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SUMMARY

THE SCHOOL CAREERS OF PUPILS AT RISK IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

The first section of this final chapter briefly reviews the theoretical background and the key questions raised in this thesis. Section two summarizes the research and the most important conclusions. The third section gives policy recommendations for the integration/reintegration of pupils at risk into mainstream primary education. Lastly, section four gives ideas for further research on the theme of integration/reintegration.

7.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND KEY QUESTIONS

This thesis focuses on the school careers of primary school pupils who are described in policymakers' jargon as 'pupils with moderate learning and/or behavioural problems'. These are the pupils at risk who in the past were referred to as young children with developmental difficulties (in hun ontwikkeling bedreigde kleuters - IOBK), children with mild learning and behavioural difficulties (kinderen met leer- en opvoedingsmoeilijkheden - LOM) and children with severe learning difficulties (moeilijk lerende kinderen - MLK). In the international literature these children are often described as learning disabled (LD) and mildly mentally retarded (MMR). The IOBK, LOM and MLK now constitute special primary education which together with mainstream primary education make up primary education as a whole.

Typical LOM pupils at risk demonstrated partial learning problems in the basic subjects of the school curriculum (language, reading, spelling, writing and arithmetic), in spite of having a normal level of intelligence. These specific learning problems were often accompanied by behavioural problems. In contrast, typical MLK pupils at risk had a low general level of intelligence. Consequently this type of pupil at risk experienced shortcomings over the whole learning domain.

Research has repeatedly shown that there is a strong overlap in child characteristics of LOM and MLK pupils at risk. Differentiating between the different types of pupils at risk is hampered by methodological and other problems. There is also an overlap between pupils at risk in special primary education as a whole and those in mainstream primary education. This is because environmental factors influence whether pupils at risk stay in mainstream primary education or are referred to special primary education. Mainstream primary schools obviously vary in their adaptive ability to keep pupils at risk on board.
The diagnosis of pupils at risk with learning and/or behavioural problems has prompted worldwide discussion. At the same time the organization of special education on the basis of the problems that cause pupils to be at risk has also been the subject of discussion.

It is striking that special education has grown in less than a century from a small sector into a clearly differentiated sub-system. A steadily increasing number of pupils at risk has been referred from mainstream education to special education. IOBK, LOM and MLK in particular expanded greatly. The systematic growth of these types of special education can be explained by an interplay of various factors concerning society, science and research, the education system, special education, mainstream education, parents and pupils.

For many years the continually expanding system of special education was regarded as a socially desirable development. The overriding opinion was that pupils at risk were better off in a segregated educational system. This changed, however, in the 1970s. Questions were raised in the burgeoning amount of literature on the consequences of the institutional segregation of pupils at risk. The possibility of stigmatization and the prospect of a not so bright school career and future were considered to be real dangers. Moreover, the organization of special education in the Netherlands differed from that in neighbouring countries.

Since the 1970s educational policy has promoted the integration of pupils at risk into mainstream education. In spite of policy initiatives large numbers of pupils at risk continue to be transferred to special education. The failure of educational policy can basically be attributed to the statutory, administrative and financial divisions between mainstream and special education. Hence the expertise regarding support for pupils at risk is too one-sided and concentrated in special primary education. Moreover, considerable regional differences have developed in the provision of special educational facilities.

The national ‘Back to School Together’ (‘Weer Samen Naar School’ - WSNS) policy has been operational since 1990. With a raft of policy measures, this new integration policy aims to improve the capacity to help pupils at risk in mainstream primary education. The ultimate goal is to reduce the number of pupils at risk transferring to special primary education.

Mainstream and special primary education have been combined by law to form primary education. It is compulsory for mainstream and special primary schools to co-operate in consortiums at a local level. The facilities, materials and expertise available locally in special primary schools can thus be utilized in the mainstream primary schools participating in the same consortium. A fair distribution of special care is guaranteed by allocating the consortiums an indexed budget based on the number of pupils. This makes it possible to control the financial cost of special primary education.

