

Conceptual Change in Adopting a Nationwide Special Education Strategy in Finland

*Collaboration, sharing and capacity-building
to promote inclusion*

Helena Thuneberg, University lecturer,
helena.thuneberg@helsinki.fi
Centre of School Assessment, University of Helsinki

European Agency, study visit/Rovaniemi April 2011



The new Special Education Strategy (SPES)

(by the Ministry of Education, December 2007)

Background

The number of students having an official special education referrals growing (8% , year 2007).

Half of those in segregated special classes or schools – despite the country's commitment to the Salamanca statement, UNESCO 1994.

Aim today: to show and explain the conceptual change in the ongoing nationwide special education reform in Finland

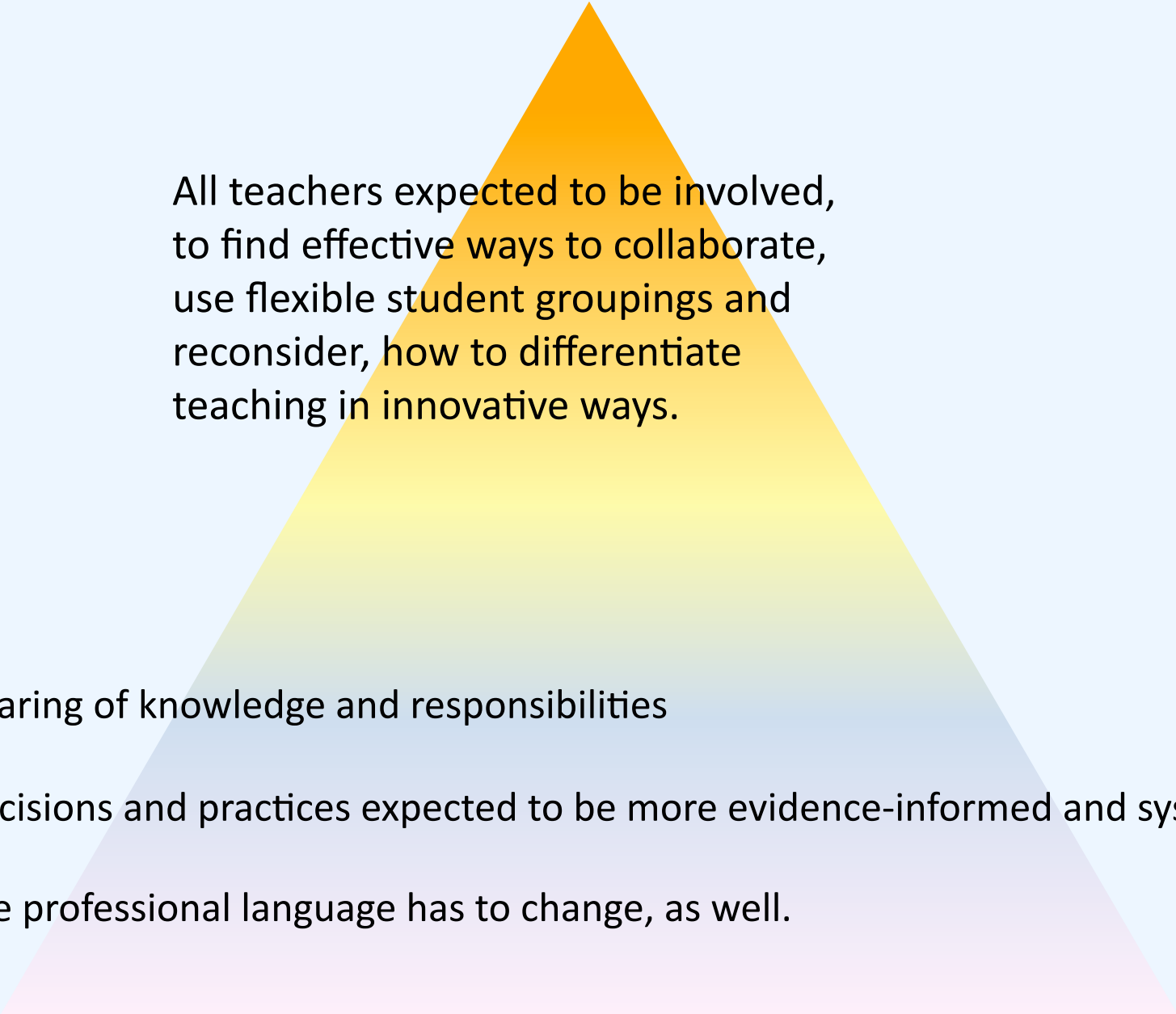


Flexible grouping of the 1st-graders
-way of part-time special
education: classroom teacher and
special education teacher
collaboration in reading instruction.

