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Multiprofessional collaboration in inclusive school

Zusammenfassung

Der Text beleuchtet die Bedeutung der multiprofessionellen Zusammenarbeit in inklusiven Schulen, welche essenziell für die erfolgreiche Umsetzung von Inklusion ist. Diese Zusammenarbeit umfasst inter- und intraprofessionelle Kooperationen, bei denen Lehrpersonen mit verschiedenen pädagogischen Fachkräften zusammenarbeiten, um eine optimale Unterstützung für Schülerinnen und Schüler mit unterschiedlichen Bedürfnissen zu gewährleisten. Der Text diskutiert verschiedene Modelle und Ansätze der Zusammenarbeit und beleuchtet Herausforderungen und Chancen. Besonders betont wird, dass eine effektive multiprofessionelle Zusammenarbeit notwendig ist, um die Heterogenität in inklusiven Klassen zu bewältigen und individuelle Lernunterstützung zu bieten. Die Ergebnisse zeigen jedoch, dass diese Zusammenarbeit oft unzureichend entwickelt ist, was die Effektivität der inklusiven Bildung beeinträchtigen kann. Der Text unterstreicht die Notwendigkeit von strukturellen Veränderungen in Schulen und einer stärkeren Unterstützung der Lehrkräfte, um eine erfolgreiche multiprofessionelle Zusammenarbeit zu fördern.

Abstract

The text highlights the importance of multiprofessional collaboration in inclusive schools, which is essential for the successful implementation of inclusion. This collaboration involves inter- and intraprofessional cooperation, where teachers work with various educational professionals to ensure optimal support for students with diverse needs. The text discusses different models and approaches, and emphasizes the challenges and benefits of this collaboration. It is particularly emphasized that effective multiprofessional collaboration is necessary to manage the diversity in inclusive classrooms and to provide individualized learning support. However, the results indicate that this collaboration is often inadequately developed, which can impair the effectiveness of inclusive education. The text underscores the need for structural changes in schools and greater support for teachers to promote successful multiprofessional collaboration.

Advance Organizer

Ziel und Übersicht

Das Kapitel mit dem Titel „Multiprofessionelle Zusammenarbeit in inklusiven Schulen“ untersucht die Bedeutung und Herausforderungen der multiprofessionellen Zusammenarbeit im Rahmen von inklusiven Bildungssystemen. Das Kapitel betont, dass eine erfolgreiche Inklusion die Zusammenarbeit verschiedener Fachleute innerhalb und außerhalb der schulischen Umgebung erfordert.

Zentrale Themen und Konzepte:

1. Inklusive Bildung
 - a) Inklusion ist sowohl eine Philosophie als auch eine Praxis, die gleiche Chancen für alle Schülerinnen und Schüler sicherstellt, indem sie auf deren unterschiedlichen Lernbedürfnisse in regulären Klassenzimmern eingeht. Es geht darum, Bildungssysteme so anzupassen, dass sie alle Lernenden unterstützen, unabhängig von ihren Fähigkeiten oder Behinderungen.
2. Multiprofessionelle Zusammenarbeit
 - a) Dies bezieht sich auf die kooperative Arbeit zwischen verschiedenen Fachleuten – wie allgemein- und sonderpädagogischen Lehrkräften, Therapeuten, Psychologen und Sozialarbeiterinnen und -arbeiter – innerhalb von Schulen, um die inklusive Bildung zu unterstützen. Das Kapitel unterscheidet zwischen interprofessioneller Kooperation (Zusammenarbeit zwischen verschiedenen pädagogischen und therapeutischen Fachkräften) und intra-professioneller Kooperation (Zusammenarbeit zwischen allgemeinen und sonderpädagogischen Lehrkräften).
3. Co-Teaching-Modelle
 - a) Verschiedene Co-Teaching-Strategien werden als wesentlich für inklusive Klassenzimmer hervorgehoben, in denen allgemeine und sonderpädagogische Lehrkräfte gemeinsam arbeiten. Diese Modelle umfassen:
 - One Teach, One Observe: Eine Lehrkraft unterrichtet, während die andere Daten sammelt.
 - Station Teaching: Lehrkräfte teilen den Unterricht unter sich auf.
 - Parallel Teaching: Lehrkräfte präsentieren gleichzeitig das gleiche Material in verschiedenen Gruppen.
 - Alternative Teaching: Eine Lehrkraft konzentriert sich auf eine kleine Gruppe, die Nachhilfe benötigt.
 - Team Teaching: Beide Lehrkräfte leiten gemeinsam den Unterricht.