Practising teachers and other educational professionals are also encouraged to take educational measures that will improve provision for the special needs of pupils at risk in mainstream primary education. The organization of integral care for pupils within
consortiums is considered to be important in this, particularly the realization of adaptive education in mainstream primary school classes.

All kinds of research has shown that differences between mainstream primary schools influence whether pupils at risk in years one to four (aged 4 - 8) stay in mainstream education or are referred to special primary education. It is, however, unclear which factors in the school context of mainstream primary education are relevant here. Some pupils at risk remain in mainstream primary education as a result of this variation between schools; others continue their school careers in special primary education. Little is known about how comparable pupils at risk develop cognitively and non-cognitively in mainstream and special primary education respectively. It is possible that pupils at risk who remain in mainstream education and those who are referred develop differently. There are indications that mainstream primary education focuses more than special primary education on educational attainments. Special primary education is thought to place more emphasis on the psychosocial development.

The key question posed in this thesis stems from the situation described above. It is: How do the school careers of pupils at risk progress in mainstream primary education and in special primary education? Four interrelated sub-studies were carried out to answer this question.

7.2 A RETROSPECTIVE SUMMARY OF THE SUB-STUDIES

Sub-study 1: Pupils at risk in mainstream primary education: continuation or referral?

The theoretical starting point for the first study (chapter 3) is that when pupils at risk are referred from mainstream education to special education not only child characteristics are important, the characteristics of the immediate educational environment are too. The question is: What characteristics in the school context influence whether comparable pupils at risk are referred from mainstream education to special education?

The school context of mainstream primary schools is divided into four sorts of characteristics: general school characteristics, implementation of WSNS, special needs support structure and classroom characteristics. The variables region, level of urbanization, denomination, pedagogical principles, school size, staff facilities, experience of the team and changes in the team belong to the first type of characteristic. The second type of characteristic comprises the variables proportion of special primary schools in the consortium, developments within the consortium, attitude of the school management towards policy measures and alternative measures for referral. The variables pupil monitoring system, presence of an internal supervisor/remedial teacher, consultation between colleagues, expertise of the team, supervision by the school advisory service and further training belong to the third type of characteristics. The fourth type of characteristics, class characteristics,
comprises the variables gender composition, average level of attainment and average level of behaviour.

On the basis of existing data from the first (1994-95) and second evaluation (1996-97) of the national PRIMA (primary education) cohort research, pupils at risk who were referred during these school years from years 2 and 4 (aged 6 and 8) of mainstream primary education were individually paired with comparable pupils at risk in the same years who were not transferred to special primary education. The pupils at risk who were referred and those who were not referred were matched on the basis of gender, age, language attainment, arithmetic attainment and behaviour. Previous research has repeatedly shown that these factors play an important role in referral. By linking pupils in pairs by child characteristics, it is possible to study differences in the school context as a factor in referring pupils at risk. The results from matching the children showed that for almost 40% of pupils at risk who had been referred, a comparable pupil at risk could be found who had not been referred. The total number of pairs formed was 200 (n = 400), of which 106 (n = 212) were from year 2 and 94 (n = 188) from year 4. Which factors in the school context are of importance in referral was analysed with the help of various univariate and multivariate analysis techniques for dependent and independent samples.

The analyses show that pupils at risk in years 2 and 4 of mainstream primary education have a higher chance of being referred to special primary education if they attend larger primary schools. Pupils at risk in classes with a higher level of achievement are also more likely to be referred. The average attainment per class in language and arithmetic is of particular influence in referral to special primary education. Pupils at risk who are referred and those who are not do not have the same level of achievement but the relative learning disadvantage of pupils in classes with a higher level of achievement is greater than that of pupils at risk who are not referred. The 'Law of Posthumus' is still valid. In addition, pupils at risk in year 4 at schools in the northeast of the Netherlands (the provinces of Friesland, Groningen and Drenthe), at schools where the team has less teaching experience, and at schools that are more likely to allow pupils to extend the early years of mainstream primary school are more likely to be referred.

