

## **Shared responsibility and sustainable support: Multi-professional teamwork in an inclusive school – a case study<sup>1</sup>**

### **1 Introduction**

School services in Iceland are currently on a crossroads. In October 2022, the Icelandic minister of Education and Children's Affairs announced extensive changes within the educational system in Iceland. These changes involve the establishment of a new law on school services and a new institution, a national knowledge and consultation centre, which will replace the Icelandic directorate of education in its current form (see also Sigþórsson et al. in this volume). Providing appropriate support for all students is a critical element of inclusive education and various challenges of organising and providing support that supports inclusion and participation of children have been outlined (see also Óskarsdóttir et al. and Köpfer & Óskarsdóttir in this volume).

This paper is a case study of a successful process of changing support services within a comprehensive school in Iceland towards more inclusive practices. The school is Brekkubæjarskóli in the town of Akranes, which is located about 40 km north of Reykjavík. It is the purpose of this paper to provide an example of what can be done and to be a motivation for others. The chapter demonstrates that change is possible through combined efforts and collaboration and does not have to be complicated. Change can be the logical consequence of reflecting practices and finding solutions together as a school community.

What makes this story so remarkable is that the process of change within the school started before the results of the external audit by the European Agency (see Óskarsdóttir et al. in this volume) were released in 2017 and long before the new law on integrated service in the interest of children's prosperity, nr. 86/2021 was passed. The changes happened from within and were based on reflection, discussion and pathfinding among school administration, personnel, and school community. People wanted to change practices because they felt a need for change, it was a logical thing to do.

The first part of this paper will provide background information and place the case study into context. The second part builds on an interview Ruth took with Dagný about the change process. The third part will discuss critical issues and then conclude with highlighting key aspects of creating sustainable support systems in the educational system.

#### **1.1 The authors' involvement**

Both authors of this paper have been involved in the changing process in some way. Dagný Hauksdóttir has been leading the process from the start. From 2014 to 2021 she worked as the head of support services in Brekkubæjarskóla and is now working as the director of the department of education and culture in the Akranes municipality. Ruth Jörgensdóttir Rauterberg

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started to get involved as a collaborative partner around 2015 as she was working in the local leisure centre. She is currently leading a participatory action research (PAR) project on inclusive and democratic practices in collaboration with children and personnel in Brekkubæjarskóli, as a Ph.D.-Student and project manager (see Jörgensdóttir Rauterberg & Hinz in this volume). Both authors have experience of working in schools as professionals, Dagný as an occupational therapist and Ruth as a social educator. We share a vision of an inclusive community that ensures participation of all children in everything that the community has to offer. We want to take a holistic approach in education, rather than look at specific solutions. We always want to include all children in plans and practices, take all children into account, from the beginning.

## 1.2 The context

Akranes is a small town with around 8.000 inhabitants. There are two comprehensive schools from grade 1 to 10. Brekkubæjarskóli is one of them and has currently 465 students, 93 members of staff covering 70–80 full time positions. There is an educare-centre (with after school leisure programme, isl. Frístund) for grades 1 and 2 within the school buildings. Leisure programmes for children in grade 3 to 10 in both schools are within the local leisure centre.

In 1986, a special education department was founded within Brekkubæjarskóli, which served children in all Akranes. It was at the time very respected and considered being very progressive, ambitious, and professional and had a lot of human resources, both professionals and support agents.<sup>2</sup> But these services were only provided to students accepted into the department, and for that, children had to have a diagnose of disability.

Though all children in the department were also assigned to a class, class teachers were not much concerned with their matters. All management was in the hands of the professionals of the special department. Teachers had little knowledge about the student's education plans, learning goals, needs for accommodation and so forth. And vice versa, the professionals and support agents belonging to the special department were not concerned with other children in the class.

We had what could be called a 'double system' of support: on the one hand, support provided by the special department and on the other hand, support within so-called 'general education', organised by one manager of special education and provided by support agents, who often had to 'safe the day' and take on a lot of responsibilities, without having a lot of knowledge or experience or the possibility to get professional assistance (see also Óskarsdóttir & Köpfer in this volume). So, we felt that change was necessary, as every child should receive support as needed.

In 2015, a service council was founded within the municipality, with the goal to coordinate and balance the support services of the two compulsory schools in Akranes. It was the main policy of the council to make service provision independent of diagnoses. Instead, service and support should be provided according to the actual needs of every child. Many possible solutions were discussed in this context, and the focus was set on promoting and developing multi-professional

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<sup>2</sup> We will use the term 'support agent' (isl. stuðningsfulltrúi) for paraprofessionals assisting and supporting children in classes and everyday school live. We will use the term 'school assistant' (isl. skólaliði) for other non-professional school personnel with other responsibilities (like guarding children in recess or in hallways, cleaning, assisting in kitchen), as suggested in the English-Icelandic dictionary (Orðabók aldamóta, n.d.)

teamwork in both schools. In Brekkubæjarskóli, this led to the establishment of the multi-professional class-teams, which will be introduced in the next chapter of this paper.

