Examination

Participation for students with disabilities
- In Thai school from a Swedish point of view

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to create a greater understanding on how the Thai schools and their principals provide opportunities for the teachers to interact with students who have disabilities and how the schools also provide opportunities for the students’ education and prepare them to become participants in society.

The theoretical frameworks we used were three models; participation, sense of coherence (SOC) and learning by doing. In our study we have used both interviews and observation to get a more trustworthy result.

The results of our study entail that the Thai school tried to prepare the students with disabilities for society but do not make them participants in decisions made about their future. In the classroom the dialogue between the teacher and students was missing to stimulate the students to be participants in their education.

Keywords

Disability, education, interaction, participation, special school in northern Thailand.

Thanks

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1 Introduction

Our interest for students with disabilities is related to our profession as Special education teachers. In our job it is our duty to meet the students at their individual level and make them participants of their own education. As a teacher in the Swedish school, you must teach the students to be independent, to participate in their own education and to be aware of their disabilities so that they can manage their adult life after they have graduated from school. It is important that the students learn how to interact and act around other people, socially (Ineland, Molin & Sauer, 2009).

After listening to a Thai professor from Rajabhat University in Northern Thailand, our curiosity began to grow on how Thailand legislate the rights of education for children with disabilities. He talked about the conditions of disabled children in Thailand and also about how the schools worked to get the children socially integrated in society. When we got the opportunity to apply for a scholarship from Minor Field Study (MFS, 2013) in a developing country, we did. We received our scholarship and we decided to visit Thailand and follow up on our curiosity for a comparison study. Besides, both Sweden and Thailand have signed the United Nation (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007). A teacher at Linnaeus University, who is in charge of exchange students, helped us to set up a contact with the professor from Rajabhat University, to whom we had previously listened.

We wanted to focus on the students’ participation in their own education and if they got any preparations for the future on how to manage their adult life in Thailand, with starting point in our own experiences from our country. It was interesting for us to study similarities and differences in the work with the disabled students' participation in Swedish and Thai schools. It was also interesting to look into how the countries prepare these individuals for the adult life. Participation is a leading word in the Swedish curriculum and we were curious on whether the Thai schools focus on participation as we do in our professional roles as special education teachers in Swedish school. In our profession as teachers it is also important to reflect on conditions in other countries and we felt it was interesting to see what opportunities our students have in comparison to Thai students.
The results of this study can be very useful to us as active special education teachers and to observe education in another country, exchange experiences with other teachers can also be very valuable in our profession. We can learn from each other’s advantages and disadvantages, we can also learn about other cultures and witness the impact that culture has on a country. It was also very interesting to visit a country that has not the same financial advantages as Sweden and compare the different school-systems with the background of our own experiences from the Swedish school.

In the following chapter we have written about how the world looks at children’s right to an education. We have also mentioned some important issues in the Swedish and the Thai curriculums. Our focus in this study was on children with disabilities and their participation in school. In our research we have compared theories with our experiences and results.
2 Guidelines

“States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and life-long learning […]”

This is what article 24 in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) says about education. The UN adopted this convention in December 2006 and both Sweden and Thailand have signed the convention in 2007 and are now obliged to follow this. Further on the article 27 in the convention declare that;

“[…] the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities […]”

This quote is also important to our study; as Thailand and Sweden have both signed the convention, both countries need to think about how they are going to apply the rights and participation into society for disabled persons.

2.1 Mutual agreements

To begin with we have some quotes that tell us that education is a human right, they do not reflect reality. In the year 2000 the UN decided on the Millennium goals in the Millennium summit, to focus attention on the need for exposed people around the world. The Millennium goals include eight measurable goals that are going to be evaluated in 2015 and children’s’ right to an elementary school is goal number two; Achieve universal primary education (2012). In spite of the fact that “The Millennium Development Goals Report” (MDG) claims that 95 percentage of all children in South-Eastern Asia attend school, disability was not specifically included in the MDG Goal 2 until 2010 (2012). The fact that disability was not involved in the MDG goals led to the publication “Disability and the Millennium Development Goals” (DMDG, 2011). In this publication it is discussed in what ways disabilities can be included in the MDG and how important the MDG is to people with disabilities. The DMDG can be seen as a guideline of inclusion for persons with disabilities.

Further on United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2013) states that 93 million children have disabilities worldwide and among them four

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1 The Millennium Development Goals Report 2012; p. 18
of five children world-wide, live in a developing country. UNESCO encounter that 90 percent of disabled children are not going to school, and these children are the ones that demands the largest amount of money. In Sweden there is an organization called MyRight. MyRight has worked together with different Swedish supportive organizations and has in 2012 printed a publication called “Millenniemålens bortglömda barn”. In this publication MyRight says that children with disabilities, girls and ethnic minorities are left out in the school-system in developing countries because of the high costs that they bring to society.

Another publication that contains international issues of education is Salamanca-declaration (2006). According to this publication an inclusive school has a pedagogical responsibility to educate all children and to adjust the pedagogical strategies so that it is beneficial to all children and youths. A school must be able to meet all students, see them as individuals and see their differences in order to be an inclusive school. In our country we have an exclusive education and according to Salamanca-declaration (2006) an inclusive school does not have so high costs. In the declaration it is written about the importance of inclusive education in order to build solidarity between children; whether they have a disability or not, friends are important to children and they need to feel coherence. In both Sweden and Thailand there are both inclusive and special schools. To send a child to special schools should be an emergency-solution in rare situations after it is proved that the education in a ordinary class is not sufficient or if the child, needs more consideration because of his or her health.

2.2 Swedish curricula
Sweden has nine years of compulsory schooling; from the age of seven years old to sixteen. After that the students can voluntarily attend three years of Gymnasium or four years if they are students at a Special school. All costs in Swedish school are free of charge for students whether it is a private or a public school. Swedish school has an assignment, among many, to raise good citizens and that is the reason why the personal encounter is so important. In our curriculums, both in Elementary school (Läroplan för grundskolan, 2011) and Special school (Läroplan för grundsärskolan, 2011) participation is one of the leading words. The Swedish word “delaktighet” (participation) means to be an active part of something (Swedenborg, 1990). The teachers have an obligation to work with a students’ participation in their
education; the aim for the students is to have a good social interaction with other persons. One aim in the curriculum for Special school (Läroplan för grundsärskolan, 2011) is the students interaction with others based on the knowledge that people have differences and similarities.

2.3 Thai curriculum
Thailand has nine years of compulsory school, free of charge; a few years ago there were only six years. The students start school at the age of six and according to National Education Act (1999) society offers another three years of free schooling for those who want to continue studying. The first level in Thai school is Primary level and the students end in Upper secondary level. Even if the education is free some things such as the school-uniform, lunch and writing materials is the individual family’s expense.
The current curriculum in Thailand was inserted in 1999 and it is part of the country’s basic education. Basic education is built on eight main subjects; mathematics, natural sciences social sciences, religion and culture, health and physical education, career and technology, skills and foreign languages (Ministry of Education, 2008). The curriculum has its starting point in Buddhism and the king’s position; every school puts religion and the Royal family in a high position. During our visits in different schools, we were told that education in religion was held by Buddhist monks and every morning the students sang the national anthem in honour of the king.