4. Herausforderungen bei der Zusammenarbeit
 - a) Das Kapitel diskutiert verschiedene Herausforderungen bei der Umsetzung einer effektiven multiprofessionellen Zusammenarbeit, wie etwa ein geringes Selbstwirksamkeitsempfinden bei allgemeinen Lehrkräften, mangelnde Unterstützung und die Komplexität der Koordination zwischen Fachkräften mit unterschiedlichem Fachwissen.
5. Fallstudien und Beispiele
 - a) Das Kapitel verweist auf Studien und Modelle aus verschiedenen Ländern, insbesondere Finnland, wo inklusive Praktiken durch ein dreistufiges Unterstützungsmodell und eine starke Zusammenarbeit zwischen Lehrkräften und weiteren Fachkräften in das Bildungssystem integriert sind.

Verbindung zu Vorwissen und Kontext

Dieses Kapitel baut auf grundlegenden Konzepten der inklusiven Bildung auf und führt die praktischen Aspekte der Umsetzung solcher Systeme durch Zusammenarbeit ein. Lesende, die mit allgemeinen Lehrpraktiken, sonderpädagogischen Bedürfnissen und der Bedeutung von Teamarbeit im Bildungsbereich vertraut sind, werden feststellen, dass dieses Kapitel aufzeigt, wie diese Elemente in einem inklusiven Rahmen miteinander interagieren. Die Diskussion über Co-Teaching-Modelle und die Unterscheidung zwischen verschiedenen Arten der beruflichen Zusammenarbeit hilft, das Verständnis dafür zu vertiefen, wie Inklusion in Schulen erfolgreich umgesetzt werden kann. Indem theoretisches Wissen mit realen Anwendungen verknüpft wird, ermutigt das Kapitel Lehrkräfte, traditionelle Rollen zu überdenken und kollaborative Strategien zu nutzen, um inklusive Umgebungen zu fördern.

Introduction

Inclusion is understood as a process that helps to overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners. In general, inclusive education is seen as a process of strengthening the education system's capacity to reach all learners (e.g. Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Inclusion means the right of everyone to study in a school for all, with equal opportunities for all students. They must have adequate support for their studies in their nearest school. The aim is to reduce discriminatory attitudes and exclusion, from early childhood settings to wider society. The narrow view of inclusion focuses on support measures and their provision for students with learning or behavioral challenges or needs. The broader view of inclusion emphasizes processes and involving all stakeholders. The broader concept of inclusion also focuses on adults working in primary or

early childhood education, who play a crucial role in developing an inclusive and participatory environment; including the practices and beliefs that are used in the educational community (e.g., Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2020; Ahtiainen & Lahtero 2024).

In practice, the processes of inclusive education address how we develop and design our education programs, schools, and activities so that all students learn and participate together. Inclusive systems value the unique contributions students of all backgrounds bring to the classroom and allow diverse groups to grow side by side to benefit all. Evidently, inclusive systems require changes at all levels of society and create an increasingly complex and multidisciplinary working environment, which requires shared expertise and interdisciplinary collaboration (Neumann, 2019). Multidisciplinary and interprofessional expertise are important objectives in the restructuring of working life and multidisciplinary cooperation is also highlighted as a key development area (e.g. European Commission, 2016). In inclusive education good quality of teaching and support, teacher's relationship with the students, and close cooperation with colleagues and parents are needed. In addition, regular exchange with parents about child's learning status and support plans are important (e.g. Lütje-Klose & Urban, 2014). However, to collaborate in a multiprofessional manner is still a challenge (Wirtz, 2020). This chapter discusses different models and perspectives on multiprofessional collaboration and its importance in inclusive education.