Year 2009:
almost 30% of students >
part-time special education;
and 8% > official sp. ed. decision



The new Special Education Strategy



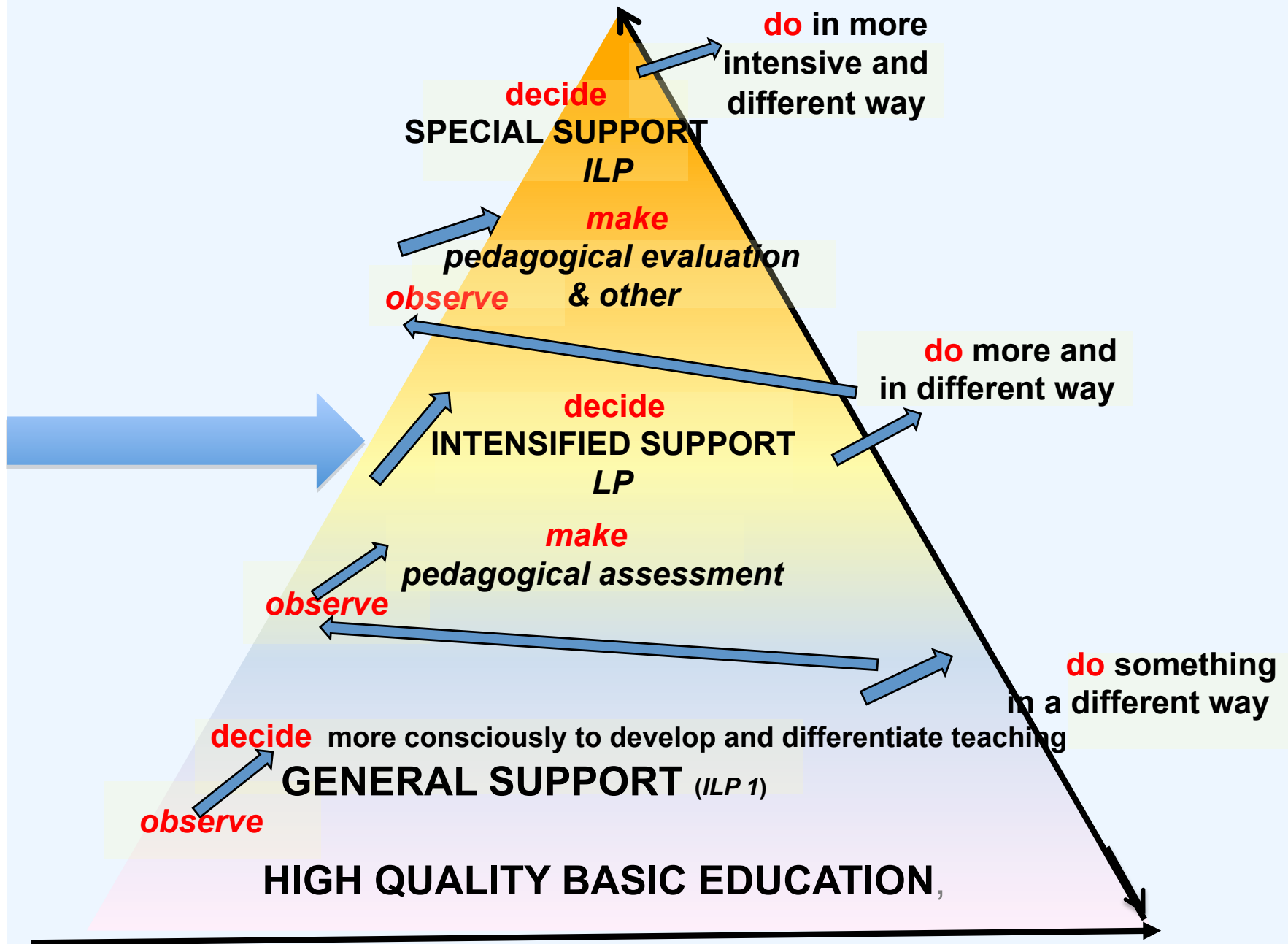
All teachers expected to be involved,
to find effective ways to collaborate,
use flexible student groupings and
reconsider, how to differentiate
teaching in innovative ways.