The curriculum is built on flexibility in order to apply and assimilate local knowledge and cultural implementation and this will be consistently through all the main subjects. Further on the Ministry of Education (2008) points out that in the Thai curriculum the students are supposed to think for themselves, find self-learning strategies and learning. In our school-visits we saw this very clearly; the students worked effectively and followed instructions and they did not question the teaching. According to the National Education Act, section 27² (1999) there are eight subjects who represent the core in basic education in the curriculum. Through these subjects the Thai identity is encouraged, to be a good citizen, be taught how to support yourself and be stimulated to work as much as to continue studying. Each school has a developing plan and an individual curriculum for the students according to their needs, based on the eight subjects. It is written in section 37 (National Education Act, 1999) that the authorities

² The National Education Act has sections similar to chapters.
will provide a basic education and where there are persons with disabilities the Ministry of Education can add support.

Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center (2009) presents that the base of the current curriculum has come from “People’s constitution”, created in the year 1997. This constitution is about the students’ knowledge of moral and to improve education in interaction with the economic and social changes in society. Since the year 2002 parents are forced to send their children to school and a result of this is that the Thai school, at least on paper, has become “Education for all”. Children with special needs are in compulsory school in a suitable environment and are taught with a suitable method. Special need education applies to children who have low status in society such as poor or orphans or those who has a disability.
3 Aim and questions at issue
The aim of this study is to create a greater understanding on how the Thai schools and their principals provide opportunities for the teachers to interact with students who have disabilities and how the schools also provide opportunities for the students’ education and prepare them to become participants in society; this compared to our experiences from the Swedish school.

- In what ways does the school provide opportunities for students with disabilities to be a participant in their own learning?

- How is the interaction between teachers and students applied so that the students are prepared to be participants in society?
4 Focus on children with disabilities

World Health Organization (WHO) is an organization that has thoughts regarding disabilities and talks about ICF-CY (2007)\(^3\) and SOC (2013)\(^4\). As far as we can see, the ICF-CY notices what the students are able to manage and what can be improved. All this considerations are helpful so the students can become a greater participant in their education. It is very important for the students to participate so they can achieve good results; the students need to feel that the education is important. The students also need to feel that they can influence the teaching and the teaching needs to be very well structured according to SOC. To realize that the education is part of a bigger context and that you as an individual belong to a fellowship is extremely important.

4.1 Participation in Swedish school

In Sweden we talk about the rights of individuals with disabilities and according to Swärd & Florin (2011) it is a privilege for all individuals to participate in solidarity whether they have a disability or not. In Sweden we have an expression saying *a school for all* (en skola för alla) and it relates to Education for all (EFA) in Salamanca-declaration (2006). This has become a concept that can be read as a contrast, were Special school and Elementary school represents two sides. The authors claim that there is a huge risk with these methods and that is the opinion for or against the segregation and the inclusive school; these environments face each other. The Swedish school needs to think about what it means to have two school-systems; one for those who are considered capable and one for those who are considered incapable.

Students with intellectual disabilities can choose Elementary school instead of Special school if they would like. The problem that might occur in an Elementary school is the lack of support that these children need to be able to manage the demands that the school requires. It is mentioned by Swärd & Florin (2011) that students with intellectual disabilities in Elementary school are often seen as troublemakers because of the school’s failure; the students becoming the problem instead of getting help. We talk about a democratic foundation, that the students must participate in their own education. It seems so obvious to some people but difficult for others to both understand and to

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\(^3\) ICF-CY – International Classification of Functioning for Children and Youth, developed by WHO. This is a model that sorts out information concerning the individual’s physical, mentally and social situation.

\(^4\) SOC – A sense of coherence. If a person has the high values of SOC, he or she can handle rough challenges in a better way; a person can grow stronger if he or she stands in front of a crisis.
apply. The curriculums in Sweden are built on a democratic foundation and Swärd & Florin (2011) argue that a democracy appreciates people’s differences and diversities. A dictatorship is the opposite of democracy and has trouble with allowing differences. Swärd & Florin (2011) maintain that depending on how we put the stress on the single words in A school for all, the Swedish school can be interpreted in two different ways; both a democratic school and a school of dictatorship. If we pronounce the words one school more efficient the expression a school for all can be interpreted as a school of dictatorship; everyone is the same. On the other hand, if we pronounce the words for all efficient, it can be interpreted as a democratic school; everyone is an individual and has the right to be seen from his or her own needs.

4.2 Participation in Thai school
It is not written anything specific about students’ participation in the Thai curriculum. What is to be read about participation, is the educational preparations towards life-long learning.

According to the report given to UNSECO by the Ministry of Education in Thailand, regarding EFA, there are six valuations used and Thailand has achieved the aims (Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center, 2009). The three valuations that are important to our study are the following:

- Provide all children with an essential education.
- Provide all children the ability to manage life in general and professional training.
- Develop the education specifically when it comes to abilities essential for living.

The National Education act (1999) is also about the Thai government supporting the production and availability for books and study material. What Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center (2013) approached in their study, was that both curriculum and books focus and follow the Buddhistic way of thinking and on the King’s position in society. The teaching is built on religion and the respect of the monarchy, which was very clear to us during our school visits. Further on Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center (2009), explained that the Thai school talk about encouraging the respect of human rights. There is also a non-formal education and according to Ministry
of Education (2013), this mean that the society provide a life-long learning for those who needs it.

4.3 Research about teachers and students in interaction

Factors that affect the students’ individual progress and motivation are presented from five authors’ perspectives (Berg & Scherp, 2003). The perspectives are included in a school-development-project and the authors have some mutual views on the subject. For instance one of the mutual views is interaction between students and teachers, the leadership of the school and other social-/psychological relationships. One of the authors, Blossing (2003), has done a study on how schools can improve the students’ work. Some of the conclusions that Blossing found, was that some teachers want to use the students’ experiences in education and to let the students have a bigger influence of the education. This cannot happen if you work too segregated from each other and have no cooperation with colleagues. Other teachers in this study work totally different. The teachers’ lesson-planning is available for colleagues and exchange of experiences are discussed with others and the individual methods of the individual teacher are reviewed and improved. The importance of asking for the students’ response on their own education is also important and the teacher should question habitual patterns and try to do things in a new way or from a new perspective, even if the results are uncertain (ibid).

