Who should do What to Whom?
Occupational Groups’ Views on Special Needs

GUNILLA LINDQVIST

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Opponent:
Professor Kristina Ström, Åbo Akademi

Ledamöter i betygsnämnd:
Professor Eva Forsberg, Uppsala Universitet
Professor emeritus, Jerry Rosenqvist, Malmö Högskola
Professor Ulla Runesson, Högskolan för lärande och kommunikation, Jönköping

Handledare:
Professor Claes Nilholm, Högskolan för lärande och kommunikation, Jönköping
Fil.dr Gun-Marie Wetso, Högskolan Dalarna

Högskolan för lärande och kommunikation, Jönköping
ABSTRACT

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The overall aim of this thesis is to increase our knowledge of different occupational groups’ views on work with children in need of special support. This is explored in four separate studies.

The first study investigates the views of occupational groups in preschools and schools in one municipality. A questionnaire was handed out to all personnel (N=1297) in the municipality in 2008 (72.5% response rate). The second study explores the views of educational leaders (N=45) in the same municipality. Questionnaire # 2 was distributed in 2009. All the educational leaders responded to the questionnaire. The third study describes the views of different occupational groups concerning special educational needs coordinators’ (SENCOs) role and work. This was highlighted by comparing responses from questionnaire # 1 and # 2. Responses concerning SENCOs’ work were also added using a third questionnaire. This questionnaire was handed out in 2006 to chief education officers (N=290) in all municipalities in Sweden. The response rate was 90.3%. Finally, the fourth study presents five head teachers’ descriptions of their work with special needs issues. Study four was a follow-up study of questionnaire # 2. These head teachers were selected because of their inclusive values and because they seemed to be effective according to certain criteria. They were interviewed in January 2012.

The results reveal a number of interesting findings. For example, there are both similar and different views among the occupational groups concerning work with children in need of special support. A majority of the respondents in all groups state that children’s individual deficiencies is one common reason why children need special support in preschools/schools. Differences between the occupational groups become especially visible regarding their views of SENCOs’ work.

Critical pragmatism (Cherryholmes, 1988) is applied as a theoretical point of departure. Skrtic’s (1991) critical reading and analysis of special education relative to general education is specifically used to interpret and discuss the outcome of the studies. Additionally, Abbott’s (1988) reasoning concerning the “division of expert labor” is used to discuss the occupational groups’ replies concerning “who should do what to whom”.

The findings in the studies are contextualized and theoretically interpreted in the separate articles. However in the first part of this thesis (in Swedish: Kappa), the theoretical interpretations of the empirical outcome are discussed in more detail and the results are further contextualized and synthesised. Inclusion and premises for inclusive education are also discussed in more depth in the first part of the present thesis.