...sharing of knowledge and responsibilities

...decisions and practices expected to be more evidence-informed and systematic

...the professional language has to change, as well.

The verbs



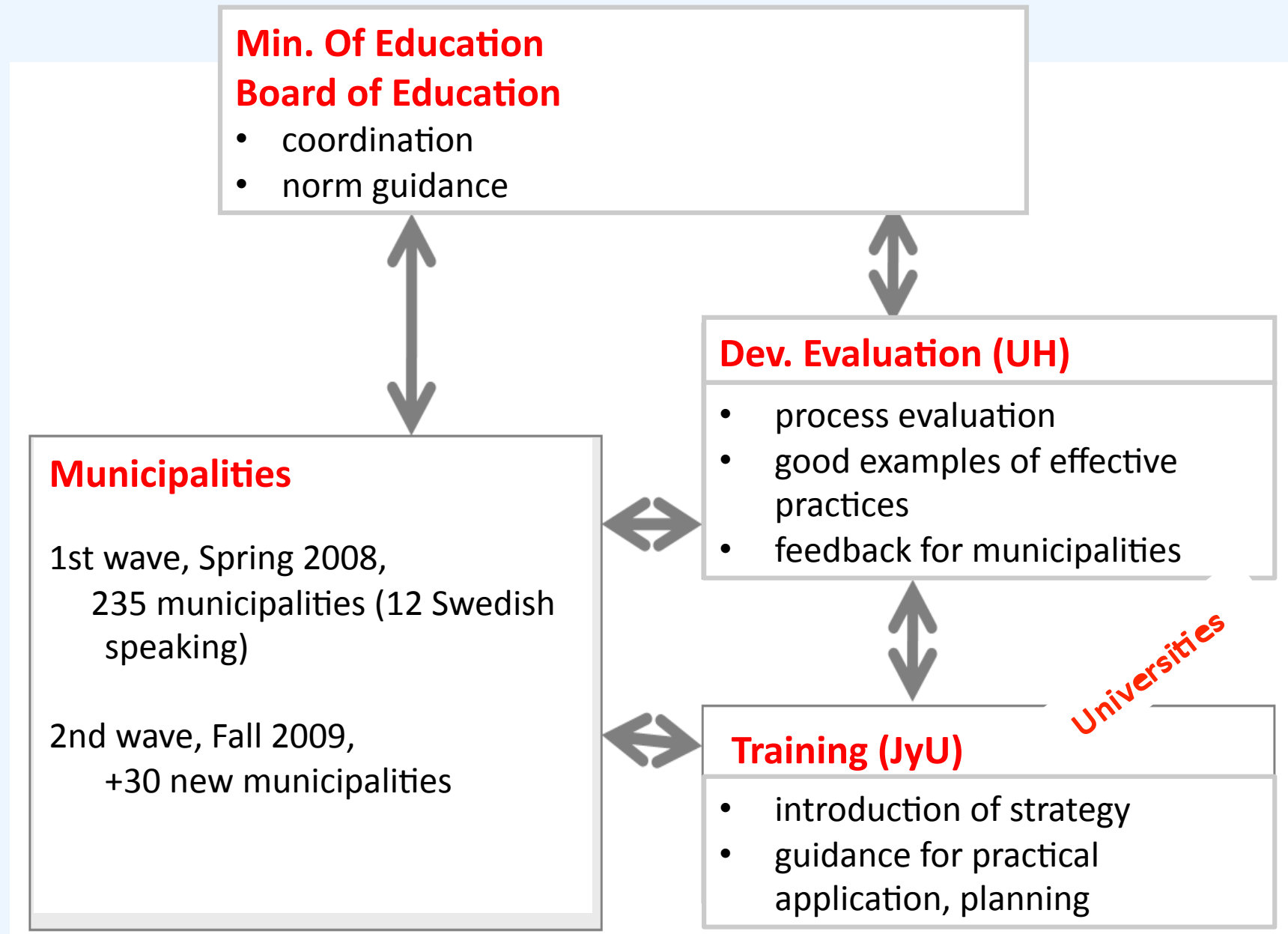
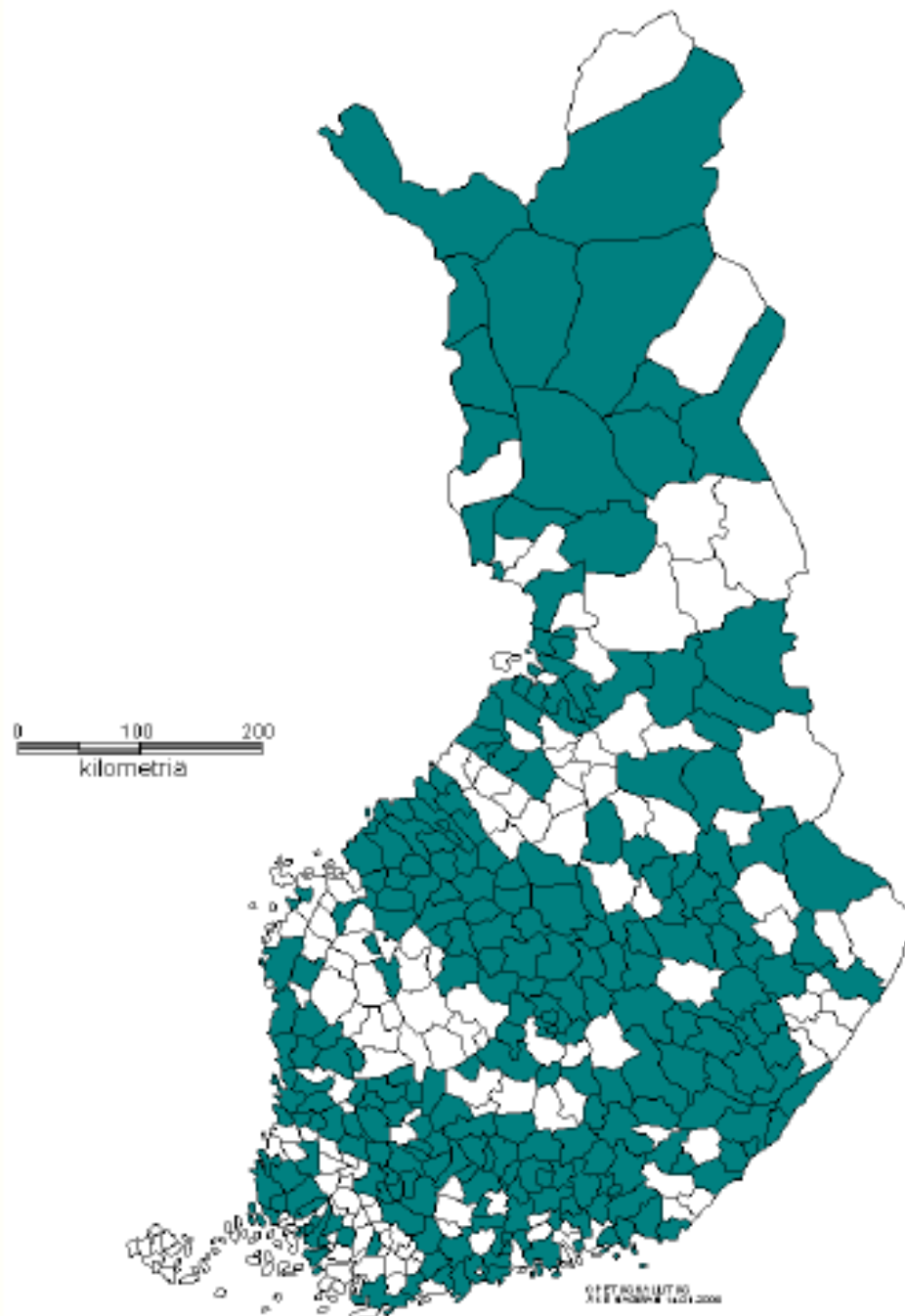


