



The Nordic Congress in Low Vision on 7 to 9 September 2022



EXPERIENCE OF LEARNING IN SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS WITH BLINDNESS

– WHAT MATTERS?

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A qualitative interview study

- Undertaken in 2019 in connection with the graduation project on the Master in vision pedagogy and vision rehabilitation at the University of Southeast Norway
- In Denmark, among youngsters with blindness who have attended mainstream school and their parents

Background and problem

- **A special task to teach students with blindness**
(Socialstyrelsen, 2016) ((The National Board of Social Services, 2016))
- **Inclusion, the guiding principle of today**
(Undervisningsministeriet, 1994; Undervisningsministeriet, 2017) ((Ministry of Education, 1994; Ministry of Education, 2017))
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- **Fewer young people with blindness get education and jobs**
(Amilon, Bojsen, Østergaard & Rasmussen, 2017)
- **Are some students doing worse at school today?**
(Nielsen, Rangvid, Christensen, Dyssegaard, Egelund & Henze-Pedersen, 2016)

«...if there had been a new support teacher the whole time, then I would have both had to ...yes, you could say teach my support teacher what my support teacher had to do. At the same time that I had to teach the teachers what to do.» (Student)

Purpose and usefulness

- Present students with blindness and their parents' perspective on what is important for the student's opportunity to learn through the school process
- To gain knowledge and understanding of what is at stake for students with blindness when their learning needs to be secured
- Can be used in relation to guidance by municipalities, schools, teachers and pedagogues
- The research questions:
 - *What experiences and observations do students with blindness have with their learning through the school process?*
 - *What experiences and observations do parents of children with blindness have with their child's learning through the school process?*
 - *How can that be understood?*
 - *What do students and parents experience that has an impact on learning?*

Method

- Qualitative research interview study (12 interviews)
 - Hermeneutic-phenomenological
(Berndtsson, 2001; Heidegger, 1926/2016; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Wentzer, 2015; Zahavi, 2018)
- Letter of inquiry via the Vision Register (Øjenklinikken Kennedy Centret, 2018) ((Eye Clinic Kennedy Centret)
- Inclusion criteria: Braille reading and final exam within 2 years
- 6 youngsters with blindness aged 15-18 and their parents
- Semi-structured interview (recorded and transcribed)
- Analysis
 - Informants' understanding
 - In-depth interpretation based on transformative learning, learning in a life-world perspective and self-psychology
(Bengtsson & Berndtsson, 2015; Illeris, 2013; Tønnesvang, 2002)
- Ethics and weaknesses of the method
(Datatilsynet, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) ((The Data Protection Authority, 2017a, 2017b, 2018))

Results

7 themes about experiences with learning at school:

- **to have to take responsibility for teaching**

"How was he supposed to convey to the teachers, that is, what should actually have happened."
(Parent)

- **to be able to master**

"When I knew I could handle it and I could be on an equal footing with the others." (Student)

- **to feel motivated**

"Being allowed to be active yourself – being allowed to contribute something." (Student)

- **intersubjective relationships between student and teacher / student and other students**

"A teacher who understood what I needed." (Student)

"It's really cool to be taught together with other students with blindness. It's like you're in the same boat." (Student)

"They have forgotten me a couple of times but were otherwise good at paying attention." (Student)

- **to learn braille and use aids**

"It was a huge advantage that I had learned braille before I started school."
(Student)

- **to be exhausted**

"because you kind of have to listen to everything, because it could be that someone was talking to me." (Student)

- **organization**

Many teacher changes throughout the school course

Lack of training of the teachers

How is students' self-understanding affected by their experiences with learning through primary school?

- Several students describe that they have become a more closed person
- Pupils with an experience of being able to learn had expectations of being able to take an education

Conclusion

This has an impact on learning at school:

- Commitment from the teacher and empathetic relationship with the student
- The student himself can be active, master and participate
- Training of personnel
- Continuity in the organization of school services
- Conditions, to a limited extent, present
- Desire for the opportunity to be able to go to school locally

What can we use the results for?

New studies show that:

- Well-being in primary school is not going any better
- It is still difficult to gain a foothold in education and the labor market
- It is still important to have a written language – Braille

- What are your experiences?

- Can we make recommendations or suggestions on how we can provide students with blindness with a schooling/education that matches their needs in the future?

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