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Leonardo da Vinci

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Dear Reader,

I am proud to present the first of four issues of our publication concerning the inclusion of disabled persons in mainstream education. The publication is dedicated in particular to academic teachers, yet we will be thrilled if it also reaches teachers of other schools and informal educators. You will find here a wealth of information on the modern approach to disability understood in the social dimension, that is as a challenge related to all the areas of life, where broadly defined education seems to be of prime importance.

Education of disabled people is becoming less and less a domain of special establishments and increasingly a part of the regular teaching process and consequently teachers need more and more knowledge related to suitably selected methodologies, alternative formats and assistive technologies. In an effort to meet these expectations, the Jagiellonian University Disability Support Service developed, in 2007, foundations for a European project called DARE (Disability Awareness: a New Challenge for Employ-

ees), which was subsequently approved and received funding under the EU's Lifelong Learning programme.

The goal of the project was to enhance the level of disability awareness, and it resulted in the development of modern interactive training programmes for academic teachers and public administration staff. The programmes were prepared on the basis of similar schemes already existing in the UK offered by Learning-Difference. They have been modified, however, in order to take into consideration the local conditions in the countries where they were to be implemented. The training programmes include a great wealth of modern knowledge on the daily lives of disabled people in progressive societies of unifying Europe as well as the social processes accompanying the phenomenon. In particular, however, that knowledge is related to the need of a thorough teaching process adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. In the Polish market, such programmes are a truly unique offer.

In the implementation of the DARE project, the Jagiellonian University was assisted by its academic partner, the University of Padua, and social partners, organisations focusing on disability issues from Spain and Bulgaria. The co-operation bore fruit in

yet another form, a conference entitled *Disability Awareness: New Challenges for Education*, which was held at the Jagiellonian University in October 2009 and brought together nearly 250 participants. It reflected the dire need for modern knowledge on disability in many locations as well as the importance of co-operation between academic teachers and specialist units offering educational support for students.

I am very happy that the objectives of the DARE project, as well as its results in the form of further development of the training programme for academic teachers will be continued as part of DARE 2, the implementation of which was approved by the European Commission in late 2009. Thanks to that, the DARE Consortium has been joined by the University of Iceland from Reykjavik and the Cyprus Adult Education Association.

In this first issue, I wish to share with you some key thoughts stemming from that conference. The keynote speech delivered by Prof. Willy Aastrup from Aarhus University has not just educational value but is also a prime source of knowledge concerning the change in thinking about disability.

To conclude, let me express my joy at the fact that such a programme focusing on raising the level of disability awareness, first ever at a Polish university, was developed at the Jagiellonian University, of which I am a graduate and a staff member. In this context I wish to thank its authorities for their consistent support of the idea of including disabled people in mainstream education. I am convinced that this will bring major benefits for disabled people, Polish schools of higher education, and the entire society alike.

*Ireneusz Bialek*

*Chief Coordinator at the Jagiellonian University Disability Support Service*

## Chapter 1.

### **Supporting disabled students at the Jagiellonian University**

**F**or ten years, the Jagiellonian University has had its very own Disability Support Service. It fulfils the role of an educational support centre. Its mission is to ensure equal access by disabled students to the university's standard educational offer. The Service promotes a modern 'social' model of thinking about disability understood as a result of interaction of the person with the environment rather than an inherent dysfunction or a deviation from a norm of that person. The practical implementation of the social model means creating appropriate adaptations for the student compensating for his/her impairment and allowing him/her to fulfil his/her student's duties in compliance with academic standards.

**The offer of our Disability Support Service is addressed to:**

- students with restricted mobility
- students who are blind or partially sighted
- students who are deaf or hard of hearing
- students with mental health difficulties
- students with specific learning difficulties
- students with other types of impairment
- applicants wishing to pursue education at the Jagiellonian University, and
- the University's academic and administrative staff.

