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## GOLDEN AREA.

### (4) Adjusted Learning

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### 1.- What is the meaning of Adjusted Learning?

An inclusive school is an organization which provides that all pupils have the opportunity to get adjusted learning within the frames of a common social, cultural and academic community. ( Lysberg og Uthus ,2004)

Politically the theory about adjusted learning is standing right in the big gap between the thinking of an effective school with the effort upon results, competition, comparison between schools and countries and the other side with the thinking of an inclusive school which emphasize upon participation, solidarity and equal possibilities, following the principles of UNESCO Declaration of Salamanca, (Mayor Zaragoza, 1994).

Reflecting upon adjusted learning we can see two perspectives:

1. Adjusted learning as an individual right for the pupils with special need.
2. Adjusted learning as each pupil's right to be in positive, individual learning processes.

In summary the union of both perspectives result an adjusted learning as an individual right and as a possibility to create an enriched learning environment in schools and classrooms with room for everybody.

The main objective for adjusted learning is to decrease the pupil's possibility to social comparison with other pupils. The pupil is supposed to look upon his own prosperity and to compare himself with his own progression and individual goals. In this matter he is able to maintain and develop his self-esteem and build up a positive learning identity.

Adjusted learning can have two different perspectives. One is the individual adjustment system where each pupil has his individual learning plan based on individual needs, interests and qualifications. Many teachers think this is a utopia and that is not possible to fulfill such

individuality in a normal classroom. They think it will be too much work and to many different learning processes to handle at the same time.

The other perspective is the enriched classroom model. It means that the classroom environment is full of possibilities and alternatives, and the pupils can choose between different levels, tasks, places and learning strategies. In this matter it is the pupil himself who is monitoring his own learning process. The teacher's role is to guide pupils in their choice and to organize a variety of possibilities and activities. In both perspectives we can regard the pupil as a subject or as an object.. The pupil is the active part in his own learning process.

If it is the teacher who decide everything and who has the responsibility for the adjustment regarding level, contents, strategies etc., we often call it adjustment by quantity. Perhaps the difference is to pay the same attention as the individual needs, than the group needs.

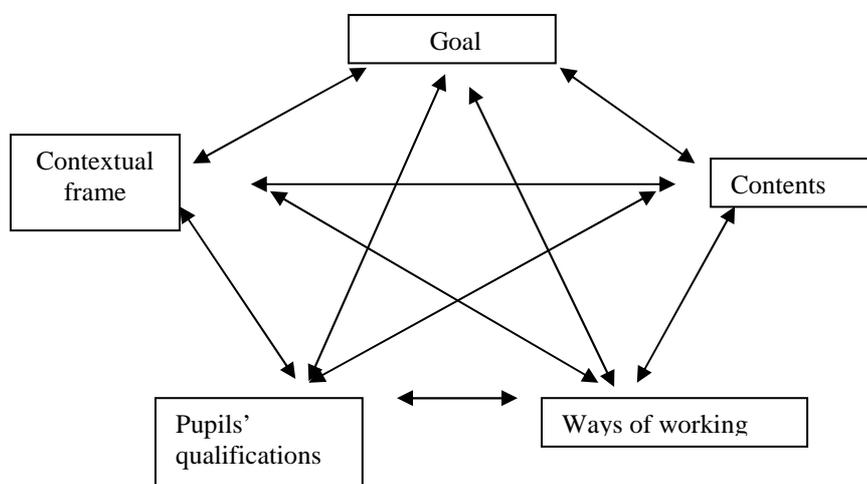
An inclusive practice demands different elements: (European – agency, 2001)

- a. Teacher's attitudes.
- b. Teacher's choice of methods.
- c. Support of working material.
- d. Frames of time.
- e. Competence in how to deal with differentiations.
- f. Skills with an emphasis upon relation building between pupils and teachers.

## 2.- Basic principles

The didactical relational model ( Bjørndal and Lieberg, 1978) is one way of planning adjusted learning in a systematic way.

**The didactic relational model** (*Bjørndal og Liberg, 1978*)



At the moment of planning there are five elements that must be taking into consideration, and trying to make as much connection as possible between them. What do you want to get, the contents to be developed, the ways of work, the different levels of the students and all these aspects within a particular context related to the Peace day, or anything that can be on the interest of students and social background.

