EARLI SIG 15 – Special Educational Needs

Newsletter Volume 2 – December 2019

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1 – SIG 15 Meeting 2020 in London

The Child Development and Learning Difficulties lab (www.jovanherwegen.co.uk) at the UCL Institute of Education is happy to invite you to the 2020 Biennial SIG 15 Meeting in London, UK. The theme of this year's meeting is "**Learning difficulties and inclusion: Challenges and solutions for the future**".

The main conference will take place from **Monday August 10th to Tuesday August 11th 2020**.

Abstract submission will open in 20/12/2019 and deadline is 21/01/2020. We welcome any related research to learning difficulties and inclusion. Presentation formats include symposium, individual papers and poster presentations. Abstracts should be no more than 300 words and include at least how results will be analysed and what the impact of the results would be, should data not have been collected yet (for further details on types of submissions and details see the conference website).

There will also be a JURE workshop on Wednesday **12th August 2020** which will focus on '**Improving evidence based practice**'. This workshop is aimed at new as well as established researchers and we welcome all researchers to contribute to the discussions. See website for topics to be discussed.

Information on abstract submission, venue and further details can be found on the conference homepage: https://www.earli.org/node/38

2 – Current Research Projects

The Role of the Peers in the Development of Students With Intellectual Disability – The Study KomPeers

Christoph Michael Müller

University of Fribourg, Department of Special Education, Switzerland

Evidence suggests that the peers influence the academic and social development of typically developing children and adolescents (Bukowski et al., 2018). However, less is known on the role of peers in the development of students with intellectual disabilities (ID). Often, explanations for these children's and adolescents' development focus primarily on individual and parental factors or professional support. In the study *KomPeers* (i.e., shortcut for "Competent with peers" in German) we therefore aim to shed light on the question of how the peer context contributes to the development of students with ID. Conceptual foundations of this research relate to social learning theory and models considering the role of behavioral group norms in shaping individual development. Our study may allow to identify factors in the peer environment that positively impact on the lives of students with ID and help to understand how teachers can support positive peer experiences. Regarding the school context, we specifically focus on the peer situation in special needs schools for students with ID, given that in many countries most of these students attend such settings (e.g., 87.7% in Germany, KMK 2019). We have three main research questions:

1. What is the peer context of students with ID in special needs schools that may influence individual students, i.e., what are students' characteristics in terms of background factors, adaptive behaviors and behavioral problems?
2. What are the peer relationships of students with ID in special needs schools and which factors predict peer acceptance and rejection in these settings?

3. How susceptible are students with ID to peer influence and which factors moderate peer effects?

An additional research question focuses on peer processes on the level of teachers and their colleagues at special needs schools. Here, it is of special interest whether teachers' stress due to students' problem behaviors can be buffered by positive relationships with their colleagues at school.

To examine our research questions, we received funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF-172773). The study is conducted at the University of Fribourg/CH (Prof. C. Müller, M. Amstad, Dr. T. Begert, S. Egger, Dr. V. Hofmann, G. Nenniger, N. Schoop-Kasteler) and includes cooperations with the Radboud University Nijmegen/NL (Prof. A. Cillessen) and the University of Wuppertal/D (Prof. C. Huber, P. Nicolay). We use two different methodological approaches for data collection. One part of the project includes a longitudinal study using teacher-questionnaires in special needs schools. In the other study experimental tasks are used and participants are adolescents with ID and matched control groups.

In the longitudinal questionnaire-based study 16 Swiss special needs schools for students with ID participated and data were assessed at the beginning and at the end of a school year. There were 397 professionals reporting anonymously on the background characteristics, peer relations, adaptive behaviors, and problem behaviors of 1115 students with ID (age M=11.96 years; SD=3.75). We had access to data from 96.7% of all students attending the participating schools which allows a detailed description of the peer context in special needs schools. In addition, teachers reported on their experience of stress due to students' problem behaviors, their beliefs regarding instruction, and their social situation among their colleagues at school.

Besides of using questionnaire data, we additionally addressed the question of peer influence susceptibility by using computer-based experimental tasks. Here, differences in peer influence susceptibility between adolescents with ID and mental age-matched typically developing adolescents and children are assessed. In these tasks, participants have to make decisions (e.g., to rate the "coolness" of anonymous peers

on photographs) under different conditions, including information about how fictitious peers had decided in their situation.