The Service welcomes students and applicants holding a valid certificate specifying the level of their impairment, an equivalent document or an attestation of receiving medical treatment. Student affairs are considered on a case-by-case basis by qualified consultants of the Service, who will analyse in detail the academic and health or impairment circumstances of each person. Information gathered in this way will make a basis for formulating an assessment of support needed in response to the student's letter to a dean or a university head of unit. If approved by the student,

the Service consultants will draft detailed educational guidelines and send them to the lecturers. Such guidelines constitute a recommendation of specific methods of working with students, whilst their incorporation into the teaching process will ensure full support for the student as regards their access to education. The Service staff are open for collaboration with lecturers, whose experience and knowledge of disability are key in developing appropriate adaptations to be made in the form of their classes taking into consideration the specific nature of their particular branch of knowledge and essential requirements set for the students.

**Examples of what our students with disabilities can count on:**

- courses and examinations organised in a format adapted to their individual needs stemming from their needs
- consultations on their current academic situation
- development of an educational support strategy
- training and counselling in modern technological solutions supporting the teaching process
- adaptation of teaching materials into electronic or Braille formats for blind students

- English language classes for students who are blind, partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing
- co-operation between consultants in charge of student affairs and university teachers
- agency or mediation between the student and other university units
- additional material assistance: a bursary for disabled students.

### **Adapted-format examinations**

Not adapting the format means exemption from an examination or its simplification. Adapting the examination to the individual needs of disabled examinees means exclusively changing its technical elements, not the substance.

Students may apply for an adapted examination/credit not later than three weeks before the test or exam. Educational support will be most effective for the student, however, if it is provided from the very beginning of the academic year.

### **Examples of appropriate adaptations to the examination format:**

- written exams replaced with oral exams
- oral exams replaced with written exams

- spreading examinations over the examination period rather than lumping them together
- taking examinations using forms printed in an particular font size or Braille
- taking exams using an assistant
- using assistance of a sign or signed language interpreter
- extending exam duration.

### **Assistive technologies**

The Service offers computer hardware and multimedia equipment. In its IT room for blind/partially sighted students, they can use computers, advanced software and specialist auxiliary tools. They can also count on consultations as regards selection of equipment best suited to their individual needs stemming from impairment.

In our multimedia language tuition room, equipped with, for example, an interactive board, English classes are offered using a methodology accessible for students who are blind, partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing.



Image 1. A Braille printer, a Braille SENSE notetaker and an enlarger

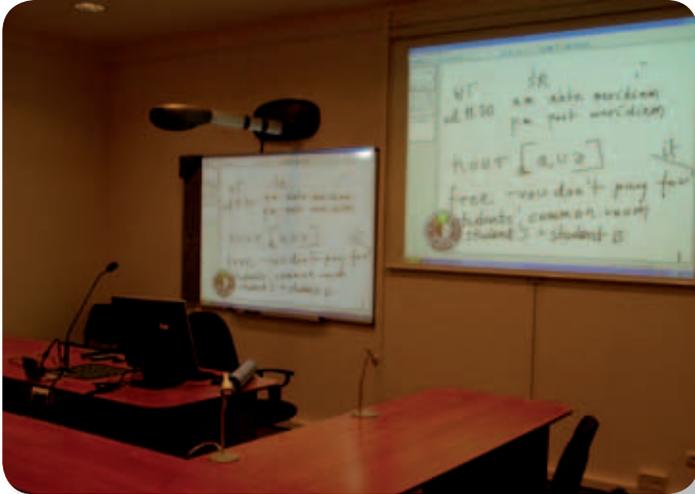


Image 2. An interactive board in the multimedia language classroom

## **Chapter 2.**

### **International and research projects**

**I**n comparison with other such units based at Polish universities, the Disability Support Service is the most involved in international co-operation, focusing on making university education accessible accounting for the needs of disabled people. In 2007–2009, together with the University of Padua, the Service carried out a programme of innovative training in disability awareness amongst academic and public administration staff through the DARE project. As the results of the DARE project were highly praised, the Service got the green light to extend it for another two years (2009–2011). Under DARE 2, the partner university is the University of Iceland. The DARE and DARE 2 projects are both funded from the EU's Lifelong Learning programme.

