Support in learning and school attendance in Finland: New model for all learners and teachers

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STARTING POINT AND THE REALITY OF LEARNING: In one school class there are many kinds of learners.

HOW TO OPERATE: In the Finnish new three-level support model the aim is to recognize individual learning styles and identify the needs of support for learning.

ROLE OF TEACHERS: Key persons in this process are ordinary class teachers and subject teachers. In the first level of the model the teachers should co-operate together and help the student to get individual support for learning. The idea behind this is that "every teacher is a special education teacher as well".

ROLE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND EXPERTS: In the second and third level the teachers are supported also by special education teachers and other support groups.

THE CHALLENGE: The challenge of this reform is how to run the teachers into this system and give them expertise to identify all learners’ needs for support. This is a great challenge for in-service and pre-service teacher education.
Previous thinking:
Picking up students with special needs: ”serious cases”
New thinking: Many kinds of learners with their individual needs
Three-level support in learning and school attendance

1. General support
2. Intensified support
3. Special support
The main forms of support are available in all levels (part-time special-needs education etc.)

For instance about 30% of all learners get individual support/guidance in reading (this happens mainly in general support level.)
Three-level support in learning and school attendance

Many forms of support:

3. Special support
2. Intensified support
1. General support

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Three-level support in learning and school attendance

I. General support for all learners

- is built on positive school culture

- quality teaching and every teachers’ guidance: ”every teacher is a special education teacher”

- many forms of support

- co-operation between all teachers, and between teachers and parents
Three-level support in learning and school attendance

2. Intensified support

- decision of intensified support is based on a pedagogical assessment made by teachers
  - individual learning plan

- many forms of special needs of support: part-time special-needs education, individual guidance counselling and use of flexible teaching groups etc.
  - support is systematic

- student’s learning and schooling must be monitored and assessed regularly
Three-level support in learning and school attendance

3. Special support

- consists of various kinds of support and special-needs education
  - decision of special support is made by the officials
  - decision is based on a written **pedagogical statement** made by multi-professional group
    - a student get individual **learning programme**
    - discussion with student/parents before the decision
  - special support includes different types of pedagogical arrangements, and assessment of learning environment, student welfare or other arrangements to be made in order to support student
Role of teachers

- In this model all teachers are active: pre-school teachers, primary school (class) teachers, subject teachers

- All teachers need skills for high quality education
  - Skills to observe and notice students’ individual learning styles
  - Skills to operate in different situations and use different kinds of teaching and learning methods
  - Skills for co-operation with students, other teachers and school personnel, and parents
  - Skills to do pedagogical assessment
Challenge for teacher education

- How to provide three-level support skills for in-service teachers and pre-service teacher students? How do we build our TE curriculums? Do our TE students get any practice for operating the three-level model?

- The role of headmasters and whole school
- Communicative and co-operational skills

- It is a question of ideology behind pedagogical thinking:
  - how do we understand good learning and teaching
  - how do we understand students’ individual needs of education
  - how do we understand personal growth, difficulties and mistakes

- It is really not a shame to get support in learning and school attendance. It is a every students’ right and possibility!
New thinking: Many kinds of learners with their individual needs
Education for diversities

- An example of a course in teacher education (Helsinki University, Department of teacher education)
- Blend of special education, multicultural education, relationship and co-operative skills
- A joint course for all student teacher programmes (pre-school teachers, class teachers, subject teachers, special education teachers)
- The students work in mixed groups and deal with different kinds of learning/teaching/relationship situations and pedagogical case studies from school -> the aim is to discuss and find solutions
Other perspectives and comments

- Pirjo Koivula
- Eija Kauppinen
  - Finnish National Board of Education