

Towards Integration in Switzerland

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Photo: Ursula Markus

1. Introduction

Switzerland's 26 cantons have broadly varying education policies, also concerning the integration of children with special needs. Separation into special classes and special schools is still being practiced. But there is a not quite painless shift of paradigms taking place in the German-speaking part of Switzerland towards integration, or depending on definition, inclusion. Zürich is the canton that usually takes the lead within German-speaking Switzerland. This is why the analysis of the current development is interesting to study further. How did the change of mind come about? How is the shift of paradigms taking place?



To begin with, Switzerland is described in the context of its geography and educational policies. Secondly, a historic view of the development of special schools leading up to the current situation is given. And finally, the trends happening within the new public school law (Volksschulgesetz - VSG) are described and analysed.

2. Swiss Geography and Education Policies in Context

Switzerland has a population of about 7.5 Million. 1,495 Million are foreign nationals. This is 20,6 percent of the total population.

There are 20 full cantons and 6 half-cantons. Four languages are spoken officially: German, French, Italian and Romanic.

Responsibility for education is divided between the federal government, the cantons and the communities, but the cantons are the main policy makers. Swiss education is organized in a decentralized fashion. There is no national ministry of education. The decentralized organization is geared towards the different cultures and languages.

Nation-wide regulation restricts itself to the age of school entry, the start of the school year and its duration, as well as the duration of mandatory school time. Besides this, every canton has its own education laws. And the communities have quite extensive autonomy, enabling locally optimized solutions.

Thus, the cantons hold the main responsibility for education in Switzerland. Together with their community councils, they bear 90 percent of education expenses.

<http://www.swissworld.org/de/bildung/>

In every canton, primary schools are set up differently; some take four years, others 5, and others again 6 years to complete. The secondary level is divided into stages in all cantons except for Ticino, which has a single secondary school stage, "scuola media unica".

3. History of Special Education in Switzerland

German-speaking Switzerland is defined by an early development of special education and this has made a lasting impression on the history and culture of special pedagogics.

Below is a list of various special homes and schools, showing the strong tradition of special education of disabled children in German-speaking Switzerland.

1769 - Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) founds the "Neuhof bei Birr" (canton Aargau), a home for orphans and abandoned children.

1777 - The special school for the deaf is opened in Schlieren near Zürich.

1780 - The special school for physically disabled children is founded near Orbe.

1810 - The special school for the blind is inaugurated in Zürich.

1841 - Johann Jakob Guggenbühl (1816-1863) opens a home for mentally disabled children on the Abendberg near Interlaken in canton Bern.

1899 - Albert Fisler (1847-1900), special class teacher in Zürich, begins with the "Swiss Courses for Teachers at Special Schools and Institutions for the Weak in Ability" ("Schweizerische Bildungskurse für Lehrkräfte an Hilfsschulen und Anstalten für Schwachbegabte").

1903 - School is made obligatory also for disabled children.

1919 - The special class for children with language disorders is founded in Zürich.

On June 10, 1920 the founding assembly of the association of the special pedagogic seminar Zürich ("Verband Heilpädagogisches Seminar Zürich") convenes, following an initiative by the director of the canton's institution for the blind, deaf and mute in Zürich (Kantonale Blinden- und Taubstummenanstalt in Zürich) Johannes Hepp (1879-1963).

1919 - Special classes for children with language disorders are founded.

1922 - Special class for the hard-of-hearing is founded in Zürich.

1924 - The special pedagogic seminar Zürich (Heilpädagogisches Seminar Zürich - HPS) is founded under the direction of Heinrich Hanselmann (1885-1969), an important special pedagogue in his time.

Pedagogy, psychology, hygiene, pediatric psychology, psycho-pathology, anatomy, and pathology of the nervous system are the subjects being taught and the seminar organizes practice visits in institutions for the disabled.

1926 - An observational class for the socially deviant is founded.