Thanks to the outcomes of this project work the Jagiellonian University has now modern interactive training programmes

for academic teachers focusing on enhancing their professional qualifications to include knowledge about effective methods of educating people with various types of impairment. Find more on the training programmes developed by the DARE Consortium at **[www.DareProject.eu](http://www.DareProject.eu)**.

As the first school of higher education in Poland, the Jagiellonian University has received a grant to develop systemic solutions enhancing the inclusion of students with mental health difficulties. A 'programme of educational support for Jagiellonian University students with mental health difficulties' is going to be implemented in 2010–2011 and funded from the European Social Fund.

## **I. The DARE project**

**T**he long-term objective of the project and the DARE Consortium is increasing the level of disability awareness and awareness of the daily lives of disabled people in modern society, i.e. the knowledge society. Disability awareness means solid knowledge on disability, combating stereotypes and providing information on ways of active support, that is support based on empower-

ing disabled people in various areas of social life. Such an approach requires involvement from members of society and disabled people themselves, yet it also brings major benefits to both.

Disability awareness also means promotion of attitudes of openness and tolerance towards disabled people, the largest minority in European societies who also make up those societies as their citizens. The tangible results of the DARE project are training programmes enhancing the level of disability awareness, primarily targeting academic teachers and public administration staff. The DARE Consortium conclude that those professional groups require particularly effective support in the form of training programmes featuring solid knowledge of disability, as they have a major impact on shaping public attitudes. We would like very much to see academic and public administration staff perceiving their participation in the DARE training as a major extension of their basic professional qualifications.

We harbour that hope since the DARE training programmes include not just modern knowledge that will often completely reconstruct the disability awareness held so far, but they are also designed to be interesting and involving for the participants. A large

portion of the exercises include multimedia material related to situations when academic teachers and administrative staff may be confronted with problems related to disability. Completing a full course will allow the trainees to understand the difficulties faced by disabled people in accessing education and public offices, but also to develop effective methods of support, easily applicable by academic or administrative staff.

DARE 2 is going to build on the already existing training programme for academic teachers as well as to develop an entirely new course for managers from small and middle-sized enterprises, also transferred from the United Kingdom.

Following the rules informing pilot projects developed and implemented as part of the Lifelong Learning programme, work contributed by Consortium partners focuses on innovation transfer. In this particular case, it is transfer of knowledge from the UK, where disability awareness training is relatively well developed. As the DARE Consortium attaches much importance to the quality of its training programmes, a Quality Management Group has been set up, comprising European experts experienced in various areas of education and training. The variety of views held by

QMG members is a guarantee of optimal control over the quality of the project products.

The DARE Consortium places a lot of emphasis on the promotion of the participation of disabled people in social life. Our training programmes may support that process, as the main road to such participation is through education in its broadest sense. In its efforts to disseminate the idea, the DARE Consortium co-operates with European educational institutions and the partners attend a number of specialist conferences, workshops, and seminars on access by disabled persons to mainstream education.

## **II. Adaptation support programme for Jagiellonian University students with mental health difficulties**

**T**his year, the Jagiellonian University Disability Support Service is beginning to implement a project aimed at developing an effective system of support for students with mental health difficulties. Another objective of that programme, which is innovative on a national scale, is to make the academic community aware of the fact that people with various health conditions have always been, are now, and will always be amongst us and suitably targeted support may allow them to continue their university education. The project is also about breaking the taboo related to all the areas associated with mental health and their consequences for the educational process.

As a result of project work, forty Jagiellonian University students will be offered comprehensive psychological support as well as support targeting the improvement of their wellbeing at the university. Thanks to an Internet educational platform, a number of experts in psychiatry, who have agreed to co-operate in this undertaking, are going to answer questions and dispel many myths

accompanying debates on mental health conditions. We hope that the activities performed as part of project work will facilitate the development of a modern approach to that challenge as the number of students with mental health difficulties is growing each year. Find more on that initiative in the subsequent issues of our publication and at [www.KonstelacjaLwa.pl](http://www.KonstelacjaLwa.pl).

