Inclusive Education and Its Implementation: International Practices

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Abstract
Research problem. There is a big demand for high level competencies in an increasingly knowledge driven society. Ensuring that each individual has an equal opportunity for educational progress is a challenge worldwide; inclusive education is a question of equity and a premise for active contribution to society by all people, included the weakest. Inclusive schools work to ensure full participation and access to quality learning opportunities for all learners, respecting and valuing diversity, and fighting discrimination in and through education.
The aim of this paper is to study and select the best strategies for empowerment, talent development and raising achievement of all students, including the students with disabilities and special education needs. It explores the area of educational measures both for talented learners, and for upskilling staff to address a heterogeneous student population.
Research methods: The methodology implies the use of authoritative studies and of official documents from national, and the International Bodies, linking them to the author's personal experience in teaching and in project management, especially keeping in mind the inclusive tradition in Italy. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (art.24) stipulates that countries must take steps to ensure that persons with disabilities can access an inclusive primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live.
Conclusions and recommendations. We need to understand the importance of inclusivity, to widen the empirical research, to develop, and implement measures to capture the learners' potential, their academic, and personal development, improving teaching strategies, and guidance. Families and society also make a contribution. It is a challenging task, where teachers play a key role in innovative school systems. The results of the study can be used in policy making, curricula development, teaching programs, and improving the quality of education for all learners.
Keywords: inclusive education, talent development, quality teaching and learning, teacher training.

Инклюзивное образование и его реализация: международная практика

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Аннотация
В обществе, в значительной степени ориентированном на образование, уделяется особое внимание высокому уровню компетенций. Обеспечение равных возможностей для всех обучающихся является проблемой для всего мира. Инклюзивное образование – одна из попыток решить эту проблему. Оно нацелено на формирование общества, в котором активное участие будут принимать все люди, включая самых слабых. Инклюзивные школы, признавая

и уважая ценность разнообразия и борясь с дискриминацией в сфере образования, работают над обеспечением доступа к качественному обучению всех учащихся. Целью настоящей работы является изучение и выбор наилучших стратегий расширения прав и возможностей, развития способностей и повышения успеваемости всех студентов, включая учащихся с ограниченными возможностями и особыми потребностями. В работе рассмотрены образовательные меры как для обучения одарённых детей, так и для повышения квалификации учителей, работающих с разнородным составом учащихся. В методологическом обосновании работы использованы авторитетные исследования и официальные документы национальных и международных органов. Кроме того, привлекается личный опыт автора в преподавании и управлении проектами, а также инклюзивные традиции Италии. Конвенция ООН о правах инвалидов (статья 24) предусматривает, что страны должны принимать меры для обеспечения инвалидам наравне с другими доступа к инклюзивному начальному и среднему образованию в местах их проживания. Руководители в сфере образования должны понимать важность инклюзии, расширять эмпирические исследования, разрабатывать и реализовывать меры для выявления потенциала учащихся, их академического и личностного развития, улучшения стратегий обучения и управления. Семейные и общественные институты также должны участвовать в этой работе. Особая роль в решении этой сложной задачи в современных образовательных системах принадлежит учителю. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы в разработке образовательной политики, учебных планов и программ, в повышении качества образования на всех уровнях.

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, развитие способностей, качественное преподавание и обучение, подготовка учителей

Introduction

There is a big demand for high level competencies in an increasingly knowledge driven society. Every child has the right to quality education and learning; however, people with disabilities are one of the most marginalized and excluded groups.

School inclusion has been considered in most countries around the world in the last 30 years, especially since the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). In 2006, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)* was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly. Article 24 asserts the right of people with disabilities to education and states that part of this right includes that children with disabilities "can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live" (UN, 2006).

Inclusion is a question of equity and a premise for quality contribution to the society by all people, included the weakest. Equity is at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) 2030; it lies at the heart of the target 4.5 SDG on Education.

Although 160 countries are signatories to the CRPD, progress toward an inclusive education that promotes meaningful access to, and progress for, learners with special education needs (SEN) in the general education curriculum has proceeded slowly. Students with extensive support needs tend to lag significantly behind their peers academically (Ryndak, Jackson, & White, 2013). Such exclusion has long lasting impacts because education is the gateway to full participation in society, for employment, and engagement in their communities.

Teaching inclusively enables all students, whatever their circumstances, to enjoy the fullest possible learning experience; it is considered the most effective way to give children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to thrive. Ensuring that each individual has an equal opportunity for educational progress remains a challenge worldwide.

Student population is more diverse than ever. The definition of "disability" varies depending on the circumstances and context of the evaluation. Despite the range of definitions, disability evaluation is based on the criteria of the bio-psychosocial model of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) adopted by

the World Health Organisation (WHO), or according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM).