The current state of our study (12/2019) is that data collection is finished so that we now work on data analyses and publications. A project-related systematic literature review on peer relationships in special needs schools for students with ID has just been published (Schoop-Kasteler & Müller, online early view). The results of this review suggest that students with ID in special needs schools meet specific challenges in developing positive peer relationships. For example, individual social difficulties, but also the small and heterogeneous classrooms, point to the importance of actively fostering peer relations not only in the classroom but with regard to the whole school peer context. Other papers are currently submitted or in preparation. These articles will shed light on the characteristics of the student population in special needs schools (Müller et al., in prep.), how adolescents with ID differ from control groups in terms of peer influence susceptibility (Egger et al., in prep.), how teachers' social dynamic management practices influence social networks in schools for students with ID (Begert et al., in prep.), and on how stressful different problem behaviors typically seen in students with ID are experienced by teachers (Amstad & Müller, submitted).

We hope that the results of this research project help to better understand and support positive peer relationships and influence processes in students with ID. We are looking forward to exchange with other researchers from SIG15 and beyond who also work on these types of questions.

References:

Amstad, M. & Müller, C. (submitted to Frontiers in Education). Students' problem behaviors as sources of teacher stress in special needs schools for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Begert, T., Cillessen, A., & Müller, C. (in prep.). The influence of teachers' social dynamic management practices on classroom social networks in special needs schools.

Bukowski, W. M., Laursen, B., & Rubin, K. H. (Eds.) (2018). *Handbook of peer interactions, relationships, and groups.* London: Guilford.

Egger, S., Nicolay, P. Huber, C., & Müller, C. (in prep.). "How cool are these peers?" Susceptibility to external influences and social judgments in adolescents with intellectual disability.

Müller, C., Amstad, M., Begert, T., Egger, S., Nenniger, G., Schoop-Kasteler, N., & Hofmann, V. (in prep.). Students with ID in special needs schools – Background factors, adaptive behaviors, and behavioral problems.

Schoop-Kasteler, N. & Müller, C. (online early view). Peer relationships of children and adolescents in special needs classrooms - A systematic review. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*. doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12471

3 – PhD in the Spotlight

Laetitia Castillan

Affiliation

University of Toulouse.

Name of the PhD project

"Accessibility of digital textbooks for visually impaired students" (under supervision of prof. dr. Julie Lemarié and Dr. Mustapha Mojahid)

Content

More and more digital learning resources like digital textbooks or interactive boards are used in classrooms. There is a lot of research that determines the conditions under which these teaching aids are effective for learning (Amadieu & Tricot, 2014, Mayer, 2014).

However, the vast majority of research is done with students which do not have special educational needs. For many years, in many countries, most students with special educational needs have been included in regular classes. The aim of this research is to evaluate accessibility of digital textbooks for visually impaired students in order to improve their design.

Why did you decide to do a PhD?

Doing a PhD has always been in the back of my mind since the beginning of my studies. Focusing on one subject intensively for a long period of time is what appealed to me in doing a PhD. I like the idea of building strong knowledge in one specific topic. When I saw the announcement for this PhD proposal I immediately applied. Socially and politically, the current context provides for the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools and promotes the development and use of digital technology for education. I applied because I had already worked on the design of multimedia

documents and I was personally interested in the field of visual disability, even if I was not an expert in this field.

What will the PhD involve?

A lot of perseverance, determination and sometimes imagination. The population that I work with is visually impaired and blind high school students. With inclusion, the students are now dispersed throughout the country and it is sometimes very complex to recruit participants. These difficulties can sometimes affect the choice of data collection I make. Also, for my PhD, I mix qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis depending on the goal of the study. For example, I conducted an exploratory study combining interviews with various types of stakeholders (specialized teachers, Braille transcribers, visually impaired students enrolled in regular classes) and classroom observations of students with visual impairments. This allowed me to describe the existing situation in terms of access to educational content for students with a visual impairment (what content is accessed and how) and to identify categories of difficulties encountered by students in accessing and processing digital learning resources and their consequences for learning. Another study included evaluation of the accessibility of digital textbooks for visually impaired students compared to sighted students when performing learning tasks.