The period from 1925-1936 sees the rapid expansion of special schools and classes. In the years before and during the second world war (1936-1945), this expansion stagnates. The development of special classes rapidly increases again with post-war industrialization. An important milestone for special pedagogy is the installment of reinsurance for invalidity ("Invaliditätsversicherung" - IV) in 1960. It enables the financing of special schools and classes, but also therapies and rehabilitation, once a child has been accorded IV-Status.

During the sixties, the rise in economic prosperity is strong. Workers from the south of Italy, and also Spain and Portugal are imported.

"Workers were called for, and humans come." („Man hat Arbeitskräfte gerufen und es kommen Menschen“ - Max Frisch, 1965). The numbers of pupils increase, especially from abroad.

1968-1977 - "Equal opportunities" become an important topic, as in many other countries in Europe. I define "equal opportunities" as the just distribution of access- and life-opportunities. Especially the unequal distribution of opportunities in education and in the job market hinder social integration of people with disabilities. Already in the year 1968, mostly children from a background with little access to education frequent special classes. The special classes are well-managed, have a small number of attendees and have good infrastructure. Often the teachers do not have to strictly adhere to the educational program. But the underlying idea of helping children so as to re-integrate them is not successful. The children remain stranded in the special schools and classes.

As an answer to the demands for equal opportunities, the canton of Zürich installs "measures for ambulatory support and help" („Ambulante Stütz- und Fördermassnahmen") in 1977-1985, following the idea that children could be better integrated into normal classes.

Support- and help courses, homework support, complementary courses, language disorder courses, therapies for dyslexia and calculation disabilities, psycho-motorics, psychotherapy and German for non-natives are part of the "newer" special education package.

The attempts at integration (1985-2007) start in five communities in 1985 and today are active in over 120 communities. „Integration“ here is defined as integration of children with school problems. Children with sensory disabilities, especially those with visual and acoustic disabilities are taught in special schools during the eighties. Here too, a different approach has taken hold within the last ten years. A few pupils with sensory disabilities go to regular classes with the support from a special teacher, but have the possibility to "go back to special school". Children with a cognitive disability or children and adolescents with a social disorder get special education. Here too, there are only few exceptions to the rule.

Conclusion: The special schools and classes are well-managed, have well-trained staff and excellent infrastructure consisting of kitchen-, group-, handcraft-, psycho-motorics-, logopedics-, ergo-therapeutics- and music rooms and corresponding therapies. They have low numbers of children per class, generally there is no pressure to adhere to the educational program, and they have access to ample funds. In short, they are small and well-tended. Regular schools can easily transfer unmanageable children and so the know-how (individualization, differentiation, management of heterogeneity and management of children with social disorders is partly lost.

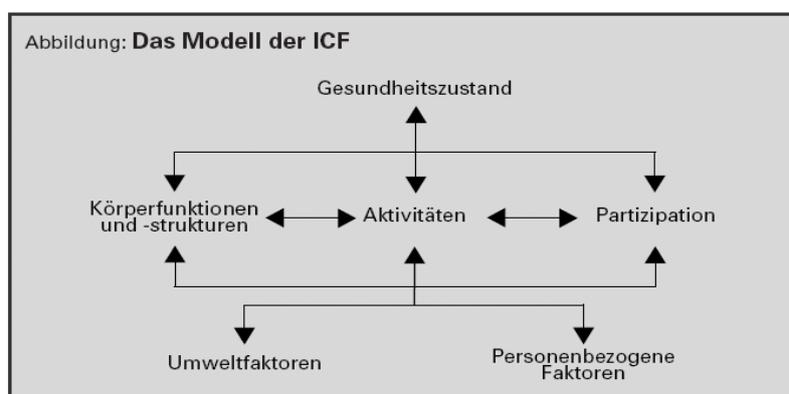
4. Term "Disability"

Within the national and international special pedagogic discussion the term "disability" is used differently and with various meanings. When we speak of disabilities in everyday life, we often first think of severely physically and mentally challenged children and

adolescents. this group comprises about 2% - 2.5% of children at school age. Traditionally, in Switzerland they frequent special schools and homes. Partial integration or integration into regular school accompanied by special education is a possibility.