### Chapter 3.

## **Conference Disability Awareness: a New Challenge for Education, Main Auditorium of the Jagiellonian University Collegium Novum building, held on 22–23 October 2009**

**T**his event saw a summary of the results of DARE project work, but was also an opportunity to present the achievements of the Jagiellonian University Disability Support Service, created as one of the first units of its kind in Poland.

The conference brought together many eminent guests and experts from EU Member States and the USA. The contributions delivered focused on disability awareness amongst academic teachers and public administration staff. Access by disabled people to mainstream education is linked to awareness concerning impairment-related limitations, but also a potential present in each disabled person, methods of effective educational support and tech-

nologies assisting the teaching process. Disability awareness also means treating disabled people as empowered individuals, setting for them the same requirements, and at the same time offering them equal opportunities in access to knowledge, combating stereotypes and routine thinking. It is also moving away from the medical perception of disability as a form of suffering towards treating that state as a permanent and natural feature of an individual.

Key conference topics:

- educational and technological support for blind and deaf students at modern universities
- dyslexic students as a new educational challenge: standards of compensatory support
- mental health difficulties: support systems and their efficiency
- new technologies in education of disabled people
- equal opportunities and diversity as foundations of modern society.



Image 3. Minister Paweł Wypych presenting his contribution



Image 4. Prof. Willy Aastrup from the University of Aarhus delivering his paper on dyslexia



**Image 5. Conference participants in the Jagiellonian University Collegium Novum auditorium**

Presentations on the above subjects reflected the thematic range of the training programmes developed by the DARE project for academic and public administration staff. Moreover, in 2009 the Jagiellonian University Disability Support Service celebrated the tenth anniversary of its operation. It was set up as one of the first units of its kind in Poland. From the very beginning, the Service has been co-operating with a similar unit at the University of Aarhus in Denmark carrying out joint projects, workshops, training programmes and seminars. That is why the conference began with a festive session summarising a decade of the Jagiellonian University Disability Support Service and ten years of its collaboration with the University of Aarhus.

## Chapter 4.

### **Keynote speech by Prof. Willy Aastrup delivered at the conference Disability Awareness: New Challenges for Education**

#### **I. Willy Aastrup**

**F**ounder and director of the Counselling and Support Centre at the University of Aarhus. Willy Aastrup (born 1948) is M.Phil. (philosophy) and trained psychotherapist. He has practised existential and philosophical counselling for 20 years.

He has more than 15 years experience in student counselling. Chair and co-chair of professional and research seminars and congresses, numerous congress keynote speeches and presentations and abstracts in psychology, inclusion and SEN and counselling. National and international teaching and training in inclusion and SEN and counselling philosophy and psychology. Former advisor

to the Danish Ministry of Education in the field of counselling students with special needs and is a member on several national advisory boards to the Danish Ministry of Education. For several years he has been associate professor (ext.) at University of Aarhus reading among other psychology and modern philosophy and is now officially appointed external examiner.

Serial editor of the publication *Inklusion* (Inclusion), studies, reports and other research findings related to counselling and other educational practices mainly in the SEN field. Member of the steering committee for the HEI network on support to SEN-students in the Nordic Countries. Member of several professional associations covering psychology, inclusion and SEN and counselling. Coordinator of the Inclusion working group in FEDORA.

His research interests are:

- a) counselling and education of students with special needs; basic concepts, practical and methodical approaches and comparative studies, and
- b) philosophy of counselling and education – theoretical assumptions, basic issues and concepts in counselling – and the development of practice.

## **II. The Counselling and Support Centre at the University of Aarhus**

### **The University**

The University of Aarhus is a ‘classic multi-faculty’ state university enjoying full academic rights, located in the city of Aarhus. It currently has around 22,000 undergraduate/graduate students and 700 doctoral students. The academic faculty comprises circa 2,500 persons. The University’s website is **www.au.dk**. It is a leading educational institution in Denmark as regards teaching disabled students and persons with special educational needs.

### **The Centre**

The Counselling and Support Centre is an inter-faculty unit, with a total staff of 20 academic specialists, administrative clerks and university teachers. The Centre provides services in counselling, special compensatory education and IT (assistive technologies for disabled persons). It also offers advisory services as regards suitable teaching strategies for academic staff and recommendations on how to ensure effective support of disabled people wish-

ing to pursue university education and how to present appropriate attitudes towards their impairments.