Figure 3. Organization of the implementation of the Special education strategy.



The
participating
municipalities
2008-09
(= dark color)
+30 new
municipalities in
2009-11

(Source: Board of Education)

DATA:

(in addition we have: interviews, class observations)

In one and half years, four documents from the cities and municipalities were obtained:

- 1.The initial application (Dec 2007), which included an organization plan for special education
- 2.The more specified plan (June 2008)
- 3.The intermediate report (April 2009)
- 4.The municipality's plan of education (September 2009).

METHOD:

The content analysis particularly focused on identifying the presence of the 31 main concepts (63 592 occurrences) of the SPES in the documents, and the trends, based on those four time-points.

The concepts of SPES can be classified into three:

1. totally new strategy concepts
2. old concepts but with a new or somewhat changed meaning
3. old concepts

PRINCIPLES
Early intervention
Neighborhood school
Inclusion
STRUCTURE
3-tiered model (general, intensified, special support)
PROCESSES
Intensified support
LP Learning Plan
Special support
ILP Individual Learning Plan
PRACTICAL TOOLS
COLLABORATION, ROLES
student
Parents, guardians
Preschool, class, subject, spec. ed. teachers
Principal
Multi-professional Student Welfare Group, Multi-administr.

Matrix to cover dimensions of the student support on the basis of the conceptual analysis

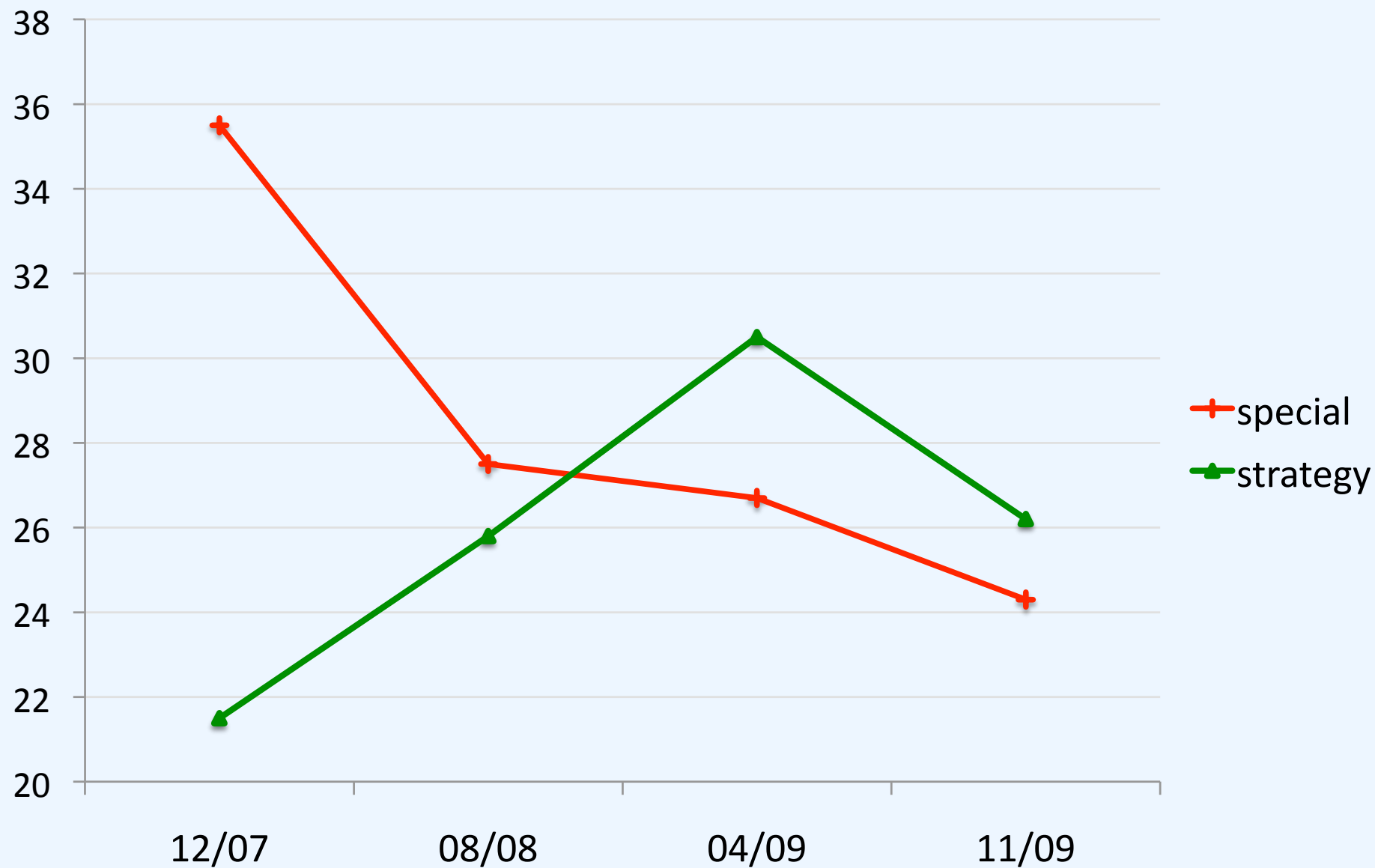


Figure 3. The changes in frequencies (%) of special and strategy terms in four sets of municipal documents