Definition

Interprofessional cooperation means collaboration of teachers with other educational professionals (caregivers, socio-educational professionals or therapeutic staff). Intra-professional cooperation, on the other hand, is the collaboration between general teachers and special educators (Kuper & Kapelle, 2012). These forms of cooperation within the school are supplemented by cooperation outside the school (e.g. with specialist agencies, science and research, sports and exercise promotion, parent education). In English language, terms describing multiprofessionalism, such as multi-, inter-, cross- and transprofessional, describe qualitative differences. The former refers to traditional cooperation, while the latter describes more intensive collaboration (Mikkeli & Pakkasvirta, 2007).

In the social, health and education sectors, multiprofessional collaboration has been justified in terms of improved service, smoother care and support pathways, fewer errors in care and prevention of problems. In healthcare, the importance of interprofessional working is highlighted in acute crisis situations (Thomas et al., 2014). Multidisciplinary work has been studied since the early 1990s, but the number of studies on it has multiplied in the 2000s (Kekoni et al., 2019).

Intra-professional cooperation

In Germany inclusive classes, co-teaching is a practice where one general teacher and one special educator share instruction in lessons in teaching dyads (Jurkowski & Müller, 2018). The subjects taught vary based on student needs and the special education teacher's resources. Special educators may work in multiple dyads with general teachers within one school or simultaneously with general teachers from different schools. Close cooperation between general and special education teachers, which is characterized by the different expertise of teachers (Pool Maag & Moser Opitz, 2014), is essential for effective inclusive education and providing individual support. However, disagreements and conflicts may arise, necessitating the development of cooperation between general and special education teachers.

Grosche & Moser Opitz (2023) make a conceptual distinction between extracurricular cooperation (e.g. co-construction for team development, lesson preparation, counselling or support planning) and classroom cooperation (e.g. co-teaching to support students). Co-teaching involves collaboration between at least two professionals in various educational settings to enhance instruction and improve student outcomes. Co-teaching is established to manage the increasing heterogeneity in inclusive classes and to adapt instructions to varying students' learning capabilities and special needs. Co-teaching pairs provide intense instruction based on general education content and learning goals for all learners (e.g. Arndt & Werning, 2013; Lütje-Klose et al., 2005).

Co-teaching includes professional planning and delivering instruction. Friend et al. (2010) lined out six different approaches:

1. One teach, one observe: one teacher leads instruction, and the other collects data
2. Station teaching: instruction is divided into parts, which are taught by the different teachers
3. Parallel teaching: two teachers present the same material to half of the group each simultaneously
4. Alternative teaching: one teacher works with most students, while the other works with a small group for remediation
5. One teach, one assist: one teacher leads the instruction, while the other offers individual help for students
6. Team-teaching: both teachers lead the whole group instruction by both, lecturing or illustrating two ways to solve a problem (Friend et al., 2010).

Already in older study of Takala et al. (2009) which concentrated on the work of special educators in inclusive education and three elements were revealed: teaching, consulting and background work. Teaching, often focusing on giving support to

children who had challenges in the main academic subjects, was realised in small groups, in co-operative or individual settings. Consultation mainly concerned co-operation and discussion. Behavioural challenges needed a targeted approach. The main problems experienced by the teachers were the lack of time for consultation and co-operation, an unclear work profile and too much work. The work of special education teachers was partly inclusive, but also entailed segregative elements.