Sub-study 2: Adaptive education and referral to special primary education

The second sub-study (chapter 4) resulted from the first. Owing to lacunae in the PRIMA material, the school context of mainstream primary education could not be related to factors regarding the teachers. WSNS places a great deal of importance on the realization of adaptive education. The extent to which teachers adapt their teaching to the needs of WSNS pupils at risk can be important in the process of referral to special primary education. Teachers who do not adapt enough are probably more likely to refer pupils at risk. The key question in the
second sub-study was formulated as follows: Does adaptive education result in fewer pupils at risk being referred to schools for special primary education?

The sample for this study was the same matched group of pupils at risk selected for the first sub-study. This research framework comprised 200 referrals (106 from year 2 and 94 from year 4) and an equal number of pupils at risk who were not referred. Attempts were made to include all the teachers from the entire matched group in this study. Ultimately the teachers of 25 matched pairs (12 from year 2 and 13 from year 4) were involved in the study. Their \( n = 50 \) approach to instruction when teaching language and arithmetic was analysed retrospectively in a structured interview to determine how far it could be considered to be adaptive. The measurement instrumentarium for adaptive education developed by Houtveen and Booij (1994) and Houtveen, Pijl, Reezigt and Vermeulen (1998) was used for this purpose.

A descriptive analysis showed that teachers structure their instruction in language and arithmetic more or less the same. The univariate and multivariate data analyses show that teachers who implement adaptive education less in language and arithmetic tuition refer more pupils at risk to special primary education. The results for year 2 are more pronounced than those for year 4. There was less correlation between referral in year 4 and the extent to which teachers adapt their teaching but this is probably the result of divergent child characteristics, such as disappointing educational attainments and a poor approach to schoolwork.

Sub-study 3: The cognitive and non-cognitive development of pupils at risk in special and mainstream primary education

The previous studies show that differences in the school context and teachers’ approach to education account for whether comparable WSNS pupils at risk are referred from mainstream primary education to special primary education or not. This sub-study (chapter 5) focuses on the consequences for the further development of comparable WSNS pupils at risk. The central question in this third sub-study is: How do comparable pupils at risk develop in special and mainstream primary education respectively? The first research question is: Do the cognitive and non-cognitive development of comparable pupils at risk differ when they attend special or mainstream primary education? The second research question is: Do the cognitive and non-cognitive development of pupils at risk vary by gender and social-ethnic background?

International and Dutch literature provide sufficient empirical evidence to formulate two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is: The cognitive development of pupils at risk is less favourable in special primary education than in mainstream primary education. The second hypothesis is: The non-cognitive development of pupils at risk is more favourable in special primary education than in mainstream primary education.

Pupils at risk in year 4 of special primary education were linked using the precision matching method to form pairs with pupils at risk in year 4 (aged 8) of mainstream primary
education. This was based on the cognitive variables *language attainment*, *arithmetic attainment* and *non-verbal intelligence* and the non-cognitive variable *behaviour*. The matching data were derived from the first PRIMA assessment (1994-95). The development of the matched pairs was monitored in years 6 and 8 (aged 10 and 12) of special and mainstream primary education on the basis of the cognitive and non-cognitive variables used in the matching. The second (1996-97) and third PRIMA assessments (1998-99) were used for this. Regression effects owing to the unreliability of the matching variables were taken into account in the linking process. The total number of matched pairs was 500 \((n = 1,000)\), of which 342 LOM pairs \((n = 684)\) and 158 MLK pairs \((n = 316)\). It was shown that the percentage of overlapping pupils at risk in year 4 of special and mainstream primary education was 55%. This was corrected with the help of estimation techniques for a selective drop-out of pupils at risk in the original research groups.

Multivariate analyses of repeated assessments show that the development of *attainments in language and arithmetic* are significantly better in mainstream primary education. The development of *non-verbal intelligence* and *behaviour* is the same for pupils at risk in special and mainstream primary education. When a differentiation was made between LOM and MLK pupils at risk, no differential patterns in development were found. American research, however, found that pupils at risk with serious learning problems, comparable to the MLK group, do develop better cognitively in special primary education. The longitudinal research for this thesis also did not find any significant variance in the development of pupils at risk with different background characteristics.

