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Inclusive education: Continuity of the Macedonian reflective teacher

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Abstract

Following the theoretical basis of the Inclusive education, the paper gives clear picture of what we have as experience in the Macedonian Educational system and the possibilities of improvement the processes of teaching and learning using inclusive teaching modules.

The paper consists of three parts. The first part *Inclusive Education- reality for all* contributes to the permanence of the inclusive education. The second part *Getting started with inclusive teaching- detection and elaboration of the possible crossroads when creating inclusive classrooms. Changing roles of teachers and pupils in the Macedonian inclusive classroom* as a third part, contributes to the transformation of the participant's roles in the classroom in order to respect, activate and support "the other" in the classroom and school.

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education today is basic principle in which should strive the education in one country. These directions are especially addressed from international organizations which dealing with educational policy and they are recommended to EU member states and to those that are not included in EU. These directions are results of social and economic changes in society. In front of current and future teacher's inclusive education stands as a challenge with which they should deal it.

2. Inclusive Education- reality for all contributes to the permanency of the inclusive education.

Under the influence of the goals for education set by institutions which deal with educational policy, the emphasis is placed on the educational trends that the education in the EU member states and in the countries from Western Balkan should follow. Those trends refers to inclusive society, therefore, the reforms in education should be in directions of achieving and implementation of inclusive education. In 1990, UNESCO represented the

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Education for all movement, and UNICEF in 2007 set the conceptual frame of Education for all based on human rights.

Conceptual frame for approach to education based on human rights emphasizes that human rights related to education cannot be established if there is no review made of the right of access to education, the right to quality of education and right to respect in the learning environment. (Stubs, 2012,9)

In order to accomplish these rights, some obligations in relation to the stated rights must be implemented such as providing free and compulsory education, quality living standard, free access to information from different sources, and promoting respect of human rights and the capacity development of every child. These obligations which provide the human rights are stated in many key international documents and instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education. Inclusive education is a process of education which ensures promotion, respect and practice of these rights.

According to Johnson Inclusive education is one kind of approach in order to fulfil needs for learning of all pupils inside educational system. Its principles are based on basic principles of Convention of children rights (UNICEF, 2010)

Some other authors state other components of the definition of *Inclusive education* such as increasing the respect, accepting and reducing exclusion, reducing discrimination, changing the system, the culture and the practices in schools.

The authors of this paper consider inclusive education a process different from the very process of education the main goal of which is acquiring knowledge. Inclusive education is a continual process which aims at the development of the child's personality according to his or her abilities. In this dynamic process the stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination, non-tolerance, inactivity, unavailability, non-inclusion of all the children in the process of education, and disrespect of differences are terms which are not accepted and tolerated.

3. Getting started with inclusive teaching- detection and elaboration of the possible crossroads when creating inclusive classrooms in the Macedonian society

Many of research conclusions show that teachers have a lot of tasks to perform, but they do not get the support and help relevant for dealing with the challenges of the process of inclusion. A small number of schools have developed the inclusive practice, and thus the inclusive politics and practice are found only in those schools and with teachers who are enthusiasts. Those practices of some of the schools which may serve as example do not meet the criteria for building and developing inclusive education within the entire system simply because neither qualitatively nor quantitatively do they mirror an inclusive education model. This is confirmed by the absence of established practice which covers the whole system of education. Current efforts for inclusiveness can be seen only in elementary education. Thereby, as a country, we face a difficult and responsible task of identifying the barriers on the way of inclusive education and defining the corresponding measures to take. It is the only way to provide inclusive education as a segment of the broad context of inclusive society.

Some of the measures that we propose can serve as an example in overcoming barriers: teachers' training in methods of work in accordance with the needs of the child, inclusion of both children and their parents in the entire process of inclusive education, application of the acquired knowledge into the process of education, building a system of identification of children with special educational needs, establishing institutions for evaluation and support for every participant in the educational process, developing procedures for assessment of achievements, developing practice of building IEP, developing school inclusive politics, promoting inclusive values, models of different good practices.

In order to promote a more inclusive system of education in Macedonia, we recommend eight action steps. Each of these recommended steps relates to a challenge at the school municipal and national level, and each one includes:

- 1 - Improved access to education for children who are out of the educational system*
- 2 - Equitable funding that will encourage inclusiveness*
- 3 - Implementation of legal provisions to prevent discrimination and organizing training in all schools across the country*
- 4 - Redesigning the system for assessing children at risk*

5 - Improve the inclusion of children with special educational needs in kindergartens and supporting access to education for children in day care centers

6 - Extension of the school day for all children in order to enable extracurricular activities

7 - Preparation of teachers, principals and parents for inclusive education

8 - Promoting the involvement of parents (Johnston, 2010)

The key point in the effort of overcoming barriers is implementation of double approach which includes the focus of both the society model (focused on system) and the medicine model (focused on pupil) in the process of inclusion. Both models are sometimes criticized because of their unilateral nature; only the double approach excludes this risk by overcoming the weaknesses of each of the models, and thus makes the goals possible to achieve.

4. Changing roles of teachers and pupils in the Macedonian inclusive classroom

Teachers represent key factors in process of developing and implementation different politics and models of inclusive education. Approaches in teacher education should be oriented to finding ways of increasing his or her responsiveness in inclusive education. Special attention should be taken over methodologies oriented towards children and their active participation in many educational initiatives. Methodology of work should be based upon a few basic principles such as openness, democracy, participation, balance, activity. The principle of openness means inclusion of all children and overcoming barriers for learning. The principle of democracy means promotion of practicing democratic values such as tolerance, protecting human rights, equality in the process of education regardless of the religion, gender, ethnicity, or any other social or individual characteristic of the individual. The principle of participation means respecting educational interests of different social groups. The principle of balance means equal presence of educational areas i.e. areas which provide knowledge acquisition, and development of values, skills, and abilities. The methodology of work which the teacher uses includes various teaching strategies, promotion of various learning styles, methods such as research, project method, interaction, techniques such as observation, multi-structured interview, panel discussion, and thus helps the optimal development of each child according to his or her developmental potentials, needs, and abilities. The participative methodology is based on participative learning and acting (methodology of developmental work inspired by Robert Chambers) leads us to several key principles: triangulation, exchange, removing of subjectivity, introducing changes in process of learning, facilitating, self critics, awareness, responsibility, sharing. Participative methodology is key element of improving and increasing quality in education at all.

5. Conclusion

Following the European i.e. the world trends in the area of inclusive education is not a choice for the sake of being modern only. It is a necessity if we are to meet the needs of those for whom the educational system exists – the pupils, the citizens. But achieving inclusive education is not a one-moment process, but a long-lasting process in the core of which is the teacher's role. The role of the teacher may sometimes be a good point to start with but it certainly does not offer the thorough approach that we need. The teacher's capability to do the necessary work is most important, but it is not always the only solution. There are other steps at the society level which will draw the whole picture about inclusive education.

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