From 2015 to 2017, Akranes participated in an Erasmus+ Project on inclusive education. This project led together key persons from the field of education and leisure within the municipality and resulted in the formation of a great collaborative platform between these persons and their institutions. They engaged in a powerful and productive conversation on inclusive education, which supported the process of change. One output of the Erasmus+ Project was a model of the ‘circles of participation’, a tool that turned out to be very useful in the process.

### **1.3 Circles of participation: a model for inclusive practices**

The purpose of the Erasmus+ project was to develop tools that can assist school professionals to develop more inclusive practices and find ways to provide the suitable support to all children within their group. We wanted to get away from clinical ways to determine support needs, which mostly build on defining deficits. We wanted to design a tool that had the objective to guide educational personnel towards an inclusive way of thinking by asking questions that demand self-observation and self-criticism. The tool was supposed to assist personnel with getting to know the child in a holistic way and find ways and solutions for more participation and more inclusion.

In this context, we developed a model we decided to call ‘circles of participation’. The idea for the model was derived from the Person-environment-occupation-performance (PEOP) model.<sup>3</sup> In our model of the circles of participation, we adapted the basics of the PEOP model to the educational situation. During the development process, we worked with children and young people and asked them about their experience of opportunities and barriers for participation in school. They almost exclusively mentioned environmental factors. Thus, we found it especially important that the model would look at the environment of the child. This is in line with a social approach to disability and diversity, where disability is seen as the result of a person encountering barriers for participation in the environment (UN-CRPD, 2006, Art.2).

Our model consists of three circles: child (person), activity and environment. All circles are interconnected and interdependent (see figure 1). What happens in the Child-circle has often direct influence on the Activity-circle. What happens in the Environment-circle has usually very much influence on the Child-circle and the Activity-circle. For example, if the child does not understand the environment because of lack of visual clues, it will be confused or afraid and probably expresses its feelings through behaviour or withdraw from activity. On the other hand, a supportive environment where the child experiences that it can use its strengths often leads to active participation.

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<sup>3</sup> The PEOP model provides a person-centred approach in occupational therapy and enables the person to develop goals based in individual wishes and needs. The model builds on the assumption that a person’s occupation and performance are directly linked to intrinsic personal factors and extrinsic environmental factors. All these factors interact and influence a person’s well-being and quality of life (Akyurek & Bumin, 2017).

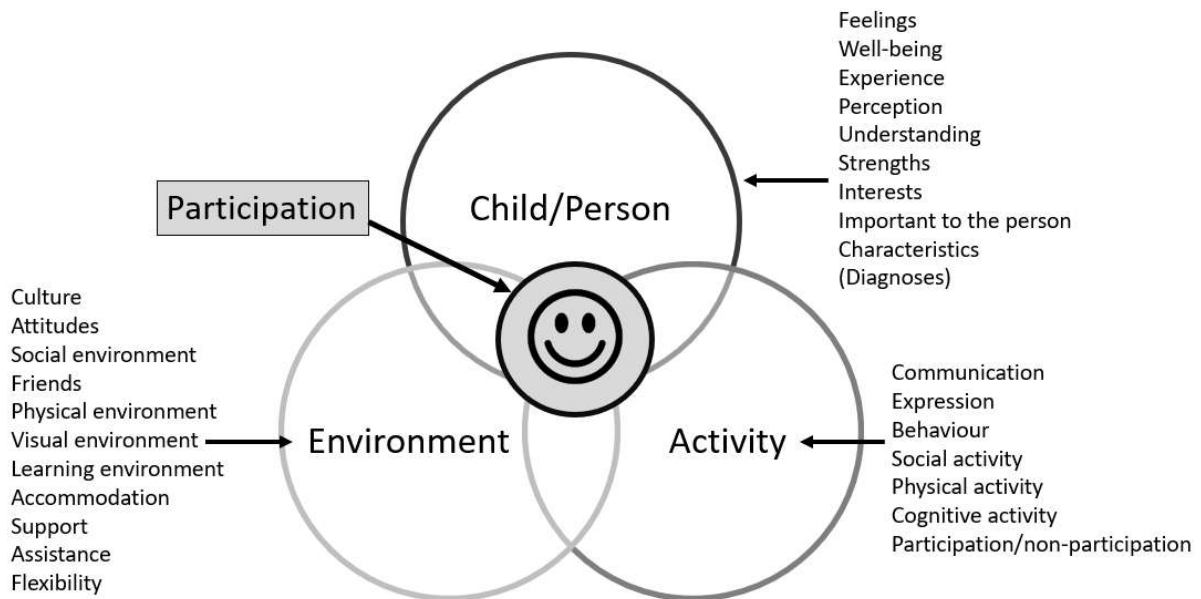


Fig. 1. Circles of participation (own figure)

A digital accessible questionnaire was developed to accompany the model. The questionnaire offers a set of questions concerning each circle and has the purpose to find imbalance between the circles, to find possible barriers and missed opportunities for participation and guide educational personnel towards an inclusive way of thinking and acting. This questionnaire currently still serves as a basis for information gathering and solution finding in Brekkubæjarskóli and we see great opportunity in using this model within the new ‘prosperity services’ introduced below.