Some successful elements on how to succeed with the students’ participation in their education is something Göransson (2008) discusses and explains. She has done a study based on interviews with children who have disabilities. Some of the parts that Göransson (2008) has mentioned as successful factors are a good climate in the classroom, the influence from the individual students and interaction between students and between the teacher and the individual students. The teachers must have the ability to interact with the students and create opportunities for students to interact with each other. According to Aspelin (2010) the teachers should not treat students as an object in their mind or students among others, the teachers must treat the students as the individual person that they are. You create a higher motivation if the students feel safe and noticed.
The philosopher Buber (2006) states that the individual person can be interpreted in two different ways depending on how other look at you; you choose to see others as “me-and-you” or as “me-and-it”. This thesis has Røkenes & Hansen (2006) discussed when they talk about the meeting between teachers and students in general. They have argued from the perspective how we relate to each other in the meeting. When you meet the students you can look at the relationship with them, as a “me-it-meeting” or as a “me-you-meeting”. Either you relate to the students as a subject, a “you”, or as an object, an “it”. A “me-you-meeting” where you treat the students as a subject, is different, the mutual experience is stronger in this form. The meeting characterizes as a “me-you-dialogue” and is genuine because it is mutual and equivalent. It might be a thin line between becoming too friendly and caring, and Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012) claim that caring can be too dominant and interrupt the education and the students’ participation. You must see to the students’ individual needs and personal care. In order to make the students aware of their disability, to make the students feel as a participant and to make them feel independent, it is extremely significant that the teachers interact constantly with their students.

The teachers’ behaviour affects the students’ self-awareness, attitudes and thoughts (Göransson, 2008). It is all about a good atmosphere of interaction and respect for the students. To the teachers it is vital to have a dialogue and reflect about sensitive matters regarding the students’ own actions in a certain situation. Together with the students the teachers do some ethical considerations and reflections on how to change the students’ behaviour and you can confirm and contribute to their change. It is essential to establish a trustful relationship with the students so the students feel that they are seen and noticed for who they are (ibid).

A professional approach depends on the teachers; it is the teachers’ responsibility that the interaction is professional (Jenner, 2004). It requires that the teachers have the ability and the awareness to create and handle a dialogue with the students. Knowledge, self-awareness and empathy are important characteristics that the teacher needs in order to help the students to development (ibid). To encounter the students where they are in life, the characteristics from above are essential qualifications that the teachers must have so that the meeting with the students, the dialogue and the interaction, will be successful.
It is important to provide opportunities for students so they can manage in society, we need to create a sense of coherence and by doing this we can reach a higher motivation (Dewey, 1997). As Swärd & Florin (2011) state, persons with disabilities need to have faith in their own ability and if they have that their motivation increase.

4.4 Participation in society
When children with disabilities have finished school they have two options in Sweden. Either it is “Daily activity” \(^5\) or there is “Work allowance”\(^6\). The first option is the most common one, after attending Special School the students end up in the social welfare and joins “Daily activity”. The second option is menat for a life outside social welfare and do what non-disabled persons do, sign up for a job in the employment agency. How the second option strikes on the individual is not known (Ineland, Molin & Sauer, 2009).

As we mentioned in the background the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), article 27, declares that disabled individuals are treated equally with others and given opportunities to work and make a living. Swedish politicians have made a national plan of action, and made a proposition, Prop 1999/2000:79 (2000)\(^7\). One of the issues that was firmly announced in the proposition was; “... to be able to work means a lot to people’s participation and the aim is that disabled persons will have the same opportunities as persons with no disability” (our translation). In Thailand there are nothing written about the government’s responsibility after school when it comes to disabled persons. The society, the provinces, relies on the individual family and the connections that might be within a village or city.

\(^5\) Our translation.
\(^6\) Ibid
\(^7\) Applied in the year 2000.
5 Theoretical frameworks
The inclusion model has been developed by Jansson (2005) and when Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012) write about participation of students, it is this model they use as starting point. According to Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012) participation is in a constantly movement and in a proceeding. During a normal day in students’ lives, participation can differentiates in different situations. In one situation participation can be very active and in another very inactive, participation is something changeable. Participation of an individual in an activity is representing by interaction between individual conditions and the environment and another important part is the approach of the surroundings.

5.1 Aspects of what participation can entail
There are six aspects, according to Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012), where students’ participation can be included and these aspects can be a recommendation on how we can understand and use participation in school; belonging, availability, collective action, recognition, involvement and autonomy. Of these aspects the authors indicate three more specific that they believe are important for students with disabilities; availability, autonomy and collective action.

Availability is a fundamental basis in participation. Within availability there are three subheadings mentioned as important; the physical-, the symbolic- and the social- and communicative availability. Physical availability can include adjusted classrooms or school-yards, teaching aids and other individual tools in order to help the students handle their school-day. The pedagogical staff needs to be given opportunities to plan their work together and also given possibilities to use the teaching- methodology adjusted to the students. Further on the symbolic availability is about understanding the activity in coherence, to understand why we do something at a certain situation and this is something that comes from our individual experiences.

The social- and communicative availability is about creating a perspective where the students are given an opportunity to understand norms and contexts. The school needs to control how to use communicative technic such as talk, sign language, none-verbal communication. The pedagogue needs to understand that children with neuropsychiatric disorder, for instance, have difficulties with metaphors and irony, when it might help
other children. It is about understanding and how to follow the norms of interaction in the specific situation.

Another way of helping disabled children with participation is to help them to develop autonomy. Autonomy is a concept used when we talk about independency (NE, 2013). No individual who lives in a social coherence is completely independent, but lives in an environment where you are dependent on others in a context with rules to follow. School is one of these contexts (Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers, 2012). The writers claim that if the physical environment is better the autonomy gets better; these aspects work side by side.

Collective action is also something positive in participation mentioned by Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012). If the students need special education the students often gets it in a separate room because of the silence and focus but it is important to teach the disabled child to adjust to a bigger context and participate in mutual activities.

5.2 Sense of coherence
With the individual and the social context in mind, Dewey (2004) based his thoughts in these two categories. He means that the individuals grow through interaction with their environment and here the individual develops social rules and learn from coherence. Learning by doing is a base in education according to the author and it is important that the students are given opportunities to try and experiment. Further on the author claims that teaching is supposed to look at the students’ interests and activity and the teachers’ assignment is to stimulate, prepare and deepen the students’ development.

A sense of coherence (SOC) is a model used by Antonovsky (2005) and it is a main factor behind the maintenance of health and unhealthiness. The SOC of the individuals depends on the extent their experiences the existence as meaningful, apprehensible and manageable and according to the model individuals with a strong SOC feel that they are participants.
6 Method
In this chapter we will present; methodology, implementation, ethical considerations, credibility and validity process. We conducted our study in Thailand, therefore we present how we did our selection and why we acted the way we did. In a foreign culture other values are needed to be taken under consideration and we needed to adjust to the Thai customs when we did our study.