A much larger group of children and adolescents are also part of special educational measures without being "disabled" in the common sense of the word. These are, for instance, children with learning disabilities, dyslexia or dyscalculia, or with social disorders. Within the discussion of special pedagogy, the term "disablement" also includes this group. It is important to stress the fact that this target group also includes children with special talents. Generally, it is children with special educational needs. The new public school law of the canton Zürich adopts the ICF-Model (International classification of ability to function, disablement and health) as its standard.

The ICF-Model



Ability to function and disablement are defined on the level of physical functions and structures on one hand, on the other hand on the level of the individual person, its activities and social participation. Ability to function is always tied to situational circumstances or environment and influenced by inner factors of the afflicted person. (Bildungsdirektion Kanton Zürich, 2007a, S. 16)

5. Term "Integration"

"Integration describes a social process of change which cannot be confined to school and which aims at criticizing and changing conditions that produce disablement, disadvantages or exclusion, so that the integration of all persons is guaranteed with respect to their originality" (Cuomo, Bologna, March 2002). Integration means that children at certain stages of development play, learn and work together with a common object (Feuser, <http://info.uibk.ac.at/c/c6/bidok/texte/thesen.htm>).

Inclusion is the partiality of the individual in society, disregarding abilities and disabilities. "Inclusion means change and a never ending process of heightened learning and increasing partiality of all pupils." (Hinz, 2003, p.10). In the "Index for Inclusion", work is aimed at three specific levels: inclusive cultures produce communities, inclusive structures

establish a school for all, and inclusive practices develop learning arrangements (Hinz, 2003).

As mentioned, in German-speaking Switzerland, "integration" is understood as the inclusion of children with school and learning difficulties.

5.1. International Comparison of Integration

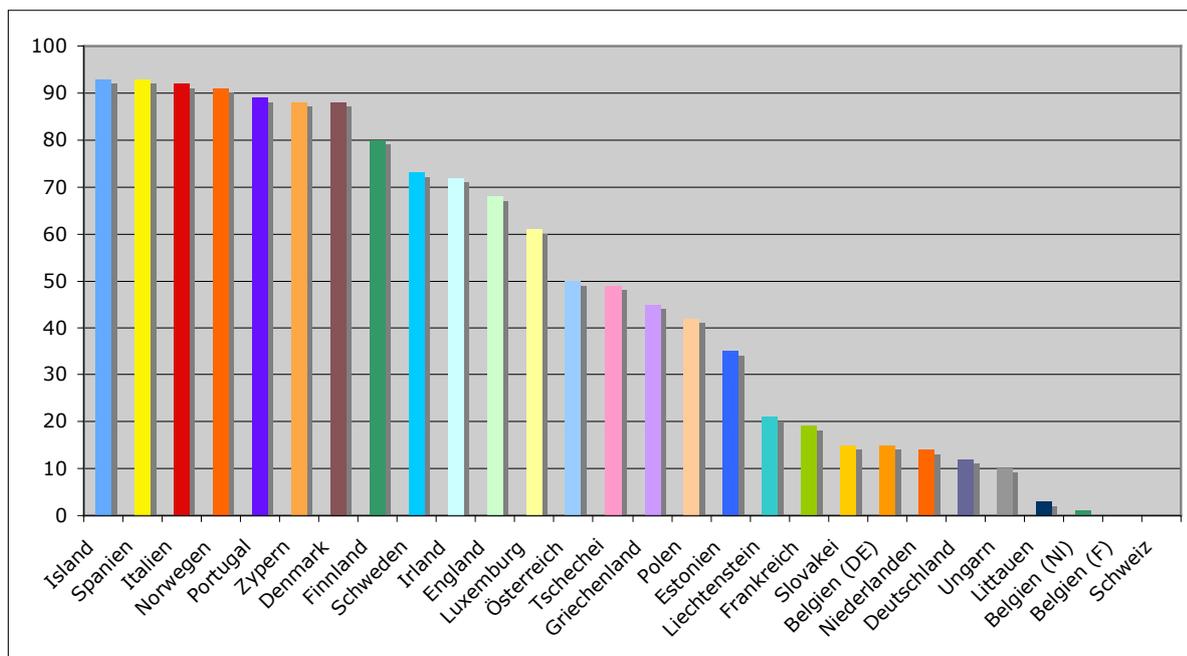


fig. 2. Source: Euridice 2004

The figure shows clearly that Switzerland integrates less children compared to other countries. The cantons that integrate the most are Ticino and Valais (See fig. 3). Integration in Switzerland in the current context does not mean integration of all children with disabilities, but especially children with difficulties at school. Integration compared to other countries is minimal. Switzerland is at the top in rehabilitation, therapies and management of special schools and classes.