The Centre has been a partner in several scientific programmes supported by the European Union. Its co-operation with the Jagiellonian University dates back from 1999 when the Disability Support Service was established at the Polish university in Kraków. Back then, the Danish centre had been in operation for two years and could share its experiences with the newly established Service as regards the development of a modern offer of educational support for disabled people.

Both universities share the same outlook on education of disabled people. It is a view anchored in human rights and the ‘social’ model stressing the broadest possible participation of the disabled community in social life. This approach is not about granting disabled persons more concessions and privileges but providing them with support compensating for impairment-related effects. If such compensation is sufficient, the university has the right to, and should, expect its disabled students to fulfil the same obligations as are expected of all students.

### **III. Disability awareness and some key issues in the universities widening participation policy and practice.**

The overall objective of this presentation is to examine and discuss some key issues for universities – and other higher education institutions – in the process of opening educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

As pointed out in the conference heading disability awareness represent challenges for education in general and in specific for universities. First we can observe a general political insistence on productivity (i.e. more candidates in shorter time) and the demands that candidates on all levels also must meet the general and specific academic requirements for quality prescribed in the Bologna Process framework for qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. On the other hand there is also an equally strong political insistence that disabled students must be integrated and included in mainstream higher education and academic life.

How is it possible to meet this challenge? More and higher quality candidates and equal opportunities for disabled students? Recently – and still in process – it was important for university

management on all levels to increase the focus of the academic and administrative staff on students and education. From a university self-image of first and foremost being a research institution and education and teaching more secondary to a broader and more diverse view where research and teaching enjoy the same status.

In my presentation I will argue that disability awareness is the natural and logical consequence of the development of emphatic focus on education at universities. And second it is also a consequence of the equally emphatic demands for inclusion for disabled student in education and academic life.

If inclusion in education is to be realized in practise – and not only in policy-papers – it is absolutely necessary that academic and administrative staff – in the ideal world: all – is aware of the possible diversity in the student population. Not all students fit into the “mainstream style”. What is essential is that the staff should not be trained to be experts. They should be aware – i.e. know of – that the significance in the combined concept of “disabled students” is “student”. This individual student may need some educational support but is nevertheless a student with his or hers potentials. These potentials differ from one student to another. Some students are

more clever, talented, motivated and study harder than others. However the social relations and intuitional context is also very crucial. Student's opportunities may be significantly helped or constrained by the praxis of others. Especially if it is an "Important Other" – and for university students university staff are very important others.

## **Introduction**

**T**he issues – unfortunately the time limit will not allow us to go in details, we can only permit us self to touch the themes in brief - that I wish to draw to your attention in this lecture: Bologna process, integration and inclusion, lifelong learning, knowledge society and other topics not explicitly mentioned but nevertheless also highly relevant, represent the headlines of the themes that have been in focus in my ten years cooperation with The Disability Support Team at Jagiellonian University. The mentioned topics also represent the development and changes in focal points during the last ten years. In the beginning the center of attention was first and foremost the legislative and institutional structural conditions for support to students with disability. What kind of support was feasible and pos-

sible and at all realistic and practicable in the specific socio-political and economic situation? Ten years ago there was also a need for awareness work. In the general public it was not unusual to be met with the opinion that persons with a disability can't have more than basic education, can't carry out a job and can't live independently.

From another point of view the perspective is changed from the perspective of basic accessibility which in its pure form emphasizes accessibility in relation to the physical surroundings or for example support of assistive technology to a more broader spectrum - what I elsewhere have called a usability-oriented perspective - where the emphasis is not only placed on physical and quantitative conditions but on qualitative conditions. Where accessibility provide the conditions for integration the usability-oriented perspective enables the inclusion of students with disability.