#### 1.4 Integrated services in the interest of children’s prosperity

Akranes is one of four Icelandic pioneer municipalities in implementing the new Act on integrated services in the interest of children’s prosperity, the so-called ‘Prosperity Act’ (no. 86/2021; see Sigþórsson et al. in this volume). The act applies to all children and young people 0–18 years of age and has the main goal to create a framework that guarantees all children and their parent’s access to appropriate integrated services without barriers.

According to the act, Akranes is developing a new service system, the ‘prosperity services’ (isl. farsældarþjónusta), which build on equity for all children and shared responsibility of everyone involved. Prosperity services are provided at three service levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary (Akranes Municipality, e. d.; Government of Iceland, 2020).

- Primary level services include basic services which are accessible to all children and families. Early support is provided and followed up in a targeted manner.
- Secondary level services include more targeted support services and resources, based on professional assessment.
- Third level services include specialised support services in accordance with a detailed analysis of needs.

As will be presented in the next part, Brekkubæjarskóli decided to define three levels of support. This happened a considerable time before the new law came into effect but fits surprisingly well with the emphasis of the prosperity services.

## 2 The process of changing support services in Brekkubæjarskóli

This part outlines the process of change in Brekkubæjarskóli and builds on Dagný's reflection on the process, which started around 2014 and is still going on.

### 2.1 The beginning – start, goals, expectations, first steps

*Why did you start this process, what do you want to achieve, and why are you so determined to go this way?*

Our vision has always been to create a culture that celebrates diversity. At any given time, it has been our intention to meet the diversity within our student group better than we had done before. All children should receive all the support they need in school, regardless of diagnoses or other labels. The focus has always been on solution orientated approaches in all school practices, where we provide holistic services to all children, share collective responsibility and build on the strengths and capabilities of all students and staff. Also, we have always aimed for our multi-professional class-teams to be mostly sustainable concerning all services for their group.

*What did you do and how did you do it? What steps did you take?*

Mainly, we started to work in an organised way towards our vision and made it the core of our school practices and inner organisation. Figure 2 provides an overview of the whole process of change so far. This has been a long process and we have been taking little steps at the time. Overall, it has been a rather conflict-free process, every step being some logical continuation of what has already been done. The process builds on constant development and review, where we reflect on our work and the changes we had made, evaluate the results, and make further changes based on that evaluation. It is a continuous process that never stops because we can always do better.