*Sub-study 4: Orientation on attainment in mainstream and special primary education and the development of pupils at risk in language and arithmetic*

The fourth sub-study (chapter 6) endeavours to explain the more positive development in language and arithmetic of pupils at risk in mainstream primary education in the context of differences in the orientation on attainment in mainstream and special primary education. The orientation on attainment is defined as the extent to which the educational situation pressurizes pupils to realize the desired attainments in the most important school subjects, namely language and arithmetic. It can be assumed that mainstream primary education is more strongly oriented on attainment than special primary education. Research on school effectiveness and improvement shows that when schools and their teachers are more strongly oriented on educational attainment their pupils achieve better. The core question in this sub-study is: *Is the difference in orientation on attainment between mainstream and special primary education partly responsible for the less favourable development in language and arithmetic of pupils at risk in special primary education?*

Attainment factors at school level are the pursuance of objectives, the systematic monitoring of pupils' progress, the identification of educational disadvantage and the
evaluation of pupils’ progress. Attainment factors at class level are the implementation of minimum objectives in basic subjects, testing the objectives, registering pupils’ progress, the importance of cognitive attainment, the teaching time reserved for core subjects, setting homework and structured instruction.

The comparable sample groups of pupils at risk in the third sub-study were used as the analysis group in this study. The development in language and arithmetic of the comparable pupils at risk in years 4, 6 and 8 of mainstream and special primary education was analysed in the context of attainment factors at school and class level.

Several sequential multiple regression analyses indicate that the more favourable development in language and arithmetic of pupils at risk attending mainstream primary schools is partly due to the greater emphasis on attainment in these schools at class level. Teachers in mainstream primary schools pay more attention to achieving minimum objectives in basic subjects, monitor pupils’ progress more often and use whole-class instruction more frequently than their colleagues in special primary education.

Conclusions

There is a noticeable overlap in the child characteristics of pupils at risk who remain in mainstream primary education and those who are referred to special primary education. Following on from this, a large overlap also occurs between the population of pupils at risk in mainstream and in special primary education. The context of teaching in the early years of mainstream primary education is influential in referring pupils at risk to special primary education. Hence teachers who offer a lower level of adaptive education refer pupils at risk more often. The influence of situational factors on whether comparable pupils at risk are referred from mainstream primary education has far-reaching consequences. Pupils at risk who continue their school careers in special primary education develop less well in language and arithmetic than comparable pupils at risk who remain in mainstream primary education. This is partly due to the fact that teachers in mainstream primary education place more emphasis on educational attainment than teachers in special primary education. The movement towards integration propounded by the WSNS project can contribute to improving the school careers of pupils at risk. Increasing the level of adaptive education in the early years of mainstream primary education can reduce the transfer of pupils at risk to special primary education.
7.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE INTEGRATION/REINTEGRATION OF PUPILS AT RISK INTO MAINSTREAM PRIMARY EDUCATION

In the Netherlands there is now scarcely any discussion at all on whether less pupils at risk should be referred to special primary education. The question is how can the integration/reintegration of pupils at risk into mainstream primary education be furthered.

WSNS did at first seem to reduce the number of pupils at risk transferring to special primary education (Ministerie van OCenW [Ministry of Education, Culture & Science], 2000). However, the number of pupils at risk registering with the so-called Individual Needs Committees, which are responsible for admissions to special primary education, has increased (Van der Pluim, 2001; Inspectie van het Onderwijs [Education Inspectorate], 2002). The number of pupils at risk on the waiting lists for special primary education is also increasing. It is therefore not impossible that special primary education will expand again in the near future.

For this reason the policy recommendation is made below to improve the level of competence of staff teaching the younger children in mainstream primary education. Moreover, it is recommended to have more pairs of hands in the classroom. Yet another recommendation states that more pupils at risk should be removed from special primary education and return to mainstream primary education. Lastly, it has also been suggested that the consortiums should be supervised. All of these recommendations concur either with the findings of this research or with other types of research results and objectives that are relevant to realizing the WSNS policy plan.

