

## **Some Considerations on Inclusive Education in Sweden**

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### **Abstract**

In social science, the complexity of the concepts of integration and inclusion has led to extensive debates. Integration and, recently, inclusion has been used frequently in the debate about children with disabilities in schools. The frequent use of the concepts has not resulted in a consensus as to their content. On the contrary, the multitude of meanings attached to them – as a result of different and sometimes opposing theories these concepts are related to – have led to blurred definitions. In this paper I will argue that inclusion can best be understood as describing the loose coupling between children with disabilities (environment) and the school (system). The article aims at discussing inclusion/exclusion from the viewpoint of Luhmann's sociological systems theory, which is from the viewpoint of the operation of function systems. In Luhmann's systems theory, the twin concepts of inclusion and exclusion are understood as a correlate of functional differentiation. Function systems are confronted with a tension between an all-inclusive semantic (e.g. human rights, construction of citizenship etc.) and phenomena of exclusion. The conceptual discussion will be related to the inclusion debate in Sweden focusing on the dramatic increase of the number children with learning disabilities in ordinary classes who choose to go to special remedial classes.

### **Introduction**

In social science the complexity of the concepts integration/inclusion has led to extensive debates. "Integration" and, during the last years, "inclusion" has also been used frequently in the debate about children with disabilities and their education. Despite the frequent use of these concepts it has not emerged any consensus about what they signify. On the contrary, a multitude of meanings are attached to them, a result of different and sometimes opposing theories. In this paper I argue that inclusion in school can best be understood as the mutual relation between children with disabilities and the school system.

According to Luhmann's systems theory, which is my point of departure, the twin concepts of inclusion and exclusion are understood as a correlate of functional differentiation. The school system is confronted with a tension between an all-embracing semantics about inclusion (e.g. human rights, construction of citizenship) and increasing exclusion of those who do not meet the criteria in particular systems. It is almost commonplace to state that before there could be any claim about inclusion a differentiation process must have taken place. A single social organisation does not give birth to claims about inclusion. Without differentiation there is no need to talk

about inclusion since everyone and everything would *ipso facto* be included. Consequently, in order to analyse inclusion, it is necessary to define what differentiation means.

There is no close connection between inclusion/exclusion in one system to another. Exclusion from one sub-system can lead to inclusion in another sub-system, and vice versa. The exclusion can function as qualification for inclusion in another sub-system' or the exclusion from one sub-system can trigger exclusion from other sub-systems. It could as well be insignificant for the other system or subsystem. Inclusion by way of money in the economic system is different from inclusion by way of grades and school performances in the education system, and one does not necessarily influence the other.

The fact that persons with disabilities live a more or less segregated life depends to a major extent on the shortcomings of social systems. One of the most important of these is the education system. There is a close relationship between education and inclusion in society. Education reduces those differences which themselves are the results of social, cultural and economic conditions, or an irreversible biological process. Education opens up a door towards a better life, or is at least a prerequisite towards a better life. This goes for everyone, also for those who are in a more disadvantageous situation whether because of gender, social class, ethnic belonging or disability. Education of persons with disabilities has consequently been one of the target areas of disability research and policy.

During the 60's and 70's an increasing criticism against the way children with disabilities received education became prevalent in Sweden. The criticism was based on the fact that education for pupils with disabilities was organised in a segregated setting. It was a long process towards a change. Normalisation and integration were formulated as objectives in education policy. Already from the 1960's the municipalities had been obliged by law to give all children the opportunity to be enrolled in the regular classroom of their neighbourhood school with age-appropriate peers, or to attend the same school as the other pupils. Although "all children" did not apply for all children with disabilities; children with any kind of mental retardation were excluded. The integration politics intensified during the 70's. The outcome was the political aspiration of "a school that suits every child" and it is still one of the prior objectives within the education policy. This policy is – along with ethical, economical and political arguments – based on the assumption that it is not suitable to have an education system based on pedagogy of segregation. It did take a long time, though, until the policy reached also the school yards and the administrative routines. In 1992 the municipalities became obliged to take the responsibility for all children, included children with mental retardation in the school system (in Sweden the public school under the responsibility of the municipalities has until recently been the dominant school form). Nonetheless, in the amendments to the Education Act made in 1992 some exceptions from the inclusive educational objectives were made, namely for pupils with severe disabilities, who had to attend to special institutions and special schools.