Inclusion of disabled individuals into the educational system on equal terms with others, will consequently prevent some of those social mechanisms of rejection which are often experienced by the individuals involved. A national policy - followed by institutional practices - that emphasizes the inclusion of disabled individuals in the educational sector is vital. Not only because higher education is

essential for individual commitment, change through personal development and the individual's social well-being, but even more that integration – or rather inclusion as I prefer – is closely linked to the presumption that the educational system is one of the central routes to the labor market, to self-support, and to integration in society, where inclusion in the labor market holds the main key to self-support and the wider inclusion in society.

It is a matter of fact that education always – since the time of Socrates and Plato in Greece – and even before that – have been considered a general good enriching both the individual and consequently the society in which the individual was living in – but nevertheless, if we look on at least the historical period represented in the history of The Jagiellonian University it is true that one pillar in the construction of higher education was and is an general understanding that education is a quality in its own right. But it is equally a matter of fact that another important pillar is the students acquisition of competences that is relevant for the labor market. In other words higher education is important for the student's preparation for work. As indicated this has always been crucial to higher education – in some faculties more emphasized than others – but in today's knowl-

edge society the employability is an important quality issue for all fields of higher education.

### **The learning environment according to the Bologna Process**

This brings us to the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process is first and foremost a systematic instrument for standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area. Many states all over the world have committed themselves to the standards and guidelines. Another point worth emphasizing is that the major stakeholders the signing ministers refer to is the students and the employers. Again we see that the employability is crucial – “what you see on the diploma is what you get”. And last but not least: What is important in the Bologna Process is not so much the content of the curriculum. Much more essential is the learning outcomes. This approach is very relevant to the labor market. In consequence the curriculum has to reflect that and therefore have to be redesigned in many higher institutions.

According to the conception of the Bologna Process, academic learning can be described as a process of skill development (acqui-

tion of competences) where the students over time and in different levels acquire certain elements of learning through a specifically designed developmental process:

*Practical skills:* skills aimed specifically at the management of vocational skills.

*Academic expertise:* Expertise within one discipline as well as interdisciplinary expertise related to the individual education or the individual academic subject.

*Intellectual qualifications:* General theoretical, and methodic qualifications, communicative skills, and the ability to structure one's own learning beyond the individual education or the individual subject in question.

An important aspect of the descriptions of the learning objectives and the elements in the Bologna Process is that the intention of the academic learning process is determined as something more than just the acquisition of knowledge. Accordingly, the elements of learning involved in a university education can be divided into three forms:

*Knowledge and abilities:* general knowledge and abilities or knowledge and abilities specific to a certain discipline. Discipline is here to be

interpreted as a knowledge field, which is applied to arrange knowledge of a certain case or subject.

*Qualifications:* Practical, intellectual and/or academic ability to employ knowledge in relation to handling problem areas in general within one or more disciplines.

*Metaknowledge:* the ability to reflect on problem areas in general or within one or more areas of studies in order for the individual in question to become capable of questioning existing knowledge, developing new knowledge, and solving new problems.

The learning objectives for the two overall levels, or cycles as it is usually called, of the general educational structure – the so-called 3+2 model, which stands for 3 years for a bachelor program and 2 years for master program – express that the student should demonstrate these skills at a basic level for the bachelor’s program and at an extended and specialized level for the master’s program.

Based on the learning objectives and the elements of the further and higher education, “academic” learning can be described as a process of skill development. However, there is no mention of academic learning as a *psychological process* through which the individual develops the skills or the *educational working methods* which

should lead to this development. If individual learning is considered – in the widest sense a psychological process – it could generally be described as a continuous cognitive and emotional activity, through which knowledge and abilities are created by means of *experience and practice*. In the horizon of learning for the further and higher education, the objective is to develop a number of specific skills and a certain amount of specific knowledge at a higher level, and this puts demands on the *complexity of the psychological learning process*. If a student is to achieve the ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate complex problem areas within one or more disciplines, he or she needs certain reflective forms of learning.

Depending on the area of study, there are disparate processes of learning involved. For example, one does not apply the same level of consciousness to solving advanced math problems as one applies to interlinking historical occurrences, gaining insight into environmental legislation, or completing a program in social studies or elementary education. Each area of study is connected to its own practice, its own cause, and its own domain as well as its own traditions, theories and ways of synthesizing, analyzing, and evaluating its own problem areas. Hence, the learning process involved in attain-

ing knowledge, abilities, qualifications, and metaknowledge is a psychological process that depends very much on the field or discipline in question.