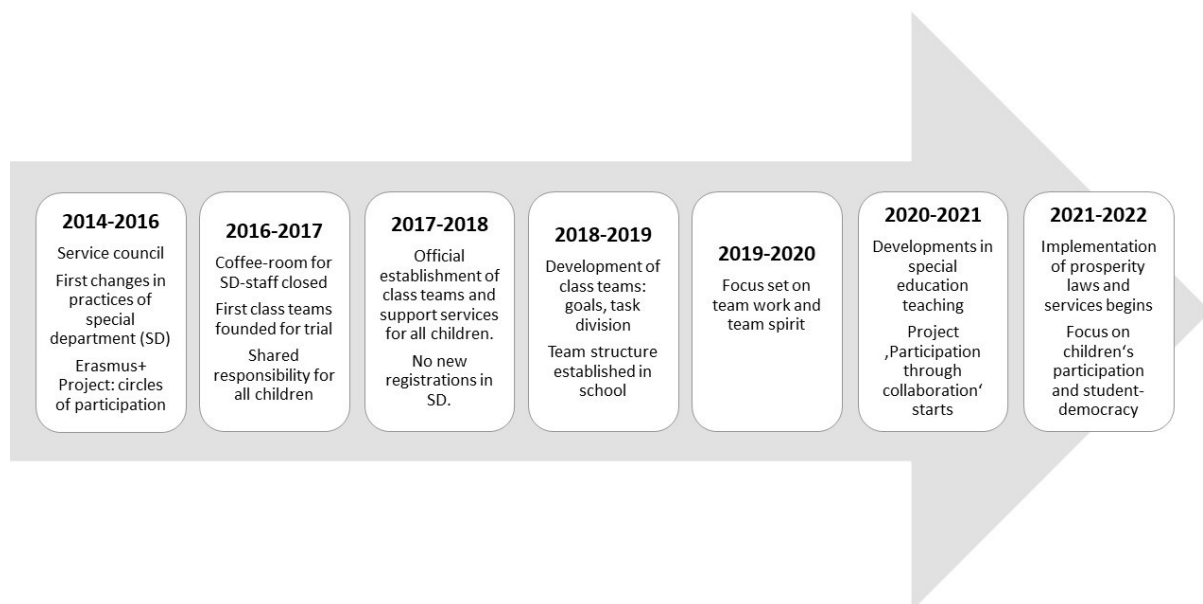


Fig. 2. Overview of changing process 2014–2022 (own figure)

One of the most central things was to develop and promote a new mindset. We changed our way of thinking about the special department and students inside and outside of it. In the beginning, it was not our goal to change the department or even close it. We mainly wanted to do better and ensure that all students received services and support. But then, as we provided

services to more children and looked at things through different glasses, it did not longer make sense to enrol students in a special department, as we were providing services to all children anyway. Also, people experienced a certain discrepancy, as we have a large group of kids still in school, who don't meet diagnostic criteria, but are still in a very great need for support. And, vice versa, we have children with official diagnoses that do not need very much support during their school day.

In autumn 2017, we officially stopped to register children into the special department and started formally with a new approach of comprehensive services for all children and established officially the multi-professional class-teams. So, children enrolled in first grade that year started within the new system. And after that, the department just faded out, with less and less students enrolled. But the level of service to each student remained always the same, except that we think differently about things. And alongside, we also stopped to do a lot of other things that led to segregation.

We stopped hiring support agents for certain students, or 'ear-marking' support agents to certain students,<sup>4</sup> because that can lead to segregation, marginalisation, and othering of both the student and the support agent (see also Óskarsdóttir, 2017 and Köpfer & Óskarsdóttir in this volume). Instead, we started hiring people into the multi-professional class-teams. We emphasised that all children belong to their class and therefore to every member of the class-team. Our experience revealed that it is not good for a child to get support always from the same person. That can lead to problems, for example when that person is sick and no one else knows the child. It is very challenging for one person to always be with the same child, and, vice versa, very challenging for the child to always be with the same support person.

We stopped splitting up children in the same grade and assign certain groups to certain teachers. Now we have just one group in each grade that all teachers are assigned to. In the beginning, we also stopped to talk about 'classes' and started to talk about 'year-groups', but the children did not want that. They felt that they were all in one class and wanted to use that term. But of course, the classes can be easily divided in smaller groups, if needed, but the groups are not fixed and can vary for different activities.

We then applied a structure of teamwork throughout all school practices, which was a very logical step to take. There has always been a culture of teamwork within the school, and everyone was prepared to take this a little further. So now, we have 10 class-teams, an art- and crafts-team, a sports-team, a maintenance-team, and an administrative team. We also consider it very important and efficient to be very clear on our vision when we hire new personnel. We choose people that we feel are 'fitting' into our vision and our way of working and are ready to work with us in this way. We find it essential that learning about diversity and working with has a significant part in the continuing education of all school personnel. And every autumn, all teams have to explain in their curriculum how they plan to meet diversity and how they plan to ensure participation of all.

We are still working on correcting discourse that segregates certain groups of children, like talking about 'students with special needs' and change into using more inclusive discourse. Discourse usually goes hand in hand with attitudes and perspectives. We want to promote the perspective that inclusive education is not a choice but our shared task that we are all responsible for. We see school as a cross section of a diverse society and, as said before, we

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<sup>4</sup> In Icelandic, the term "eyrnarmerkja", i. e. 'ear-marked', is used for this; it has the cultural background that all sheep have a mark on their ear indicating that they belong to their owner. So, if a person is 'ear-marked', they belong to a certain child – and vice versa.

want to celebrate diversity. Thus, we must find out what creates segregation and exclusion and find better ways. We see diversity as our greatest strength.

In 2020, we started a development project called ‘Participation through collaboration’ which is funded by the Icelandic Innovation Fund and part of the PAR-research Ruth is conducting (see Jörgensdóttir Rauterberg & Hinz in this volume). We want to increase democratic thinking and listen to children’s voices. So far, the changing process of support services has been on grounds of administration and personnel, and now it is consequent and timely to involve the students.

Regarding finances, we are unfortunately still in the pit that children need diagnoses to receive a contribution from the Icelandic Equalization Fund. But each school can decide how they use these resources to provide support within the school. It is our principle that parents should never hear from school professionals that their child cannot receive service due to the lack of money. That discussion we take in other places. Every child and its parents should feel that this is their school, and they are not to experience to be excluded from services. We have seen that we can do a whole lot within the financial frame that we have, there is a lot of possibility for change. Nowadays, we can provide services to new students with complex support needs without applying for extra money. We can find solutions through organisation, collaboration, and sensible distribution of resources. This, we found, was the greatest success of the changes we made.