For more information see:

https://clle.univ-tlse2.fr/accueil/navigation/equipe-ltc/

https://www.irit.fr/departement/intelligence-collective-interaction/elipse/

4 – Paper in the Picture

Academic Well-Being, Mathematics Performance, and Educational Aspirations in Lower Secondary Education: Changes within a School Year

Anna Widlund, Johan Korhonen & Heta Tuominen

The aim of this study was to examine what kinds of profiles of academic well-being (i.e., school burnout, schoolwork engagement and mathematics self-concept) and mathematics performance can be identified among students in 7th and 9th grade, if there are gender differences within the profiles, how stable the profiles are during one school year, and lastly, how students with different profiles differ with respect to their educational aspirations. By means of latent profile analyses, we identified four distinct groups of students (thriving, average, negative academic well-being, and low-performing) among 9th-graders, that differed from each other in performance and well-being measures. Interestingly, we only found three groups of students in 7th grade (thriving, average, and negative academic well-being). Boys were overrepresented in the thriving group, while girls were overrepresented in the negative academic well-being group in both grades. Configural frequency analyses revealed that the profiles were relatively stable across one school year; 60% of the students displayed identical profiles over time. Overall, the results indicated that the majority of students perform quite well in mathematics and express rather positive patterns of academic well-being. However, the proportion of students belonging to the negative academic well-being group was more than 15%. Considering that these students, despite experiencing high or moderate levels of school burnout, also performed rather well in school, potential problems might easily go unnoticed. In our view, taking into account students' performance as well as various aspects of academic well-being simultaneously, enables a more comprehensive understanding of students' academic and emotional functioning. With this understanding, we might be able to identify the at-risk students and even to discover ways how to best support students to find suitable educational pathways for themselves and to thrive in school.

The reference:

Widlund, A., Tuominen, H., & Korhonen, J. (2018). Academic well-being, mathematics performance, and educational aspirations in lower secondary education: Changes within a school year. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 297. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00297.

5 – Conference Calendar

Conference	Date	Location	Homepage
13th Equality, Diversity and Inclusion International Conference	July 6-8, 2020	IOP, University of Bern, Switzerland	https://www.edi-conference.org/
EARLI JURE 2020	July 13-17, 2020	Porto, Portugal	https://www.earli.org/JURE2020
ISEC 2020	August 3-5, 2020	London, UK	https://www.ucl.ac.uk/inclusive-supportive-education-conference/
SIG15 2020	August 10-11, 2020	London, UK	https://www.earli.org/node/38
EARLI SIG18&23	September 6-9, 2020	Freiburg, Germany	https://earli.org/sig1823-conference2020

6 – Inclusive Education and Special Needs Education Governance in Europe: Scientific exchange for comparative analysis

Summary of meeting by Minna Törmänen

In October 2019 an international conference was organized in Zurich, Switzerland at University of Applied Sciences of Special Needs Education entitled: *Inclusive Education and Special Needs Educational Governance in Europe - Scientific Exchange for comparative analysis.* This conference brought together experts from the fields of inclusive education, educational governance, and educational economics.

The meeting had two main aims. The first aim was to share experiences and compare what is effective education and special needs education. It was discussed:

- *How governance of Special Needs Education is realized in different European countries*
- *How cost-effective is Special Needs Education within different educational systems*
- *How to measure effective Special Needs Education? Especially success.*

The other aim was to discuss and compare special educational systems in different European countries concentrating on question: *"Is effective Special Needs Education inclusive?"*

During four days (22nd-25th of October 2019), there were 11 public lectures and four roundtable discussions of the experts' research to date, followed by discussions about perceived gaps in knowledge and the methodological, practical and ethical issues. The public program followed by a workshop for the experts on 24th October and focused on the identification of current European research priorities. The final day was aimed at students from the University of Applied Sciences of Special Needs

Education, Zürich and offered a specific course covering the topics of scientific exchange and a lecture by keynote speaker Professor Mel Ainscow (University of Manchester, UK).

The keynote lecture at 22nd of October

Professor Mel Ainscow (University of Manchester) is internationally recognized as an authority on the promotion of inclusion and equity in education (Director of a UNESCO Teacher Education project on inclusive education involving research and development in over 80 countries, a consultant to UNESCO, UNICEF and Save the Children). His work focuses on ways of making school systems effective for all children, and attempts to explore connections between inclusion, teacher development and school improvement. Professor Ainscow had keynote entitled: "*Promoting inclusion in education: Lessons from international experiences*" where he describe what has happened internationally during the 20 years since the ground breaking UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education, held in Salamanca, Spain. His presentation challenged participants to consider what else needs to be done to make education systems more inclusive. It was argued that inclusive education should be seen as a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to student diversity. Different implications or the development of classroom practice, school organization and leadership, the involvement of families and external partners, and national policies were also discussed.

