

Collaboration in the inclusive classroom: effects of teacher characteristics and classroom composition on the collaboration between regular and special teachers.

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General description of research questions, objectives, theoretical framework (max 600 mots)

Many systems in Europe and worldwide are faced with the challenge of inclusion (Ainscow & César, 2006). In Switzerland, the movement toward inclusion has developed in the recent years through regional evolutions in educational laws and regulations. Change was triggered in part by an intercantonal agreement promoting the idea that inclusive solutions should be preferred to separate ones in the schooling of children with special educational needs. Taking up this challenge, schools and teachers are testing new ways of supporting children with special educational needs (SEN), most of which involve increased collaboration (Benoit & Angelucci, 2011), in particular between regular teachers and the special teachers that enact support to the SEN children in the regular class. Research in this area is scarce: for example, the only meta-analysis on the effectiveness of co-teaching includes only six studies and moderately supports co-teaching as an effective model of service provision (Murawski & Swanson, 2001). Some research shows a high level of satisfaction in teachers that practice co-teaching (e.g. Kloo & Zigmond, 2008). On the whole, it seems that co-teaching is being practiced as a consequence of inclusive policies, with the risk of being appraised by actors in the field as a negative by-product of inclusion (increasing their workload, stress, time pressures) instead of a positive and efficient way of supporting the inclusive schooling of all students. Our research aims at contributing to fill part of this knowledge gap by addressing questions about how such collaboration is organised on the local level, and which factors contribute to its efficiency (Bonvin, 2011).

Our research design is based on an analogy with inclusion research, from which we know that teacher training and experience are related to their attitudes towards inclusion, this relationship being moderated, in the case of training, by teachers' perceived self-efficacy (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Bélanger, 2006). Positive attitudes, in turn, seem to be related to more inclusive practices and students' success (Bélanger, 2006). Our working hypothesis is that the same dimensions can apply to the study of co-teaching as an inclusive practice.

This paper presents results from the two first measurement points of a longitudinal Swiss National science Foundation (SNF) research project, which studies the collaboration between regular and special teachers in inclusive contexts in the French speaking part of Switzerland. Three objectives of the wider project will be treated here: (1) to describe the collaboration between regular and special teachers (co-planning time, proportion of co-teaching, co-teaching practices; satisfaction with the collaborative relationship; a corollary of objective 1 is the development and validation of a procedure aiming at evaluating reliably teacher collaboration in inclusive contexts); (2) to evaluate whether modes of collaboration are influenced by classroom composition (number of children with special needs; students' achievement, self concept and social integration); (3) to evaluate whether teacher characteristics (experience, age, gender, attitudes toward inclusion, self-efficacy, professional satisfaction and risk) influence modes of collaboration between regular and special teachers.

Methodology (max 400 mots)

Sixteen classes participated in the two first measurement points of the study (between September and December 2013). 304 third and fourth grade students (of which 23 were identified as having special needs), 19 regular teachers and 15 special teachers participated in the study. Data presented in this paper focuses on two measurement points: student data collected at the beginning of the school year, and teacher variables 2 months into the school year (further measurement points aim at capturing the evolution of those same variables over the whole school year).

Data was collected using different questionnaires. Student characteristics include sociodemographic data (gender, age, nationality), academic achievement in mathematics and French (standardised performance tests) at the beginning of the school year, self-concept (*CoSoi*; Bless, Bonvin & Schuepbach, 2005) and social integration (sociometric matrices; Genoud, 2008). Teacher sociodemographic data (gender, age, experience and training) were collected by an ad hoc questionnaire, while the following dimensions were evaluated using adaptations of valid instruments: attitudes toward inclusion (*Opinions Relative to the Integration of students with disabilities – ORI*; Antonak & Larrivee, 1995 ; *Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale – ATIES*; Wilczenski, 1995), teacher self-efficacy (*Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale – TSES*; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), job satisfaction (*Échelle de Satisfaction de Vie Professionnelle – ESVP*; Fouquereau & Rioux, 2002), and burnout (*Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey – MBI-ES*; Dion & Tessier, 1994). Teacher collaboration was operationalised on the basis of a questionnaire developed by Bonvin (2011), in order to evaluate co-teaching practices (co-planning time; proportion of co-teaching – teaching together in the classroom; co-teaching practices, as described by Friend & Bursuck, 2009).

Expected outcomes, results (max 300 mots)

Our research is exploratory insofar as the practices we wish to capture have been implemented only recently, and little research is available to back any hypotheses related to the modalities of different collaborative practices as well as their relative frequencies in the field or their determinants or effects. Apart from the lack of research, the definitions of collaborative teaching and co-teaching cover a wide scope of meaning (Benoit & Angelucci, 2011). Thus, our first intention will be to describe the modalities of collaboration in our sample, and evaluating the method used to collect data. Further multivariate analyses will explore the relationships between teacher and student characteristics (on the classroom level) and the modalities of collaboration between regular and special teachers.

Exploring the correlates of collaboration is an important task in times where many schools in Switzerland, Europe, and worldwide are experimenting with inclusive practices. As research interests are shifting from the question of localization (*where* to school SEN students) to questions about the process of inclusion (*how* to do it; Zigmond, 2003), we have every reason to believe that a better understanding of how collaboration works in the field will contribute to the uncovering of important mediator and moderator variables in supporting efficient inclusive practices in our schools.

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