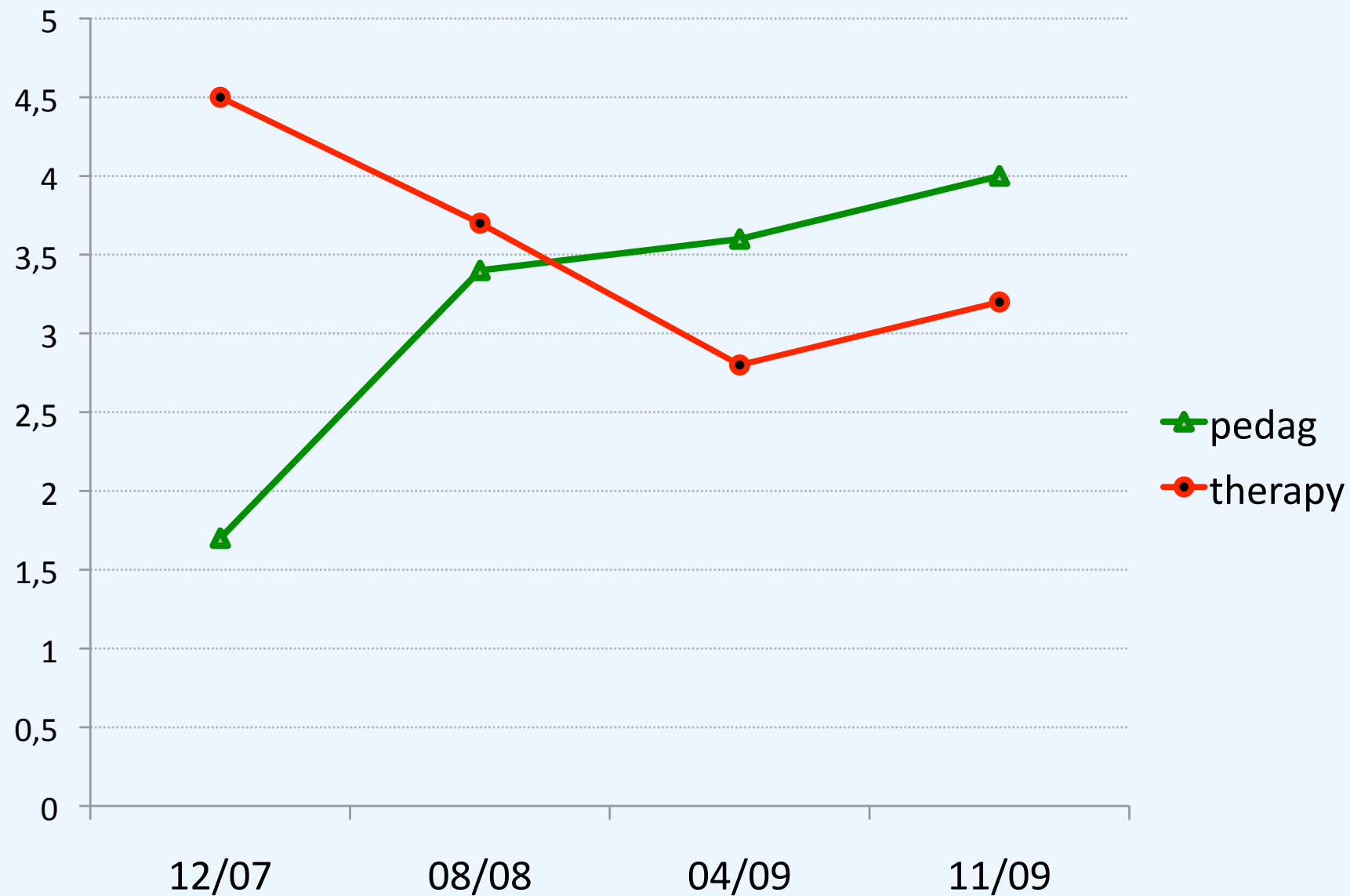


Figure 4. The changes in frequencies (%) of pedagogical and therapeutic terms in four sets of municipal documents

Contamination of terms

Integrating new terms:

Luhmann: triggers, irritation

...contact surface, interactional openness, interpretative viability,
productive misunderstandings

-> *pedagogical evaluation, intensified support*

Olson (2003): importance of the local interpretation

Hayes, Barlow & Nelson-Gray (1999): logical generalization= a compromise of
research and local practice

CONCLUSION

Transfer of meaning and accurate application of a strategy concept is not possible, but the aim should be

“to promote creativity in the *application* (invention) of the concept”

(Seidl, 2006)

Stage of implementation (Hall & Loucks, 1977)