Different students learn best in different ways and progress at different rates. Besides disabilities, there are special needs (specific learning disabilities like dyslexia) and disadvantages due to different reasons: migration status, poor economic or/and cultural background, belonging to minority groups as Roma children (UNICEF, 2011). The social-ecological perspective defines disability as a mismatch between personal competencies and environmental demands (Schalock et al., 2010; World Health Organization, 2007).

An estimated 93 million children worldwide live with disabilities (Save the Children, 2020). They face persistent barriers to education stemming from discrimination, stigma and the routine failure of decision makers to incorporate disability in school services. Nevertheless recently, according to UNICEF, there has also been a shift in the attitudes of teachers and school administrators towards enrolling children with disabilities in regular schools (UNICEF, 2017).

Purpose and objectives of the study

– To discuss the importance, the concept and the strategies of inclusion at school, from an international view, gathering relevant information from national and international sources (literature, work of international bodies) on inclusion, the principles that underpin inclusive education, the various definition of inclusion, looking for existing examples developed in the international scenario,

– To take one of the countries with long lasting experience: Italy, as a case study, to study and select good practices, developing proposals for successful inclusive education, for the empowerment and talent development of all students, especially at the secondary school level; it explores the area of educational measures both for talenting learners, and for upskilling staff to address heterogeneous student population, to raise the achievement of all learners.

Situation and literature review

Within the international view, there are ambiguous definitions and multiple interpretations of the term "inclusion" itself, as widely discussed in the literature (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). On the other hand, each country implements education for disabled and disadvantaged children differently, according to many aspects related to its social and political context, as well as its school system structure and tradition.

There is a rich production of research and publications in the field of inclusive education, referring to students with Special Educational Needs (Amor et al., 2018; Van Mieghem et al., 2018), and to students without Special Educational Needs (Dell'Anna, Ianes, & Pellegrini, 2019). International and national Institutions, Universities, Research Centres, bodies like UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Fund), Save the children. Uncountable centres and agencies as the EASIE (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education), the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE), NGOs like the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), or the European Dyslexia Association (EDA), as well as national bodies are very active in awareness raising, research and support for inclusion. They promote information, coordination, host events and other forms of outreach geared towards policymakers and the general public, and in capacity-building by training teachers, administrators and communities.

The answer to inclusive education does not lie in building more special schools for children with disabilities. This would only serve to isolate them further and is unlikely to

be sustainable in the long-run. Instead, we should share resources that already exist in educational systems.

Inclusive education is when all students, regardless of any challenges they may have, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes that are in their own neighbourhood schools to receive high-quality instruction, interventions, and support that enables them to achieve success in the core curriculum (Alquraini & Gut, 2012).

Inclusion is a process that ensures full participation and access to quality learning opportunities for all learners, respecting and valuing diversity, and eliminating all forms of discrimination in and through education. Talent development for all should be part both of the school policy and of the Initial and continuing teacher training. The term inclusion represents a commitment to making preschools, schools, and other education settings, places in which everyone is valued and belongs, and diversity is seen as enriching. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education studied the link between inclusive education and social inclusion, finding evidence to suggest that there is a link between inclusive education and social inclusion in the areas of education, employment and living in the community. At the same time, the review suggests that attending segregated settings minimizes the opportunities for social inclusion both in the short term and the long term (EASNIE, 2018). Bringing students of all backgrounds together in the same classrooms and in the same schools allows them to learn and grow side by side. It is not only equality, it means reducing barriers for all (CAWI, 2015). 'An inclusive setting refers to education where the child/learner with SEN follows education in mainstream classes alongside their mainstream peers for the largest part -80% or more- of the school week' (EASIE, 2018).

It is recognized that positive attitudes toward inclusion are also among the most important for creating an inclusive classroom that works, supported by reasonable accommodation and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs (Hagiwara et al., 2019). Successful inclusive education happens primarily through accepting, understanding, and attending to student differences and diversity, which can include physical, cognitive, academic, social, and emotional elements. This is not to say that students never need to spend time out of regular education classes, because sometimes they do for a very particular purpose. But this should be the exception.

The driving principle is to make all students feel welcomed, appropriately challenged, and supported in their efforts. Individualized supports play a central role (Schalock, 2013) in the education context. Supports are defined as "resources and strategies that aim to promote the development, education, interests, and personal wellbeing of a person and that enhance individual functioning" (Schalock et al., 2010). Types of support are seemingly innumerable. Thompson et al. assert that there are three broad categories of supports relevant to general education contexts, including curricular adaptations, instructional supports, and participation supports (Thompson, Walker, Shogren, & Wehmeyer, 2018). It is an ongoing challenge for individual teachers, pupils, parents, principals and the system as a whole.

