TEACHING AND LEARNING, INCLUSIVE PRACTICES AND PUPILS' PARTICIPATION IN LITERACY EDUCATION IN ICELANDIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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UKLA 51st International Conference
National College for Teaching and Leadership
Nottingham
10th to 12th July 2015
THE PRESENTATION

• A few notes on Icelandic school system
• Origin and overview of the study
• The data set used for the presentation
• The population, sample of schools and groups of respondents
• The questions addressed in the presentation
• Findings and conclusions
Students aged 16–20

Pupils aged 6–16
- Lower secondary level years 8–10
- Primary level years 1–7

Pupils aged 1, 5 or 2–6
BEGINNING LITERACY – BL

• An approach to literacy education in the first two years of the primary school, and a professional development programme for teachers
• Pioneered by Rósa Eggertsdóttir in four schools in 2004–2006 – in general use since autumn 2006
• Currently (spring 2015) in use in 80 primary schools – nearly 50% of primary schools in Iceland
BEGINNING LITERACY (CONT.)

• An interactive / balanced approach to literacy teaching
• Not a single method but an arrangement of methods with a tight connection to constructive learning theories
• Strong emphasis on inclusive education
THE STUDY

• Commenced in 2011
  – Literacy education in grades one and two under the banner of BL
  – Team of researchers from the University of Akureyri and the University of Iceland
  – Expanded to include literacy education in non-BL schools

• Aims relating to
  – teaching and learning
  – professional development and school improvement
MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS RELATE TO

• the BL as an approach to literacy education
• learning experiences and outcomes of pupils’ literacy learning
• teaching arrangements, and teachers’ conceptions of literacy education
• staff development issues
• internal conditions for implementation in schools
THE DATA SETS

• Existing data

• Six cases studies in BL schools
  – Classroom observations, focus group and individual interviews and document analysis

• On-line questionnaire survey
  – Teachers in 68 BL and 53 non-BL schools
  – Development leaders and heads in 68 BL schools
  – Heads in 53 non-BL schools

• On-line questionnaire survey to parents
QUESTIONS ABOUT TEACHING PRACTICES

1. Organisation of teaching and activities of teachers
2. Teaching plans
3. Organisation of pupils’ learning
4. The organisation of pupils’ group work and how they are assigned to groups
QUESTIONS ABOUT TEACHING PRACTICES

5. Pupils‘ learning tasks and pupils’ participation in organising their own learning

6. The organisation of pupils‘ homework

7. Teachers‘ reactions to reading difficulties and the organisation of special education

8. How teaching organisation is adapted to different needs and dispositions of children
### ORGANISATION OF TEACHING AND ACTIVITIES OF TEACHERS I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Almost all of the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Almost never</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspects of learning adapted to individual students</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>The arrangement of student work</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>How assignments are completed</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning environment</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56</td>
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<td><strong>Teaching plans</strong></td>
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<td>Allow for individualised learning tasks</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allow students to choose learning tasks</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td><strong>When working in groups</strong></td>
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<td>Pupils' interests are taken into account</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pupils with different abilities work together</td>
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<td>60</td>
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<td>Pupils with similar abilities work together</td>
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<td>53</td>
<td>33</td>
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ORGANISATION OF TEACHING AND ACTIVITIES OF TEACHERS II

- Methods in teaching literacy:
  - **Almost in every lesson**: 8%
  - **About every day**: 29%
  - **Once or twice a week**: 41%
  - **Less than weekly**: 21%

- Students work in groups where assignments are:
  - **Almost in every lesson**: 8%
  - **About every day**: 29%
  - **Once or twice a week**: 41%
  - **Less than weekly**: 21%

- Students rotate between different assignments:
  - **Almost in every lesson**: 8%
  - **About every day**: 33%
  - **Once or twice a week**: 44%
  - **Less than weekly**: 15%

- All students work on the same assignments:
  - **Almost in every lesson**: 6%
  - **About every day**: 55%
  - **Once or twice a week**: 30%
  - **Less than weekly**: 9%
PUPILS’ LEARNING TASKS I

Organisation of literacy learning...

- Pupils are engaged in self-assessment: 26% almost in every lesson, 28% about every day, 64% once or twice a week, 21% less than weekly.
- Pupils can decide their pace: 18% almost in every lesson, 39% about every day, 23% once or twice a week, 21% less than weekly.
- Pupils have choice of tasks and methods: 19% almost in every lesson, 43% about every day, 35% once or twice a week, 35% less than weekly.
- Pupils participate in setting learning goals: 9% almost in every lesson, 20% about every day, 71% once or twice a week, 21% less than weekly.
- Pupils get learning tasks according to their interests: 12% almost in every lesson, 27% about every day, 58% once or twice a week, 10% less than weekly.

