

Being a Teacher in the Inclusive School

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ABSTRACT

Why this topic? Because our official statistics force us to talk about it - almost 20% of school age children are not enrolled in the educational system. Measures taken have not proven to be viable solutions. We propose a responsible approach of dropout by extending the term inclusive school and addressing the inclusive teacher's skills. To promote inclusive classes or schools means a win for all students and teachers. I submit to your reflection two concepts that are commonly used in meetings, debates and events that have been discussing (for more than ten years) the need for change in education. These concepts are 'integration' and 'inclusion', often used indiscriminately. Inclusive education reflects the values of a fair and democratic society that offers everyone equal opportunities to enjoy human rights and human development goals [6]. In other words, 'inclusion' emphasizes the idea that schools and education in general must change and adapt to student needs, must value diversity and find solutions to the needs of different types of learners, while 'integration' signals the need to do something for the marginalized population - individuals or groups - by the standards and conditions of the dominant social group.

KEYWORDS: *inclusive education, integrated education, children with SEN*

1. INTRODUCTION

Some Romanian pedagogues make a distinction between the concept of inclusive education and integrated education. *Integration* can be defined as a student's access to mainstream education, where he or she often adapts to the policies, practices and the existing curricula of the school, while the school itself remains largely unchanged. *Inclusive education* is "an approach that specifies that all children should have equal opportunities to attend school together and learn together, irrespective of their cultural, social, ethnic, racial, religious and economic background or their skills and intellectual or physical capabilities" [12]. The *integrated education* "assumes that all disabled children are accepted in regular schools and classes. There still appears no significant concern towards the adaptation of regular classes / school environments. It also offers partial access to education for children with severe disabilities. In inclusive education, it is argued that all are accepted, naturally, in schools" [12].

The main forms of integration, says the same author, are:

- a) vocational integration - students are placed in the same building with mainstream school, but they are included in separate units or classes or follow a different curriculum;
- b) sociale integration - students attend classes or special units but have the opportunity to socialize with students from the mainstream school (on the playground, at lunch, at joint meetings of school);

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c) functional integration: provides joint participation in educational programmes that include all students.

2. GUIDELINES AND TRENDS IN TEACHER TRAINING

We noted a few guidelines and trends in teacher training, as they have been structured during the past two decades in Europe and in Romania. Iucu Romiță, professor at the University of Bucharest [5], identifies a few tendencies of the teaching career development through evolutionary processes of:

- training or professional development;
- initial and continuing training - professionalizing the teaching career;
- professionalisation of the teaching career model – from the pedagogical ability to the pedagogical competence;
- orientation of the training systems towards pedagogical competence and educational performance;
- quality and training - teacher training standards;
- mobility and career development through the professional transferable credit system;
- induction programme / mentoring / practical training for the teaching career debut;
- curricular dominants of the training programmes - practical orientation;
- managing the teacher training systems - from a systemic approach to programmes and projects approaches;
- accreditation of training programmes - training providers - the training market;
- E-learning / distance education - support for the continuous training of teachers.

2.1. *How could teachers promote inclusive education?*

We know that previous educational systems have placed children with learning difficulties or who were different in a separate section, a 'special' one. The training of teachers who were not specifically and concretely involved in special education was started from the premise that they would not have to manage classes with pupils with SEN. These students are in special schools and have teachers with an adequate training. Today, the inclusive education approach supports the fact that students with special needs should be educated with their peers in mainstream schools.

In the work "To understand and respond to the children's needs in the classroom" [11], the directions and principles which all teacher training must rely on in order to support school inclusion of all children:

- all students are at gain when teachers adapt the school curriculum and their own teaching style to accommodate the great diversity of children in any class of students (which requires a lot of creativity);
- it is very important for teachers to realize and strengthen the partnership with other professionals to be supported in their efforts;
- links between schools in a neighborhood should be strengthened, as well as partnerships with other community groups so that educational requirements can be met both in school and outside it;
- to enable people with disabilities to participate effectively in society;
- to achieve the right to education, without discrimination and with respect for the principle of equal opportunities, an inclusive education system will be ensured at all levels, as well as lifelong learning, directed to: development of human potential, of

the sense of dignity and self-worth, consolidating the respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms and human diversity;

- development of disabled people’s personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their full potential.

We consider that we can speak of an *inclusive* approach when schools help pupils overcome barriers to learning and where (good) teachers have the skills necessary to help students succeed. The inclusive vision on the educational process assumes that teachers have social responsibility and professionalism, that they are trained, supported and empowered for the knowledge and application of teaching technologies for curricular adaptation/ differentiation, evaluation and promotion.

2.2. *Methods of developing teachers’ teaching skills for inclusive education*

To support the implementation of inclusive schools, we must take into consideration the following facts [10]:

- a. The initial training, performed in colleges and universities;
- b. Trainings for teachers’ continuous training and for the teacher trainers;
- c. Conducting teacher training programmes in schools.

a. The teachers’ initial training for inclusive education

The teachers’ initial training is vital because, "in order to prepare pupils for the EU's increasingly knowledge-based society, teachers are required to teach a new range of skills, which often require new teaching methods. In addition, there is a growing demand for teachers to teach classes that have pupils from different cultures, mother tongues, with different levels of skills and with special needs" [2].

To meet learners’ diversity, we should reflect on the problem of developing a curriculum for initial teacher training to support these modern pedagogical skills that could and should provide future teachers the training necessary to prepare them to face an inclusive educational system. “The curriculum for teacher training should be based on learning outcomes. Therefore knowledge and competences specific to education sciences should always be combined with knowledge and skills specific to the subject matters included in the curriculum” [1].