Many teachers think that adjusted learning is very difficult in a practical way, and they have a lot of bad consciousness because of all the pupils in the classroom that cannot cope. In Norway, a study developed by Marit Mjøs, ( 2005) shows that 75% of teachers are agreed with the principles of inclusive education and adjusted learning. 60% of them think that is difficult to put into practice, and 35% is already putting lots of efforts to implement it.

As a general comment they show the importance of the school administration, attitudes and competences to facilitate this process, also they point the importance of teachers working together especially Especial Education Teachers and general ones.

To make an inclusive school based upon adjusted learning we must look upon three criteria:

1. **The frames:** Economy, The school buildings, the teachers' competence, Attitudes and Values, Schedules, Learning materials and Curriculum.
2. **Processes:** The common practice in school and classroom, way of organizing things, autonomy, pupil's responsibility, pupil's activity, pupil's feelings and meaningfulness.
3. **Emotions:** How pupils feel about their school and classroom emotional, cognitive and social, their expectations, motivation, safety, self – confidence and self- esteem.

To make an inclusive school based upon adjusted learning we can see four main obstacles: (Ogden, 2004)

1. The problem of implementation focus upon how a school with little experience with adjusted learning can change their goals, attitudes, orientation and practice.
2. The problem of variety: How can a school master the variety of pupils with different backgrounds, abilities and competence, motivation, tempo and effort?
3. The problem of relevance: How can we make a school that creates meaning for the pupils, based upon their interest and experience?
4. The problem of control: Increased liberty for pupils and pupil's responsibility demands a dynamic balance between pupil's liberty and teacher's control.

More freedom would also require different skills from adults. In an atmosphere of more freedom students develop other learning skills, choose by themselves, establish priorities, and use their time in an efficient way... A good balance between freedom and authority is not easy to achieve.

All these problems become less so when compared to the objectives of inclusive education: to decrease social differences, to improve academic skills and the student's self-

esteem. These objectives help create a positive environment in the classroom, encouraging equal participation of all students.

The perceptions of the single individual and the group are very important factors which act as an audience. As we remarked earlier on, the group effect emphasizes both the best and worst. From this angle, the student's subjective perception is essential to understand his failure or success. A strategy to equal these negative perceptions is the concept of Empowerment, which enforces the control and influence of a person in his own life and his learning processes. It will make us feel stronger, safer, confident, and more independent and it will give us more opportunities to achieve our priorities and objectives (Manger, og Wormnes 2005)

The empowerment requires working on the autonomy, or the capacity to take decisions, the feeling of competence, and the influence of the surroundings, the importance and meaning of that person. If the strategies of the Golden Program try to give power to the students, their role in adjusted learning will doubtless affect their approach to the subject and their academic adjustment in general.

The importance that the student is active in his learning process is fundamental for the learning development. The activity can be traditional exercises, but one can tell a student is really active when he takes decisions and acts in an intelligent way. It is essential a student takes relevant decisions in his learning process, as the following review taken in Norway shows.

<i>Ref. Elevinspektøren 2002/2003 N= 18000</i> %	NO	a little	quite	YES
Create your own project.	<b>38,07</b>	33,86	23,96	4,11
Choose in what to work harder and in which subjects to learn more.	18,02	35,33	<b>38,27</b>	8,38
Choose how to work.	12,58	31,76	<b>42,54</b>	13,12
Choose how to grade yourself.	32,48	<b>37,24</b>	23,84	6,43
Choose when to grade and when to hand in projects.	<b>40,87</b>	31,74	20,03	7,36

### 3.- Adjusted learning diversity

Adjusted learning can be done in a quantitative or a qualitative way. For “quantitative adjustment” the teachers establish changes for students (ways of working, contents, quantity, and level of difficulty...). “Qualitative learning” is a cooperative process between teachers, families and students. The teacher gives a guide and help, but the student has total responsibility of his own process.

It is necessary to adjust the curriculum to the students' different characteristics and necessities. We must take into account this does not mean changing each student's

curriculum, but to approach the needs and create the best working conditions allowing for a great variety of students.

The different adjustments mean that the students must be able to choose between many things, depending on what he is going to do, where and how.