Data : the last document, the arrangement plan of education, from September 2009

Indicator: *intensified support*, because it was a new concept

Of the 235 municipalities, 134 documents were available in time

Stages:

of the municipalities

at the 1st level: *non use, orientation, preparation*, 22%,

at the 2nd level: *mechanical use, routine*, 60%

at the 3rd level: *refinement, integration and renewal*, 18%

Example 1:

The current model of the special education of the x-city (2 special schools, special classes, part-time special education and integration) is still experienced as a working way to teach students with special needs. The aim is to keep the model as it is. (Middle-size city, South Finland, 11/09)

1st level:

= often those, *who want but cannot yet.*

= those, *who can, but do not want.*

Example 2: We develop a system in which a general education student can study in a special class, when it is the wish of the guardians, without an official special education decision. (Middle size municipality, Eastern Finland 12/07)

Example 3: We intend to have a more inclusive school, but simultaneously to keep the multi-route model. (Small municipality, Lapland 12/07)

2nd level:

...often parallel or contra strategy

At the 2nd level

Example 4:

The small classes are in the early grades the form of the intensified support in the schools of the x-town. Small classes are situated in the neighborhood schools. Students stay there in general for 1-2 years and usually move after that to the general classroom in their own school to study further. --Starting the school in the small class requires an official special education decision. (Middle-size city, West Finland, 11/09)

At the 3rd level

Example 5:

When the integration increases, resources from the small groups can be directed to the measures of the intensive support. (Middle-size municipality, Northern Finland, 11/09)

3rd level:

...more than the strategy
= *They can and do*

At the 3rd level

Example 6:

All elementary school students can study in the general education classrooms and get support based on their needs. All teachers of the x-school have now agreed to work in teams. (Small town, Northern Finland, 11/09)

Example 7:

To deliver general, intensive or special education support in equal and fair manner in all the schools of the town of X, screening for the age cohorts are administered in order to identify students who need support. According to studies (cf. Alpo-project) teachers are good in identifying the problems of the student and are able to get support for them.

--Interpretation of the screening does not consume extra special education resources. (Middle size city, South-Western Finland, 11/09)

At the 3rd level

Example 8:

In the development projects we utilize the special knowhow we have gained in other projects, previous and current. One central baseline of the qualitative development of the basic education is to capitalize on the extensive but dispersed knowhow of the educational institutions and to turn it to common resources. (Capital area, Southern Finland, 12/07)

Example 9:

"Development of the special education organization – special education teachers instead of the school assistant" (Middle size municipality, Northern Finland, 04/09)

Year	The central phases of the action in timeline
1999	<i>a small group pilot was started, goal: to get early support for all</i>
2000	<i>a process analysis based on the quality certificate</i>
2001	<i>organization of special education based on the process analysis</i>
2002	<i>participation in the LATU-project of the Board of Ed. and Inclusion-project of the University of Jyväskylä and the FAIDD</i>
2004-06	<i>Different learners-common school –project and its subprojects, Virtual school-project, Snowball-project and Social and emotional difficulties in school –project</i>
2005-06	<i>ALPO-project</i>
2007-08	<i>development of the school welfare services organization in preschool and basic education</i>
2007-	<i>Nice school –project</i>
2008-	<i>KELPO –development [Special education strategy implementation]</i>
2008-09	<i>project of student welfare services</i>
2009-	<i>development project of unified comprehensive education (municipality's own project). In addition development of the morning and afternoon clubs.</i>