But how can we make future teachers familiar with special educational needs issues? Here are some possible approaches: the topic can be treated as a separate subject matter or it can be integrated in other subjects (as part of a course on differentiated teaching or on special educational needs in general); the topic can be approached from a dual perspective – being treated in special modules and being integrated within broader topics.

As regards the training of teachers for inclusive education, there can be identified three models of initial training:

- a) “the general training model;
- b) the training through collaboration model;
- c) the unification model.

In the general training model, students will be able to attend one or two courses covering inclusive education.

The collaborative training model asks students to attend several inclusive education training classes while doing practice in inclusive classes.

The third model is the unifying one, where all students have the same curriculum that prepares them to work with inclusive classes where there are children with special education needs” [9].

Teacher training should take into account other elements, such as learning difficulties and disabilities, emotional and behavioural problems, techniques and technologies of communication, symbolic representation, meaning and multiculturalism, diverse curriculum, teaching methods and techniques, educational relations, cultural self-critical reflection placed in the context of training in real situations and with authentic examples, the ability to bring all students to at an optimal learning level.

In terms of attitudes, beliefs and values in initial teacher education, we must highlight the importance of junior teachers' positive attitude in the inclusive school as well as the importance of the beliefs that influence future teachers' attitude towards inclusive education, which in turn influences their intentions and behaviours and the need to create a "sense of belonging". Training students as future teacher must therefore be focused on promoting teachers' attitudes and training skills. The complexity of inclusive education should be adapted to include labour in training teacher attitudes and beliefs rather than "relying exclusively on a technocratic, competent approach, more suitable for the transmission of bureaucratic and procedural knowledge" [4].

b. Trainings for teachers' continuous training and for the teacher trainers;

Emil Paun, professor at the University of Bucharest, noted that professionalizing teaching career is "a process of developing a set of skills and competences in a given area, based on a set of assimilation of knowledge (theoretical and practical), process controlled in a deductive way by a model of the respective profession" [8]. The professionalisation dimensions are highlighted:

1. The first dimension regards professionalization, which involves the description or drawing of a "professional identity", so as to outline a set of knowledge and skills structured in a "professional model" (the professional standards), which can be assimilated systematically, scientifically;
2. The second dimension of the professionalisation for the teaching career is the effort to legitimize the teaching profession in field of social activities and professions. This requires a model of the teaching profession, which is relatively difficult to achieve given the specificity of the educational activity;
3. A third dimension of professionalisation involves "a broader effort of rationalization and alignment of the entire process of initial and continuous teacher training on professional standards. The teachers' activity must be understood and studied not only as the fulfillment of a vocation and personal qualities, but as an activity that is subject to specific and precise rules and constraints. It is based on skills and knowledge assimilated in different ways, which involve training based on a rigorously developed professional model. This is not easy to achieve given the specificity of the educational activity, often involving variables whose standardization is neither possible nor necessary. 'Travail humain sur l'humain', this is the specific of the teaching profession. Therefore, its analysis oscillates between the description of the conditions and standards and the emphasizing of the creative, personal, non-standard aspects [8].

In 2001, *The strategy for developing the system of teachers' initial and continuous training in secondary education in 2001 - 2004* was developed. Some of developmental directions and objectives of the strategy [5, 9] were:

1. The design and implementation of national standards for the teaching profession - complex evolutionary standards (normative and excellence ones) for a dynamic and flexible teaching career;
2. Obtaining the teaching degrees.

What can result in the professional field from special education educators and mainstream school teachers working together? First, the development of new capabilities related to: consultancy offered to teachers and parents; curriculum in mainstream education; best practices in inclusive classes. Secondly, trainers who are knowledgeable in the field of mainstream education but also in special education and who understand very well inclusive practices are valued.

The study “*Special requirements in the classroom*” [10] presents the mechanisms for the self-training and self-development of school in order to support implementation of inclusive schools all over the world. The improvement in schools requires cooperation between teachers and a coherent and lasting policy in this respect, for each school. The necessary directions identified in the school are: joint analysis of the development policy of the school; assistance for the lessons among teachers; group discussion of the issues arisen and the solutions found; honesty in assessment; positivism in tackling learning difficulties faced by children; real partnership with parents; call for community services to solve limitations [10].

3.CONCLUSIONS

The central idea that emerges can be formulated as: it is profitable to work in parallel, using the same strategies and means, both in the teacher training and in the classroom learning activities. It is considered that the common methods (interactive, participative, inclusive ones) bring both efficiency and quality in teaching and teacher continuous training.

A new phrase, “collaborative teaching” is more often used in the language of teaching. To design and implement an inclusive educational system, the collaboration between leading professionals in education is crucial. The professional team should include the presence of a teacher, a support teacher or itinerant teacher, a speech therapist and a psychologist. Teamwork enables easy monitoring of student progress in the classroom and observing behaviours and problems faced, offering the possibility to give immediate support.

Education for inclusion should be seen in terms of meeting the learning needs of all children, youth and adults. Teachers must constantly adapt to the specifics of a changing generation, so we consider opportune presenting and defending the claim launched at European level and which stipulates that “teachers should receive appropriate training to work with students at risk of leaving school early or who face insecurity, live in areas with social problems or are at risk of exclusion. Therefore, we need modern teachers, able to integrate in a multicultural and multidimensional learning environment” [3].

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