



Equal education for all?

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

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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 9th grade	C C	D D	B A	--- ---	B A	D 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.

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Thank you for your attention!