

Communication – Documentation – Cooperation

Currently the district of Reutte/Tirol is partner of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education within a project about assessment. With the assistance of the European Agency, teachers from the district of Reutte are working on a long-term project to improve the quality of inclusion offers. The core question of this international project is not whether a common education is possible, but how.

Last spring, an international delegation of experts came to the district of Reutte to evaluate the efforts being made to implement inclusion.

The experts then summarised the impressions and observations in a report, which recommends to “formalise the informal“. This report, which describes the district's strengths and weaknesses in terms of inclusion, pays high tribute to the commitment of the persons involved, and on the other hand refers to three activity fields, which have to be further developed, namely: communication, documentation and co-operation.

In terms of an improved communication, they suggest to formalise and extend the communication beyond the informally efficient personal contacts. For this purpose instruments shall be developed, which structure and facilitate information exchange and cooperation between the persons involved. Concretely mentioned are the exchange of experiences between integrated classes and schools, and the collaboration with extracurricular (outside school) areas (parents, therapy, assistance,...). Moreover, the district has been asked to improve the documentation of their work. It has been recognised that a lot of good work is being done at the specific schools, however, the work is not documented sufficiently and due to the form of layout, cannot have an influence beyond a single class, school or region. In the field of co-operation it is also about team work of the various participants in an interdisciplinary co-operation.

The report points out specific activity fields at class and school level:

At class level:

- Improvement of the communication of single students
- Involving the students in the planning and reflexion of their learning processes
- Parents should act as partners during the planning and reflexion of the processes
- Communication and co-operation of the various teachers

At school level:

- Need for elaboration of specific instruments, depending on the type of school, for the documentation of the learning processes
- Development of reliable and person-unrelated instruments for class and school integrating communication
- Development of instruments to improve the interdisciplinary co-operation with extracurricular areas
- Documentation and publication of successful strategies at single schools

The report is in line with the basic knowledge of international and German literature. For instance the report corresponds with the work of Georg Feuser, who attributes a central role to the principle of shared learning in the field of inclusive pedagogy:

“It’s about the exchange and the mutual adaptation of competences of colleagues (in terms of the preparation, realisation and analysis of the common work and of their optimisation and high co-ordination) in connection with the essential team work of all pedagogic, therapeutical and collaborating experts (e.g. personal assistants) with different jobs and work experience, and with team teaching of teachers and special education teachers.”

Georg Feuser: Prinzipien einer inklusiven Pädagogik, Erschienen in: Behinderte in Familie, Schule und Gesellschaft. Nr. 2/2001; Reha Druck Graz, S.25-29

URL: <http://bidok.uibk.ac.at/library/beh2-01-feuser-prinzipien.html> - Download 20080202

Mel Ainscow also shows in his research that co-operation is an effective strategy for schools which face the challenging circumstances of heterogeneity.

„Co-operation in and between schools can do both: provide the necessary shared learning, and maybe even more important, generate context-related new knowledge.“

Mel Ainscow, et.al.: Collaboration as a strategy for improving schools in challenging circumstances Published in: Improving Schools, Vol. 9, No. 3, 192-202 (2006)

URL <http://imp.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/9/3/192> - Download 20080202

He describes the force of diversity as resource for new ways of thinking and to develop better practice. Co-operation is described as the fundamental process of social learning. The teacher’s co-operation competence is directly shown in the student’s ability to co-operate and has a positive impact on their learning progress.

Schools which want to improve co-operation and team work have to pursue, among other things, the following questions:

- What is the definition of co-operation and team work at schools?
- Which factors influence teamwork at school and in which way?
- What qualifications do the persons involved contribute to the process?
- Which common activities are created?
- What forms of guidance are needed?
- What expenses are involved?
- In which way does it have an influence on the student’s learning?
- Which difficulties can be expected?
- How can one assure sustainable team work?
- What external support is needed?



It involves a time-consuming complex process, which hasn't one completed format, but has to be revised at school level continuously , be formally assured, and furthermore requires an adequate personal team.

In order to make this come true at the schools in the district of Reutte, we want to create the possibility (pilot project) at single schools to pass the resources from the direct work with the child onto the system level of schools, in order to improve their quality. Moreover, we want to entrust qualified teachers with the tasks mentioned above.