6.1 Methodology
The essay is based on a qualitative approach with the starting point in earlier literature and scientific articles in the current topic. We have chosen a method of observations in three Thai school environments and interviewing their principals and the study was done based on our experiences from Swedish school. Bryman (2011) points out that the quantitative research is built on numbers as the qualitative research is more focused on the depth. Since we did not do a statistic analysis, quantitative research was something we put aside. In a qualitative research we can write about how it might be to in Thai schools when and if the students participate, how the principals want their schools to work with disabled children. We can never write about how it really is but how something might be according to the thoughts and everyday-experiences of the interviewed persons (Kvale, 2009). According to Bryman (2011) qualitative interviews have a clear structure and the choice of method is natural even when we will observe the teachers’ in action. To do a qualitative interview with the principals and then observe the teachers interaction with the students, give us more data on how the principals’ opinion are applied.

Within the methodology we decided that an ethnographic study, instead of a survey, is the most accurate method in order to get possible answers to our aim and questions at issue. A survey is anonymous and since we did our study in a country abroad we thought it would be better to do observations and interviews so we could redirect if we had further questions. The language can be a huge obstacle in a survey if the selected persons do not understand the written question and we cannot redirect if we do not understand what they have written. To do a qualitative interview had the advantages to ask the questions in any order we would like and we could rephrase the questions during the course of interview if necessary. We could also get more additional information that was important to the study and in a survey we could not get answers on any other
questions than what the paper says (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011). Another decision that we made was to plan a recording of the interviews in order to focus on the interviewing moment and not on every single word that the principals were saying.

According to Fangen (2005) it was an ethnographic starting point we worked with. This means that the interviews could be the entry to the observations and seen as a complement in our study. We did not use an interpreter, because after meeting a Thai woman in Härnösand during the MFS-course,⁸ we learned that it was more polite to get to know the person we were going to interview. The woman also mentioned, if using an interpreter we need to take under consideration whether the interpreter says everything precise and this is also mentioned by Ahrne & Svensson (2011) also mention this. In some cases the principals did not speak any English at all so the professor from the Rajabhat University helped us translate – without us asking him.

The observation is a central core in an ethnographic study; to approach a situation related to our aim and questions at issue, to get other persons’ perspectives and to visit environments of the interviewed persons (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011). It was important for us to observe so we could analyse whether disabled children participate in their education or not and if they were prepared to be a part of society.

6.2 Selection
After a discussion with the professor we decided that interviewing principals in three different schools was enough for this study because of the amount of time spent in Thailand. When the Thai professor visited our university he talked about one specific school and we mentioned to him that we wanted to visit this school. We also mentioned that we were interested in what kind of schooling Thailand provided for children with disabilities and since the professor had many connections he helped us set up interviews with the requested school and two others.

After the interviews we were going to observe the interaction between teachers and students during a school-day. The most trustworthy way of finding out if the teachers applied the principals’ thoughts, was to observe the teachers’ interaction with the

⁸ MFS course in Härnösand in March 2013. It was obligatory to meet a person who originally comes from the country we were going to visit. The course was about what MFS stands for and our obligation to them.
students. If we interview the teachers they might say things to please us and it is important to take the word of people under consideration (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011); that is why we did not interview the persons we were going to observe. Furthermore, we decided that we were not going to interview students since the ethical considerations would be a big issue. The students come from all over the province in Northern Thailand so it would have been impossible for us in our time schedule to get all parents’ approval for interviewing their children. Besides, our study focused on the action of the pedagogical staff, not on the students’ behaviour or point of view.

Table 1. Selected schools, their placement, students and orientation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placement and environment</td>
<td>Edge of the city; close to activities and sports.</td>
<td>Centre of the city. The school-yard was paved with the possibilities to perform activities.</td>
<td>Edge of the city-centre. The school-yard was paved with the possibilities to perform activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Students with some sort of disabilities.</td>
<td>Students with some sort of disabilities.</td>
<td>One fourth of the students had some sort of disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Included in a very small extent in the education, but were trained to be included in their future schooling in their home-village and society.</td>
<td>Not included in education but were trained to be included in society.</td>
<td>Included in school with the other students, but not trained to be included in society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interaction that we observed</td>
<td>Interaction between the teacher and a few students.</td>
<td>Interaction between the teacher and a group of 5-10 students. We observed different groups.</td>
<td>Interaction between the teacher and a group of 20-30 students. We observed different groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3 Implementation
Here are the interviews, observations and ethical considerations presented. We did a study with both interviews and observations, which means that the study had a higher credibility.

6.3.1 Interviews
Before our qualitative interviews we led a pilot interview (Bryman 2002) on each other with the issues involved. This was done to avoid possible misunderstanding of the questions during the interviews. After having tested the interview we realized that our questions should be more open\(^9\). The reason for interviewing each other was that we had already arrived to Thailand when we finished the questions and we had no time to find a person on who we could do a pilot interview.

In all three schools the procedure was almost identical. When we arrived at the schools we felt very welcomed. After the introduction of our aim, we asked the concerned principle if we could record the interview and if they spoke English. The recording was not a problem at any school, but in one school the principle did not speak any English and in two schools they tried their best. The professor from the Rajabhat University acted as an interpreter during the interviews but this was nothing we had asked him to do. The lack of spoken English from the principals was not mentioned by the professor when we discussed what schools to visit. The professor also drove us wherever we were going and did everything he could to help us conduct our interviews. We had not asked the professor to drive us to the schools in question; it was just something he did.

The interviews were done in English with the principle in question and we used recording as a tool so the data became as accurate as possible and kept a high quality. It was also important to record so we could listen to the interviews when we got back to Sweden and finished our study. When we arrived to the schools we were brought to a quiet and secluded place at the schools, they told us this was to avoid possible distractions. The persons who joined the interviews, besides the principal, were the professor from Rajabhat University and in one of the schools the assistant principle.

\(^9\) Appendix B in the study.
Before the interviews started we verbally informed the principle about the aim of our study and the principle also received a written letter in Thai from the professor\textsuperscript{10}. The letter contained information about us and why we wanted to do our interview and observation in their school. The interview was scheduled for an hour which turned out to be a good calculation. After finishing the interviews we asked if the principals had any questions for us.

6.3.2 Observations
The teachers we observed were given to us by the principle at each school after discussing with them what our aim and questions at issue were. The focus on the observations was to study the participation of students in the school environment in the different schools. We told the principals we wanted to follow up the interviews with an open observation in their school during one day. We explained to the principals at the schools that we wanted to observe the teachers approach on how they interacted with the students and making them participants in their own learning. To observe the education for a whole day in each of the three schools was something we estimated was important and valuable to our research in order to get a solid result to work with. In the observations we focused on the interaction between the teachers and the students and chose therefore to keep a distance and not becoming a part of the observation. We sat down in the back of the classroom and held a low profile during the education. This choice was something we had planned in order not to influence the student’s concentration. We did not have specific schedule to follow when we observed. We made notes in our own personal way; small sentences, words – so we could remember what we saw. Whether the teacher made the students participants in education or not was our focus which was why we made notes of the observation in ways that was suitable to our own personal needs.