These are the aspects in which students should have options (Håstein og Werner, 2003), and at the same time they should work on their autonomy, responsibility and general empowerment.

1. Choose what to learn
2. Choose how to learn
3. Cooperate in planning
4. Cooperate in presentation
5. Give ideas, propose solutions and possibilities
6. Take part in the evaluation process

In order to make a school based on differentiation and adjusted learning we must emphasize on seven different categories: (Dale og Wærness, 2004)

1. The individual student's abilities, qualification and special needs.
2. Curriculum and individual working plans.
3. Level and tempo.
4. School-day organization.
5. Learning arenas and learning materials.
6. Ways of and methods of working.
7. Evaluation.

This implies offering a diversity of experiences which allows the student's activities appropriate to their level to facilitate their learning processes and choosing strategies methodologies and evaluation.

To introduce diversity in the classrooms, in the teaching methods, is a challenge. To avoid it many teachers would say they are not properly trained, that they teach too many students, they lack equipment; they have to comply with formalities (Skaalvik og Fossen 1995; Dalen 1994). We understand all these reasons, but we need a change in methodology with the basic principle: we need to adapt to diversity.

The evolution of teaching methods is partially related to the evolution of the mass manipulation strategies developed in Social Psychology. The initial studies from the 40s pointed out persuasive strategies that advertising should use to influence the mass-media. Studies showed that there were clear effects, but the differences and individual needs affected the results. These differences were studied and the interest of the subject was outstanding. It was impossible to pay attention to individual needs, therefore they worked with target groups from the 70s, and advertising is done according to group typology, covering a variety of interest and reaching out to a vast audience. Until then the audience was thought of as passive, but nowadays it is considered active.

Concerning education traditional techniques which understood the group as a homogeneous gathering gave way to methods that acknowledged differences, especially

individual ones. The change is now to pay attention to the diversity, taking into account the active role of the students.

This report concludes that to be able to make an inclusive school we have either to increase the general recourses given to each pupil or we have to redistribute existing recourses through:

1. Use more IT.
2. Use more independent pupils work.
3. Use pupils as a resource for other pupils.
4. Make changes in structures and way of organizing classrooms and lessons.

To fulfill this and make an inclusive school we have to increase the cooperation between the special education and normal education, between the teacher and the parents, between the pupil and the teacher and we have to give the pupils strategic individual help based on learning strategies and building positive attitudes towards school an learning in general

Premises for adjusted can be summoned in these points (Werner ,1998)

1. There has to be a constructive and positive interaction between the pupils and the teacher.
2. Each pupil has to be valuated.
3. Safety in learning processes and safety in learning environment.
4. Systematic adjustment through didactic relational model.
5. High learning motivation among pupils.
6. High degree of pupil's participation and developing pupil's responsibility.

To be able to carry through these matters in the daily school life the teachers have to organize structured pupils conversations, systematic learning conversations, process-guidance in daily life and systematic meeting with parents to make common priorities.

In an inclusive learning environment there has to be a lot of **variation and possibility for pupils to choose**. The pupils should be able to choose between different tasks, different learning strategies, and different ways of solving problems, to choose where to work and with whom.

They should also be able to choose where to seek help, from teachers or other pupils.

There also has to be the feeling of **valuation**, the pupils being seen and confirmed, given positive feedback, and self-evaluation.

**The individual perspective** should be strong where every pupil has a positive role based upon individual qualities and strengths for the benefit of all. Individual cooping and mastering is essential based upon individual interest and experience.

And all this should be done in an **inclusive atmosphere** based upon common experience and mutual respect and task where pupils get social challenges and exchange of knowledge between pupils.

In order to offer diversity to students you need to have a variety of activities in the classroom. The classroom can be divided into groups; each of one is given a project according to their capacity of decision under a certain colour:

Green project: student centered. (student has great capacity of choosing)

Yellow project: student/teacher centered (teacher chooses more than students)

Red project: teacher centered (only the teacher decides).

It basically offers diversity in the classroom that covers different learning styles, ways of working, levels of difficulty. For example:

- Diversity of contents (four subjects)
- Diversity of working ways (individual, in pairs, groups)
- Diversity of difficulty (easy, with student's help, with teacher's help)
- Diversity of ways of expression (drawing, writing, handcraft, reading)
- Diversity of nature and election: free (creative, the student decides), semistructured (teacher gives certain guidance), structured (guided highly by the teacher).