For a full list of presentations see:

https://www.hfh.ch/fileadmin/files/documents/Marketing_Kommunikation/HfH_IPSE_ ScientificExchange_FlyerA5_web_nb.pdf

The results of this scientific exchange can be divided into two aspects. *First,* this event offered international scientific discussions, strengthened international collaboration

and gave new perspectives. There were several critical discussions between the experts and audience on core issues of different proceedings of effective inclusive education systems, and their governance, and importantly, how it is possible to reach inclusive society.

Another aspect of the results concerns the workshop, which aimed to develop a plan for research priorities. Using Nominal Group Technic (NGT) the experts answered the question: *"What are the research priorities for inclusive education and governance of Special Needs Education in Europe?"* The research initiatives will lead us to develop a European research project on international comparative analysis on inclusive education and inclusive systems, as well as educational governance and resources. With different research priorities of policy, discourse and praxis levels will deliver foundations on effective and efficient special needs educational governance and inclusive education.

Importantly, during scientific exchange we reached a new and modern level of discourse, and manage to build bridges between to two different concepts; inclusive education and special needs educational governance – the topics which have high importance when developing European educational systems towards inclusive direction.

As a result of workshop a peer-review article will be published in open access journal during spring 2020 in collaboration with the experts of this scientific exchange. As practical implication a video interview: "Every school is inclusive – to some degree!" with Professor Mel Ainscow was done by Wissenschaftskommunikation, University of Applied Sciences of Special Needs Education, Zürich. You will find this "open access" video on Youtube (https://youtu.be/oKz09ngdNcA). It can be used in higher education as well as pedagogical material in in-service training for teachers and school officials, and at schools in general.

I was acting as a project leader with my colleague Professor Monika T. Wicki. This conference was funded by Swiss National Science Foundation.

7 – SIG 15 NEWS

SIG15 Membership

We would like to ensure that SIG15 includes a healthy number of academics within the field of special, educational needs and inclusion and is represented by members from across all European countries, as such we would like to encourage you to invite your colleagues, collaborators and students to join us. There are a number of planned activities and benefits to joining SIG15, including the newsletters, access to podcasts of talks held at various universities across the SIG15 network, online discussions, share interesting papers, share collaborations and funding opportunities and much

SIG 15 Newsletter

Thank you to those who have contributed to the newsletter. We hope to release at least 2 newsletter a year (one in spring and one in autumn). The next one would be in JUNE 2020. If you have any content, you would like to contribute please email mailto:j.vanherwegen@ucl.ac.uk.

SIG 15 Recorded lectures

We would like to share more inspiring talks and ideas. As such, EARLI have agreed that we can send them audio recordings of talks and discussions which will then be uploaded on the SIG15 webpage. We could look into making the audio files password protected but most speakers might be happy to have their audio recording on the web (you would need to know where to look for them!). If you have any interesting talks lined up in your lab, please ask the speaker if you can audio record them and share the talk/discussion with SIG15!

SIG 15 invited Symposium at JURE 2020

For next year's EARLI JURE conference in Porto, Portugal (13th to 17th July 2020) SIG 15 is going to organise an invited symposium on the assessment of learning progress (e.g. single-case research designs, progress monitoring, curriculum-based measurement, dynamic testing). Possible contributions should cover topics such as construction of measures, methodological issues, analyses of formative data, or conceptual ideas and developments. Presentations from all age ranges and domains (e.g. numeracy, literacy, behaviour) are welcome to participate in the symposium.

As this is a JURE conference, we are specifically looking for PhD-students and other early career researchers. If you are interested in participating in the symposium, please let us know under jbosch@uni-potsdam.de with a short description of your possible contribution.

SIG 15 Twitter

Our twitter account is now active and this would allow you to quickly spread news or make announcements to other SIG15 members. **If you are on Twitter please follow us @EARLISIG15.**

Season's Greetings and a Happy New Year!

All good wishes from the SIG15 coordinators
Pirjo, Jo, & Jannis