It was the teachers’ honest action we wanted to look at and how they interact with the students, not how they might act according to what they believed we wanted to observe. The teachers worked daily in a school among children with disabilities, the principals had ideas on how they wanted their schools to act. It was easy for us to relate to the teachers since we also work with the same kind of students, children with disabilities.

\textsuperscript{10} Appendix B in the study.
Ahrne & Svensson (2011) claim that it is an advantage; to be able to relate to the people we meet when we collect data.

6.4 Ethical considerations
According to Vetenskapsrådet (2011) there are four requirements on how to approach ethics in a study. There are requirements of; information, consent, confidentiality and use of data.

*Information* – We informed the principals about our study and what our purpose was. This we did verbally in English and our contact, the professor at Rajabhat University, gave the principals a letter in Thai informing them about our study.

*Consent* – Regarding the interviews the principals had already given us their consent to the interview through the professor and when we arrived to the schools they once again gave their consent to interviewing them. The principals also gave us their consent, verbally, to let us conduct observations in their schools. This was why we did not ask for the teachers’ consent to observe them, the principals had already said yes to the observations. We were aware of the possibilities that the teachers let us observe them against their wills, but this was nothing we noticed. We informed the teachers that the results of the observations were to be used in our study. Here the teachers could have implied if they did not want us in their classrooms or if they thought that their principals had forced them to participate in our study. It was our opinion that the teachers were honest in their attitude towards us; they were polite, friendly and very proud to shows us their education and they were very accommodating.

*Confidentiality* – According Vetenskapsrådet (2011), the study must ensure the confidentiality of the participants so that unauthorized persons cannot access the data. Therefore the principals in the study will be replaced with 1, 2 and 3. Kvale (2005) argues that decoding is postulate to ensure the interviewed persons’ anonymity.

*Use of data* – The collected data will be used in the study and the three principals had been informed of this before the interviews.
6.5 Credibility and validity
In our study we have chosen to focus on the concepts credibility and validity. As we mentioned before we used a qualitative method through interviews and observations. Validity is something Kvale (2009) means is within social sciences and has come to be applied if the method focuses on what it is claimed to focus on. Ahrne & Svensson (2011) believe that the advantages of interviews lie in the possibility to develop and follow-up questions from the interviewed respondents’ own reflections. The weakness in the interviews is the results from a conversation at a certain place at a certain point. That is why the interviews are supplemented with other methods such as covering everything from studies to documents, observation and even monitoring the participants. Bryman (2011) states that the qualitative method rarely shows results in general but gives us information that is useful to us in our profession.
7 Results

The different facilities that we observed in Thailand were schools that had different orientations for children with disabilities and they were all situated in northern Thailand. All schools had children from the age of 6 up til the age of 12; from Primary level to Upper secondary level. Each school had a principle that was responsible for the organisation at the school and was the one who structured the work and was responsible for the finances. The teachers were responsible for the pedagogical work with the students, with the help from volunteers. The volunteers came from different supportive organisations and could be compared with a personal assistant or a student assistant in Sweden. All three schools had staff with different professions; teachers, physiotherapist, psychologists and volunteers.

The first school that we visited was a school that had an included help-centre for children with disabilities and also offered support to the families. At the school the staffs was working with developing and preparing the students for an ordinary schooling in their home-village. All staff interacted with the children and their parents. There were 25 disabled children living at the school and another 350 children, also with disabilities, who were registered in the centre but lived at home with their families. Some teachers went out and taught these students in their home-villages because they were not being able to come to the centre; it could be an issue of economy for the parents or if the children had a severe disability that made it impossible for them to go somewhere.

At the second school it was also only children with disabilities that were accepted. The school had children from all-around the province and those who lived far away stayed at the school during the weeks. Almost 400 students attended this school.

The third school had about the same amount of students as the second school and this was an inclusive school. Inclusive school was a school where most students with disabilities were included in the same classroom with students that had no disabilities. The students with disabilities had support from a volunteer and they followed the education based on their own intellectual level. One volunteer was responsible for roughly five-seven students. There were students in this school that were not included in the classroom; these students were called the severe cases according to the staff. They were considered too damaged to assimilate the education but were included in social
activities. There were approximately 25 percent of the students in inclusive school that required special need education.

In none of the three schools that we visited, there were no students who had major physical disabilities. These students, we were informed, were taking care of in hospitals and had a teacher from their home-school educating them at the hospitals.

7.1 Results from the interviews

In the chapter of results from the interviews we will call the principals, principle 1, principle 2 and principle 3 in order to clarify the answers that the principle gave us. All three principals mentioned in the beginning of the interviews that their school was of high standard and quality and described their staff to be very competent and skilful. The principals were very positive of us visiting them and were very proud to be in our study. The structure in this chapter was a result of all three interviews; all three principals had similar answers to most of our questions. We have some quotes and if there is a footnote, it was the professor’s translation from Thai to English and if there are not any footnote it was the principals’ own words.

7.1.1 Approach in education

All three principals claimed that their school was going to help students with disabilities to be participants in society. The teachers had the responsibility for the education and daily work together with the students unlike Sweden. Here in Sweden is the principle responsible for the education but the teachers work with the students daily. Principle 3 said; “The teachers are pedagogical leaders, not me. They can and know how to meet the students”.¹¹ The principals’ assignments were economy or to solve administrative difficulties that could occur in the schedule or problems with students. The teachers had the principals’ trust as professionals and on how the education should be taught. According to the principals there was a dialogue between each province in Thailand and the individual schools; together they decided how a school should be structured and what aims it should have. That was why the participation of the students was different in each school.

¹¹ The professor’s translation
7.1.2 Education

The three schools had individual aims for the students based on the national curriculum. The teachers put up personal aims based on the eight main subjects that were mentioned before and when they had done this they called for a meeting with the parents. “We look at what the child needs in her life when we plan education and set individual aims” (principle 3). Together with the parents the individual school decided what the students’ individual curriculum should enclose and this was done from primary school. We were told that the family was important and was informed continuously about the students schooling. The individual curriculums were used to set aims for the students’ knowledge and their own thoughts about the future were put aside in early age. According to the principals, all the important decisions concerning the students’ education and future were exclusively made by the family. “Haha no, the students are not included in the decisions affecting them” (principle 1). This was the answer we got when we asked whether the students could participate in their educational plan or not. Sometimes, in the end of the education Upper secondary level, the students could participate in the school-meetings concerning them but the word of the family was the definitive word.

The principle 2 and principle 3 claimed that students with disabilities had an individual curriculum based on 30 percent from the national curriculum and 70 percent on individual adjustments according to their individual needs. Students with no disabilities had an opposite individual curriculum; 70 percent based on the national curriculum and 30 percent based on individual needs. Further on these two principals asserted that the students’ needs, if they had a disability, were individual adjusted so they could have a solid qualification to manage in society. These two principals also claimed that they gave their teachers the means to interact with the students and that this was something they were both proud of. Principle 1 said that they followed the national curriculum and did not talk about individual curriculums in percentage; he only talked about the students’ preparation to continue schooling in school in their village.