## **2.2 The changing process – new criteria, class-teams, support services**

*What criteria did you use after you stopped using diagnoses for service provision?*

We had to construct new criteria for assessing and categorising service and support needs, that include all children, completely independent from diagnoses. Of course, it is always complicated to categorise human beings and their diversity, and so to some extent, these criteria are probably subjective. But I feel that by now, we have become quite good and trained in estimating our student’s needs. Here, the circles of participation developed in the Erasmus+ Project have been come in very useful in order to see each child in a holistic way and assess needs for consultation, accommodation, assistance, and support.

We also designed the ‘Ace-Twist-Thrice-system’. We use that system to determine how many support agents and support professionals are assigned to each class-team. Within this system, there are three categories of support: on the ‘Ace-level’, on the ‘Twist-level’ and on the ‘Thrice-level’.

- Support on the Ace-level means considerable support and assistance in all school activities. On the Ace-level, students receive services and advice from a support professional and need support with all or most daily activities. They also need considerable accommodation of teaching material, environment, individualised education plans, and often also specific services and training. Support on the Ace-level can be limited to a timeframe and a diagnose is not a prerequisite for getting this kind of support.
- Support on the Twist-level means assistance and support most of the school day, in larger or smaller groups, as well as services and advice from support professionals. On the Twist-level, students often need accommodation of teaching material and environment, and sometimes support or assistance with daily activities. Usually, students can work and participate independently in specific tasks, projects, or activities, but still need continuous service and support based on expert knowledge of their needs.
- Support on the Thrice-level means support at some time during the day or with certain activities. On the Thrice-level, students might need training in social activities, reading, maths, they might need the involvement of study and career advisors, job-related

programmes, some accommodation of learning material and environment. Nowadays, we see this kind of support as ‘normal’ support for all children in a diverse group. There will always be children in all groups that need support on the Thrice-level for longer or shorter times, so we do not categorise into that level, providing support on that level is something that we always do.

When we look at these criteria now, we find it quite remarkable, that they match the criteria for service assessment and provision that is now being implemented with the new prosperity law. This reassures us that this development really makes sense as these criteria evolved from our reflection of practices within the school. They are built on actual experiences and expertise of people working in the field.

*Can you tell me more about the multi-professional class-teams, their composition, main tasks, and work division between team members?*

The main tasks of the class-teams are to organise and exercise teaching and learning activities for the whole group, to map and assess individual needs, share responsibilities between team members and to create a culture that celebrates diversity. In order to do that effectively, it is essential that team members are all working towards the same goals.

The number of personnel in each team is flexible and depends on the number of students and support needs in the group. Currently, they are between 36 and 56 students in each class or year-group. The basic class-team consists of two class teachers, one support service professional, and one support agent. Support agents are part of the team, their experience is valued and used, but they have less professional responsibility. A team composed like this is supposed to provide support on twist- and thrice-level in the group. If there is a student needing Ace-level support, another support agent is added to the team. However, this support agent is not assigned to this particular student, but with addition to the team, tasks can be divided between more people and thus, it can be assured that there is always assistance available for this student. Still, this does not mean that an extra support agent is added for each student that needs Ace-level support. Often, this is unnecessary because of the synergy and collaboration in the team.

Our teams have become quite good in dividing tasks between team-members. In the beginning, it was not clear for all teams who should do what and who should manage which tasks. We then worked together on a task division chart, that defines how responsibilities and tasks can be distributed between team members (see figure 3).