### **Special schools and special classes as sub-systems**

The differentiation process within social system is a process of a formation of sub-systems within that system. The education system, for instance, was when it emerged as a system in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, very simple compared with today's system with its many educational levels, grades, specialisations within the profession, etc. It is important to remember that the formation of sub-systems within systems does not mean

that the entire system has been decomposed into sub-systems. The difference is that the sub-systems have only evolved into a system/environment difference within the system. For the sub-system, for instance primary school education the secondary school education makes up an environment to it. The sub-systems acquire their identity – and functional difference – through their fulfilment of a function for the entire system. I propose that special classes for children with intellectual disabilities could be understood with respect to the function they fulfil. One may consequently ask: What problem do they solve in the education system? Is special education a sub-system differentiated within the school system? And has it been differentiated in order to reduce complexity in the school organisation that the demand of inclusion leads to?

In the Swedish school system, pupils with disabilities belong to two groups: those who must attend education in segregated schools and those who can be integrated in regular classes in regular schools. Those who are considered as uneducable in the regular school and thus go to special schools are no longer considered to be the responsibility of the regular school system. This screening procedure reproduces the traditional model of education for pupils who have, for instance, an intellectual or emotional disability in separated classrooms and the education of children with disabilities, exempted those with intellectual disabilities, in regular classes. The division in these two groups is accepted because it is assumed that the screening criteria reflect the inherent potential of the individual pupil with respect to being educable in regular classes or not. Social science research, however, shows that this presumption might be false. The assumption does not take into account the way the school system is structured and the way communication evolves within class rooms as well as other conditions in the school environment that affect a pupil's ability to benefit from education. It is now days almost a common place among social scientists that learning problems must be understood in an inter-subjective level that also takes the context into account. Learning difficulties exist within the context of the classroom where the curriculum design, the competence of the teacher, the resources available etc., influence the degree to which pupils can be effectively served (Porter & Richler, 1991).

### **Reflections on the use of the inclusion/integration concept**

In social science the complexity of the concepts integration/inclusion of persons and their negative correlates has led to extensive debates, and many authors would agree that inclusion and integration are problematic concepts to understand. Bauman (1998) considers exclusion to be an effect of poverty. Poverty excludes people for whatever passes for a normal life. While for Littlewood (1999), the term exclusion signifies new patterns of social cleavage due to economic restructuring, modifications to welfare state provision and changing definitions of eligibility for a variety of rights. According to these theorists, focusing on the economic system, whether pupils are excluded from ordinary school classes or not depend on the arrangements of distribution and redistribution provided by the welfare state.

According to Parkin (1974, 1979) exclusion is a process or a strategy whereby members of a group try to restrict access to resources and opportunities by reference to a group attribute: ethnic identity, language, social origin, religion, disability etc. Parkin's definition of exclusion is very close to that of Max Weber's (1968) where exclusion becomes a result of closure. Parkin goes on to develop this thesis by identifying and analysing the two main generic types of social closure. Inclusion is thus regarded as a consequence of, and a collective response to exclusion and usurpation. In Parkin's theory the notion of citizenship is central to explaining inclusion or exclusion of

disabled children from ordinary school classes. Citizenship is crucial in any attempt to determine whether policies counter, or indeed erect, barriers to their participation. Thus, according to this theory, focusing on citizenship rights, exclusion of disabled children from ordinary classes must take into account the demands, strategies, actions of parents to non-disabled children, teachers and the community at large and view exclusion/inclusion processes as power relations over the valuable resource that education is.

According to Drake (1999) to be a citizen is to be able to take part in the decisions that creates and re-creates the contours of a society, and to be able to participate, to be included, in key fields such as education, work, leisure, political debates, etc. The opposite of citizenship is exclusion. Citizenship is a concept that essentially defines those who are and those who are not members of a common society. According to this theory exclusion of children with disabilities has been and continues to be a *de jure* segregation effected by specific provisions for children with disabilities to be educated in special schools and classrooms. School policies have been treating children with disabilities as special and in need of a separate educational programme outside the regular classroom.

With Niklas Luhmann's sociological systems theory, follows another path of defining inclusion/exclusion, as has already been touched upon. His sociological systems theory (1986, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003) is built on the premise that modern society is differentiated in function systems, which means among other things that inclusion and exclusion is system specific. The systems theory concepts of exclusion/inclusion as correlates to functional differentiation imply that no person is included in only one particular function system. Indicators for inclusion in different systems in the functionally differentiated society vary depending on the system at stake. Income in the economic system, grades in the school system, rights in the legal system, voting in the political system etc. This is important because there cannot be a general indicator for inclusion. Each system has its own criteria for inclusion that are not compatible or interchangeable with those of other systems (Muller, 1994).