In school number 3 there was a volunteer who worked with about five children with disabilities at the time in the classroom. These students were included in regular teaching. Principle 3 talked about the possibilities and advantages for students with

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12 The professor’s translation
13 The professor’s translation
special needs to be a natural part of the classroom-environment and not be excluded. The social interaction with other children and the individual adjustments were two factors that the principle claimed were very successful in their inclusive school. The work of the volunteers was also a factor of success according to the principle; they helped the students with theoretical clarifications.

**7.1.3 Future in society**

One mutual aim that all three principals mentioned was that students with disabilities were going to be participants in society, but the means to get there differed between the three schools. For example school 1 had some cooperation with an ordinary school, the principle pointed out that he wanted the students to be participants in social events with ordinary students. This was an activity free of choice and was arranged during summer holiday when some students stayed at school but some went home. Principle 1 also said that participation was a part of the education in order to support the students to be able to manage in society in spite of their disabilities.

School 2 worked with education outside of school, in society. To visit and practise with students who had disabilities in a natural environment gave the students tools and means to be able to be participants in society and control different situations in every-day-life. The principle emphasized that she thought it was important that the students felt comfortable and could manage daily things in society when they finished school. “Some students can follow the society, everything in society”.

Principle 3 had, as we mentioned before, included students with disabilities together with ordinary students. In school they were trained to be participants in society, students with disabilities participated in national anniversaries in the city together with other citizens. He also said that some of the students with special needs worked a couple of afternoons in a shop but not on initiative from the school.

A few other things that the principals had similar answers to were household chores, staff and Buddhism. In all schools the students practised household chores such as make their own bed, cook, hygiene and economy. The students got an individual teaching with a basic education to be able to manage their future according to the principals. One principle mentioned that there were big differences on the quality of the school if you lived in the city or in a small village in the country or in the mountains. It was mostly
the lack of educated teachers outside the city that affected the quality of the schools. These schools were public and not financed by the government so the pay was poor.

When it came to the staff in the three schools, the principals were proud of their trust for their teachers. According to them they gave their teachers time and possibilities to discuss solutions to pedagogical problems and mentioned the importance to do so because it would help the students in their progress.

Buddhism was very important in Thai schools and religion had a big influence in education. We were told that monks visited the schools and educated the students in Buddhism; their roles were to tell the students how to act towards each other according to Buddhism. The national curriculum and the Thai society were built on religion and Buddhism. According to the principals the society in Northern Thailand had a certain way of thinking; to help each other. This way of thinking increased the possibilities for students with disabilities to get a job or some kind of employment. Many students had work-practise in a shop or restaurant or in the different markets; this was a first step to join society. “After school many students, almost all, stay in the family, the family is like a company, sale and work with everything” (principle 2). This principle, and the other two, mentioned that many families owned a family-business and that was why many students with disabilities stayed with the family after they had finished their education.

7.2 Results from the observations

In the observations we saw a clear one-way-communication when the teachers met the students in the classroom; the teachers told the students what to do and they tried their best to do what they were told. Some schools had a little bit more one-way-communication and some a little bit less. The differences in communication between teachers and students in the three schools depended on the students’ disabilities and intellectual level. It was also a question on whether the students could manage some on their own or if they needed a volunteer or other grown-up next to them. The teachers communicated with the students in different ways, depending on the students’ disability. Pedagogical tools were used to communicate with the students; tools such as coloured schedules, pictures for different activities, computers or I-pads. Many of the tools used in teaching were tools developed by the teachers themselves. The lessons were well planned and the teachers had a structured teaching when they taught the students.
In school 1 the students only participated in practical education such as rhythmic, drawing and play. The staff worked in this way in order to discover what intellectual level the students were in, and theoretical subjects came second. Most of the time there was one teacher with one student at the time. In school 2 there were 10 students at the most with one teacher and in school 3 there was a subject teacher in an ordinary class with about 20 students. In this school, school 3, there were a few students with disabilities in each class and one volunteer to help them. They also had parallel classrooms where students who needed more support had their teaching. The teachers called these students “severe cases” and each teacher had one student at the time.

In all three schools interaction in education implied that the teachers asked the students questions to answer and if the students did not succeed or did not know the answer the teacher guided the students in succeeding. Every time the students answered correctly, with or without guidance, the teachers and the other students applauded. The students were part of the teaching but not part of the content of the lessons or part of the way the lessons were conducted or in their education; the students had a physical conclusive role, not a reflective role. This was visible in all teaching-levels and in all schools that we visited. During the observations we could not once apprehend any students asking questions for the teachers or questioned what the teachers had to say. Nor did we see any students asking what to do or reveal that they did not understand.
8 Analysis

In this chapter we analysed the results in the study; both from the interviews and the observations and how they relate to the theoretical framework.

8.1 Participation and availability

In our study we put focus on participation for students with disabilities and the work that were done with them. Participation, concerning students with disabilities, is according to Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012) of great importance in order for the students to be aware and take part in different situations. The changing participation is related to a specific situation (Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers, 2012) which we saw clearly in our observations in classrooms. The students were there physically and active, but were not given any opportunity to be participants in their education. The three schools differed in their way of including the students. The inclusive school, school 3, had an aim that all students should be together, with or without disabilities. The other two schools had another point of view; students with disabilities were educated together and worked as a group and it was here in this group where the participation was. They were not integrated with ordinary students.

The results from our observations also showed that the students’ availability was different. The physical availability was changing depending on what the different schools had chosen to focus on. In the physical availability the Thai schools had a high standard in classrooms, adjusted school-yards, individual teaching aids and tools to help the students succeed in their everyday-life. After visiting and observing the three schools in Northern Thailand, we would prioritize the physical environment in Swedish schools; we agree with the Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012) that this is very important to children in special needs.

8.2 Autonomy

To prepare the students to be independent by practical exercises was something all schools had in common. The autonomy in everyday-life is of great importance so the students can be participants in different situations according to Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012). Students with severe physical disabilities went to hospital-schools, where they also stayed during the weeks. These students were not in school in the
similar conditions as other students with minor disabilities. Antonovsky (2005) claims that SOC is important for maintenance of your health and to put students in a facility like hospital-schools with no social interaction can affect their lack of meaningfulness and no practice of autonomy.

8.3 Collective action

Students in Thai school were educated in coherence where they were taught things they could use in everyday-life. The teachers associated education with things the students needed in their lives after school. The students met well educated staff in the classrooms and this was consistent with SOC; the coherence was enhanced in the environment in the classroom. In the classroom the students worked with preparing for their lives in society and their future and the subjects were also focused on the students’ lives after school. The schools in Northern Thailand individualized the education for students with disabilities and let them be part of a teaching activity in a collective action with others. As Dewey (2004), Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012) and Antonovsky (2005) mention the individual teaching is important but it needs to be supported by a participation and collective action in a bigger content.