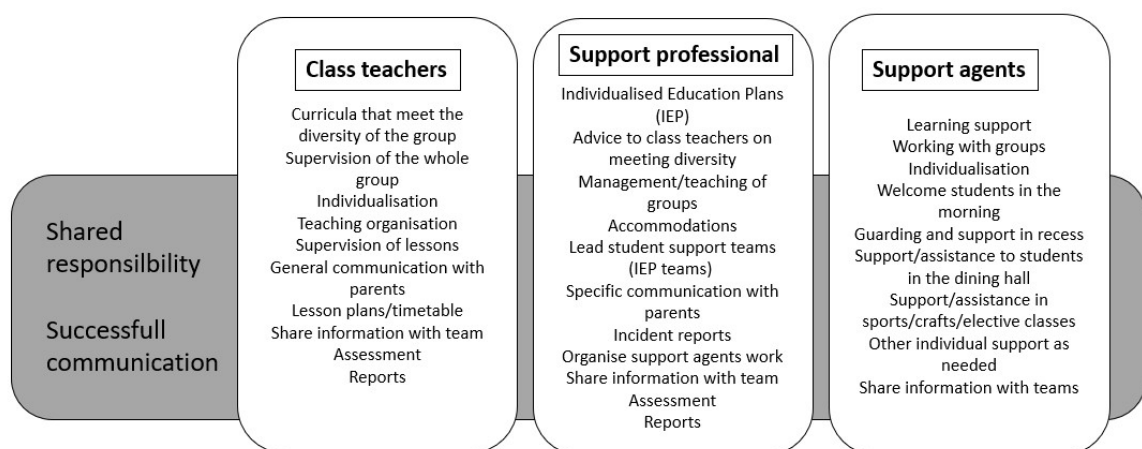


Fig. 3. Task division in multi-professional class teams (own figure)



Some teams rely a lot on this chart, while others figure it out mostly on their own. In the first meeting of each school year, all teams decide on and plan their task division, which can of course be reviewed later.

#### *What makes a team a successful team?*

We found out that there are several aspects that contribute to effective teamwork and a positive experience of staff. The composition of the team is very important. We managers put a lot of effort into choosing well the teams, where we take personality, knowledge, experience into account. The more cooperation and consultation within a team, the better everyone agrees on that. For the past three years, all the teams have a fixed meeting time of 40 minutes at least once a week. We enable the support agents to attend those meetings by changing our schedule, children go home 40 min earlier once a week.

It is very important that all team members have access to curricula, plans and schedules. This makes everything easier; everybody is well informed and more confident because all members know what they are going to do. Curricula or plans are always made with the whole group in mind, individual education plans are also connected to the class curriculum. All team members receive information that is relevant to the entire student group. It is very important that everyone feels responsible for all children, so that if something happens, the whole team can react. Also, it is essential to talk about conflicts as soon as they appear. This was difficult at first, but now most teams have become admirably good at this.

#### *How are the support services now organised in the school, how are the work processes?*

The multi-professional class-teams are responsible for their year-group. They are getting mostly self-sufficient on providing service and support to all students within their group. However, sometimes they feel that a child needs more support. In these cases, they can seek advice from the so called 'solution team'. Both personnel and parents can raise those concerns and start the solution searching process. The solution team then assists the class team with finding the right ways of support. Sometimes, cases have to be referred to the Student Welfare Council,<sup>5</sup> for example to apply for starting a diagnostic process, or to refer to other specialists. But the main purpose of the solution team is to decrease the numbers of cases that have to be referred to others and to find and activate the resources that are already within the school or in the closer community, for example the youth centre, the sports association, the music school or others. Akranes is a little community with short communication ways, which makes it possible to solve a lot of things on the level of local collaboration. This is also very much in line with the goals of the new prosperity law.

#### *How does the solution team work?*

The solution team discusses the concerns raised by class teams or parents and works with them in search of a solution. The solution team is composed of the head of support services, another member of the administrative team, a social worker, an experienced teacher and a support professional. The team meets regularly every two weeks for two hours. At least two meetings take place before the case is referred somewhere else if needed. With this, we want to increase efficiency by keeping track of the cases and keep a record of what has been done. We want to avoid assumptions like 'We have tried everything...' – because we have a record of what this 'everything' is – and what it is not.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Compulsory School Act, it is the principal's responsibility to establish a Student Welfare Council. The role of the council is to coordinate the work of those responsible for individual student's cases in each school. The council consists of representatives from the school services, health services and child-protection authorities.

As mentioned before, the most significant change we made implies that it is no longer necessary to request a diagnostic process in order to apply for more support services. This way of working is in the past. And by now we have seen that not all cases necessarily end up with starting a diagnostic process. All this leads to a much more effective use of psychologists and other services and to the shortening of waiting lists.

*How did the staff experience the changing process?*

I think it is safe to say that there is general satisfaction with the changes, and no one in the school wants to go back to how things were. No one wants to re-establish the special department and the dual support system mentioned before. In general, people feel that they are more involved in all matters.

But all this requires a lot of flexibility from our staff. Such extensive changes often mean extra work and effort, at least for some time, until people find out how to use each other's strengths and abilities and how to collaborate effectively to optimize their work. But now, staff tells us that they feel better equipped to meet the children's needs and to have more insight and overview. Also, we have reached a common understanding that trust, respect, and honest communication are very important. All members of staff are supposed to discuss all matters with the team, also the very sensitive ones, and talk freely about their opinions.

*Did you encounter any challenges?*

Yes, of course there were challenges on the way. Society is still kind of 'wrongly programmed' when it comes to diagnoses. There is still the perception that when children receive a certain diagnosis, they are entitled to certain things, like 'earmarked support'. Consequently, people often think that children are not getting any support at school if they do not get this particular way of support.