The conceptualisation of the school system as one among many self-referential social systems that reproduces specific communications by communications alters the interpretation. Since communications cannot be treated as products of individual actors, but as products of the communication processes themselves, inclusion has to be explained on the basis of the organisation and structure of the communication system. Exclusion as well as every sociological explanation is not, according to this theory, reducible or causally attributed to individual actors. It is the system itself that determines, through its own processes, whether and for what reasons inclusion in the particular system comes into being. That is to say, exclusion of disabled children cannot be explained with reference to individual's attitudes, prejudices, malevolence, interests, etc (there is a slight similarity with Merton's notion of institutional discrimination).

Much research on the exclusion of disabled children from schools has focused on attitudinal aspects, but inclusion and inclusion strategies from a sociological system's theory perspective are very much social, not individual phenomena. Communication is prior to action. Social systems produce communication and meaning. What happens in people's minds - the values and attitudes they have - is undoubtedly interesting, and Luhmann's theory does not deny the existence or importance of actors' cognitions and

intentions, but it is what happens in schools as systems that are of concern here, and from the school systems perspective inclusion is a product of communication, not of psychic systems, of cognitions (Hendry & Seidl, 2003). It is the organisation of the school system that both enables and restricts communication.

Inclusion means that the school system – or any social system – assigns positions to the pupils, and that these assignments correspond to role expectations to be met. When there is a complementarity between the assigned positions and personal skills, interests and needs, there is a feeling of belonging together (Jäckel, 2001; Geissler, 2000). Inclusion in schools means the access of children to this system, their participation in the demands, transfers and gratifications of this system. Exclusion means not only that children fail or are barred from participating in school, but also that children going to regular classes are not substantially included, i.e. do not take part in the communications. Luhmann's conception of being included means to have a role in a subsystem, of participating in the communication in the particular system. The merit of the concepts, inclusion and exclusion, is that they are well suited to analyse the involvement or non-involvement, attachment or non-attachment of individuals or groups vis-à-vis different subsystems.

In every individual's life span there are periods of inclusion in some systems and exclusion from others. This means that there is a loose coupling between individuals and social systems in the sense that most individuals during their life span will move into and out from several systems. None will be included during the whole life span in all systems and there are very few that are excluded permanently from all systems (Möller, 2002). Exclusion could thus be more or less neutral. Leaving school after thirteen years in order to go to higher education implies being excluded from the school system, or becoming a pensioner means to be excluded from the labour market. Although there is also another, more dramatic exclusion; the one that cuts off the persons from the system although s/he ought to be included (whether from the labour market because of long term illness or the school system because of disability). The cumulative effects exclusion can have on other systems (for instance, education because it is so fundamental for our society any more; without education one can hardly enter the labour market). In this latter sense Luhmann refers to "generalised exclusion".

Counted to be included are individuals who however are not included in their total existence as psychic systems and bodies, but only by being addressed as 'person' in communication. Analysing school as a social system from the viewpoint of Luhmann's systems theory and its relation to disabled children, one can not use the concept individual, but the concept person. Because man becomes part of social systems as a person – pupil, student, citizen, elector, legal entity etc. – when the system assigns the person a role. In systems theory individual and person are given different references. Persons refer to systems and individuals to the environment.<sup>1</sup> Implicitly, it is also assumed here that not simply individuals, but specifically classified individuals are included or excluded, so that classification also determines the process of inclusion/exclusion or alternatively is created by it. This leads to the question of how to explain why inclusion/exclusion processes are for example disability-specifically coded and why the disability codification systematically leads to exclusion (cf.

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<sup>1</sup> Luhmann's concept of person differs from the concept of role. The main difference is that the role bearer – as an individual – is detached from the expectations of behaviour addressed to him. Person refers to the attribution and expectations of behaviour addressed to a specific individual. An individual can be attributed and perform many persons (Holmström 1996).

Stichweh & Stäheli, 2001). Inclusion thus means persons' participation in certain communications. Being included in the school system means that pupils' schooling is connected to certain expectations. Not being addressed as a person from the school system is the other side of inclusion and this is signified as exclusion.

