

Inclusion on a systemic level and its influence on teachers' expectations

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Abstract

This paper is reporting on a Scandinavian inclusion project which focuses on school culture and its framing condition resulting in a structure of expectations in and about school. In specific, the project investigates on the relationships between the structure of expectations inside school, the local community, and vice versa. One central assumption is that the conscious reflection on expectations will contribute to improve inclusion on a systemic level. The opportunity to rearrange these structures is to implicitly (re-)construct a role model for the students for an inclusive school. This will create a better working situation for teachers concerning their teaching and the learning opportunities for their students respectively. A working SD-model is derived by using an educational change theory (Goodson, 2001) and sociological and educational studies (Pritchard, Morrow & Marshall, 2007; Langfeldt, 2015). As starting point, a conceptual model was constructed on qualitative data, already collected by a pilot study (School-In, 2015).

Introduction to the Scandinavian school policy 'one school for all' which has become under pressure by the Europeanisation of education and national testing

In general, the Scandinavian schooling approach is an inclusive one. This is mirrored by the Norwegian educational policy titled as 'one school for all' (see White paper, no 28, 1998-1999). Hence, Norway's educational system do almost not offer special needs schools.

This policy on inclusion can be analyzed on an individual level as well as on a systemic level. Anyhow, there is a necessity and an educational law in Norway to support children related to their dispositions during schooling. This is called TPO (Dale, 2008) which means 'adaptive teaching' within regular lessons. In specific cases, extra support can be given by a special needs team supporting teachers that students become better included in the classroom, socially and intellectually.

Unfortunately, the focus on school results have influenced the schools in Norway since national testing was introduced. As well as the publication of the PISA results have had an impact and created

pressure on teachers and schools. Referring to Karlsen this is called 'Europeanization of Education' (2011, p. 216f.). In Norwegian schools one tendency can be observed: a higher ratio of students from 1st-10th grade receive extra support or are taken out for extra teaching hours to presumably avoid the decrease of the average learning results of a class or a school measured for instance by the national tests. This is orthogonal to the Norwegian inclusion approach and the educational policy as 'one school for all'. In addition, teachers' perception and attitudes have become (unconsciously) internalized about assumed different performances of students. Hence, it is more likely that teachers make use of the extra support team. As mentioned before, an increasing ratio of 'problem kids' are send partially 'out' in the care of the extra support group. Additionally, a tendency can be assumed that teachers' expectations towards these 'taken out' kids have become lower.

From a systemic point of view schooling needs to be seen in its local environment which influence the school's culture. There are empirical results of sociological studies which support this assumption. Studies have shown that the environment and the culture of schools have an impact on students' performances (Pritchard, Morrow & Marshall, 2007; Langfeldt, 2015).

The research project's focus, instruments and the theoretical background

This paper is reporting on a project which focuses on school culture and its framing condition resulting in a structure of expectations in and about school. In specific, the project investigates on the relationships between the structure of expectations inside school, the local community, and vice versa (Langfeldt, 2015). Research has shown that the performance of a school is affected by its environment. Instead of primarily stressing activities based on school results and on specific and individual provisions for inclusion the research focus is on the expectation structure, accompanied attitudes and processes. One central assumption is that the conscious reflection on expectations (called inside innovation) will contribute to improve inclusion on a systemic level.

The 'inside innovation' activities can be shortly described as workshops conducted at the pilot school using reflection methods like world café, mapping-techniques, wall mounted paper work etc. to make the teachers aware about their own assumptions and expectation, their teaching, the local environment as well as and most central about their own students. But these activities are just seen as a starting point. This kind of work needs to be continued by all participants involved. The intervention methods for managing expectations will not be discussed further in this paper.

One of the research projects instruments is a questionnaire trying to build up in specific those variables which are visualized by the following conceptual and SD-model (see figures 1 and 3).

As another data source we use focus groups interview as well as the reflective group work results.

A former Norwegian study (Langfeldt, 2015) has shown typical characteristics of inclusive schools. An inclusive school:

- is strongly related to the local environment – make use of what is in common
- has equal role expectations towards all students, this role definition is made explicit to the students
- has a culture of sharing (teachers share learning material, experiences, teaching approaches)
- has a well-being perspective as well as good national test results
- has a high active participation rate of students' during lessons
- make use of a 'dialogic teaching' approach and not a repeating or confirming one

To summarize the inside innovation approach of our project: It aims to rework on the expectations, and attitudes teachers have about the local environment, their own school culture and finally about their students and their roles.

