

POWER AND PERSPECTIVES – AN INVESTIGATION INTO INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH COVERING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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An empirical investigation of international research relating to special educational needs is reported. Two international arenas were identified: a North American and a British/European. Articles from 2004 were analysed with regard to 1) sex of authors, 2) country of institutional affiliation of authors, 3) themes and 4) perspectives. The analyses suggest that, to a large extent, research is still nationally oriented. Female authors were most common in 11 of the 12 journals. The thematic analyses revealed similar patterns across arenas but the theme inclusion was far more common in the British/European journals. Research perspectives were mostly normative and a possible emerging middle-ground was identified. Implications of these empirical patterns are discussed in the article.

A research community has to define itself. Such a definitional process encompasses issues such as, who belongs to the community, how one gains entry, what the important research questions are, how relationships to other research communities are/should be and the perspectives and methods that are given priority. Such definitional processes seem to be at hand whether the research community focuses on them or not. However, the author believes that it is important for research communities to reflect upon, and discuss, these issues. Further, it is important that this is carried out against a background of empirical research. The focus of the investigation reported in this paper is special educational research from an international perspective. Important journals from 2004 relating to two different international arenas are analysed. In this way, the overriding aim of the present investigation is to acquire knowledge regarding special educational research as an international endeavour and also to provide an empirical background for discussions about how the research community(ies) of special education should be understood and, perhaps, altered. The research is meta-analytical in relation to the particular field of research, i.e. it will take the field of research, its problems, social relations and perspectives as its research objective. In order to be able to provide empirically grounded answers to the questions put forward concerning the structure and role of the research community, it is necessary to gain knowledge of this kind.

Prior research

Very little research has been conducted which addresses the field of special educational research from the perspective outlined, especially if one considers special education as an international research field. Skrtic (1991, 1995) analyses the field in terms of its underlying *paradigms* (cf. Kuhn, 1970, Burrell and Morgan, 1979) trying to provide a conceptual overview of the field. Skrtic (1991, 1995) suggests that there are four basic *paradigms* underlying research in this area. However, these analyses relate to theoretical possibilities, rather than the perspectives usually employed by researchers. In contrast, the present paper reports an empirical investigation of, amongst other things, the topics and perspectives actually addressed in research today. A number of earlier investigations have relied on empirical methods in order to explore the research field. E.g. Patton, Polloway and Epstein (1989) used expert knowledge in order to gain insight into the research field. Interestingly, this approach proved to be inadequate as overall agreement as to what constituted as being the most important contributions was not achieved. MacLeskey (2004), on the other hand, suggested that more objective indicators could be used in order to investigate those contributions which have had the largest impact upon research into special educational needs. By using a number of citations as the main criteria of selection, he identified 50 articles from the journals *Exceptional Children*, *Journal of Special Education* and *Remedial and Special Education*, which have been important from an historical perspective. These

articles were categorised according to content. Three categories involved more than 5 articles: School reform, Inclusion and mainstreaming (20), Assessment and classification of students (10) and Attitudes/labels (6). Thus, from an historical perspective, these issues seem to have been important to the American research community..

Although innovative and interesting, the article by MacLeskey (2004, also cf. MacLeskey and Landers, 2006) illustrates a problem which will be further discussed in this present article. Thus, special educational research actually equates with research published in American journals! This hidden assumption is actually never discussed in the article. Special education as a social practice is, however, a widespread phenomenon. Moreover, research covering the practice of special education is well-established or at the emergence stage in several countries throughout the world. Therefore, the time seems ripe to investigate this research area in an international perspective. I have not been able to find any prior research which empirically addresses this issue. Thus, the aim of the research reported in this article is to deepen our understanding about research into special educational needs as an international phenomenon. Hopefully, it will contribute to discussions about how the research community is constituted in practice and also devote time to deliberations about how it should be constituted. Several issues will be investigated: How can one define *international* research and can such research arenas be identified? Who, in terms of sex and country of institutional affiliation, are active on such arenas? What topics dominate? What perspectives are most common?

