

“It’s a very strange system!” – Inclusive attitudes amongst trainee and newly qualified teachers in Tromsø

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Summary

The new Norwegian five-year primary and lower secondary school teacher-education prepares teachers with increased subject-specific and research-based knowledge. These new teachers should be able to adapt teaching to individual students and integrate special education approaches. The presented study investigates how newly qualified teachers experience their formal taught-competences from a five-year integrated master’s programme compared with their need for knowledge on adapted and special education at career-start. The study is based on qualitative interviews with 43 newly qualified teachers from the first three cohorts on a five-year integrated master’s teacher-training programme at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. The study is part of the longitudinal research project “Relevant master-education for school teachers”. Data are thematically analysed in Nvivo 12 with results showing that new teachers experienced challenges in adapting teaching for all students, especially for pupils with additional-support needs. The new teachers found they lack the competence to work with behavioural problems and particular diagnostic groups. They felt they lack expertise on how external specialist support systems work and how and when to report concerns. Newly qualified teachers acquire special-education competence by testing out their own ideas or based on advice from colleagues. Some also attend courses or seek guidance from support services on topics such as individual plans or diagnoses. The experience-based learning approaches taken by new teachers strengthens established and criticized thinking about special education and perpetuates a dysfunctional system. Newly qualified teachers need more knowledge about inclusive pedagogy, adapted education, and relational thinking in education.

Keywords: primary school teacher education, newly qualified teachers, special education, adapted education, relational thinking, inclusive pedagogy