Jurkowski & Müller investigated (2018) the development of multi-professional cooperation in teaching dyads of general teachers and special education teachers in inclusive classes in secondary schools for one year. The findings based on general and special education teachers' reports revealed that multi-professional co-operation remained constant at a low level at all points of measurement for both dyad members. The results suggest that general teachers and special educators do not harmonize as an effective teaching dyad or develop a common ground of co-operation. They do not use the opportunity to coordinate and bring together their different expertise to support students' learning and to support each other in managing the heterogeneity of inclusive classes. Students taught in inclusive classes recognize this lack of cooperation. These results are alarming given the assumption of the impact of teachers' cooperation on student outcomes in inclusive settings. In closing, the results underscore the need for changing structural conditions for inclusive education within schools and supporting teaching dyads in developing their cooperation. This might improve the conditions for the development of effective teaching dyads. (Jurkowski & Müller, 2018)

Grosche and Moser-Opitz (2023) conclude in their systematic review that it is largely unclear whether cooperation between teachers to implement inclusive education actually leads to objectively verifiable effects (e.g. in terms of school performance, participation, well-being, independence) and can also be interpreted causally.

Multiprofessional Collaboration

Also widely discussed is collaboration in multi-professional teams as a crucial factor to meet the demands of inclusion, since collaboration may lead to the development of professional knowledge and attitudes towards inclusion. Multiprofessional, inter- and intraprofessional collaborations can be differentiated (Pool Maag, 2022). Multiprofessional teams can also be categorised to preferential intervention teams and school-based health teams. The former focuses on inclusion of students. The latter includes many forms of health, mental health and social services within the school building (Thornberg, 2008). For example, in Finland student welfare services are offered in the school building and includes physical health, psychological well-being and social support in addition to the pedagogical support (Vainikainen et al., 2015).

The practice of inclusive education in Nordic countries aims to remove special and general education divisions, embracing the ‘one school for all’ concept (Keles et al., 2024). The three-tier model: general support, intensified support, or special support, implemented in Finland since 2010, and introduced in Norway in 2019, is recommended.

Finland’s learning and schooling support emphasizes early intervention and a pedagogical approach instead of the former psychological and medical ones, focusing on preventive multi-professional student welfare work and collaboration. The aim is to detect and prevent learning challenges early on, ensuring students maintain a positive perception of themselves and their schoolwork. Teachers’ responsibilities include pedagogical expertise, collaboration with the student welfare team, and guidance for the student’s schooling. Cooperation with the student’s caregiver(s) is also crucial for successful educational support (FNAE, 2014). Students in pre-primary to basic education are entitled to learning and schooling support at three levels: general, intensified, or special. Children with intellectual disabilities, severe disabilities, or illnesses can receive extended compulsory education from age five, with special support provided for extended compulsory education (FNAE, 2022).

The learning and schooling support demands that all teachers in pre-primary and basic education are, when needed, expected to give students educational support in class (FNAE, 2014). Educational support can include interventions, part-time special education, interpretation services, a teaching assistant, and special aids. The student’s role is active, and it is important that the student is involved in decisions. The multiprofessional team and the student welfare services have key roles, and the aim is good communication with the caregivers and student.

General support is short-term, focusing on single pedagogical solutions in everyday school contexts, available for immigrant and other students without pedagogical documentation or assessment. If insufficient, students should receive intensified support, more regular support. A pedagogical assessment and individual learning plan are necessary for intensified support. The plan should focus on the student’s learning, strengths, and previous educational support. Continuous assessment and revision of the plan are crucial. Special support is provided to students struggling in general education who need systematic support to complete comprehensive education and qualify for upper secondary education. This requires a pedagogical statement, formal decision, and individual learning plan (FNAE, 2014). The Finnish government will reform the legislation during 2025 of the learning and schooling support system in pre-primary and primary education due to the lack of clarity and flexibility of the system. The aim is to ensure adequate support and reduce administrative burden on teaching staff. According to reform support for learning must be provided on an individual basis and following the needs of the student. The forms of support are nationally consistent, clear and

varied. Small group teaching and special classes are also possible where necessary. (Parliament of Finland, 2024)