But of course, it is a big challenge to make sure that children who have complex support needs receive sufficient support. We are all very aware of that challenge. In our new system, there is a danger that some children, often the ones with the highest energy, take up most space, time and resources. So, we have to be constantly on our toes and our teams try to improve their practices constantly in order to meet that challenge.

Also, it varied a lot among teams, how quickly they adapted to the collaboration practices and to respecting each other as equal partners in the team. We still occasionally hear teachers say things like: 'But we are only two teachers working with 50 students...', though their team consists of five persons. This is a very rude thing to say, and we had to work with the attitudes laying behind this discourse. Also, there has always been a 'teacher's table' in each classroom, but other team members, like the support professional, did not have a 'traditional working place'. Last year we renovated some classrooms and bought new interiors and furniture. In these classrooms, there are no teachers' tables. Team members use the same tables as the children to work on and they keep their stuff in a locker. Also, there is not a table and chair for every child, but there are also bean bags and sofas, and children decide on their working spaces for the day or lesson.

And then there is the 'luxury problem' of having to split up successful teams. Last year, we had a team that had been working together with a year group from grade 1 to grade 4, a hugely successful, professional and excellent team. But we had to split it up, to be able to send the year group into the next school level with some people they know. So, we tried to let two people continue with the group and two people started again with grade 1 – it seems to turn out quite well, and both new teams profit from the teamwork experience, so actually this turned out to have a multiplying effect.

## **2.3 The outcome – benefits, challenges, further development**

*What were the most benefits for school practices?*

There were certain bonus effects following the process, which were an unexpected pleasure. There is a lot of balance in our human resources and it has improved every year since we started the changes. This means that we do not have to add extra support staff, though we get new students with complex support needs. There is a balance in the school, and we can share and move resources and we are very much self-sufficient. We can do a lot by changing practices – with the same number of staffs. This is a great advantage.

One of the most important benefits is that it is much easier to provide support to some students within our new system. There were students that just wanted to crawl under the table when a special department employee was trying to approach them. They did not want the stigma they felt was following those being associated to the special department. Or they just ‘pulled the brakes’ at the door to areas ‘belonging’ to the department and refused to go in. But this has somehow completely changed, many students do not experience getting anything ‘extra’ or ‘special’, because the support has become a normal part of the school practices. But this can also be quite complicated, when children go home saying that they ‘did not get any special support’, leaving parents worrying about them not getting the right service. This often needs quite some explaining that the child is not going to specifically assigned training programmes, but that the training just happens within the flow of learning.

As a consequence, almost all the students have started to look at the whole team as their ‘teachers’, it doesn’t matter if it’s a support agent, the support professional or the teacher who says things. Before, it was often the case that students did not respect support agents in the same way as teachers, but we have put that mostly behind us.

And the best thing is that these changes have had a very positive effect on the workplace morale, there is a lot of solidarity, friendship, respect and growth in our teams, which is very valuable in schoolwork. All personnel feel that everyone is equally important, everyone has the same voice, and there is no more ‘class division’ as it used to be.

*How did this journey prepare the school for the recent developments?*

It is safe to say that our journey of change and development is very much in line with and has prepared the ground for the recent developments within school services. It has prepared the school, and the municipality, to take on with the new tasks. We see a lot of similarities between inclusive education and the new prosperity services, both processes follow the same rules or principles: they are concerned with *all* children, they are not a choice but a legal obligation, they call for changed perspectives, changed practices, and shared ownership of a development and a process of implementation.

The most important elements and at the same time greatest challenges in both processes are to create, maintain and nurture attitudes that promote inclusion, to take joint responsibility for all children and to develop sustainable support systems. However, if we fail to meet these challenges successfully, then we are in danger of falling back into the same pits of clinical approaches and dual or segregated service systems. Thus, it can be said that the journey has prepared us, but we must keep our eyes on the ball and not lose sight of our goals, continue to reflect on actions and developments and always ask us if they are in line with our vision.

### 3 Discussion

After this journey through the change process, we want to bring forward some discussion points, that – as we think – will need consideration for the further development within the school, in the municipality and for inclusive education in general. These are points that could determine whether we continue to go forward towards sustainable and inclusive support systems or fall back into the old pits.

We think that Brekkubæjarskóli has come a long way in developing an inclusive and sustainable approach to school services and has in fact reached further than most schools within the Icelandic education system. Especially when it comes to collaborating in multi-professional teams, sharing responsibility and organising support according to the actual needs of all children rather than diagnoses. Brekkubæjarskóli has become a professional learning organisation that can take on with complicated tasks and solve most issues that arise. Such an organisation is at the centre of a functional model of school services, introduced by Sigþórsson et al. (in this volume). We would also like to say that Brekkubæjarskóli has reached a level of teamwork, that Sigþórsson et al. describe as a level where „teamwork has become the normal mode of operation and part of school culture.”

