



Equal education for all?

School outcome for six students with blindness or severe visual impairment in Swedish inclusive education

Kim de Verdier, Lic. psychologist and PhD student

National Agency for Special Needs Education,

Resource Centre Vision Stockholm

University of Stockholm, Department of Special Education





Background

- Inclusive education for students with visual impairments since the mid-1980's
- "Participation on equal terms?" – a research project concerning Braille readers in inclusive educational settings (Rönnbäck, de Verdier, Winberg & Baraldi, 2010)
- A study of an entire age cohort of Swedish Braille reading students (n=7) during their first three years of compulsory school





The present study

- 9th grade, last year of compulsory school
- Aim: to examine the school outcome for these students, concerning academic achievement, reading skills, psychological well-being and experiences of support and accessibility
- Six families consented to participation
- Quantitative and qualitative data:
 - Results from yearly reading observations in grades 1 – 7
 - Results from the reading skills test LS (Johansson, 2004) in grade 9
 - School grades in all subjects
 - The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, SDQ (Goodman, 2009)
 - Semi-structured interviews with students, parents and teachers





Participants in 9th grade

Student	1	2	3	4	5	6
Visual impairment	SVI	SVI	Blind	Blind	Blind	Blind
Etiology of VI	LCA	Retinal disease	Congenital Glaucoma	ONH	Retino-blastoma	ONH
Additional disability	ADHD	No	No	ID	No	AS
Type of school	Reg	Reg	Reg	Spec	Reg	Reg
Paraeducator avail.	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher qualification	Yes	---	No	Spec. teacher	Yes	No



Pedagogical support and accessibility

- Four families were mainly unsatisfied with the support offered in the local school.
- Two families were very pleased with the support, mainly because the schools had a very positive attitude and were creative in finding good solutions
- Some teachers lacked knowledge about teaching methods for students with visual impairments, especially at senior level
- Accessibility was generally described as better in lower classes
- Two students had reduced curricula, partly due to problems with making school subjects accessible



Reading development



- All students started as emerging braille readers, but their reading development then took different directions
- Two blind students developed good braille reading skills
- Two blind students had extensive problems with reading
- The two partially sighted students gave up braille at different stages, due to issues with identity
- In some cases teachers clearly lacked competence to support the students' braille reading



Reading skills in grade 9

Student	1	2	3	4	5	6
Visual imp.	SVI	SVI	Blind	Blind	Blind	Blind
Etiology of VI	LCA	Retinal disease	Congenital Glaucoma	ONH	Retino-blastoma	ONH
Additional dis.	ADHD	No	No	ID	No	AS
Type of school	Reg	Reg	Reg	Spec	Reg	Reg
Paraeducator	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher qual.	Yes	---	No	Spec	Yes	No
Reading skills	Gave up braille, quite fast print reader	Gave up braille, slow print reader	Good skills, but prefers audio books	Decods only a few words	Excellent skills, mostly prefers braille	Extremely slow, inefficient reading



School grades

- The student with an intellectual disability did not receive traditional grades
- Grades ranging from adequate to excellent
- Two high achievers – both blind (not congenitally), due to Retinoblastoma and Congenital Glaucoma, both received good support throughout school
- Students with additional disabilities were in need of a great amount of support in their schoolwork. Managed to receive passing grades, but were they allowed to reach their full potential??





Mean grade levels in grades 8 and 9

Student	1	2	3	4	5	6
Visual imp.	SVI	SVI	Blind	Blind	Blind	Blind
Etiology of VI	LCA	Retinal disease	Congenital Glaucoma	ONH	Retino-blastoma	ONH
Additional dis.	ADHD	No	No	ID	No	AS
Type of school	Reg	Reg	Reg	Spec	Reg	Reg
Paraeducator	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher qual.	Yes	---	No	Spec	Yes	No
Reading skills	Gave up braille	Gave up braille	Good skills	Decods few words	Excellent skills	Extremely slow
Mean grade lev.						
8th grade	C	D	B	---	B	D
9th grade	C	D	A	---	A	C



Psychological well-being

- On a group level the SDQ-ratings revealed minor or no difficulties in most areas
- Students that received scores indicating psycho-social problems, all had disabilities in addition to the visual impairment
- However, subtle signs of emotional symptoms and loneliness were reported in several cases
- The interviews supported these findings and revealed unsatisfactory social situations for some of the students





The voices of two students

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Visual imp.	SVI	SVI	Blind	Blind	Blind	Blind
Etiology of VI	LCA	Retinal disease	Congenital Glaucoma	ONH	Retino-blastoma	ONH
Additional dis.	ADHD	No	No	ID	No	AS
Type of school	Reg	Reg	Reg	Spec	Reg	Reg
Paraeducator	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Teacher qual.	Yes	---	No	Spec	Yes	No
Reading skills	Gave up braille	Gave up braille	Good skills	Decods few words	Excellent skills	Extremely slow
Mean grade lev. 8th grade 9th grade	C C	D D	B A	--- ---	B A	D C



How do you feel when you think about school?

1: The bad totally overshadows the good... It's been chaotic, too many students in the class, too many different teachers, I've had a hard time...

3: It has been really, really good! Good friends and good teachers... No problems really.



Tell me about school work!

1: Well, they haven't been very good at adapting material and making things accessible for me... (...) Small issues get big and problematic all the time – that's soooo tiresome!

3: They have always been very engaged in trying to make it work for me. I think all the school subjects work very well for me.



**Are you able to express
your opinion on the
support that you receive?**

**1: Yeah I guess... but I don't
feel that they listen too
me...**

**3: Yes I am, I have a very good
dialogue with my teachers!**



Do you feel participatory?

1: No, not really. But I don't care anymore, soon it's over anyway.

3: Yeah, I really do. I don't really experience any obstacles at school.



Conclusions

- The students' experiences varied greatly
- Swedish teachers need more competence in braille and teaching methods for students with visual impairment
- Adults must be responsive to signs of emotional problems
- The heterogeneity of the population needs to be considered
- Schools' attitudes play an important role for the outcome
- The support system for students with visual impairments in Sweden is fragile and would need to be more systematized
- Listen to the students' voices



For downloading the report "Participation on equal terms":

1. Go to www.spsm.se
2. Click on "English"
3. You will be directed to the English website, where all publications in English will automatically show up on the first page

Article: *"A Longitudinal Study of Reading Development, Academic achievement and Support in Swedish Inclusive Education for Students with Blindness or Severe Visual Impairment"* (de Verdier & Ek, 2014) accepted for publication in Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, the nov/dec-issue 2014



The article presents more detailed results concerning mainly reading development and academic achievement; results concerning psycho-social aspects will be reported in a forthcoming article.

Contact: kim.deverdier@spsm.se

Thank you for your attention!

National Agency for Special Needs
Education and Schools 