Method and categorization of articles

The methodology of the present investigation involved various stages which will be described in more detail below. The first stage was to define the *concept* of international research. Secondly, international research *arenas* had to be identified. As already mentioned, a number of journals relating to these arenas were investigated. The third stage involved *selecting* such journals and *categorising* articles within them.

Defining international research

There are different ways to understand the notion of *international research*. Here, the focus will be on the literal meaning of *inter-national*, i.e. international research in this study involve arenas where transactions between actors from different nations occur (inter-national). In the present investigation, international journal arenas are the object of research. There are several reasons for focusing on journals: 1) Journals provide an opportunity for many researchers to present their research, 2) Journals that are peer-reviewed provide for good quality research where, ideally, the influence of networks and contacts are down-played, 3) Access to the research community is considerable, 4) There are, on some occasions, more or less *objective* indicators of the impact on the research community.

Identifying international arenas

The database *Ulrich's periodical directory* (<http://www.Ulrichsweb.com/ulrichsweb>) registers journals from all over the world. Consecutive searches with 1) *special education* and *active*, 2) *special education, active* and *academic/scholarly* and 3) *special education, active, academic/scholarly* and *refereed* yielded the three columns presented in table 1. Total number of special educational journals in May 2005 were 393 and an additional 154 journals are registered as inactive; altogether 30 countries have or have had special educational journals. More than 2/3 of the active journals, and about 3/4 of those classified as *academic/scholarly*, are published in English-speaking countries. Furthermore, when the criteria *refereed* is added, U.S.A alone contributes with about 2/3 of the 88 journals but only 6,7 % per cent of the refereed journals are published in countries where English is not the first language.

Outside the English-speaking world, only 8 journals representing four national contexts were identified (Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and Italy). Denmark and the Netherlands are too small and do not fulfil the criteria that an international arena should be open to many potential contributors. The four journals from Germany and Italy were contacted by e-mail and three of them responded. These journals were found, with the exception of one article, to contain articles published by native researchers. Thus, given the definitions provided, international arenas were only found in the English-speaking part of the world.

Table 1.
Number and percentage of journals classified as *Special Education* per country in total, in the categories *academic/scholarly* and also *academic/scholarly + refereed*.

Country	Number and percentage of journals		Number and percentage of journals in the <i>academic/scholarly</i>		Number and percentage of journals categorised as <i>academic/scholarly</i> and <i>refereed</i>	
U.S.A	218	39,9 %	87	51,5 %	58	66,0 %
Great Britain	52	13,2 %	30	17,8 %	14	15,9 %
Germany	39	9,9 %	25	14,8 %	3	3,4 %
Canada	18	4,6 %	8	4,7 %	7	8,0 %
Japan	9	2,3 %	1	0,6 %	0	0 %
Denmark	8	2,0 %	2	1,2 %	1	1,1 %
Netherlands	7	1,8 %	2	1,2 %	1	1,1 %
Australia	7	1,8 %	3	1,8 %	3	3,4 %
France	5	1,3 %	0	0%	0	0 %
Poland	4	1,0 %	0	0%	0	0 %
Sweden	4	1,0 %	0	0%	0	0 %
Switzerland	3	0,8 %	3	1,8%	0	0 %
India	3	0,8 %	1	0,6%	0	0 %
Italy	3	0,8 %	3	1,8%	1	1,1 %
Spain	2	0,5 %	0	0%	0	0 %
Other	9	2,3 %	4	2,4%	0	0 %
Total	393		169		88	

Identifying journals

The database ISI web of knowledge was used in order to identify journals which are considered to be of great importance by the research community. In table 2, journals classified as special education are ordered in terms of how often they are referenced. The impact-value was chosen as one criteria of selection for further analyses. An additional criteria concerned whether a journal focused specifically upon special education or upon more general research into disabilities/a specific disability.

Table 2.
Influential special educational journals 2003 according to web of science.