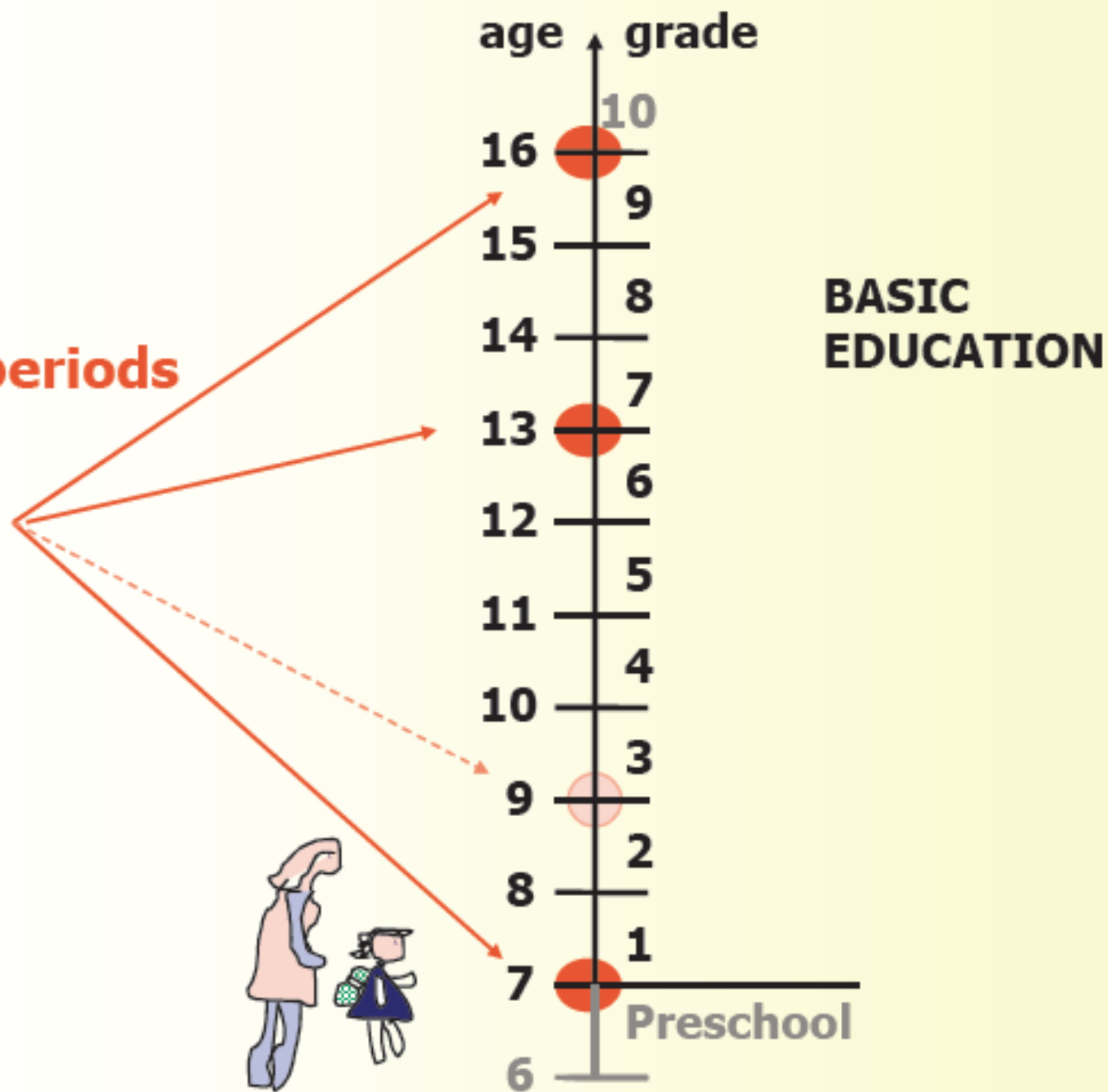
PRINCIPLES		resources (human, time, material)
Early intervention	attitudes	
Neighborhood school		
Inclusion		
STRUCTURE		will
3-tiered model (general, specific, intensive)	understanding, knowledge and skills (of learning processes, brain plasticity, intervention, learning and behavioral needs)	
PROCESSES		
Intensified support		
LP Learning Plan		
Special support		
ILP Individual Learning Plan		
PRACTICAL TOOLS		identification of core contents and basic skills
COLLABORATION, ROLES		
student		student's view of own learning and needs
Parents, guardians		
Preschool, class, subject, spec. ed. teachers		
Principal		
Multi-professional Student Welfare Group, Multi-administr.		

Matrix to cover dimensions of the student support on the basis of the conceptual analysis

creating of optimal physical, social and psychological learning environment

differentiation
(task, time, space, material)

interaction competencies (co- and teamteaching, flexible grouping)



MEMBERS OF SWG

The Student Welfare Group

School Principal, chair of the group

School Psychologist

School Nurse

Special Ed. Teacher

And according to the topic:

Class Teacher

Social Worker

Student Advisor

Plans, organizes, evaluates.

Meets 2-4 times/month.

- Acute problems
- During the school year discusses the situation of every class (= all the pupils); supports teachers, parents

Main target: physical and psychological well-being of pupils, successful learning, good learning environment

"School leaders and teachers need to create school, staffroom, and classroom environments where error is welcomed as a learning opportunity—" (Hattie, 2009)

"It is the students themselves, in the end, not the teachers, who decide what students will learn" (Olson, 2003)