Student welfare is a multiprofessional support system that varies across countries, including the Nordic Countries. In Finland, it encompasses non-teaching work by school personnel and representatives from various professional groups. The student welfare group is a regularly meeting team led by the school principal. Finnish student welfare work is systematic and an important part of the individualized service system for pupils. Finland defines student welfare by legislation, and all Finnish pupils should have access to the services of a psychologist, a social worker, a school nurse, and a medical doctor in addition to the support organised by the school staff, which includes all teachers and, in higher grades, student counsellors. Pupil and Student welfare act entered into force in Finland in 2014. According to that, every school and educational institution has to have qualified social worker and school psychologist services available. In other countries, services are organized at a municipal or school level, with special education teachers, school psychologists, social workers, and school nurses working together. However, the organization and focus of these professionals vary depending on their location and the team's focus on student welfare (Vainikainen et al., 2015).

Vainikainen et al. study (2015) analysed the impact of student welfare personnel availability and regular multiprofessional team meetings on principals' experiences with multiprofessional collaboration in Finland. Results showed that regular meetings increased satisfaction, particularly in areas with limited services. The reactivity of the multiprofessional team contributed to early intervention goals. The study concluded that principals' expectations are influenced by service availability, with qualitative aspects receiving greater emphasis (Vainikainen et al., 2015).

Educational team composition is crucial for inclusive education. However, some countries still integrate students with developmental disabilities in general classrooms without additional support or with special educators for limited hours each week (e.g. Sermier Dessemontet & Bless, 2013). Additionally, paraprofessionals without proper qualifications in special needs education may be used as support. These solutions have been found ineffective for students with special education needs (Ainscow et al., 2012; Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Ehrenberg & Lindmeier, (2020) also show in their ethnographically based study how, for example, assistants can trigger othering processes through differentiation practices. "Children with school assistance are constructed as disruptive 'others' and addressed as resistant and potentially disruptive subjects through the exercise of decision-making and defining power in regulatory practices." (ibid. p. 149). Disciplinary perceptions, the desire to relieve the burden on regular classes and the generation of resources due to existing regulatory framework conditions act as barriers to bring together the different perspectives of the professionals involved to form a common assessment (Labhart, 2019).

Challenges

Numerous challenges must therefore be overcome in the context of multi-professional collaboration in inclusive schools:

1. General education teachers' low self-efficacy and lack of support from special education co-teachers can limit the effectiveness of instruction in inclusive classrooms (e.g. Sahli Lozano et al., 2024). This can intensify stress and occupational burnout, reducing instruction effectiveness (e.g. Takala et al., 2009).
2. Paraprofessionals can help general education teachers by providing more time for students without special education needs, but they often lack sufficient knowledge about effective learning methods for heterogeneous classrooms. Pool Maag & Moser Opitz's study (2014) found that general teachers prioritize individual student work and ad-hoc groups for student learning, while special educators prioritize individual learning objectives, assignments, and materials for effective student learning.
3. Special need education teachers in Finland and the UK face demanding work environments, with limited support systems and limited management power. They often work alone, face unlimited work profiles, and struggle with bureaucracy and administration. In the UK, SENCOs have joint responsibility for special educational needs and inclusion but lack control over funding and manage their workload (e.g. Takala et al., 2009).
4. Vangrieken et al. (2015) review concluded that collaboration is often more forced than voluntary: Teachers' work is generally not characterized by teamwork. Teachers experience forced collaboration as stressful.
5. Multi-professional cooperation between regular teachers and special need educators remain constant at a low level at all points of measurement for both dyad members (Jurkowski & Müller, 2018).
6. Research based on ethnographic research methods regularly found in multiprofessional collaboration the development of othering processes through distinctive differentiation practices (Ehrenberg & Lindmeier, 2020; Labhart, 2019).