Journal	Total references	Impact factor	Country	No. per year	Publisher	Index (in addition to "special education")
1) American Journal on Mental Retardation	1912	1.71	U.S.A.	6	American Association of Mental Retardation	Rehabilitation
2) Journal of Learning Disabilities (US)	1448	1.21	U.S.A.	6	Pro-Ed Incorporated	Rehab.
3) Exceptional Children	952	1.03	U.S.A.	4	Council Exceptional Children	Rehab.
4) Journal of Intellectual Disability Research	919	1.27	England	6	Blackwell Publishing Ltd	Rehab.
5) Mental Retardation	635	1.14	U.S.A.	6	American Association of Mental Retardation	Rehab.
6) Journal of Special Education	494	.83	U.S.A.	4	Pro-Ed Inc	-
7) Research in Developmental Disabilities	425	.82	U.S.A.	6	Pergamon-Elsevier Science LTD	Rehab.
8) Journal of Remedial and Special Education	364	.464	U.S.A.	6	Pro-Ed Inc	-
9) Learning Disability Quarterly	340	.714	U.S.A.	4	Council for Learning Disabilities	Rehab.
10) Topics in Early Childhood Education	329	.74	U.S.A.	4	Pro-Ed Inc	-
11) Annals of Dyslexia	295	1.261	U.S.A.	1	International Dyslexia Association	Rehab.
12) Journal of Early Intervention	281	.60	U.S.A.	4	Council Exceptional Children	Rehab.

In this way, seven journals were selected for further analyses: Journal of Learning Disabilities, Exceptional Children, Journal of Special Education, Annals of Dyslexia, Journal of Remedial and Special Education, Learning Disability Quarterly and Topics in Early Childhood Education. Four of these are general special educational journals, whilst three concern learning disabilities. Since several of these journals usually have articles with authors from outside U.S.A., the arena itself was considered international. However, at this stage the implication that each journal lived up to the criteria established with regard to internationality of research could be assumed.

Since the database encompasses primarily American journals, additional journals from the British/European context were selected. Here, the selection of journals was less systematic due to the lack of a corresponding database in Great Britain/Europe. Thus, journals known to be influential by the author (a European) were selected. Further, the reasonableness of the selection was discussed with several colleagues. In this way, four journals were selected for further analyses: European Journal of Special Needs Education, British Journal of Special Education, Journal of Inclusive Education and International Journal of Development, Disability and Education. These are well-known British/European journals, published in Great Britain and all are general journals.

Analysis of journals

Seven journals representing a North American arena and four journals representing a European/British arena were selected for further analysis in accordance with the research questions and the overriding purpose of the study. Sex and country of institutional affiliation of the authors were noted for each article. Further, each article was analysed according to its overriding theme and perspective. Themes and perspectives were discerned by the present author after reading the abstract and skimming through the article. When necessary, articles were read more thoroughly in order to be objective in regard to the classifications. Only one theme per article was discerned.

The perspective of the articles were analysed according to the localisation of the educational *problem* and the role of participant perspectives within the article. In special educational research, different perspectives about problems can be discerned (cf. e.g. Brantlinger, 1997):

... alternative ways of looking at the phenomenon of educational difficulty, based on different sets of assumptions that lead to different explanations, different frames of reference and different kind of questions to be addressed (Ainscow, 1998, s 8).

Perspectives vary among different dimensions. However, it could be argued (cf. Ainscow, 1998, Clark, Dyson and Millward, 1998) that one central dimension concerns what is understood as problematic in the area of educational problems. Thus, we can discern perspectives that understand educational difficulties as individual problems; as interactions between individual characteristics and environmental circumstances or as shortcomings of schools and societies to accommodate differences (cf. Oliver, 1988). In cases where the researcher has a normative position, a stand is taken as to where the educational problem is to be found.