5.2. Integration in the Different Cantons of Switzerland

The various swiss cantons have adapted to their neighbouring countries. Thus, Ticino (TI) and Valais (VS), proceed in a similar fashion to Italy - meaning they are the most integrative cantons of Switzerland, while the swiss-german cantons are similar to their german neighbours. The percentage of children in special schools and classes is at 6.1% nation-wide, while the canton of Zürich (ZH) has a rate of 6.6%.

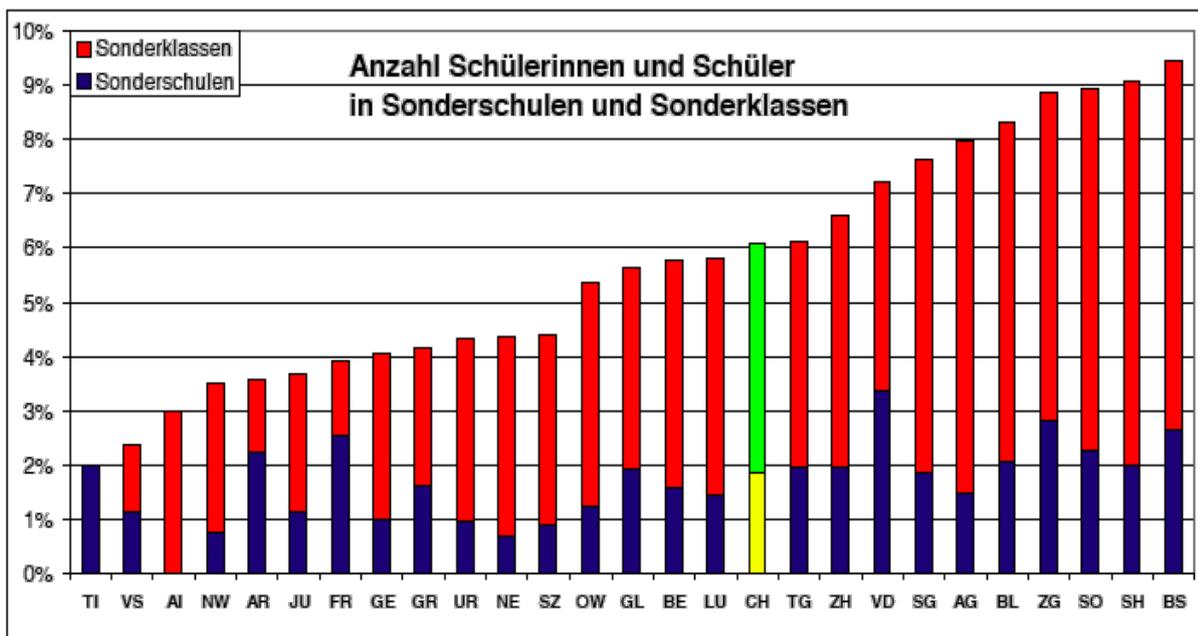


fig. 3 Number of Pupils in special classes and schools in the cantons (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2003)

Ticino only has special schools now. In 1977, this canton discontinued special classes and in turn installed a unified secondary school level as well as the support- and training service ("sostegno pedagogico"), which is responsible for integrated children.