Extending teachers’ level of competence

To improve the possibilities for integrating and reintegrating pupils at risk into mainstream primary education it is essential to raise the qualifications, particularly the starting qualifications, of class teachers in the first four years of primary education. It is usually during this period that the learning and behavioural problems of children are noticed that are the primary reason for referring pupils to special primary education.

Staff teaching these age groups in mainstream primary education have varying levels of skills enabling them to teach according to the principles of adaptive education. Teachers with a high level of skills in this respect refer fewer pupils at risk to special primary education (see chapter 4). This study and similar research have shown that teachers who use adaptive teaching methods to a lesser extent do not provide an adequate solution to the observational and diagnostic data on pupils at risk (Houtveen et al., 1998; Edelenbos, Meijer & Harms, 2002). Likewise, they often fail to evaluate the solutions they do choose and to adapt their individual treatment of these children as necessary. The Education Inspectorate makes similar conclusions (Inspectie van het Onderwijs [Education Inspectorate], 2002), stating that the curriculum is not sufficiently adapted to the relevant differences between pupils. It is also
important to point out that more and more behavioural problems are identified in mainstream primary education. Moreover, these problems appear to be increasingly more concerning (Inspectie van het Onderwijs [Education Inspectorate], 2002).

It is well-known that teachers find it difficult to mainstream pupils at risk with externalizing problem behaviour (Safran & Safran, 1984; Good & Brophy, 2000). To deal with learning problems, modern teaching methods offer a differentiated curriculum content for the different levels of groups of pupils. Schools also often have remedial teaching packs for language and arithmetic. These make it easier for WSNS pupils at risk with learning problems to participate in class lessons. In contrast, teachers have to rely to a greater extent on their inventiveness, creativity and improvisation when dealing with the integration/reintegration of children with behavioural problems.

Seen in this light, it is essential that teacher training courses pay special attention to the adaptive approach to education and the early identification and treatment of children’s behavioural problems. There must also be an emphasis in teacher training on how teachers deal with children with behavioural problems.

There are basically two approaches that can be taken to improving teachers’ level of competence: the initial training path and the post-initial training path (Onderwijsraad [Education Council], 1998a, 1999). With regard to initial training, it is essential that trainee teachers are taught starting competences to deal with differences between groups of pupils. Learning to teach according to the principles of adaptive education is a valuable facet of this. The ability to apply multimedia resources (information and communication technology) in the primary process can improve trainee teachers’ capacity to differentiate within the concept of adaptive education. The ability to develop, implement and evaluate individual education plans for specific pupils and planning documents for the whole group must be emphasized. Class management is vital here. It is also sensible to equip trainee teachers with methods to regulate behaviour that will enable them to cope with children with behavioural problems. Teachers in the early years of primary education must know how to use the behavioural intervention measures that are available. The development of children’s psychosocial problems, both current and future, can be tackled with a broad spectrum of preventive and behavioural therapies and training in social skills (Van der Ploeg, 1997), either individually or in groups. On an intrapersonal level children can be shown how to learn to deal with their own problem behaviour; on an interpersonal level they can be taught how to interact with other people with the help of behaviour modifying strategies. At the environmental level, children can be taught how to deal with the various facets of their own personal world. Preventive or curative programmes that stimulate the healthy psychosocial development of pupils can also be useful for teachers (Louwe, 2001).

It is worth considering including a module on ‘Teaching children with learning and/or behavioural problems’ in primary school teacher training courses. This would help to prepare trainee teachers for teaching a changing pupil population. Permanent training opportunities
(‘lifelong learning’) of a high level that take current social developments into account must be structurally available. Those responsible for curriculum content at teacher training colleges, at the national education advisory services and at the school advisory services must make provision for this.

The post-initial training path must continue to broaden the level of competence of teachers in the early years of mainstream primary education. Compulsory in-service training for teachers guarantees further professionalization. Nationally recognized certificates should be awarded for these courses so that their added value becomes clearly established.