An additional aspect of the notion of perspective concerns whether a particular article studies participant perspectives. When participant perspectives are studied, a further distinction can be made concerning whether such perspectives are studied in their own right or are subsumed under the author's/authors' normative perspectives. Thus, there is at least a theoretical possibility that participant perspectives will be studied non-normatively, i.e. to a large extent as an interesting object of investigation in itself. The issue of where the participants localise the educational problem then becomes central rather than the researcher's assumptions regarding this matter. The latter research position could thus be described as a non-normative interpretative stance. To sum up, we can speak of a normative dimension, where the *problem* can be localised on a dimension between the individual and the environment. In cases where participant perspectives are studied, these could be subsumed under the normative perspective of the researcher or constitute a research object in its own right. It is believed that these rather basic distinctions would be helpful in revealing the general structure of the field. Of course, within these general approaches to research, there will be different lower-level approaches and theories. E.g. within research about reading problems where the problem is localised within the child, there will be different theories regarding what intrinsic processes that are failing.

Given these points of departure, the 2004 volume of each journal was analysed. A short narrative for each journal was written based upon the categorisation of the individual articles. The narratives concerned what perspectives were represented during the year, which ones were most common and how often, and in what ways, participant perspectives were studied.

Outcome

This section will present the outcome of the analyses with regard to sex of authors, institutional affiliation of authors, themes in articles and perspectives utilised. Due to limited space, the results will be aggregated over journals for both arenas. The focus will be on a comparison between the two research arenas identified, as well as on the overall pattern.

Sex and institutional affiliation of authors on the North-American arena

About two thirds of the 549 authors on the North-American arena are women in 2004 (table 3). Moreover, 84,9 % per cent have their institutional affiliation in U.S.A. A few more women than men from outside U.S.A. published in the journal.

Table 3.
Sex and institutional affiliation of authors on the North-American arena 2004.

	Men	Women	
U.S.A.	150 (27,3 %)	316 (57,6 %)	466 (84,9 %)
Other	36 (6,6 %)	47 (8,6 %)	83 (15,1 %)
	186 (33,9 %)	363 (66,1 %)	549 (100 %)

As can be seen in table 4, there are differences between journals regarding sex of authors. On the one extreme, Journal of Special education has a slight overweight of women authors, while 4 out of 5 authors in Topics of Early Childhood Education are female.

Table 4.
Percentage of female authors in North-American journals.

Journal	
JLD	61 %
ExCh	69 %
JSE	56 %
ADy	70 %
JRSE	66 %
LDQ	60 %
TECE	80 %

Authors not from U.S.A represent seventeen countries (table 5). Only three authors come from countries outside Europe, Israel or Anglo-Saxon countries.

Table 5.
Number of authors (not from U.S.A) from respective countries.

Land	Number of authors
Finland	15 (two articles)
Canada	11
Greece	9 (one article)
Israel	9
Australia	8
Belgium	6
Other	25

Looking at the different journals, an interesting pattern emerges (table 6). While almost half of the authors in Annals of Dyslexia and almost one third of the authors in Journal of Learning Disabilities are from countries other than U.S.A., the remaining journals, with the exception of Learning Disability

Table 6.
Proportional number of authors outside the United States represented in leading North-American special educational journals 2004.

Journal	
JLD	29 %
ExCh	4 %
JSE	10 %
ADy	46 %
JRSE	0 %
LDQ	17 %
TECE	0 %

Quarterly, contains articles of which less than 10 percent are from authors representing institutions from outside the United States. Notably, authors from outside the United States are hardly represented at all in the general journals.

Sex and institutional affiliation of authors on the British/European arena

As can be seen in table 7, more females than males published in the journals during 2004. Slightly more than one third of the authors have their institutional affiliation in Great Britain and less than one fourth of the authors have their institutional affiliation in Europe. Moreover, more than two out of five authors have institutional affiliations outside Great Britain. This category is, in contrast to the others, dominated by female authors.

Table 7.
Sex and institutional affiliation of authors on the British/European arena 2004.