The greater part of pupils in special schools and classes in Switzerland is suffering from learning and social disorders (almost two thirds). This amounts 6.6% of all pupils at primary and secondary level I (depending on the canton, 2 - 10,3% of all pupils go to special schools.)

http://www.educa.ch/dyn/bin/43984-59279-1-download_sonderp_dagogik_dt_04_12.pdf

6. Development of Special Classes and Schools in the Canton Zürich

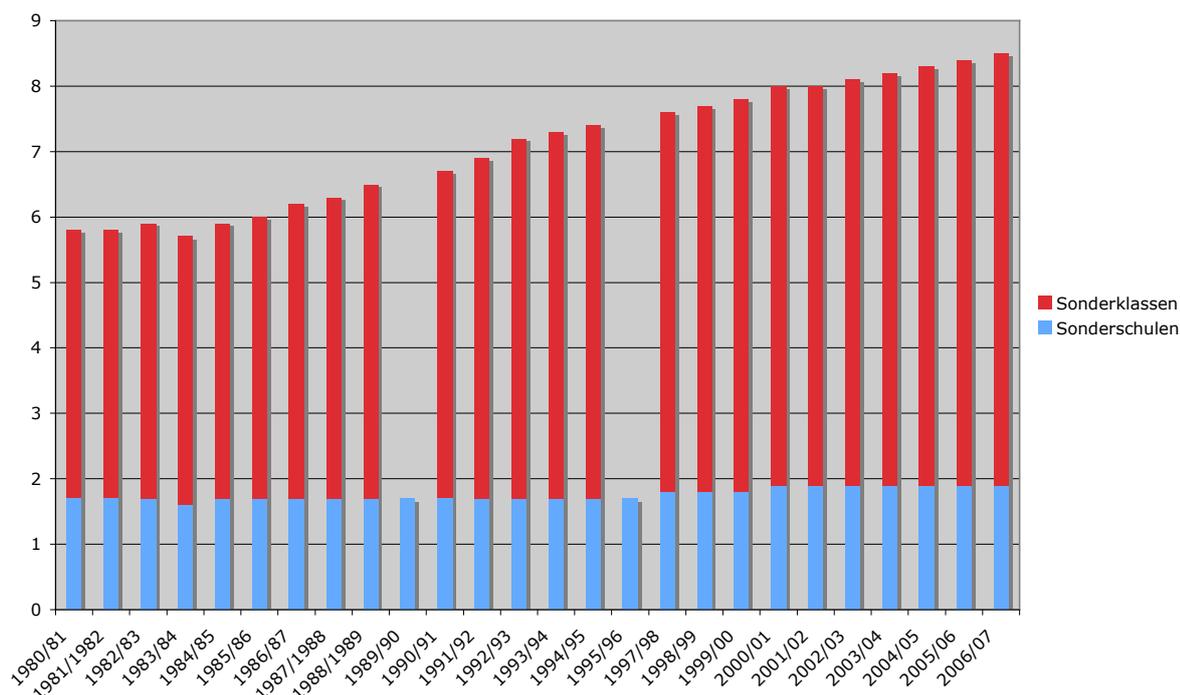


fig. 4. Development of Special Classes and Schools in the Canton Zürich (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2007)

The table shows that integrative special education as well as separative special classes have become more common in recent years. The problem in special classes is that here, more than half the number of children come from a migrant background. The special pedagogic measures have increased to such an extent that more than half the number of children in canton Zürich has received some form of special pedagogic treatment within the first three years at school.

Bless (2004) has proved that the higher the rate of exclusion, the more random the transfers of children with "minor disabilities" to special classes (p.53). When an industrialized country excludes 1.5-2% of its children, only those with "severe" disabilities are affected: children with a mental disability, sensory and physical disabilities or multiply disabled children (p.53). "If the rate of exclusion rises to 4%, children with learning and speech disorders or with severe social disorders are also affected. Diagnostic precision is no longer comparable to that of intermediate and severe disabilities" (p.53).

Bless' second thesis is that "special educational institutions of separative and integrative nature as well as additional resources in regular school degrade to become supportive structures" (p.54). The more resources are provided by the school system and the more it takes care of children with minor disorders, the less our society or school tolerates deviances (Bless, 2004). The third argument is that "increased use of supportive structures results in a higher delegation of competence when solving pedagogically difficult

situations" (Bless, 2004, p.54).