*More pairs of hands in the classroom*

On the whole teachers are positive about supporting pupils at risk but are hindered by the lack of additional support in the classroom (Scott & Vitale, 1998). Understaffing contributes to the lack of ‘extra pairs of hands in the classroom’. The most recent data of the Education Inspectorate indicate that the internal special needs system to support pupils at risk is not always well organized owing to the shortage of teachers (Inspectie van het Onderwijs [Education Inspectorate], 2002). Internal supervisors and remedial teachers are asked to teach regular classes to make up the number of teachers in spite of being timetabled to supervise pupils at risk and teachers (SCP [Social and Cultural Planning Office], 2002). As the shortage of teachers is worse in mainstream schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged pupils, these schools in particular may experience problems in providing adequate support for pupils at risk. The shortage of teachers can be a serious obstacle to the integration/reintegration of pupils at risk. Solving this problem is a crucial factor in the success or failure of WSNS.

Another problematic factor in the integration/reintegration of pupils at risk into mainstream educational practice is class size (Gottlieb, Alter, Gottlieb & Wishner, 1994). It is more difficult for teachers to give all pupils individual attention at the appropriate level in large classes. A condition for the integration/reintegration of pupils at risk is the continuation of the reduction of class size that has recently been implemented (Ministerie van OCenW [Ministry of Education, Culture and Science], 1997, 2002; Onderwijsraad [Education Council], 1998b). It is not a problem that schools choose to spend the funding for reduction in class size on ‘more pairs of hands in the classroom’ by appointing extra class teachers, specialist teachers, unqualified teachers and teaching assistants. On the contrary, class teachers are then more likely to find time to give individual help to pupils at risk. The extra support staff can of course also undertake educational activities for the benefit of pupils at risk (Prick, Van Kessel & Oranje, 2002).
Re-referral policy

Up to now only an extremely small number of pupils at risk have returned to mainstream primary education from special education (Brandsma, Krikken & Leemkuil, 1995; CBS [Central Office of Statistics], 2002). Stimulating the return of pupils at risk who have previously been referred is certainly worth considering. One very good reason is that WSNS pupils at risk develop better in language and arithmetic in mainstream primary education (see chapter 5). It is not unlikely that better chances in further education, on the labour market and in society are linked to this. The Advisory Committee on Primary Education actually put forward the idea of reintegration in the 1980s.

Relatively little is known in the Netherlands about the theme of reintegration whereas much progress has been made abroad with the reintegration of pupils at risk. American and British studies (see e.g. Green & Shinn, 1994; Shinn, Powell-Smith, Good & Baker, 1997) on this theme indicate that the following conclusions can be drawn. Shinn et al. (1997) conclude that the reintegration of a group of pupils at risk with moderate learning problems is on the whole successful. The progression in improvements in reading of children with learning problems is in general comparable to that of poor readers in the same reading groups. In general the parents are satisfied with the reintegration, partial or complete, of pupils at risk (Green & Shinn, 1994; Shinn et al., 1997). Positive elements in parents’ experience were the quality of the care and individual attention of the teachers. Parents feel that their children enjoy reading more and their attainments in reading have improved. They are also of the opinion that re-referral improves the children’s self-confidence. The research of Shinn et al. (1997) likewise indicates that teachers in both mainstream and special primary education are impressed by the return, temporary or otherwise, of pupils at risk to the mainstream educational setting.

Re-referral of larger numbers of pupils at risk can be stimulated from within the financial framework of the consortia. The consortia can opt to reallocate the special WSNS funding internally to facilitate the re-referral of pupils at risk, a decision that particularly benefits the mainstream schools. Mainstream schools can use this funding for extra staff, to buy in additional services from school advisory services, for proper facilities and the acquisition of suitable teaching aids.

When a decision is made to make a huge effort to return pupils at risk to mainstream education, pupils should obviously be selected who are expected to complete this process successfully. The reintegration can be phased, making the complete return to mainstream education a gradual process. It is essential that parents agree with the re-referral. Equally important is that the school team of the recipient mainstream primary school are unanimous about the initiative. Peripatetic supervision by the special primary school the pupil attended and consultation between the mainstream teachers and the former special teacher can have a favourable influence on the return. The progress of pupils at risk that have returned to
mainstream education should be monitored by systematically following pupils’ development with the help of a pupil monitoring system.