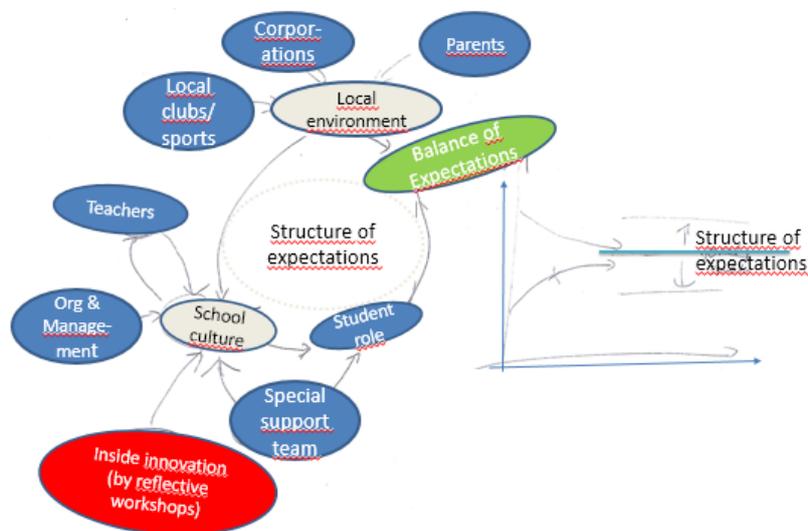
The systemic perspective in detail – a first conceptual model

This paper explores a change of expectations understood as an ongoing process based on how local schools perceive their external expectations of as well as towards their local community. The assumption is that this process influences internal expectations for teachers and students and the school culture itself. Shortly spoken, over time a balance will be reached –mutually- about the expectation structure in and about the school as well as towards the local community. As Hargreaves (2014) concludes that change originates itself within the school and not from a top down process, there is a primary need to affect teachers to rethink and become conscious about their expectations. The possibility to rearrange the school structures of expectations and implicitly a role model for the students for an inclusive school, will give teachers better working conditions concerning teaching and learning. A working System Dynamics model is derived out of the theoretical framework and on the first empirical data, already collect in a pilot study (School-In, 2015) to make the model and its premises more comprehensive and transparent.

As mentioned before one underlying theory used is the theory of change by Ivor Goodson. He stresses that: “Without a fully conceptualized notion of how the internal, external and personal will interlink, existing change theory remains underdeveloped and of progressively less use” (Goodson, 2001, p. 45). Therefore, this paper makes use of System Thinking (Senge, 1990) and System Dynamics (Sterman, 2000) as a tool to identify and visualize the interlinkage of the central variables and the different kinds of behaviors respectively.

One identified archetype in our working model is a ‘balancing -loop’ which shows how a system stabilize after a period of time to a level which is framed by the systems variables. In our model this leads to a sustainable balancing process on a specific level of expectation. This kind of stabilization of the system is not necessarily negative, sometimes even desired. For instance, compared with the investment of students in learning where parameters are the time budget and the cognitive resources, the students' learning activities stops if the goal of a certain learning result is reached. This behavior is in concordance with the structure of expectations created by a school culture and the local environment and vice versa. Before starting modeling, we created a conceptual model.

Fig.1: Conceptual draft model



From the project’s point of view ‘expectations’ are seen as socially constructed by the school culture and by the local culture. To summarize it, the so called reached and stabilized ‘structure of expectations’ can be redefined. The intention is to disturb that balancing behavior by reflecting activities with teachers' by confronting them with their own expectations. The idea used is the so called ‘double loop learning’ approach (Senge, 1990). That means not to work on the symptoms or outcomes (e.g. school results) but on the reasons, which cause these expectations. Using the words of system thinking it means to change the mental models of the school culture’s expectations.

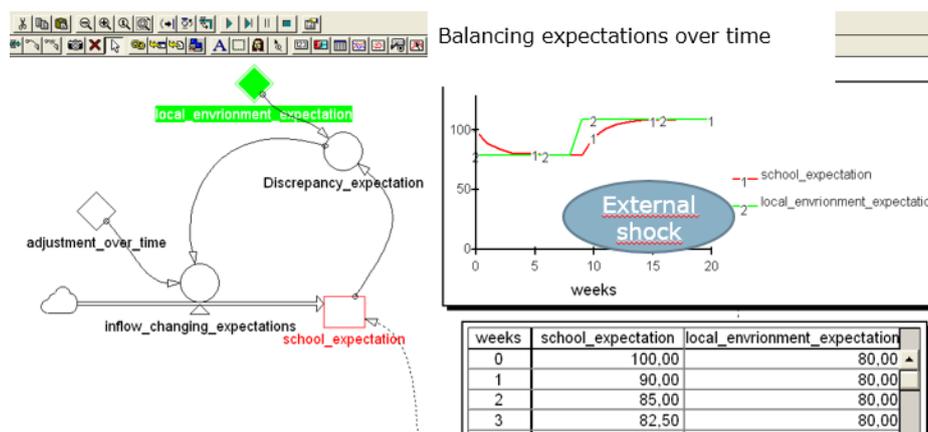
SD-models to gain insight to the model's main driver and the main structure