I would add the thesis that the higher the consciousness for deviances, the greater the danger of seeing symptoms in a child and in our case, exclude it. Brem and Rampa (2007) have proved that alertness for deficiencies is significantly higher within the group of teachers in the canton Zürich than it is within that of Italian teachers.

Again and again, the argument is brought forth that the increase of special classes and educational measures is due to children with a migrant background.

Kronig, Eckhard and Haeberlin (2000) have proved in their study:

Migrant children with deficiencies at school make more learning progress in regular classes than in special classes (foreign language classes).

Migrant children there find more potential for motivation and the possibility to orientate themselves towards better performing pupils.

Assignment to special class is perceived as a "judgement of inadequacy" and results in lessened attention.

Regular classes offer better points of contact for acquisition of a second language. It is important that learning conditions in class are such, that this chance can be utilized.

Nationality seems to distort the teachers' diagnostic perceptions. Migrant children performance is assessed to be significantly lower than that of Swiss children, which in turn has a highly significant impact on the learning process.

Research has shown that the learning progress of less well-performing children is significantly better in integrative schooling than in special classes (Bless, 2002).

Learning German is quicker in integrative models than in separative courses (Bildungsdirektion, 2007a).

Learning progress of well-performing students is not affected by integration (Bless, 2002).

The long-term consequences of integration (Riedo, 2000), have shown that integratively schooled adolescents have better perspectives on the job market.

7. Paradigm shift

All special educational tasks (outside of the medical field) become part of the education mandate. This enables a transition from "insurance logic" (deficit-oriented view for the regulation of accidents) to a special needs-orientated approach: what kind of auxiliary support is necessary for successful education?

- Integration: If possible, integrative solutions should be preferred to separative forms. The new public school laws of the canton Zurich foresee a new way leading away from separative measures towards an integrative option (ISF). Regular class should be capable of attending to special educational needs as much as possible. Increasingly, specialists attend to children at school or in class. This facilitates interdisciplinary co-operation. Assignment to special education, is made after individual oral assessments ("schulisches Standortgespräch"). The procedure seeks to determine individual need for special education in which intensive long-term measures are necessary. <http://www.edk.ch/>

Aktuell_d_f_e/mainPresse_d.html

"With integrated special training it is possible to also teach pupils from special school, with additional resources from special school integrated into regular classes" (Bildungsdirektion, 2007a, p. 4).

The following changes are planned:

- harmonization of school structures: introduce a basic stage and increase permeability at secondary school level
- create integrative special options
- support special learning in schools with a high proportion of foreign language speakers
- discontinuation of many of separative special classes
- introduction of the social index
- development of quality assurance
- introduce block hours
- develop day-care structures

Here, especially integrative changes to special education are dealt with.

7.1. New basic stage

The harmonization project of the canton's education board plans school enrolment at age four on a national level. The old form of kindergarten (for 5 to 7 year-olds) has thereby expired. Kindergarten has only recently been raised from district to canton level and thereby re-evaluated. The basic stage makes a sliding entrance into school possible. Kindergarten and first class are folded up. Children can be in basic stage for two or three years. Two to three age-groups form a class. Two instructors with a total workload of 150 percent teach the little ones. Reaching the next stage does not depend on age, but on school abilities, which should be obtained playfully. The teachers make possible an immersion into fantasy worlds, "however, if children are interested in reality, knowledge is offered to them" (Schmid, 2008, p.29). Apart from the discussion around the primary and basic stage, reforms in pre-school education extend to obligatory kindergarten and block hours as well as a reorganization of curricula.

7.2. Special integrative program

Apart from inclusive structures, there is need for a culture of inclusion and inclusive practices in order to integrate children into regular school. The canton Zurich will implement a three-phase concept to make this reality. In the year 2007, it dealt in particular with the discussion and development processes. The pedagogic institutes *Interkantonale Hochschule für Heilpädagogik Zürich* and *Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich* have compiled kickoff meetings with the aim of producing suggestions from different schools within three days of further education, so as to enable a development process of integrative

attitude and inclusive didactics. These kickoff meetings will be held in various schools in 2008. The full implementation of public school law is due 2010.