Thus, inclusion/exclusion is conceptualised and interpreted as a constructed process of communication. The characteristic of exclusion from communication systems is not its external reference to physical and psychical impairment. What is decisive is the logic that bears the communication. A description of exclusion processes or effects is not a matter of locating it physically in individuals. A discussion at lunch time in school or over a dinner table at home can just as well be characterised as excluding as can a meeting in a social insurance office, or a lecture in a school room. Social systems, as communication systems, are not physically anchored, but anchored in communication and composed by meaning. Therefore *exclusion of disabled children from ordinary classes must be understood with reference to communication, rather than with reference to children's differences regarding bodily or mental structures*. The hindrance the specific disability puts on communication – in all its senses, from body language to well phrased sentences – must be taken into account here, not as a medical fact, but as possible communication overload.

Exclusion as a phenomenon within differentiated social systems means that there is no unifying strategy to combat exclusion. The problem of exclusion from the labour market system is totally different from the exclusion in schools, from the legal system etc. This means that communication about exclusion will always take place from many different reference points and not from a common interpretive framework.

Participation in education is regulated by the school, examinations etc. Modern society makes no attempt to ensure that people who do not belong to one system belong to another. Therefore, it no longer makes sense to talk about an overall social system under which other systems are subordinated. Instead, we have to consider the inclusion problem in the light of an overall increase in the number of different systems (Luhmann, 1995). This overall increase in the number of different systems and the fact that inclusion is restricted to each individual system bring about conflicts. It is impossible to question what the point is of being included in the legal system – having rights to be included in schools – if it simultaneously does not *de facto* lead to inclusion in the education system. What's the point of being able formally to participate in the job market by searching for job, competing and applying for jobs – made possible by legislation that states the equality of everybody in the labour market – while all the long being rejected an employment, thus never entering the working life in itself? Children with disabilities have the right according to the law to be included, but whether they are included in regular classes have to be determined by the particular system. This might provide a starting point for explaining the difference between special education policy in principle and the practice in schools/, as well as explaining the increasing tension between education for everybody for longer and longer span of time, while fewer find a work.

The separation of two groups – those who can attend regular classes and those who can attend special remedial classes – is being done by means of distinctions and therefore the result of communications, related to a certain observation point (cf. Foucault, 1973, 1975). The distinction into these categories does not preclude that once these categories are established they can reduce the complexity of the individual variation in knowledge,

abilities, attitudes, performances on both sides of the distinction, making possible to refer to two categories as educable and uneducable. But the differences between these two groups regarding exclusion do not correspond to the individual variation in abilities. Educable, uneducable are socially constructed categories and not inherited physical or psychic characteristics that provide the basis for the separation of certain persons. Furthermore, the variation in abilities at the individual level is not sufficient to explain the organized exclusion on the system level. If “uneducable” indicates exclusion processes in different sub-systems, it contradicts every kind of simple reductionism to individual performances. The variation in ability at the individual level provides a better explanation for differences within the categories educable/uneducable than between the categories educable/uneducable. These categories rather indicate socially organized differences in opportunities to inclusion (cf. Tilly, 2000).

From this selective review over the use of the exclusion concept become quite obvious that: (1) the frequent use of the concept has not resulted in a consensus as to its content, (2) the concept is complicated and not easy to define and have also different meaning within different theoretical traditions, (3) the recurrent use of it and the multitude of meanings attached to it have resulted in blurred and sometimes overlapping definitions.

In my view the main difference between integration and inclusion refers to the perspective adopted. Integration refers to observations made from the perspective of the individual whereas inclusion refers to observations made from the perspective of systems. The concept of integration thus describes the process in which disabled individual's become attached to the existing school system which is not necessarily being transformed. The variable in the relation between disabled children and school system is the disabled children while the system remains constant. It is a process of adding individuals to already existing social systems. When the child succeeds in participating in the established behaviour and communication patterns, then integration is considered successful. Integration is almost understood as a unilateral process. It is not a process that demands adjustment from the school system (its structure, curricula, particular competences etc.). The school system remains constant and it is expected from the disabled children to fulfil the requisites of the system (this does not except adaptations in the environment or the provision of assistive devices). The process of inclusion is complex and does not offer quantifiable variables to the same degree that analyses of integration do.

In order to identify the cases of exclusion we must therefore proceed in a two-fold approach by asking two different types of questions. (1) “Why are disabled children excluded in this and not in other systems?” (2) “Why are disabled children excluded in this system and not those children regarded as not disabled?” The first question enables us to discover environmental causes and the second system-related causes. Both questions are taking into account the system/environment distinction. When the questions do not take into account the system/environment distinction they are formulated in a way that precludes comparison. For instance, “why are disabled children excluded from the school system?” In this case we are forced to investigate whole causal constellations i.e., stable constellations *across* cases as in variable oriented approach of empiricism.