The psychological ability or disposition required of the individual in order to acquire these competences, that is skills and qualifications, is the “academic” learning competence. The academic learning competence involves another central component which could be called metalearning or “learning to learn”. In order to complete a further and higher education, one has to achieve knowledge of how one learns to attain the knowledge, abilities, methods, and techniques within the discipline in question. In other words, one has to learn to study a discipline or an academic field. This ability to study at a further and higher education demands a special process of metalearning which is relevant for the specific program and the level of the program.

The choice regarding the educational form of working and learning depends on both ideas about the individual’s psychological learning processes and the learning objective of the education. The seminars, lectures, and other scholastic types of teaching reflect a *teacher-oriented* perception of learning by means of mechanical

transference of knowledge from the teacher to the student's "mental store". Subsequently, the success of the learning can be determined in connection with a written or an oral exam, where the student's storage of knowledge is tested. In general, such mechanical types of learning are suitable when the objective is factual knowledge and rules for the combination of facts.

More active types of learning that are based on dialogue reflect a *learning-oriented* perception of learning taking place through a dynamic exchange between teachers and students or amongst the students. The success of learning in this forum is to a greater extent determined by means of evaluating the student's active participation in various tasks. These tasks involve case studies, assignment work, exams that emphasize independence and the work process, or the student's ability to co-operate. This ability to co-operate can be evaluated in connection with a written paper, a portfolio based exam, project work, and problem based assignments as well as practice and target group oriented assignments.

## **Inclusion in higher education**

I have taken the time to outline the general educational environment in the higher education institutions. The reason for that is hopefully justified in the following. If my above analyze of the general learning environment is acceptable included the observations with the reference to the employability the overall purpose of special needs educational assistance must be for students with a physical or mental disability, who has been accepted at an institution of further and higher education, that they are able to complete the education similarly to other students. In consequence special needs educational assistance should therefore not be separated from the educational programs and curricula, from the related educational and working methods, from the objective of each program as a whole, or from the intermediate objectives of the individual disciplines that the programs are composed of. If the overall objective of completing the education is to be fulfilled, the different types of assistance must aim for the students to acquire the specific relevant academic skills and methods. The students must be capable of relating to these methods critically, analytically, and comparatively. Furthermore, they

should be able to document that they master the required knowledge and skills, for example in connection with exams and other forms of evaluation. The content and structure of the assistance, whose explicit purpose is to compensate for specific learning disabilities, should therefore involve an analysis of “academic” learning and “academic” learning skills and how the learning outcomes are evaluated.

Second the special needs educational assistance must be based on the notion that all students, *sine qua non*, must fulfill the specific and general academic requirements. The idea rests on the perception that all people have possibilities, but that these possibilities are not without restrictions. Rather, they are limited by intellectual and personal resources as well as by the individual’s actual social and historical circumstances. The general purpose is to support the individual student in clarifying the actual educational frames and in investigating and clarifying priorities in order to improve his or her effective field of possibilities and to create a well-informed basis for decision making.

The next step is to support the student in identifying and prioritizing his or her own interests as well as in analyzing the future negative consequences of an actual undesirable conduct of study.

Moreover, the student should be supported in making decisions concerning the current conduct of study. To the extent possible, the wider purpose is supportive and liberating. However, this often means that the student has to be confronted and challenged in his or her process of clarification. The attitude of supporting experts, teachers and administrative staff should be based on the notion that any student is responsible for his or her own decisions – including the fulfillment of the study requirements concerning knowledge, talent, and other skills that pertain to the study program in question.

I will take the liberty to quote a vision statement I have formulated elsewhere that summarize the above mentioned strategies for inclusion of students with specific educational difficulties:

„All students in higher education who meet the admission requirements must be secured access to an equal educational environment, which shall ensure students with specific educational difficulties the option of realizing their potential to complete a higher education”.