8.4 Participation in decisions

Students in Thai schools participated in a very small extent when it came to their education. As far as we understood the students’ own opinions were submitted to their family, who also had responsibility for the students after school was finished. Dewey (2004), Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012) and Antonovsky (2005) claim that by letting students participate in decisions concerning them a greater sense of participation appears. In Swedish schools we work with the participation of students and involving them in decisions made concerning them, so it was very strange to observe the Thai students’ inactivity and not be able to have an opinion in their schooling. Even if the family excluded the students in some matters, the family was an important part in the students’ lives. After a school-day many of the Thai students worked in the markets or in shops because relatives or a close friend of the family needed help. This kind of coherence is well in line with our theoretical framework as we mentioned before; collective action in a bigger content.
8. 5 Methods in school

The teachers’ way of communicating with the students was no interaction according to us; it was a one-way-communication. The lessons were structured and well planned but the teachers’ way of communicating with the students was to tell them what to do. The interaction between teachers and students were missing and the own free thinking for the students was consistently an absence. What we could observe there was no training for the students to make their own decisions regarding their education. This was very interesting since Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012) indicate that autonomy is of great importance for participation in different situations. The theorists Dewey (2004), Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012) and Antonovsky (2005) all claim that interaction with others is developing and important to a person. If those theories can be applied in the Thai education system, we think there is some work to be done in order to create a good methods in school to enhance participation and interaction with students.

In Thailand the teachers focused on training students in theoretical matters so they could manage the practical matters better on their own. The methods of the schools was mostly Learning by doing, a method that Dewey (2004) claims is developing. Learning by doing is a method where the students are given the opportunity to try and experiment; to apply something practical and train their skills.

8.6 Future in the society

The schools differed when it came to preparing the students for the future in society. School 1 and school 2, mostly school 2, actively worked outside of school in society to prepare the students for the adult life. School 3 worked with social inclusion and had a different focus on the future. The first two schools used the method Learning by doing when they were out in society. The students got the chance to try different occupations and activities.
9 Discussion

In this chapter we will write our own thoughts and reflections from this study which was carried out in three different schools in Northern Thailand. To begin with we will discuss the basic values regarding culture and religion in the Thai society. Then we will write about the experiences and impressions from the school-visits and finally there will be a discussion relating to our method and questions at issue.

9.1 The meeting with a different culture

We met a foreign culture with totally different values and we got the possibility to see how they worked with students’ participation in Thai schools. This awakened new thoughts and gave us new perspectives on how a school activity can work. Friendly people and helpfulness in society were something we noticed from our very first day in Thailand. During our seven weeks stay in Thailand the impression of a friendly accepting society was enhanced, and also at the schools we visited. The influence that Buddhism has on society in Thailand was distinct and we also noticed it by the presence of the monks in the streets, in the schools and all the temples in the city. The Royal family has a high and mighty position in the country and this was reflected both in schools and in society. There were pictures of the king all over the schools and the tools and materials in the schools were made and visualized the colours of the king. Every morning in school the students and staff got together in the school-yards and had a morning pray and sang the national anthem. At 6 p.m. every night the national anthem was played in big loudspeakers put up outside in the city, all in honour of the king. When the anthem was played everyone in the streets stopped and listened. We believed that the students were unaware of the influence from religion and the impact from the Royal family; they were born into the Thai society where Buddhism and the Royal family were part of basic. The students never questioned the basic values and therefore we assumed that they were not aware of the influence of the religion and of the monarchy.
9.2 The three schools and our Thai contact

Our Thai contact, the professor, could meet us after only three days in the country. We discussed and planned what kind of schools we wanted to visit and explained our aim with the study and what we wanted to observe. The professor helped us finding schools to visit and principals to interview and when we analyzed and discussed the results afterwards, we asked ourselves whether the help from the professor affected our results or not. We did not actively seek for schools ourselves; we found them with guidance from the professor. In our analyze we felt that the professor wanted to be helpful and had found schools that were suitable for our purpose; the Thai culture and the professor as an individual were very hospitable and we believe that this also affected the professor’s active choice of schools. The professor stayed the whole time during the interviews however this was not planned beforehand; we accepted it and it felt like it was accustomed for him to stay. After the interviews, when we were processing the study we came to the conclusion that the presence of the professor or his opinions had not affected the results of the study. What might have affected our study was that the professor was a well-known person in all three schools and very familiar with the surroundings. This we believe gave us a positive experience during our observations and interviews. When we say positive experience we refer to our visits in city schools with pretty good finances and a good reputation. The schools were not situated in poor areas as we saw it; they were situated in attractive areas in the city.

The structures and organizations of the three schools were the same when it came to the different roles of the staff and the principle. The biggest difference between the schools’ was the teaching methods on how to prepare students with disabilities to be participants in society. School 3 was the inclusive school and the principle wanted to have the students, with or without disabilities, in the same classroom. According to the school this was a good way of letting disabled students be socially included with others. School 1 and school 2 wanted to prepare the students for the future by letting them to take part in society and practice their social skills. The skill activities contained elements for the students to be prepared to be participants in society. These two schools were special schools that only had students with disabilities and we could see similarities with the Swedish special school; by working with different methods the students practiced their social skills in different situations.
9.3 Method

In this study we chose to use qualitative interviews with the principals. We wanted to create a bigger understanding on how the schools were organized and how they were teaching disabled students and how to make them participants in education. Afterwards we felt that the idea with conducting the interviews first in order to get to know the schools was positive. The interviews gave us answers to what aims the schools had concerning participation and they also gave us an understanding that the principals had relatively similar strategies when we talked about participation of disabled students in school. We recorded the interviews and made notes based on the interview. By recording we could listen to the interviews over again and we realized that this would help us a lot since we both had some difficulties understanding everything they said and also to analyze and separate possible opinions from the professor. Another advantage with recording the interviews was that we were able to go back to the schools and clarify misunderstandings that might have accrued due to the lack of spoken English by the principals. The principals had been prepared and informed about our topic, participation, but had not been given the questions beforehand. We believed that we would get more honest answers from the principals if they did not get the questions before our interview. According to our opinion the principals were open, honest and positive to our topic, participation. The interviews also gave us a greater understanding to the observations that we were going to do afterwards.

The observations were scheduled with one-two weeks planning and they were planned to take place after the interviews; we believed it would give us a more authentic result. With this we mean authentic result from the interviews; to observe and determine if the principals thoughts and ideas were implemented in education. During the observations we made personal notes that could support what we saw and observed. We did not have any specific protocol to follow, we only wrote down our own thoughts that awakened during the observations. When we entered the classroom we were welcomed to take part of the lessons but we did not do that because we thought that it would have affected our results. Therefore we sat down in the end of the classroom observing the interaction between teachers and students. Our choice to observe was satisfying to us and to the study, but it was also important to us in our profession as special education teachers. The observation also showed if the students participated in the classroom or not. We
could clearly see that the structure of the lesson was well planned by the teachers and that the students followed the teaching according to their ability.