### **International standards in special education policy**

With the UNESCO “Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education” (1994) the concept inclusion replaced the former frequently used concept

integration to describe the process of non-differential education in the regular classroom.<sup>2</sup> The Salamanca Statement is a powerful instrument proclaiming inclusive education as the leading principle in special needs education. It states that: “those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs” (The Salamanca Statement, 1994:viii). Inclusive education is regarded as the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes and moreover to “provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system.” (ibid, p. ix) The Statement is guided by the idea that the school system must actively adapt itself to the individual learning conditions of those children with special educational needs in order to enable them to realise their potentials. The adaptation of the education system to the needs of all children is in accordance with the understanding of disability as system conditioned. One cannot concentrate on a person’s intellectual and/or physical impairments, but one must see to the kind of changes in the person’s environment that need to be made in order to enable him/her to participate. Instead of the one-sided individual-related approach, the Salamanca Statement embraces also the person-environment relationship. This implies interpreting problems with reference to the wider environmental, social and cultural contexts in which they occur. It also implies that resources must be collected, policies implemented and programs developed. As long as the focus lies on the individual solely, learning difficulties are viewed as limitations of individuals, but with the focus on the person-environment relationship learning difficulties become the result of a complex interaction of factors which all of them belong to a greater context, e.g. nature of curriculum, school organisation, teachers’ ability and readiness to respond to the diversity of understanding as well as the lack of self-assurance and henceforth of motivation of the disabled persons. The difficulties, according to this view, to receive education as experienced by pupils with learning difficulties are the direct expressions of the absence of opportunities to get the kind of education, which is physically accessible, adapted to their specific needs and at the same time supportive; with a strong belief in their potentials.

Inclusion has been defined in Swedish official reports as the opportunity to participate in the whole. In one government report on children with special needs, “inclusion” was defined as the “process which maximizes interaction between disabled and non-disabled students.” (SOU, 1997:121) In earlier school practice (i.e. from the 60’ until the mid 90’) integration was organised in such a way that the teaching was more or less separated from the ordinary class teaching. Thus integration did not necessarily imply that disabled pupils were in the same classroom as non-disabled pupils. With the integration concept the individual student’s need became the focal point and the school was obliged to compensate him/her in the form of e.g. remedial hours or separate teaching groups. Since the 90s integration of students can look very different and in practice deals with a segregated type of teaching.

According to the new policy, teaching should take place within the framework of the ordinary class. Differences between children should be accepted and respected and ought not to impede teaching in the same classroom. In this perspective, differences

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<sup>2</sup> The Salamanca Statement uses the term ‘inclusive education’ which refer to schools which have the ability to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs, while the Standard Rules uses the term ‘education in integrated settings’. The Salamanca Statement builds upon and develops further the ideas formulated in Rule 6 in the UN “Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities” (1993), and makes them more precise.

between remedial teaching and ordinary teaching are played down and demand in principle that all teaching personnel have sufficient knowledge in order to teach all children. Segregation in this perspective consequently refers to physical separation and avoidance of contact.

### **Swedish special education policy<sup>3</sup>**

As stated at the beginning of this exposition, Swedish municipalities became responsible for the education of children with disabilities, as well as of other children (in the beginning with the exception of some groups, though). Only for very specific purposes do the government still provide special funding. The principle in the Swedish special education policy is nowadays that children with disabilities are entitled to, and should, enjoy educational training opportunities equal to those of non-disabled children. Policy is built on the premises that school should be for all pupils irrespective of their individual needs. Education within regular classes has been since the 1960's the guiding principles while special classes and special groups of pupils should be the exception. The means for achieving these goals are: (1) a common curriculum for all forms of education and also (2) the obligation to go to school was the same for all pupils irrespective if they went in the ordinary school or in special schools. This has led to that the majority of children with disabilities take part in ordinary education or special classes linked to ordinary schools.

An additional important idea in the formulation of the educational policy objectives has been that the support given to pupils with disabilities in school is important not only for the pupil concerned but also for the attitudes the rest of society has towards those pupils and disabled people in general. It is thus important also for the education pupils without disabilities receive in schools.

