the organisation such as decentralisation, the demand for efficiency (implying i.e. big classes, age-mixed groups, less teaching resources), the higher intellectual and social demands of the new curriculum, a faster pace of work and methods putting an emphasis on pupils' responsibility and on less reduced direction by the teachers are assumed to contribute to the increasing number of pupils placed in special units.

The child's difference could be unrecognised or unaccepted in the regular settings, and these processes can give rise to self-devaluation. In the special setting, the difference could be recognised and accepted and this could have positive effects on the child's self-concept. However, there was still a risk for stigmatisation.

The differences between regular and differentiated settings concerned parent-school interaction, pace and demands, pupils' responsibility and autonomy, active leadership, collaboration, flexibility and working methods. In one sense, the differentiated groups may have developed some more inclusive and *adhocratic* methodologies to deal with heterogeneity in the group, but these seem not to influence the surrounding school environment.

A modality appears with which the school organisation deals with conflicting goals, called *compart-*

mentalisation of goals and values, which contributes to the establishing and consolidating of *boundaries* at the different levels of the school organisation.

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Notes:

1 According to the preparatory work to the Education Act (förarbeten till skollagen, 1991/92:UbU21, p. 8) a placement in special units should be based on and proceeded by pedagogical, psychological or clinic investigations. A probation period of not more than six months is allowed in uncertain cases. The National Agency for Education (Skolverket) criticises several municipalities who are not following these regulations on school form placement (e.g. Beslut i tillsynsärende Dnr 99:2570, Dnr 2000:282, Dnr 2000:283, Dnr 2000:285, Dnr 2000:286).

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