The resources in the classroom were according to our opinion, adequate to the students. The teachers’ methods to make the students participants in education were something we saw was far from our Swedish way of teaching. The students did not get any opportunity to be part of their education; it was focus on teaching from the teacher’s desk. With teacher’s desk we mean the teachers staying in the front of the class asking questions to the students and they answered. No one questioned the teachers or argued or reflected the teachers’ methods. No one asked for help so either all students understood everything or they did not understand but did not say so. We never saw any students asking for help and this was interesting as Buber (2006) claims that “me-and-you” is to prefer in the interaction between teachers and students. Once again the Thai school was different in comparison to the Swedish school; in the Swedish school the interaction between teachers and students is seen as a basic foundation in order for the students to be participants in their education and learn how to question facts. We gave it some thoughts whether a wider study would give a similar result or if it would give us a different result. To visit other schools for example in poorer parts of the city or if we have found the schools by ourselves might also have affected our results.

9.4 Our aim and questions at issue

Our aim with the study was to create a greater understanding of how the Thai school and the principals provide opportunities to teachers to interact with students with disabilities. Based on our aim and questions at issue we have, with help from the interviews and observations, got a knowledge and answers to our questions. We saw that the staff in the Thai schools communicated with the students both in similar ways as in Swedish schools and in different ways. One similarity was that they treated the students with respect and one difference was the interaction and not letting the students’ has their own opinions. No one questioned anything that teachers or staff said or did.

The participation was very different in Thai schools, based on our experiences from Swedish schools. Thai schools had a positive thinking when it came to include disabled students who had a learning disability. Students with learning disabilities were more often included in education in comparison to Swedish school. This kind of school was called inclusive school and this school based their teaching on telling the students what to do. The students were not invited to participate and question the education and this is
something we do in Swedish school. In Swedish school we take the students’ opinions and knowledge under consideration during teaching. This mutual dialogue is an important part in school according to the theories that Dewey (2004), Szönyi & Söderqvist-Dunkers (2012) and Antonovsky (2005) present. Teachers and students discuss and find solutions together; the students’ thoughts and creativity in interaction are important in Swedish schools. This creates participation between teachers and students and during our observations in Thai schools we could not find this interaction. The question we asked ourselves was how this could be. The structure of the Thai society indicated that schools were pretty enlightened and in school students could develop; education had high status in society. Education was led by the teacher and we could spot a hierarchy; the society was reflected in education.

In society a few had great power; the Royal family, the monks and rich people. Could it be that participation and people’s own thinking were held back because of some powerful mind did not want people to have an opinion or was participation not an important issue in society? You just accept the hierarchy in society? Well we cannot give answers to these questions in this study but we can take with us that students’ creativity and participation in education were held back by the one-way-communication from the teachers. This is our assumption.

The principals’ thoughts about the schools’ approach to make students part of their education were interesting. When we asked if the students participated in decisions concerning their education and future, the principals said that the students hardly ever participated. Maybe at the end of their education they might be part of decisions but it was exclusively the family who had the rights to decide in the students’ behalf. In Swedish school we want students to be part of decisions concerning their education in early years and here was a big difference in customs and culture. We discussed how the Swedish school would be structured if we had Thai influences; would we have better results among Swedish students if we had a more one-way-communication between teachers and students, if our students would do as they were told and not have an opinion of their own?

As we mentioned the family made all the decisions concerning the students. To understand the influence and status the family had in the students’ future we thought it was incredible important and necessary to experience the Thai culture and society from
a native perspective. We spent seven weeks in Thailand and besides the school visits, we did not spend time with other tourists, and we travelled in the country, visited different tribes and temples and tried to get to know the culture and religion. What we could notice was that the Thai family created a comfort and in many cases a survival for other members of the family. There was no safety in society regarding economy or people in need. In our opinion the family only had each other and whether the students were disabled or not, the family made the choices they thought was good and necessary for the students’ survival.

To do a follow-up and a more extent study about participation for disabled students would be very interesting. This study has planted a seed for further research and we would have done it ourselves if we have had the time. The influence of participation in different countries around the world and the meaning of the word participation had great significance in the answers we got from the principals. The interpretation of participation is very different depending on who you ask and even bigger difference if two persons come from different cultures. One big thought that alerted us when we went home, was the difference between city schools and village schools. Further we thought about the influence from the family concerning the education for the students, how the influence affects the Thai society in the long run and if the economy of the family plays any role for the quality of students’ education.

As we wrote in our introduction, our interest for the Thai school system awakened after the professor had visited our university. The aspect of participation was a leading issue in this study and maybe if we had chosen the schools on our own, the results would have been totally different. We feel that the method we chose, ethnographic study, was the accurate one. There were many advantages with combining interviews and observations. One of the most important advantages was that we thought we got a genuine result by interviewing one person and observing others. The results of the observations were the teachers’ honest performance as they had not heard the principals’ answer to our questions.

In our role as professional special education teachers we will meet students with different needs and thoughts. We have in this study concluded that it is very important that students with disabilities must participate in decisions concerning them, it is their lives and they need to feel a sense of coherence in order to feel part of the society. To meet disabled students requires a lot of from us special education teachers; we must
have a two-way-communication with the students and interact with them to reach them in the best way possible. Students possess an incredible knowledge and this we must cherish.
List of references


Internet references


Appendix
Appendix A – Interview guide

1. What can society in Northern Thailand offer disabled children after school?
2. What are your thoughts concerning the individual role and future as a disabled child in your society?
3. How do you want the teachers to interact with your disabled students? Do you feel that the teachers apply your thoughts? Why/why not?
4. How do you as a principal provide opportunities for the teachers to interact with their students?
5. In what extent are the disabled students’ participants of their own learning and what opportunities do you provide for participation?
6. In what ways do your school interact with the students so they are prepared for participation in society?
7. How can your school influence the future of the students’ inclusion in society and make them participants?
Appendix B – Letter to principals

Special Education Program.
Faculty of Education.
Chiang Mai Rajabhat University.

21 May 2013.

To XXX The Principle.

I am Assistant Professor XXX, a lecturer in Special Education Programme, Faculty of Education. Chiang Mai Rajabhat University is coordinator in exchange programme between Chiang Mai Rajabhat University and Linnaeus University. There are 2 students; Sanna Schmitz and Martin Mosskull from Linnaeus University in Sweden have done research on the topic: How to educate the children with disability into society. Your school is _______ school and I want to take 2 students to interview you for getting the data to use in their research.

Sincerely Yours,

(Assistant Professor XXX, Coordinator.)