

What to Do when Pupils Do not Concentrate?

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Abstract

In Norwegian schools, many pupils get extra supervision or special needs education due to the lack of concentration. It is interesting to question if these educational initiatives are adjusted to the needs of each individual. The authors wanted to get a picture of what kind of insight, understanding and educational tools student teachers have for helping pupils who are struggling with their concentration. More than eighty student teachers answered a questioner one month before their last university exam at the teacher's education. They were asked about how they understand pupil's concentration problems, what reasons they see for reduced concentration and how they can give the not concentrated pupil the needed help and education. The students had a rather good insight into what the lack of concentration might look like. Many of them had the theory that the reasons for not concentrating are found in the classroom and education. The solution for nearly all the participants was to give an inclusive education in the class. The results are discussed.

Keywords: Concentration, student teachers, special needs education, attention, teachers insight, inclusive education;

1. Introduction

Teachers in Norwegian schools, understand many pupils to have problems with concentrations. The solution is one to four hours with an assistant in the classroom who gives them inclusive teaching (Knudsmoen m.fl 2011). Half of all special education given in the schools, is carried out by assistants (Nordahl m.fl. 2018). It is interesting to question if these educational initiatives are adjusted to the needs of each individual. Concentration and attention is necessary for learning (Domsch 2014) of practical and cognitive skills. Both teachers and parents are using the term concentration about attitude with some characteristic features. However, the reason of the problem is to a limited extent discussed (Stray 2013).

Teachers and coming teachers understand the pupils with their background in education, personal experiences, colleagues and fellow students. Their insight in the nature of concentration will affect for their attitude and reactions towards the pupils. The authors wanted to get a picture of what kind of insight, understanding and educational tools student teachers have for helping pupils who are struggling with their concentration. The article gives a view of the teacher students in their last year and what their intuitive comprehension of concentration for learning, how they see pupils with concentration problems and the reason for those.

2. Theory

Concentration is defined as intense focused attention on a narrow area of stimuli (Csikszentmihalyi 2014). It requires effort to be concentrated and this ability decreases mostly as the activity goes on. Kleber and Stein (1993) see concentration as the most widespread, theoretical term in education. Very often concentration and attention are seen as the same cognitive function, but this confusion of concepts may lead to an inaccurate description of the pupil's challenges. The consequences are an improper education not suitable for the pupils needs. In education, it is necessary with a balance between challenges and individual skills to reach a pleasurable and voluntary concentration (Csikszentmihalyi 2014).

To improve pupils concentration the strategy is often to develop a better learning environment with more understanding and emotional support from the teacher (Thuen 2011). This is probably because desire to learn and motivation influence the level of concentration and working effort.

Some researchers have been looking into physical factors like light, temperature and noise to explain the difficulties of concentration (Vinding, Anderson and Hansen 2012). It also found that smaller vision disturbances, which lead to jumping letters or blurry text, can make concentration a challenge (Wilhelmsen, Aanstad, Leirvik 2015; Sterner 2004; Wilhelmsen 2012). This can affect up to every fourth pupil in a class (The center of health and health care in schools 2004). Even pupils with tiny

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hearing problems will have concentration challenges because the communication may be inconsistent and meaningless (Ofte 2014).

3. Method

More than eighty student teachers answered a questioner, Table 1, one month before their last university exam at the teacher's education. They were asked about how they understand pupil's concentration problems, what reasons they see for reduced concentration and how they can give the not concentrated pupil the needed help and education. It was only given the participants fifteen minutes to answer so the answers have to be seen as spontaneous and intuitive. The 80 students represented 61 % of the total group of the 134 final year students.

Table 1 - Questions to the participants (N=80)

| |
|--|
| What is your definition of the term concentration? |
| What are the signs of a not concentrated pupil? |
| What could be the reasons for the pupil's problems with concentration? |
| How can you facilitate for better concentration? |

4. Results

The participants used a row of terms for their description of concentration as phenomena. These are the most frequent descriptions used: being focused (60 %), the time perspective (35 %) or holding the concentration over time, attention (34 %) and skills (23 %).

The teacher students mentioned several signs of a pupil who is not concentrated. These could fit into seven areas, Table 2.

Table 2 - The main signs of a pupil who is not concentrated (N=80)

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| - Are not focusing | - Talking | - Bodily uneasy |
| - Unmotivated | - Sleepy | - Unacceptable behavior |
| - Are not learning in class | | |

On one side the pupil who is not concentrated is seen as not active or quiet and sleepy, on the other side the not concentrated pupil is explained as uneasy, always speaking and too active. This means that a pupil who is concentrating in class has to balance between these two extremes.

The student's reasons for pupil's lack of concentration are divided into these three categories:

- School, learning environment and syllabus. This was seen as only reason among 23 %.
- The pupil has personal problems or a diagnose. This was seen as only reason from 21 %.
- Challenges at home was seen as the only reason alone from one participant only.

Half of the teachers students could see these reasons in combination, but only 10 participants (13 %) mentioned all three categories. Perhaps is this an indication of the student teachers focusing so much on the activities in school that they forget the pupil's home and environment.

The answers on facilitation were developing the categories a) focusing on better education, b) improve the physical environment, c) pay attention to the pupil's challenges. As many as 70 %, 54 participant, were only focusing on better education as solution for improving pupils concentration, Table 3. Not more than three of them mentioned all three areas (n=77).

Table 3 - The participants explanation of concentration problems and their solution for better concentration.

| Reason | Solution | | | | Total |
|--------------|-----------|----------|---------|--------------|------------|
| | Education | Physical | Pupil | Combinations | |
| Pupil | 11 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 16 (21 %) |
| Home | 1 | | | | 1 (1 %) |
| School | 15 | | 2 | 1 | 18 (23 %) |
| Combinations | 27 | | 3 | 12 | 42 (55 %) |
| Total | 54 (70 %) | 1 (1 %) | 7 (9 %) | 15 (19 %) | 77 (100 %) |

Although more than half the group of participants saw more reasons for the concentration problems, most of them meant that better education is the way to concentrate more.

5. Discussion

Because concentration problems is seen as a growing problem in school and it is the main reason for getting special needs education, it is important to know what this term means. In Norway the Education Act (Ministry of Education and Research 2015) is focusing "... the principles of equality and adapted learning for everyone within an inclusive environment."

The student teachers understanding of the terms concentration and concentration problems will influence their work in school and their attitude and solutions for adapting learning.

Although the participants had different understanding of the activity of concentration, seven characteristics came repeatedly, Table 2. These elements are important observations for teacher's ability to do educational changes when the education is not suitable for the pupils needs. When education is not triggering the attention and motivation, it may also lead to concentration problems (Aase & Meyer 2005; Csikszentmihalyi 2014).

The student teachers have seen a variety of reasons for pupil's problems with concentration, but are they going to manage the challenges they will meet? Do they have suitable methods for this work and for achieving equality?

The consequences of insufficient insight in the reasons for the pupil's concentration problems, and the necessary measures, are an education, which is not adapted to the pupils needs. This may result in reduced learning, low self-esteem, frustration, aggression and drop out.

6. Conclusion

When 70 % of the participants claims that better concentration can be reached within the education whatever reason, it may lead to "a wait and see attitude". This attitude can be an explanation for teachers asking for help in higher classes than in lower classes.

The participant saw many reasons for the lack of concentration, but could not see behind the term and find the individual reason and solutions. We need more research in this area to develop suitable methods in education.

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