	Men	Women	
Great Britain	31 (17.1 %)	32 (17.7 %)	63 (34.8 %)
Europe	22 (12.1 %)	20 (11.0 %)	42 (23.2 %)
Other	24 (13.3 %)	52 (28.7 %)	76 (42.0 %)
	77 (42,5 %)	104 (57.5 %)	181 (100 %)

Regarding the sex of authors (table 8), there are obvious differences between the four journals. European Journal of Special Needs Education is the only journal, of those chosen for the study, which is dominated by men. In a similar vein, half of the authors in British Journal of Special Education are men. International Journal of Inclusive Education and International Journal of Development, Disability and Education comprises of more than two thirds female authors.

Table 8.
Percentage of female authors in British/European journals.

Journal	
European Journal of Special Needs Education	43.5 %
British Journal of Special Education	50.0 %
International Journal of Dev., Dis. and Ed.	67.4 %
International Journal of Inclusive Education	67.4 %

Australia dominates as country of institutional affiliation of authors not from Great Britain/Europe (table 9). Interestingly, 24 authors (18 women, 6 men) with Australia as institutional affiliation published in International Journal of Inclusive Education and 14 (11 women, 3 men) published in International Journal of Disability, Development and Education. At the same time, no authors with Australia as institutional affiliation published in European Journal of Special Needs Education or in the British Journal of Special education.

Table 9.
Number of non European authors.

Country	Number of authors
Australia	38
Canada	13
U.S.A	7
Others	18

The influence of the publication patterns of authors with institutional affiliation in Australia is also clearly visible in table 10, where the percentage of authors without institutional affiliation in Europe in

Table 10.
Percentage of non-European authors in leading special educational British/European journals 2004.

Journal	
European Journal of Special Needs Education	12.8 %
British Journal of Special Education	18 %
International Journal of Dev., Dis. and Ed.	62.5 % (30.2 % when Australia included as part of the arena)
International Journal of Inclusive Education	71.4 (22.5 when Australia included as part of the arena)

the four European/British journals is depicted. The extremely high percentage of authors from areas outside Europe in Journal of Inclusive Education and International Journal of Development, Disability and Education is considerably lowered if these two journals are considered British/European/Australian arenas. Thus, with such a changed definition, the four journals have between 18 and 30.2 per cent authors from areas outside Europe, Britain and Australia.

Overall pattern for sex and institutional affiliation of authors

Researchers from U.S.A. and Great Britain publish to a large extent on their own arenas (table 11). Only seven of the authors in four leading British/European Journals 2004 are from the United States (all in International Journal of Development, Disability and Education). The *internationality* of the North-American arena is, to a large extent, due to the fact that several quantitatively oriented researchers report original research in the North-American journals concerned with disabilities. While the European/British arena in itself is more international than the North-American in terms of the diversity among contributors as regards country of institutional affiliation, this seems in large to be dependent on the fact that Europe consists of countries (rather than states), and the fact that a number of authors with institutional affiliation in Australia, and some from Canada, publish on the arena.

Table 11.
Authors' institutional affiliations in two international arenas.

Affiliation Arena	U.S.A. + Canada	Australia/New Zealand	Great Britain	Europe (except GB)	Other
U.S.A.	87 %	1 %	0 %	9 %	2 %
Europe/ Great Britain	11 %	22.7 %	34.8 %	23.2 %	8.3 %

Apart from the fact that there are few *flows* between the arenas, both seem to be dominated with researchers with Anglo-Saxon affiliations. Looking at the number of authors with institutional affiliations outside these geographical areas reveal that most of the world is not included on these international arenas (table 12) (An exception to this pattern is a journal which is not analysed in this context due to the criteria used. The International Journal of Special Education had (during 2004) about one third of its authors from outside U.S.A, Europe and Australia.)

Table 12.
Country of institutional affiliation of those authors, not located in Anglo-Saxon or European countries, who publish in important special educational journals.