The simplified and aggregated model below (see figure 2) reveals the typical behavior of assimilating expectations (balancing loop).

This model can be illustrated by the following dynamic story 1 (t= 0- 7week):

The school's reputation in the local environment is not too good. Parents have heard about that the school is not very good handling conflicts with students and with classroom management generally. Anyhow, a new year of schooling has started and a couple of new teachers have joined the school with high expectations. Until week 5 these new teachers have adjusted to the expectations by experiencing the local environment for instance by not too satisfactory work with parents and few collaborations with local corporations (e.g. low engagement for internships for students) and with the existing school culture itself.

Fig. 2. Simplified and aggregated SD-model about balancing expectations by incidental shocks



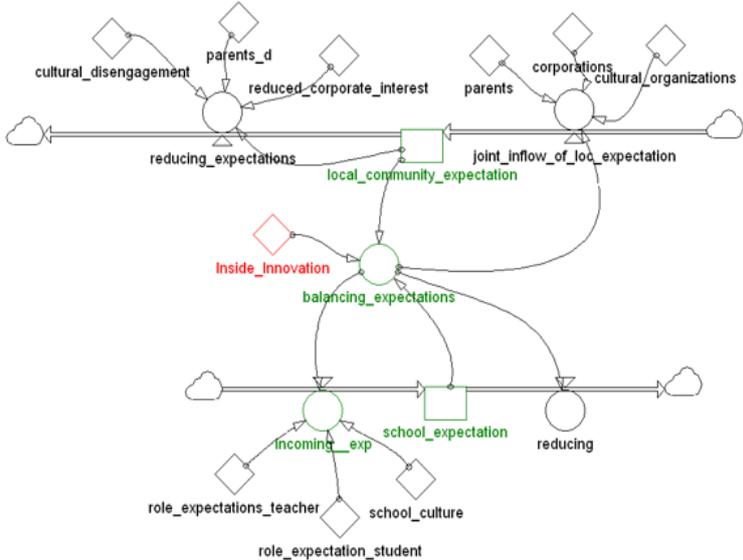
Dynamic story 2:

In week 8 a new head of school has taken over. His reputation is quite good in the local environment. He once had become popular because of the fact that he was the former mayor of the rural town. Parents' involvement in school activities increase. Teachers appreciate this engagement and finally they put more effort in teaching.

The next SD-model (see figure 3) is a more complex one, trying to visualize the relationships on a systemic level. It does not include incidental external shocks as the former two scenarios have shown. It presents the change of expectation by reflective work with teachers on their expectation

about the school itself, the parents, on the students' role and similar performance expectations as well as about the local environment contribution for a better life and teaching examples etc. Just to remind us; as one knows the level of expectation on students' performance influence their actual performance (Rist, 1970).

Fig. 3. SD-working model with the projects Inside innovation (participants' reflection) as a lever



The less aggregated simulation model includes the idea of “inside innovation” out of a “reflective comparative view” even if it is not modeled expressive yet. The reflective comparative approach is about to let teachers compare their perceptions, assumption and experiences with those of the characteristics of an inclusive school (see above). These reflections are supported by group work and discussions which contribute to make unconscious expectations and attitudes visible and approachable.

In addition, the agents for the local environment have become more explicit. This model is still under construction. Even if we need to say that the SD-working model is developed theory-based, it will continuously be adjusted by the questionnaire results and the focus groups interviews of the pilot study.

The analysis on all the data we collected will contribute to model some parts of the SD-model more expressive and other in a rather aggregated way not to miss the overview on the most important drivers. We consider to construct a sub-model on the reflection processes by teachers initiated by the inside innovation approach.

Expected research findings and added insights for research

Our expectations for applying this working SD- model will be to

- visualize the project's idea (inside innovation)
- to reveal contradictions in the theories used as framework
- to be able reflect all the factors (variables) we have been using in our questionnaire and qualitative instruments

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