Everybody is different – in a different way

Insights into the work of Sophie Scholl School in Gießen, Germany

Wiltrud Thies, Odense 2012

Sophie-Scholl-School Gießen, Germany

- ... a prominent example for successful inclusive education in Germany.
- Covering primary and secondary education SSS gives rise to inclusive settings from grade 1 to 10.
- At the moment 370 students, about 100 of them with so called „special needs“ (all kinds).
- There are up to 22 students in age-mixed classes. Teachers and other staff work in teams.

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Guiding Principles

- Every person is different - in a different way. No one is like his/her neighbor!
- In Sophie-Scholl-School we all meet and act with respect and appreciation.
- We learn together and from each other.

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Every person is different - in a different way...

- ... with or without special needs
- with or without a migrant background
- ... from different family-origins and sizes
- ... with different colours of skin or hair
- ... of different age
- ... girls and boys...
- ...

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We meet and act with respect and appreciation...

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We learn together and from each other.

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1. Ideas and organization to support the development of inclusive education

- Conceptual framework:
  - Inclusive education: none left behind!
  - Age mixed groups: didactic example of diversity
  - All-day school for all students: participation for all!
- Learning / Teaching:
  - Individual training in heterogeneous groups
  - Differentiation, social skills and independent learning methods are essential
- School organisation:
  - Aged mixed classes; children change class after each two years; opportunity to meet new teachers; reunite with children who are already known
  - Rituals and agreements for all

2. High quality instruction in heterogeneous groups

- Successful teaching is the key for raising achievement for all pupils.
- We use diverse teaching methods – they need to be different - as the pupils are all different!
- We do teacher training (before and on the job) with the aim of high quality instruction
- Remember, rethink and get to know old and new methods
- Try and reflect - with all team members!
- Develop a classroom management and classroom skills as a culture of increasingly independent and responsible learning for all students.
- Teacher training in diagnostics is necessary, so that teachers may find out easily in which way any student – not only those with handicap! – need and get support in class.

3. How teachers can learn to think inclusive

- A culture of respect and appreciation – not only for students but for staff as well...
- Time for talking and time for learning
- Discussion and personal reflection about one's image of man as well as about the guiding principles of inclusive education
- Perfectly fitted offers for teacher training (internal and external). Questions are valuable, not stupid!
- Learning by doing – but with reflection!
  - As much freedom of choice concerning the team-membership. If interpersonal problems remain in effect, change of teams must be possible.
- Clear structure and timetable of all meetings, much time for reflection and planning in different groups of staff.

4.1 How Teamwork is organized: School- and Class-Teams

- The school-team: Teachers (primary ed., secondary ed., special needs...), principal, educators, disability support workers, personnel assistants, a carpenter, a biologist, a native speaker, secretaries, facility managers, house and kitchen administrators...
- The class-teams: Teachers, educator, 1 young person in his/her voluntary social year. If necessary children with severe handicaps are accompanied by personal assistants.
  - Every member of the class-team is responsible for all children.
  - Teachers may split the professional responsibility connected with different school subjects, but not regarding groups of children in class (e.g. age, disability, high functioners...).
  - Educators work as supporting team members during some lessons. In the afternoon educators are responsible for the group.
- Personal assistance: ...if necessary. Can be given by one person for several children. Aim: to make the assistance redundant and to help students to become as independent as possible.

... to support the development of inclusive education...

- Classroom organisation:
  - Get together and talk in the classroom-group several times a day.
  - Individual training in the same learning-frame: „Wochenplan“ (weekly or daily schedule)
  - Learning different things on the same subject
  - Social skills
- Culture of respect and appreciation:
  - School is not only a place to learn but also to cultivate inclusive attitudes.
  - School and parents are partners in education and communicate.
  - Pupils learn that adults in school cooperate with respect and appreciation.
  - Adults are models for thinking and acting inclusive.

“This can’t work!” “How does it work?”

1. Which ideas, structure and organization can support the development of inclusive education at school?
2. How can we manage a high quality instruction in heterogeneous groups?
3. Can teachers learn to think inclusive?
4. How is work organized in multi-professional teams?
4.2 Communication and cooperation in multi-professional teams

- **Teacher-cooperation** in behalf of preparing lessons and teaching performance
  - several self organized opportunities per week (fixed dates, but also in breaks or spare time during the day)
- **Team-meeting**: once a week, jour fixe
  - Last-week’s discussion: Highlights, problems, questions...
  - Class-organisation for the next week
  - Planning lessons and distribution of tasks for the next week
  - Case discussions
  - Questions, needs and emergencies
  - Questions and needs that need to be discussed with the principle, the school-team, or in technical conferences
- **Morning chat**: 15 Minutes before lessons start...
  - Everyone knows what to do and how to act...
  - How do you feel today? Can I help?

The end:

Developing inclusive schools...

... is a challenge, but not an excessive demand
... is exhausting, but not too much
... is satisfying and gratifying human rights as well as expanding our professional self-image

Thank you for listening!

Mail: w.thies@sophie-scholl-schule-giessen.de