Country:	Number of authors:
Israel	12
China	4
United Arab Emirates	3
Turkey	1
India	1
Korea	1
	<u>Asia: 22</u>
<u>Africa</u>	
Kenya	3
Nigeria	1
	<u>Africa: 4</u>
<u>South and Central America:</u>	
Argentina	South and Central America: 1

Themes in articles

Tables 13 and 14 depict the most common themes printed in all North-American journals and general journals during 2004. Not surprisingly, different aspects of learning disability research dominate among the themes most common in all seven journals. Professional issues, self-determination and parents/families are other fairly common themes. The occurrence of thematic issues, concerning e.g. evidence-based practices, self-determination and theoretical critique, of course influence the frequency of themes. A closer look at the general journals (table 14) reveals that issues concerning learning disabilities are not very common.

Table 13.
Most frequent themes in leading North American special educational journals 2004.

Reading and writing	Learning problems in general	Professional issues; teachers' knowledge	Evidence- based practices	Mathematical problems	Self- determination	Parents, family	Theoretical critique	Inclusion/ Integration/ School- Development	Socio-emotional problems	Other
16 %	11.4	10.9	10.3	5.7	5.7	5.1	5.1	4.6	4.6	20.6

Table 14.
Frequency of themes in four of the general North American special educational journals in 2004 expressed as a percentage.

Professional issues	Parents/family	Socio- emotional problems	Inclusion/ Integration/ School- Development	Reading	Tests/ Adaptation of curriculum	Early Intervention	Evidence- based practices	Self- determination	Other
14.3 %	10.2	8.2	7.1	6.1	6.1	6.1	5.1	5.1	31.6

Interestingly, several themes in the general North American journals are mirrored in the British/European journals (table 15), such as *professional issues*, *parents/family* and *tests/adaptations of curriculum* although the first of these themes is twice as common in the North-American journals. A striking difference concerns the theme *Inclusion/Integration/School Development* which is more than five times as common in the European/British journals.

Table 15
Frequency of themes, expressed as a percentage, in four general British/European special educational journals in 2004.

Inclusion/ Integration/ School Development	Parents/family	Theoretical analysis/ history	Pupil perspectives/ Self-evaluations	Professional issues	Tests/ Adaptation of curriculum	Methodological issues	Math/ Maths- problems	Reading	Other
36.4 %	8.0	8.0	6.8	6.8	4.5	4.5	3.4	3.4	19.3

Notably, more than half of the articles about this theme in the British/European material is published in International Journal of Inclusive Education. Further, there are some common themes in the general North American journals which do not appear, or are infrequent, in the British/European journals: socio-emotional problems, early intervention and evidence-based practices. Conversely, some themes in the British/European journals do not appear, or are infrequent, in the North-American journals.

Perspectives

Normative points of departure dominate the research published both in the North American as well as in the British/European journals, i.e. research is geared towards solving educational problems. Participant perspectives are more often investigated in the British/European journals although this has also been the case in three of four general North-American journals. The most frequent qualitative method used is thematization of interviews. It is infrequent with research where the object, and goal, of the investigation is to gain knowledge about the participants own perspectives in their own right. Rather, participants' perspectives are more often subsumed under the researchers' normative projects.

Researchers' perspectives diverge considerably both within and between journals. A journal which stands out is the International Journal of Inclusive Education, where radical research and discussion about *inclusive* education takes place. In other journals, often an integration perspective is the point of departure, explicitly or implicitly. The *educational problem* is placed on a dimension ranging from the individual to the environment. However, appraisals for radical change of environmental factors are not that common outside of International Journal of Inclusive Education. Most often, the issue at hand concerns adapting children to environmental circumstances. There are of course differences between journals concerning this dimension, but also differences within a particular journal.

In the North American journals, the theme integration/inclusion does not receive focus with the exception of Journal of Remedial and Special Education and, to a certain extent, Topics in Early Childhood Education. Several of the articles in the journals concerned with *disabilities* express traditional perspectives on special education. Thus, one tries to discern the problem on an individual level, search for predictors (mostly on an individual level) and try to find interventions geared towards the *problem* group. However, in some of the articles where learning disability is discussed, rather than

empirically investigated, there is a challenge to the more traditional view, not the least from authors' concerned with the notion of *response to instruction* (RTI) (e.g. Fletcher, Coulter, Reschly and Vaughn, 2004). In this way, researchers within the mainstream, with regard to the study of learning disabilities, seem to take a more critical approach whereby ordinary school practices are criticised for making the individual bear the responsibility of what is really a school problem.