Once the students have chosen the project, they must finish it in a certain time which has to be specified. Making projects in the classroom makes activities meaningful for the students. The projects are easy to develop specially in subjects where research is required. History projects are especially creative; they allow students to recreate historical situations, act out historical episodes, and perform ways of live, music, clothing, art... It is easy to group students to work in the classroom at the same time, each in their different assignment.

Summun up of criteria for adjusted learning:

1. To stimulate private and not public evaluations.
2. To promote pupils to set individual and common goals.
3. To promote the use of individual learning strategies.
4. To use individual working plans.
5. To focus on individual progress and individual achievement and individual coping.
6. To use pupil's interest and experience to increase the pupils feeling of meaning and connection between daily life, future and what they learn in school.
7. To give the pupils both the feeling of mastering as well as challenge.
8. To give the pupils the feeling that doing mistakes and failing is a natural part of learning.
9. To increase the pupils influence in schools and in their own learning process.
10. To make the school more flexible concerning group organization, variety in learning areas (classrooms, group- rooms, corridors, library, school surroundings).
11. To increase the pupils possibility to use own study time within the frames of the school day.
12. To do home lessons at school with adult support for those in need for that.
13. To develop self-evaluation systems for pupils.

#### **4.- GOLDEN: proposal of key steps**

This is an example of key steps to facilitate initiation in adjusted learning, pointing out the main aspects we have been talking about like making sure of the interest and choice of the students, taking care of evaluation and the marking process and using teaching resources properly.

## INTEREST AND CHOICE

Having the ability of choose is a fundamental characteristic which increases motivation and responsibility. That is why it is important to force the option, quantitative or qualitative. It is good to give five options for them to choose three. If you allow them to research in depth in different subjects, or different ways to tackle them, motivation will be even stronger. (For example, searching information in the computer, encyclopedias, pictures, oral testimonies).

### *Key steps*

- *Students may choose between different activities, levels or work strategies. Each one must focus on his own abilities and not to encourage comparisons. We need to be sure that students chosen as the "golden ones" know how to do their activities.*
- *To take into account the interests of students and their own experiences when it comes to plan lessons.*

## EVALUATION

Evaluation is an everyday routine, but sometimes we are not aware of its importance. The aim of marking process is to know what must be improved. It is not a punishment.

From this point of view, it is very important to evaluate with special emphasis on achievements and successes. Later, it is necessary to explain how to solve what is wrong and to give the best strategies in order to achieve it in the future.

### *Key steps*

- *To mark exercises and books with a green pencil instead of a red one, emphasizing what is right, what can be improved, etc.*

This marking process must be private, since it aims for improving the student's performance, not to disclose his marks as a reward or punishment.

### *Key steps*

- *Private evaluation of students, neither in front of their classmates nor an official one. To talk to student privately and to give advices about the best ways for improving his performance.*
- *To emphasize learning strategies to improve the autonomy in the learning process.*

## TEACHING RESOURCES

This way of working on diversity requires that teachers of special education and tutor work together in the same classroom. This cooperation may be very positive, since there will be more than one adult in the classroom, and it will be very useful to plan lessons. The function of equals in the classroom has been disregarded so often, but it offers a large diversity in learning strategies, and, at the same time, it allows to use the human resources more efficiently.

Textbooks are an educational resource frequently used in teaching, but they are thought to a specific kind of student, so they can not be suitable for the diversity. Textbooks should be one more of the resources in the classroom: reading books, encyclopedias, internet, visits, games, experiments... That is why we emphasize the use of self-taught resources, created or chosen by the teachers for that special group of students. That way, students will perceive it as a sign of interest towards them.

This new organization will allow us to do an individualized record and a work planning for each student. Each one will do it at his pace and will obtain his own aims depending on his skills and interests.

#### *Key steps*

- *Special education closely related to the classroom.*
- *To use self-taught resources.*
- *To use self-evaluation ways for the students*
- *To encourage help and support among students.*
- *To give "golden students" more support in the classroom and to pay more attention to academic fields.*
- *To use a work planning as a way of learning and individualizing.*

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