Supervision of the consortiums

The quality of the special needs policy varies from consortium to consortium (Van der Pluijm, 2001). For this reason some mainstream schools continue to make referrals to special primary schools. Waiting lists are one of the consequences of this. A small number of the pupils at risk on a waiting list are at home, isolated from school. If the Education Inspectorate were given the authority to supervise the functioning of the consortiums on the basis of standardized quality criteria, their special needs policy would acquire a higher priority.

7.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH ON THE INTEGRATION/REINTEGRATION THEME

The concluding chapter makes suggestions for further research on the integration/reintegration theme. These ideas concern the functioning of the consortiums of schools, the further development and implementation of various educational integration/reintegration models and variants of adaptive education.

Monitoring consortiums

Constant systematic monitoring of the consortiums by research (Van der Pluijm, 2001) is necessary to ascertain whether the principle objective of WSNS is being achieved. Monitoring the transfer of pupils between mainstream primary education, special primary education and other special education may register shifts in the participation statistics (the so-called ‘leakage effects’). There are indications that more and more pupils at risk are registering at types of school which fall outside the WSNS project.

Quantitative research can provide insight into successful consortiums in terms of rising integration/reintegration figures. In combination with in-depth research, underlying processes can be exposed which further the increasing integration/reintegration into mainstream primary schools. A case-study on a well-functioning consortium would likewise provide insight into the variables responsible for this success.

Educational integration/reintegration models

Different teaching models are implemented within consortiums to integrate/reintegrate pupils at risk (Appelhof, 1993; Detticher, 1994; Kool & Van Rijswijk, 1995). Configurations exist
which help pupils at risk within the classroom context of mainstream primary schools (so-called ‘pull-in’ configurations). But there are also formats outside the context of the classroom (‘pull-out’ configurations), whereby pupils at risk are taught in so-called special classes (‘resource rooms’) (Coates, 1989; Van Voorst & Claessens, 1993; Bonkhorst, 1994). In some mainstream schools all pupils with special needs are placed in special classes regardless of their age group. There are also models in which pupils at risk are placed in a cross-school special class within the consortium of mainstream and special primary schools. Pupils are then taught part time or full time either in special classes or in their own class.

It is conceivable that the different teaching models vary in their potential to be applied and organizational feasibility. The models can likewise differ from each other in terms of effectiveness, i.e. differences in performance in cognitive and non-cognitive variables. This can be checked in quasi-experimental research designs with the help of the ‘natural variation’ in teaching configurations within consortia.

In addition, a purely educational experiment within a consortium could be set up in conjunction with research. The integration/reintegration models that are theoretically feasible can be systematically varied in such an experiment. This would give insight into which models result in successful integration/reintegration.

Adaptive education

Generally speaking, two schools of thought within adaptive education can be found in the literature (Stevens, 1997; Houtveen et al., 1998). Consequently, different forms of adaptive education, sometimes a mixture of the two, are found in educational practice. Applied research on the effectiveness of the variants of adaptive education can provide useful pointers for integration/reintegration practice.

Differences in the level of adaptive education are probably due to differences between teachers’ competences. Competence-oriented training is popular in teacher training courses (Onderwijsraad [Education Council], 1998c; Straetmans & Sanders, 2001). For this reason it is interesting to analyse, with the help of theoretically oriented research, which competences teachers should have if they are going to be effective in adaptive education. The results could be used to improve the initial and post-initial teacher training paths. Experimental intervention research which trains mainstream primary school teachers in a diversity of forms of adaptive education can clarify which variants are most suitable for the satisfactory integration/reintegration of pupils at risk.

Returning to the ideals formulated in the WSNS policy for pupils at risk: the near future will show whether these ideals are achieved better by the predominantly administrative and organizational system approach or by the predominantly remedial and didactic approach that has already been tried.