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What is the Significance of Competence Development for the Special Educational Practice in Special classes?

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1. Scope

The study enrolls in the knowledge field that is investigating competence development of pedagogical staff and their effects. Timperley [3] found evidence that much professional development has not had the desired effect and that many teachers have not been able to see the meaning of it.

In this paper we are focusing on the significance of teachers’ and social educators’ capacity building for practice in special classes and special schools. The aim of study is to generate new knowledge about how common capacity building contributes to creating practice development in special classes and special schools. An additional aim of the project is to point out which factors the professionals experience as respectively promoting and inhibiting the process. The empirical point of departure is a capacity-building program in the City of Aarhus, DK. The expected outcome of the program is to increase the number of pupils who pass the Leaving Examination of the Folkeskole, increased transition to upper secondary education and a strengthened evaluation culture in the schools.

The capacity-building program focus on academic skills based on the international school effectiveness research on “Visible learning” [5], Growth mindset[3] and Co-teaching[4] which doesn’t apply to the way of teaching that are preferred by teachers in special education. The pedagogy values and didactic in special education are based on a social-psychological approach, where the focus is on the pupils wellbeing.

2. Objective and motivation

The present project links to the capacity building process by examining which opportunities and limitations teachers’ and social educators’ experience regarding the relation between the capacity building program’s topics and their own practice [5]. The project addresses the following research question:

What significance do teachers and social educators attach to their participation in the competence development process, and in what ways does it appear in their special educational practice?

The paper draws on social practice theory and we obtain our concepts in social learning theory and critical psychology.

Methodologically, we mix different research methods by combining participant observations and the semi-structured research interview.

The most significant findings so far can be united in two categories:

Lack of alignment between the aims of the program and the professionals’ experienced needs. The teachers and social educators call for professional knowledge regarding specific diagnoses and legal rights regarding examination rules for children with special needs.

The intention behind the capacity-building program is focused on a contextual approach to the pupils’ difficulties, as the growth mindset theory was aimed at changing the professionals’ mindset. However we find that the professionals teach the children changing their mindset. Thus, the professionals’ interventions is based on a psychological/individual approach.

3. References