The Swedish Education Act (SFS, 1985:1100; SFS, 2003:415) states that all children shall have equal access to education, and that all children shall enjoy this right, regardless of gender, where they live, or social or economic factors. Special support shall also be given to students who have difficulty with the schoolwork. Most students with a need for special support should be taught in regular classes in compulsory- and upper secondary schools. There should also be a certain number of special remedial classes (*särklasser*) for students with intellectual disabilities, and for students with social and emotional problems. Another educational setting is offered, however, to pupils whose learning ability is lower than normal, compulsory special remedial classes (*särskola*). One reform to assure the implementation of the idea about special remedial classes was effected in a 1988 parliamentary decision regarding a new training program for teachers, which states that all compulsory school teachers shall receive the equivalent of a half term of study in special needs education. In addition to this, there is also a three term specialist training program in special education.

A pupil, who for some reason has difficulties in following lessons in a regular class can receive support in one of the following three ways: (1) benefit from a special education teacher support who assist the child in the classroom, or (2) to get education in a special remedial group outside the regular classroom but within the regular school or (3) the child can attend one of the special schools.

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<sup>3</sup> The information in the following is gathered from the website of the Swedish National Agency for Education.

In the debate about special education three important issues that have been pointed out and considered as decisive for the school system to tackle: (1) how should the school system handle the fact that children with disabilities have different experiences, knowledge and needs? There is a great diversity of differences (for instance, some children cannot perceive visual utterances; others cannot perceive audible utterances and some others cannot apprehend complex information). (2) How can pupils' differences be utilised as resources for the pedagogical work in the school in a direction that is best for all students? (3) Can the assumption that inclusion is best for all pupils find pedagogical support when the school system is structured to differentiate the abilities of students i.e., to determine who will have access to higher education, to credentials and valuable positions?

There are only a few special schools in Sweden today, existing as separate school buildings. The special school is designed to give disabled pupils individually adapted education that corresponds as far as possible to normal compulsory school education. Most children with physical disabilities, however, attend ordinary compulsory and upper secondary schools in regular classes that are equipped in order to compensate the disabled pupil's specific impairment. For deaf and hearing-impaired children, whose first language is sign language, there exists still the alternative of receiving education in special schools. There are also some special schools for blind children and for children who have multiple disabilities.

Special schools give students an education equal to the education provided in regular schools. Pupils in the special schools attend school for ten years. Special schools have greater responsibility for their students compared with the regular school, for example responsibility for the pupils' residence, after-school activities and travel to and from school. Special school for deaf and hard of hearing students is bilingual, using Swedish Sign Language and Swedish. Swedish Sign Language as a subject is part of the curriculum. Deaf pupils are entitled to sign language as their first language. This means that deaf children, young people and adults are also entitled to be taught in their own language.

Intellectually disabled pupils may with special support follow the education in (1) a regular class in compulsory school or (2) be enrolled in special classes for intellectually disabled. Under the Education Act (SFS, 1985:1100; SFS, 2003:415), children with learning disabilities must be given places in regular schools, and the municipality is obliged to provide the support they need. Most children with intellectual disabilities have such places nowadays. Special remedial classes are intended for children who are deemed unable to achieve the standard learning objectives of secondary schools because of some kind of developmental disability.

Classes for pupils with learning disabilities are designed to give individually adapted education that corresponds as far as possible to normal compulsory and upper secondary school education. There are classes for pupils with learning disabilities at both comprehensive school and upper secondary school levels. Even seriously retarded children receive educational stimulation at training schools. Training school is for pupils with severe learning disabilities whose disability makes it impossible to benefit from the education given in compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities. Instead of traditional subjects, the program of study for training school is divided into five areas. (The five areas are creative activities, communication, motoric skills, everyday activities and conception of reality.) The ordinary compulsory school and

special remedial classes follow the same curriculum, but training schools is a separated schooling with its own syllabuses, and in the case of upper secondary school its own criteria for grades. With that follows special methods and educational theories. It is up to parents to decide whether a child should attend remedial classes in ordinary school or a special school for those with intellectual disabilities. About one percent of the children go to the latter type of schooling. Compulsory schooling for pupils with learning disabilities means a mandatory 9 years of school for all children and youths between the ages of 7-16 years. Beyond that, pupils are entitled to a 10th, non-compulsory year to augment this education. About three percent of pupils i.e., just over 20 000 children and youths, attend programs for pupils with learning disabilities (2001).

Upper secondary school for pupils with learning disabilities offers preparatory vocational training similar to regular upper secondary school in the form of national- or specially designed programs. The programs in upper secondary are 4-year programs with a guaranteed minimum of 3600 hours of instruction, divided between core- and program-specific subjects. (The core subjects are Swedish, English, Social Studies, Mathematics, Physical Education and Health, and the Arts.)