It is implicit in the vision that it is expected that the students with specific educational difficulties live up to the general and specific requirements for quality of the degree program. The educational institution must guarantee to the students and to the labor market

that all graduates have achieved the necessary academic competences and that the exam results and other evaluation present a true picture of the level achieved.

But let me return to the main-statement in my abstract. If inclusion in education is to be realized in practise – and not only in a fantasy in the countless policy-papers collecting dust in university arkives – it is absolutely necessary that academic and administrative staff – in the ideal world: all – is aware of the possible diversity in the student population. Not all students fit into the “mainstream style”. I’m not advocating that teachers and administrative staff should be the “experts”, the teachers should do their teaching and research and the administrative staff should administer. What is essential is that neither teachers nor the administrative staff should be trained to be experts. They should be aware – i.e. know of – that the significance in the combined concept of “disabled students” is “student”. This individual student may need some educational support but is nevertheless a student with his or hers potentials. These potentials differ from one student to another. Some students are more clever, talented, motivated and study harder than others. However the social relations and intuitional context is also very crucial. Student’s oppor-

tunities may be significantly helped or constrained by the praxis of others. Especially if it is an “Important Other” – and for university students university staff are very important others.

## **Perspectives for the future**

**I**n my keynote address I have presented a brief and general overview of some of the questions that we (I’m presumptuous enough to include myself) have been discussing over the past 10 years and I have also tried to formulate some principles which have been the fundamentals – or practical philosophy – for our mutual interests in securing the highest possible quality. We are for sure not at the end of our work, there is still much to be done. However at this occasion I think it would be appropriate to identify some the future challenges.

The conceptual framework and the visions for the special needs educational effort are expressed through an overall strategy – presented earlier – concerning students with specific educational difficulties. This strategy is founded on the primary goal of promoting integration and inclusion of students with specific educational

difficulties at institutions of further and higher education through high quality educational assistance and counseling. This goal is to be achieved through the following strategies:

- The counseling and educational effort must be planned as a *co-ordinate* effort with clear, prioritized goals and directions.
- The counseling and educational effort must be based on the development of inter-disciplinary *knowledge regarding the specific educational difficulties* and those institutional, individual, social and cultural relations within which the difficulties must be understood.
- The counseling and educational effort must be *focused on results* by adapting the effort to the individual student's specific difficulties and to his or her academic subject and level. The aim is to compensate for the difficulties to the extent that the students can meet the general and specific academic requirements for quality.
- The counseling and educational effort must rest on research-based knowledge of the relations *between effort and effect* which is sensitive to specific and individual relations and subsequently can support the concrete practice.
- The counseling and educational effort must be structured around learning, development, and communication of *quality-*

*assured methods* which are adequate according to the students' specific difficulties and needs.

These strategies call for a special educational assistance effort based on a research reflected counseling and educational practice. Hence, the practice must be linked to the production of knowledge which develops through the interaction of knowledge application and practical learning. This interaction involves a close connection between developmental projects and research. The relevant research must consequently comprise theoretical reflections on phenomena related to the actual counseling and educational practice and the personal experiences of the practitioner as well as the need for further knowledge and improvement of the practice. Furthermore, the research must be structured around the application of knowledge, the research principles, and the methods of data collection employed within the general practice. In other words, the efforts within counseling and education toward students with specific educational difficulties must be linked to a research which is directed toward the development of application-oriented skills and perspectives.

This practice-oriented research is closely associated with the role of an active knowledge-based Center which gathers, organizes, and evaluates existing knowledge and information produced by others. Furthermore, it comprises the mapping of tendencies within the production of knowledge in order to meet the demands for systematic analysis. As regards the Counseling and Support Center, these assignments include the development of new processes and methods within the practice of counseling and special needs education. According to the defined visions and strategies, these developmental projects should furthermore be shaped according to a goal which ensures a high quality for the practice and should be based on knowledge regarding successful practice. Consequently, the developmental assignments must be closely linked to the field of research. It is essential that they primarily focus on the improvement of the field in relation to the target group. In other words, the assignments must contribute to the advancement of integration and inclusion in the educational system and in society.



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