Pupil's working methods...

- Pupils work in cooperative learning groups: 18% almost in every lesson, 47% about every day, 32% once or twice a week, 32% less than weekly.
- Pupils work in groups without interdependent...: 13% almost in every lesson, 48% about every day, 22% once or twice a week, 17% less than weekly.
- Pupils work in pairs: 2% almost in every lesson, 58% about every day, 37% once or twice a week, 3% less than weekly.
- Pupils work individually: 5% almost in every lesson, 77% about every day, 15% once or twice a week, 3% less than weekly.
- Pupils follow whole-class instructions: 7% almost in every lesson, 47% about every day, 36% once or twice a week, 10% less than weekly.
PUPILS' LEARNING TASKS II

- Takes pupils' interests into account
- Caters for different needs of pupils
- Is the same for all pupils

How often does this apply to homework...

- Almost all of the time
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Almost never

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<tr>
<td>Caters for different needs of pupils</td>
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<td>Is the same for all pupils</td>
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TEACHERS’ REACTIONS TO READING DIFFICULTIES

Reaction to reading difficulties is characterised with...

- Fits very well
- Fits rather well
- Fits neither well nor poorly
- Fits rather poorly
- Fits very poorly

Special education teacher works with pupils within the regular class setting:
- Fits very well: 15
- Fits rather well: 25
- Fits neither well nor poorly: 16
- Fits rather poorly: 14
- Fits very poorly: 29

Special education teacher works with pupils on a separate location in the classroom:
- Fits very well: 11
- Fits rather well: 18
- Fits neither well nor poorly: 16
- Fits rather poorly: 19
- Fits very poorly: 36

Special education teacher works with children outside of their class:
- Fits very well: 36
- Fits rather well: 33
- Fits neither well nor poorly: 11
- Fits rather poorly: 9
- Fits very poorly: 12

Diagnosis of reading difficulties by a special education teacher:
- Fits very well: 45
- Fits rather well: 34
- Fits neither well nor poorly: 14
- Fits rather poorly: 5
- Fits very poorly: 2

Early intervention:
- Fits very well: 44
- Fits rather well: 42
- Fits neither well nor poorly: 10
- Fits rather poorly: 3
- Fits very poorly: 1
HOW DOES THE TEACHING ORGANISATION CATER FOR DIFFERENT NEEDS AND DISPOSITIONS OF CHILDREN

Organisation of the teaching suits...

- **Girls**: Suits most 50, Suits many 41, Suits neither many nor few 8, Suits few 1, Suits almost none 1
- **Boys**: Suits most 45, Suits many 44, Suits neither many nor few 11, Suits few 1, Suits almost none 1
- **Pupils with behaviour problems**: Suits most 26, Suits many 45, Suits neither many nor few 22, Suits few 5, Suits almost none 2
- **Gifted pupils**: Suits most 56, Suits many 34, Suits neither many nor few 6, Suits few 31, Suits almost none 1
- **Pupils who are not native speakers of Icelandic**: Suits most 29, Suits many 38, Suits neither many nor few 22, Suits few 9, Suits almost none 2
- **Pupils with dyslexia**: Suits most 33, Suits many 41, Suits neither many nor few 17, Suits few 8, Suits almost none 1
- **Pupils with learning difficulties**: Suits most 38, Suits many 47, Suits neither many nor few 11, Suits few 3, Suits almost none 1
SOME CONCLUSIONS

• Answers to general questions fairly well consistent with what is expected to characterise individualised teaching

• Far more variance in answers to more specific questions about the organisation of teaching and learning and homework

• Early intervention characterised with special education as reactions to learning difficulties

• Despite answers that indicate practices not consistent with inclusive education – most teachers assume that their arrangements suit most pupils
THE BEGINNING LITERACY STUDY IS FUNDED BY:

- Iceland Directory of Labour
- KEA University Fund
- Landsbankinn’s Community Fund
- Ministry of Education and Science
- Sumargjöf Children‘s Welfare Fund
- University of Akureyri Research Fund
- University of Iceland Research Fund
BL on YouTube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A329l9O_6GE

Beginning Literacy eight years on: Seeking harmony between a literacy programme and the change programme.

Paper presented at UKLA international conference 2014
http://staff.unak.is/not/runar/Rannsoknir/UKLA_paper_loka.pdf

Literacy education through Beginning Literacy: Research and preliminary findings

Paper presented at ECER 2014, Porto 1–5 September 2014:
http://staff.unak.is/not/runar/Rannsoknir/BL_ECER_14_paper.pdf