For several reasons it is very difficult to measure results of remedial teaching and other support to students with special needs. The result is dependent on conditions in the form of various resources. For example, it must be related to the student's and the school's conditions, work procedures and to the influence of other factors, which are difficult to determine.

To conclude this review of the special education policy in Sweden, there are only a few pupils with physical impairment in special schools, but as many as 91% of pupils with intellectual disabilities receive their education in special remedial classes within ordinary school milieu. Only 9% of these pupils receive their education in an ordinary class.

### **Implementation problems**

When the responsibility for special schools was transferred from regional to municipal control in 1996, hope arose that this would result in an increase of inclusive education. It was hoped that this change in organization would stimulate a deeper understanding and tolerance of children in special needs, as well as better educational cooperation and exchange. But on the contrary, the reform had the opposite effect, and an even greater number of children were placed in special schools. The reform did not lead to an increased level of inclusive education, and it has not promoted a society offering opportunities of inclusion in regular classes to all its pupils. The opportunities of participation each and all individuals within a society and within school have lost ground in favour of economic expediency. That condition the clash between: (a) the unconditional right of pupils with intellectual disabilities to receive support, though there are no clear guidelines on how the support should be designed and (b) the municipal responsibility to finance and design the measures to be taken. This gives a large scope for local initiatives and assessments.

From a number of sources it was reported that during the 1990s the number of children in need of special support increased. This concerns primarily children with reading and writing difficulties, pupils with concentration difficulties, and pupils with compulsive behaviour problems. The number of registered pupils in the compulsory level school for

the intellectually impaired has increased with close to 40% the last five years. (There is huge variation among municipalities and an important factor for explaining this variation is, as we shall see, the economic situation in the municipalities.) In the upper secondary-level school for the intellectually disabled the student increase is 11%. There are large variations between the municipalities, but the majority reported an increase in the number of pupils in the compulsory level schools for the intellectually impaired. The figures are somewhat lower for schools for children with severe intellectual difficulties and upper secondary special schools for the intellectually disabled. Even in the special schools, the number of registered students increased with 15% over the last five years. This can be compared with the student increase in the compulsory school, which was 2% respective 8% during the same time periods.

Trying to explain what lies behind this increase, there are several factors that can be pointed out. Changes in society influence the picture in schools in several ways. (1) An increase of psychic and psychosocial problems among adults, especially among manual workers and the unemployed indicates that a certain real increase exists even among schoolchildren. To have parents who are unemployed, or divorced, or having economic and social problems imply that the home environment for many children can be quite difficult. If success in reading and writing is partly dependent on what the child's environment looks like, then perhaps increased inequalities in society also take expression in school. (2) Another factor is that the demand for knowledge, for example, the quality of reading and writing language abilities has increased in society and consequently also in school. (3) A third factor, probably the most important, is the municipalities' reduction of economic resources to schools, contributing to students' problems being more visible than earlier, when these could be handled easier within the framework of existing resources. When parents noticed that their children do not receive the education and the support they needed they decided to get a diagnose from a psychiatrist that the child had some kind of intellectual disorder – the new types of diagnoses – and get a place for the child in special remedial classes.

The transfer of schools for the intellectually disabled to municipal control has made them more accessible and attractive for parents. As a result of the integration of the school for the intellectually disabled into the compulsory school, registration in the special schools is played down. Another way to express this is that exclusion and stigmatization seems easier to accept if it occurs in an integrated context. Thus, when support to students with special needs decreases in the compulsory school, special classes for the intellectually disabled stand out as an alternative for students who earlier could be accommodated in the compulsory school. The main explanation provided by research done for the increase of registered students in the schools for the intellectually disabled is that reductions in special education teachers' hours in the compulsory schools lead to the increase in the number of registered students in classes for the intellectually disabled (Tideman, 1994, 1997a, b). The increase of pupils by 40% in special schools during the last five years may be interpreted as a sign of a decreased willingness on behalf of the local authorities to offer better education for those pupils within the frame of regular classes in integrated setting. For pupils with disabilities this means that the possibilities of getting an education within the ordinary schools have become more limited.

Another effect of the economic crisis is that pupils in special classes get teachers without special pedagogic education. According to the regulations of teacher education every teacher should have such competence in special pedagogic that s/he is able to

organize the work in the classroom according to the needs of pupils with special needs. There should be no excuse to exclude pupils with special needs because of lack of competence among teachers.