Discussion

How is one to interpret this empirical pattern given the issues raised in the introductory section of the paper? Firstly, it does seem that the arenas are dominated by female authors. However, it may be assumed that female authors are underrepresented given the underlying pattern in the professions operating in this field. In this way, we find a well-known pattern of declining representation of women at higher hierarchical levels in a particular field. Naturally, more research is needed in order to analyse these issues in greater depth, e.g. by examining the membership of those on editorial boards and research committees. Also problematic is the absence of several features of what would be considered a research community. Instead, we find two quite distinct arenas, which also are quite divided within themselves. A more critical matter is the exclusion of a large part of the world from the international research in special education. Of course, there are several obvious reasons for this, such as colonialism, the absence of educational infrastructures, not least as regards research into education, but there might also be more subtle mechanisms at play here. Obviously, more research is needed but also more concerted efforts to change this state-of-affairs.

Even if the pattern requires further analyses, it does seem as if the international research in special education can, to a large extent, be seen as American and British/European research which is then adopted as being international by a few movers (Europeans on the American arena and primarily Australians on the British/European arena, even if this latter arena is more heterogeneous). Thus, we will not be surprised to find that issues on these arenas are, to a large extent, mirror issues considered of importance in these very educational systems. Naturally, more research is needed here also.

The analysis of article themes reveals slightly different patterns for the two arenas, which will be discussed with reference to figure 1, where a model of the object of research is depicted (cf Rosengren

Philosophical and meta-theoretical considerations
History
Social and political conditions
International relations
Schooling and democracy
Educational systems
Educational politics
School leadership and organisation
Curriculum
Didactics; what to teach ?
Didactics; why this content ?
Didactics; when to teach ?
Didactics; how to teach ?
Didactics; to whom ?
Professional issues
Relations between home/school
Classroom interaction
The socialisation of youth and children
Individual differences and learning

Figure 1.

Different aspects of the research object.

and Öhngren, 1997). It is obvious that the research on the North American arena is dominated by aspects at the bottom of the figure. Didactic issues are e.g. primarily understood in terms of teaching methods.

Several of the aspects at the top of the figure are seldom, if ever, written about, but the large number of themes in the journals implies that they are touched upon at times. In a similar way, research on the British/European arena involves, quite often, the lower parts of figure 1. The common theme of integration/inclusion on this arena could imply that sometimes themes in the upper part of the figure, such as educational systems or educational politics, are analysed. However, most of the research

concerning the theme involves the study of inclusion at the school or classroom level, about parents and teachers understandings of inclusion or about the inclusion of particular groups. Moreover, when a study concerns upper parts of the figure, the normative position of the authors implies that e.g. educational systems often are evaluated rather than studied. Thus, it does seem that there is a need for studies of themes in the upper part of the figure in the future.

The picture that emerges from the analysis of perspectives suggests that there might be a middle-field emerging. On the one hand, studies which take their point of departure in a radical inclusion concept seem to be published mostly in the International Journal of Inclusive Education, while what is at times called inclusion in other journals often involve processes of integration/mainstreaming rather than inclusion taken in its radical sense. On the other hand, more traditional research in learning disabilities seems, in an increasing manner, to localise the educational problems to educational practices rather than viewing them as individual shortcomings. Of course, further research is needed in order to scrutinise this interpretation. Further, there seems to be a need for research which, in a less normative way, studies participant perspectives, both in their own right but also as they are formed in interaction at both macro- and micro-levels.

Finally, the present article could be seen as explorative and further empirical studies of the research field itself are required. In this way, several issues for further investigation have been raised. It is my conviction that the issue of power and research needs further attention. Thus, it is an issue of power to have the opportunity to express perspectives on children in special needs. This will never be an issue of pure scientific rationality but has to do with who gets their voices heard in scientific publications.

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