Discussion

Due to the inclusive education interprofessional collaboration is a part of the occupation of all teachers, particularly special educators, and a part of the occupation of psychologists and social workers. Intensive collaboration does not necessarily have to lead to greater stress. Despite the time required for collaboration, the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones (e.g. increased self-efficacy, more positive attitude towards inclusion) (Luder, 2021). Therefore, theoretical knowledge

and practice in collaboration during higher education is important for all students in these fields. However, multiprofessional collaboration is a complex subject in practice, and it is highly important that multiprofessional collaboration amongst practitioners with different backgrounds will be developed.

Äikäs et al study (2020) explored the experiences of university students of special needs education, social work, and psychology in the “Multidisciplinary Interaction Skills” course, which aims to develop interprofessional skills through online and face-to-face interactions. The study explores factors promoting interprofessional learning, its impact on collaboration and prejudice, and challenges in effective collaboration. Results show online learning is effective, but face-to-face interaction is crucial for deeper engagement. Advantages include flexibility, accessibility, and exploring perspectives. Challenges include non-verbal cues and trust building. According to Tervaskanto-Mäentausta (2018) multidisciplinary training in higher education improves interprofessional cooperation and lowers preconceptions.

Kielblock et al. study (2020) investigated experts on school development and how multiprofessional collaboration can be developed. Six major categories could present: pedagogical practitioners, pedagogical team-practices, written agreements, space and time for collaboration, context, and routines of exchanging information. School principals promote collaboration between teachers by defining tasks and goals, initiating joint meetings and clarifying roles and responsibilities.

According to Vangrieken et al. (2015) positive effects of teachers’ co-teaching include the improvement of learners’ academic performance, flatter power structures and a greater willingness to innovate among the teaching staff. Teachers feel less isolated, are more motivated and show an increased willingness to work.

In the context of inclusion, support-related and classroom-based collaboration between general teachers and special educators is widely accepted (Pool Maag, 2022). Collaboration in multi-professional teams is a crucial factor to meet the demands of inclusion, since collaboration may lead to the development of professional knowledge and attitudes towards inclusion. In-service teachers greatly benefit from a multi-professional collaboration of general teachers and special educators, mainly through a transfer of expertise and a change of attitudes (Ritter, et al., 2018).

However, it is difficult to make clear statements about its effectiveness, as cooperation takes different forms (e.g. Grosche & Moser Opitz, 2023). Special educators are usually more critical of the quality of cooperation than mainstream teachers. The effects between structural factors (teacher and organization) and process-related factors (teams in collaboration) are in a complex relationship. Grosche and Moser-Opitz (2023) conclude that “the general call for ‘more cooperation’ therefore falls short. Rather, it would be necessary to specify which types or qualities of cooperation should be implemented for which goals or functions in inclusive education.” (ebd., S. 257).

Thus, teacher training must include collaboration in multiprofessional teams, since the development of professional knowledge and attitudes towards inclusion is supposed to apply to teacher trainees, as well. Development-enhancing education refers to schooling that is warm, individualized, age appropriate, health promoting, culturally inclusive, and academically challenging. When teachers and other school professionals imitate these qualities, children thrive academically and developmentally. Educators do not need to choose between a strong education and attention to holistic childhood. With the right training, practice, and dispositions, educators can do both, and the result is a more vibrant learning environment for children. Bryk et al. (2010) found strong correlations between the management of a school and the involvement of parents ($d = 0.64$) as well as involvement in the community or city ($d = 0.47$). (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 127). Parent and community ties were found to be positive factors for successful school development with beneficial effects on student achievement (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 197).

The development of inclusive schools therefore requires a child-centered multiprofessional collaboration with regulated responsibilities and openness to families and communities. The awareness of one's own disciplinary boundaries, personal norms and differentiation practices should be combined with the desire to know about each other and learn from each other, and their impact should be regularly reviewed through intervention and ethnographically based reflection practices.

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