Many pupils are nonetheless placed in segregated groups with teachers holding no special education competence, in some cases even with no pedagogic education at all.<sup>4</sup>

### **Reflections on inclusion and integration**

The arguments lying behind the claims on the integration of disabled children in schools is normative. I believe that this partly depends on the fact that integration in many sociological theories – from Durkheim, Parsons to Habermas – is assumed to be maintained through values. Morality or some common cultural values are that which integrates systems and holds them together. As far as Parsons is concerned, a social system can only maintain its balance, if a number of basic functions are in order i.e. social goals have to be set, adaptation and integration must be possible and the individuals' motivation must be maintained. For these functions to have the desired effect, the individual has to be socialised, and this socialisation must be followed up by control (Parsons, 1951).

The term integration have been used in the debate about disabled children in school – as it is today used the term inclusion – as a metaphor for a desired state. If by integration is meant a certain degree of connectedness between disabled children and school social integration must then mean that this connectedness is of a normative type. Many social scientists and policy makers for instance mean that integration in social systems is maintained through moral norms. But in today's school the highly diversified idea of a normative integration appears untenable. In today's school neither non-disabled children can be given priority over disabled children nor can disabled children be given priority over non-disabled. What moral norm should function as an integrative principle in school? The debate about integration/inclusion in Sweden takes its point of departure from such a conception. Namely to pinpoint moral norms that should function as integrative mechanisms for children with disabilities in schools (se Emmanuelsson, 1976, 1995, 1997; Rosenqvist, 1994, 2000, 2001). We know that this enterprise contradicts our experience but, despite this, the same preaching goes on year after year. Let us say the moral norm is to be considerate to the disabled children or the principle of solidarity. Without a legal underpinning or without special designated economic resources are those norms worthless because moral norms have not a central place in a differentiated in function systems society. That does not mean that moral norms are themselves worthless for individuals' action but seen from the point of view of how school is organised and how it function, moral norms and values play a marginal roll. The school system is not based on moral norms; it is not integrated on the basis of a consensus regarding values. If we should describe the modern school by means of an integration concept based on moral norms, then it must be described as disintegrated because its function cannot be made intelligible by means of a moral norm.

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<sup>4</sup> The argument for this segregation is (1) to protect the "normal" pupils from those pupils with special needs that take too much time from the teacher; (2) the lack of resources has lead to an increased use of medical labels of pupils because this implies that schools get more resources. For each pupil in a remedial class the school gets some additional resources from the municipality and (3) the increased demands, increased standards in Swedish, English and mathematics for passing to the gymnasium. When the standards for passing the exams are higher the result becomes more exclusion.

Equality and freedom of choice are two mutually conflict-filled values, which the school system must deal with. How the schools succeeded to meet the students' needs of special support could be a test of how well the school system functions. Swedish children in need of special support have a legal right to receive support, but municipalities have the freedom to choose to what extent and how it should take place. These objectives are not always compatible. A municipality's action capability is restrained by the economic situation. Minimizing the differences within the legal system by providing rights – just another word for inclusion in the legal system – does not necessarily lead to minimization of differences within the school system. Political steering - the minimization of differences - by means of law minimizes the differences within the legal system but not necessarily within the educational system. Inclusion in one system does not necessarily leads to inclusion in another system. In every system inclusion is determined by the system's own criteria. Each system can only implement its own programs. The school system can only implement educational programs created by it not political programs created by politicians. Though the political system can create incentives for the school system to create and implement inclusive programs for children with disabilities. Inclusive education implies – as any kind of inclusion of persons with disabilities into society – radical rethinking.

### **Conclusion**

So, why inclusion in school? Inclusion in school implies access to knowledge and secondary socialisation. One is thus dependent of the school system for the way which life each individual strives to live. Disabled children's freedom to choose their life and the equality according to the law that are two cornerstones in modern democracies, imply both freedom and equal opportunities with other children in choosing schooling and school form. The distinction thus between inclusion and exclusion, between children that are included in the school system and children that are excluded from it determines whether one belongs those with the freedom and having equal opportunities to form their life.

The normative approach has lead to the moralisation of the inclusion issue. Inventing new moral norms cannot solve the problem of disabled children's inclusion in schools. Most of the debate takes its starting point in moral norms for analysing the relation between disabled children and the school. Most researchers start with pinpointing certain values and then with these values as starting point proceed to point out the shortcomings and failures in schools. The whole enterprise seems to be a judgement of a system from ideal premises. But the question of lack of resources, lack of competence on behalf of the educators, the underestimation of the communication in the school system thereby including some, excluding others – not always across the traditional barriers – are no small details in the education system.

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