The multi-professional class teams are the most significant characteristic of this collaborative culture of teamwork in Brekkubæjarskóli. These teams are located at the centre of the support system, they are core teams (see also Sigþórsson et al. on a comprehensive approach to student support, in this volume). In these core teams in Brekkubæjarskóli, professionals (teachers and support professionals) and paraprofessionals (support agents), work together and share responsibility for all children in their group. This practice has created a culture that is almost free of hierarchy and is characterised by mutual respect and the will for cooperation, exchange and learning. Teachers are very often described as the key agents in inclusive development (Guðjónsdóttir et al., 2019; see also Óskarsdóttir et al., Sigþórsson et al. in this volume). In Brekkubæjarskóli, teachers are part of a team of key agents, where all members are equally important and contribute to the team. The contribution of the paraprofessional support agents is considered very important. Their experience, personal strengths and their access to the children are very valuable.

In order to collaborate effectively, each team must be inclusive in itself, respect the diversity of its members and value their strengths and contributions. Questions have been raised whether support agents are an opportunity or a barrier to participation of all children, whether their role promotes inclusion or creates segregative practices (Egilsson & Traustadóttir, 2009; Köpfer & Óskarsdóttir in this volume). In our opinion, the answer lies in the culture of teamwork within each school: is there collaboration, sharing and mutual respect or not? Inclusion must be realised in all aspects of school life and community, also within personnel; otherwise it will not work out.

The most critical element in creating sustainable support systems is shared responsibility and everybody's commitment to the prosperity of every child. If we do not succeed in taking joint responsibility for all children, then we will not be able to create sustainable systems. Continuity and joint responsibility are key concepts in the new prosperity laws. But if we continue to have systems, where we always refer children somewhere else because ‘they need a diagnose, they need to be evaluated, they need special support’, then we will fail to realise these concepts. We have to create organisations and teams that are self-sufficient about this. Within such teams, there is knowledge and confidence to meet the needs of all children on all the different levels. And for that, collaboration of multiple professions, and also professionals and paraprofessionals, is essential.

What definitely has to be improved is using universal design for learning for all children. In the school, we still use too many special solutions for some children. We must be more conscious about that support service on the thrice level (or primary level in the prosperity services) belongs to basic services. We always have to offer multiple ways of teaching and learning to a diverse group of children. And we must find ways to include support on the twist and ace levels (secondary and tertiary) into our universal solutions. We see the circles of participation as a very promising tool to find solutions that include all children in the group.

Another critical element is the philosophy behind meeting the needs of children that show challenging behaviour. Challenging behaviour is one of the most common reasons that our teams are seeking help from others, that children are offered solutions that involve segregation from others or are referred to professionals outside the school. In Iceland, schools have very different philosophies and strategies on how to deal with these challenges (see also Guðjónsdóttir & Hinz in this volume). We feel that we need a philosophy and an approach that respect the situation, background, experience and personality of every child. Also here we can use the circles of participation, find the reasons for why a child shows a certain behaviour, the reasons for a child's distress. Maybe we have to make changes in the environment or change our behaviour towards the child. We have to look at how the child feels, listen to the child and find out what the child wants to express. But as said before, here it is extremely important that our teams have both knowledge, training and self-confidence to evaluate the situation and find solutions within school, but also work with others in the local community in order to establish integrated services that benefit the child and the situation. The child and the team should never have to wait for others to respond and remain stuck in bad situations in the meantime. Here, a new national organisation for educational development could provide valuable education and advice to all school personnel.

In this context, we see great opportunities in collaboration with the children. As mentioned before, we want to promote children's participation in school development, increase democratic thinking and listen to children's voices and involve children in the changing support systems. In order to establish sustainable collaboration with children it has to become part of the collaborative team structure in the school. Collaboration with children has to become a part of the teamwork culture. The student council in Brekkubæjarskóli has been discussing these matters and recently introduced several ideas of how to involve students into collaborative structures within the school and proposed action plans. It will be very exciting to continue working in that direction. We are very hopeful that collaboration with the students will result in finding better ways to support all children and adults the appropriate way.

#### **4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, we want to highlight the key aspects that we find critical for creating sustainable support systems in schools:

- Multi-professional collaboration
- A culture of teamwork
- Collaboration of professionals and paraprofessionals
- Collaboration between adults and children
- Mutual respect
- Shared and joint responsibility for all children
- Everybody's commitment to the prosperity of every child

- Philosophies and approaches that respect and consider every child's situation, background, experience and personality
- Support to multi-professional teams to become self-sufficient and confident in finding solutions for all children, on all support levels
- Access to education and advice from a new national organization for educational development
- Collaboration with local community in order to establish integrated services for the benefit of children.

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