The further education contains the courses:

1. "Integrative individualizing teaching"

The instructors become acquainted with focal knowledge and aspects of school integration. They learn the most important facts of integration research.

They analyze the effects of heterogeneity in teaching practice and of separative and integrative courses of action. They learn of the possibilities of using heterogeneity as a resource in teaching. They have the opportunity to reflect on their own handling of heterogeneity as an individual specialist and as a team. Didactical aspects of integrative teaching structures (team teaching, individualizing, internal differentiation, open teaching structures, handling of meta-cognition and meta-communication, accompanied learning) are part of the focus on integrative and individualizing forms of instruction. Further focus options are education planning and handling of difficult pupils.

2. Assessment of school abilities

"*Schulisches Standortgespräch*" is the name for the structural interdisciplinary procedure for individual advancement planning. It is suitable for various pupil-related discussion situations at school. It will become obligatory for assignment and examination of special educational measures. The instructors become acquainted with the philosophy of the ICF (international classification of functional capability, handicaps and health, (see chapter 4) as a thought and action model in the context of educational diagnostics. They experience handling of the principles of cooperative educational diagnostics. They learn about the process of educational planning, offering help and its implementation. They learn to use instruments of educational planning. They learn how to define and verify goals within interdisciplinary teams. They recognize resources and learn to include participation of children and parents. They develop a common language and practice (Community of Practice).

7.3. Support in multi-cultural schools

Public schools want to assure quality education for all pupils, independent of social or lingual origin. Schools with a high proportion of children from foreign language speaking families receive additional technical and financial support.

7.4. Discontinuation of special classes

Many of the separative options, but not all of them, are to be discontinued. The supportive options will find their way into regular school. The canton assigns a certain number of grade-bound full time units to the communities based on the number of students and their social index. Integrative education is a special educational option that must be available at

all school stages. Special educational needs cover both difficulties as well as individual strengths and talents.

7.5. Quality assurance

In connection with the great autonomy enjoyed by guided schools, new instruments of quality assurance and development are introduced.

<http://www.bildungsdirektion.zh.ch/internet/bi/fsb/de/FSB/foerderung.html>

7.6. Block hours

With the introduction of block times, public school laws account for change of living conditions and clearly and long ago expressed social demand. They apply to all stages of school.

http://www.bildungsdirektion.zh.ch/internet/bi/de/aktuell/news_2006/NeuVSG.html

7.6. Daily structures

Due to changed family structures and because ever more parents are employed, the demand for day-care options rises. Therefore the communities are obligated to install care options to meet it. According to an inquiry, positive experience and confidence in integrative education are missing in the communities. Abroad, this system is widespread, and also in the canton Zurich, the majority of school communities has experience with it. However, the widespread introduction of integrative education in 2008 and simultaneous discontinuation of special classes appeared risky to many communities. They feared a decrease in school quality. The disconcertion is partially also due to missing information, and therefore information will receive special attention during the introduction (NZZ, 8 January 2008). http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/zuerich/gemeinden_haben_muehe_mit_der_reform_der_sonderpaedagogik_1.646994.html?printview=true

Conclusion:

The paradigm shift comes after a long incubation period. If we recall the fact that canton Tessin already harmonized the secondary stage in the year 1977 and introduced integration at that time with the help of "sostegno pedagogico", this VSG (public school law) seems long overdue. Perhaps a correct law has to come in the right historical and political moment. In the 70's, many states introduced integration drastically: Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Spain and certain parts of the U.S. In German-Switzerland, as well as in Germany, we have remained faithful our classifying structures. Our laws lag behind reality. In Italy and in the nordic countries they are pointing the way. The most important conversion must not only take place within didactics, structure and

culture of our schools, but particularly, in our heads. First we have to free our thinking of passed down concepts, (thinking-) habits, presuppositions and prejudices. It is important not to equate absence, non-functioning, deficit, or paucity with "handicap", but to put the human being with its abilities, talents and resources into the foreground. Only in this manner can we prepare the way to an "inclusion", meaning a life together, which includes all humans with and without handicap.