



**Kasvatus 2009 Vol. 40 No 2**

**The Finnish Journal of Education**  
**Suomen kasvatustieteellinen aikakauskirja**

**Hirvonen, Maija – Ladonlahti, Tarja – Pirttimaa, Raija. 2009. From vocational special education towards supported vocational education – Insights into developing vocational special education as a part of vocational education. *The Finnish Journal of Education Kasvatus* 40 (2), 158–167.**

The popularity of vocational education as a place of further education after comprehensive school has increased in recent years (Tilastokeskus 2008a, b). The traditional duality of natural procession from the upper secondary school to academia and a quick transition from vocational school to practical working life as the avenues of education has in many ways been fragmented with the arrival of new, more diverse and increasingly individual educational paths. Since the right to learn, or rather compulsory education, has been extended to and reached the entire age group, attention has shifted towards upper secondary education. The aim is to offer a place also in post compulsory education to the entire generation of comprehensive school graduates. Partly as a result of this, the need to support students in the realm of vocational education has increased, especially in terms of special education. What do these increased needs tell us and how should we respond to them? In the following, we construct a picture of how vocational special education has evolved, what its current emphases are, and what challenges vocational special education presents to education in its current form. This review investigates vocational special education within a historical framework as well as in terms of education policy. The discourse is focused within the framework of public vocational schools.

*Descriptors:* vocational education, special education, supported vocational education

**Hotulainen, Risto – Lappalainen, Kristiina. 2009. Socioeconomic background and part-time special education and their correlation to perceived strengths and educational or vocational placements of the young adults. *The Finnish Journal of Education Kasvatus* 40 (2), 131–145.**

This follow-up field study had several objectives: to study how young adults with different levels of socioeconomic background and part-time Special Support Needs (SSN) have perceived their strengths, how the Finnish comprehensive school has supported their strength identification, and where they were either studying or working seven years after finishing their schooling. In this study, strength identification and its importance for self-development are derived from Harter's (1999) self-perception theory. Methodologically this study is a quantitative follow-up field study (N=205). According to the study results, the young adults who had part-time SSN were found to have lower strength perceptions on learning skills and mathematical skills than those who never had such needs. The socioeconomic background of the young adults correlated with their self-perception regarding learning skills, but not with their other strength perceptions. Cross-tabulations between the socioeconomic background of young adults and their assessment about how comprehensive school has supported their strength identification showed that the young adults having the lowest socioeconomic background level had more negative ratings with this regard than the others. When looking at the data for young adults' placement, those having either the lowest socioeconomic background or part-time SSN background showed lower percentages for higher education and

accordingly higher percentages for working and unsuccessful career choices when comparing with other groups. It seems that comprehensive school should pay more attention to the strength identification of students with both SSN and a low socioeconomic background and encourage them to achieve their full potential.

*Descriptors:* socioeconomic background, part-time special education, strengths-based approach, educational or employment position

**Huhtanen, Kristiina – Laitinen, Katja. 2009. Special education in transition – From early intervention to pedagogic anticipation. The Finnish Journal of Education Kasvatus 40 (2), 168–176.**

The recent national strategy for special needs education (Opetusministeriö 2007) outlines, through both curricular and legislative changes, directions for pedagogical and instructional approaches in special education for the coming years. It involves a justifiable choice to gear the administrative thinking of school authorities more strongly towards strategic thinking with respect to changes in schools' operation environment and local community structures. Turning this strategy into practice may prove quite challenging, however, due to the fact that in special needs education each case and situation is different. In addition, it depends on the situation how the learning or other problems of the student can be tackled in practice. Hence, besides the national strategy, there is a need for local educational strategies with consistent regional policies. This would facilitate the development of good practices along with strategy evaluations.

Early intervention refers to a process that aims at achieving the learning objectives as appropriate for the student's potential. By the methods of futurology it is possible to estimate the student's current frame of reference and anticipate appropriate pedagogical choices. Pedagogical anticipation deals with supported learning paths and defining an optimal learning environment in line with the student's capabilities.

*Descriptors:* futurology, early intervention, anticipation, strategy

**Pihlaja, Päivi. 2009. Special support practices in early childhood education – from the viewpoint of inclusion. The Finnish Journal of Education Kasvatus 40 (2), 146–157.**

This review examines special support practices in early childhood education from the inclusion point of view. In Finland, public day care provides an important setting for early childhood and preschool education, while nearly all children are, in one way or another, in the sphere of these services before school age. This study investigates how the different aspects of inclusion are implemented in day care. The set of data consists of a number of studies on day care, which have been conducted in years 1997 through 2007. The aspects of inclusion are defined as services for all, involvement, emotional attitudes and tolerance, professional skills and knowledge, common curriculum and resources (support system). On the basis of the data it seems that the day care service open for all fails to meet the criteria of inclusion in many respects. There are municipal differences, but also the grounds on which a child is considered to need special support do shape inclusion and special support practices.

*Descriptors:* inclusion, early childhood special education, day care, special needs education, early childhood education, need for special support

**Savolainen, Hannu. 2009. From accounting for dissimilarity to good learning results. The Finnish Journal of Education Kasvatus 40 (2), 121–130.**

The strive towards inclusive education has become an internationally accepted goal. A big challenge in this process is to simultaneously increase both equity and quality. This article discusses this question in the light of recent research findings. The results indicate that improving quality is not in contradiction with increasing equity. The findings on the Finnish comprehensive school reform and recent learning outcomes support this conclusion. During the comprehensive school era equity has increased, performance gaps decreased and overall performance improved. Possible reasons for this are that the Finnish education policy development has not followed international mainstream trends and that flexible and extensive special education provision has been built in our school system. Internationally acknowledged requirements for good education are good teachers

and the school system's commitment to take responsibility on the learning of all children.

*Descriptors:* special education, inclusive education, equity of education, quality of education

**Vehmas, Simo. 2009. The ontology of disability and policy outlines: An inevitable union of realism and constructionism. *The Finnish Journal of Education Kasvatus* 40 (2), 111–120.**

This article sheds light on the ontology of disability by means of philosophical analysis, which takes into account the physical and social characteristics of the phenomenon. The analysis is based on the notion of ontological hierarchy, by which the phenomenon of disability consists of natural and institutional facts of different levels. This article discusses, also critically, the tendency of the social-constructivist research orientation to mix up the ontological and epistemic dimensions of phenomena. This confusion often leads to linguistic idealism, according to which the existence of phenomena is dependent on language. Disability is a very complex phenomenon, and it can be considered to include a wide range of different characteristics and behaviours. When outlining the ontology of disability, we must recognise the physical and social preconditions for the constitution of these characteristics, so as to be able to describe the phenomenon of disability as fully and appropriately as possible.

*Descriptors:* disability, impairment, ontology, social constructionism