The Italian case study

A comprehensive account of the situation in Italy is given in a Eurydice report (EACEA, 2020), to which the following section shows basic similarities. Education at all levels is open to everyone - Italian citizens as well as foreign minors from both EU and non-EU countries, and from minority groups (Roma children etc.). The integration of learners with disabilities started in 1971, and in 1977 special classes were abolished. The offer of education for pupils with special educational needs is totally included in mainstream education; it is mandatory for the State as well as for local authorities and the

National health system, each within its own competences (EASNIE, 2016; Anastasiou et al., 2015).

Integration and support measures for special needs are addressed to pupils with disabilities as defined in the frame law no. 104/1992 on care, social inclusion and rights of persons with disabilities. Law no. 170/2010 recognised dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography and dyscalculia as specific learning disabilities (Bombardelli, 2006).

In Italy, pupils with disabilities are defined as pupils with stable or progressive physic, psychic or sensory disabilities, causing learning and working difficulties that can produce social detriment and social exclusion. The most recent definition of the target group 'special education needs' extends the concept of disadvantage at school, not only to impairments. A new pedagogic-didactical category of SEN pupils with "specific developmental disorders" is defined in addition to disabled pupils and pupils with diagnosed specific learning disorders. This new category includes problems in language, nonverbal skills, movement coordination, attention deficits and hyperactivity disorder, socio-economic, linguistic and cultural disadvantage.

The State also guarantees the right to education to students who are unable to attend school because hospitalized, detained or at home for a long illness. Pupils with special educational needs deriving from proven socio-economic, linguistic, personal and cultural disadvantage (e.g., reported by social services) can temporarily follow personalized learning paths, through a personalized teaching plan, and can adopt compensative tools.

The local Medical committee of the National health system can provide a document that certifies the disability and the consequent right to benefit from the support measures foreseen by the legislation in force. Following the disability evaluation, a Functioning Profile is released according to the criteria of the bio-psychosocial model of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF-WHO).

The support measures for pupils with disabilities are then selected on the basis of the Functioning Profile and the Individualized Education Plan, identifying also the professionals, the types of support measures and the necessary structural resources for school inclusion. School staff also include 'support teachers' who have received a specific initial training focused on support teaching activities for pupils with disabilities. Classes with disabled pupils have a maximum of 20 pupils, provided that the reduced class size is necessary to assure education to these pupils. Teachers, support teachers, the class council, in collaboration with parents, specific professionals (speech therapist etc.), jointly draw up and approve the Plan.

In every school there are measures to overcome architectural barriers, and a working group for inclusion is established, made up of teachers, support teachers, administrative staff, specialists of the local health authority, chaired by the school head. Schools can use compensatory educational tools and exempt pupils from some activities acting on decisions taken by the class council on the basis of the clinical documentation. Support measures for foreign minors focus on language learning with the presence of language and cultural mediators to help teachers and school staff communicating with pupils and their families.

Recurrent and final assessment of students with specific learning/developmental disorders is consistent with the pedagogic and didactic measures adopted. In particular, schools should adopt assessment measures that allow students with such disorders to demonstrate the level attained. For example, oral tests are preferable, in particular for assessing foreign languages and compensative didactic tools or exemption from specific activities are recommended, if suitable.

Assessment of pupils with certified disabilities focus on their Individualised Educational Plan. Pupils who do not sit the final exam receive a document attesting the

credits obtained and allowing their enrolment in regional vocational training courses. The upper secondary education leaving exam can be carried out with the help of special didactic tools. Pupils who followed a differentiated study plan and who have not obtained the final qualification, receive a document attesting the course of study, the subjects, the length of studies as well as competences acquired and the relevant credits obtained at the final exam.

Methodology

Authoritative studies and official documents of the national, and the international institutions, were used to explore the numerous ways in which different groups are not to be excluded from equal opportunities and achievements, in the daily routines of schools, and to link the scientific findings to the author's personal experience in teaching and in project management (Erasmus Plus project PREDIS, 2015-2018).

Results

The results of the study are the selection of the best educational strategies, which are measures in the school system, in the teaching curricula for differentiation (careful observation, motivation, non-standard evaluation, counselling, portfolio and personal development plan), paying attention to human relation, identity and self-esteem (Huysse-Gaytandjieva, Groot, Pavlova, & Joling, 2015; Booth, & Ainscow, 2018), caring for social contacts among learners (well organized group work, mutual support, solidarity), seeing students as persons, training of teachers, education of parents (educational styles, examples, media-management), to prevent under-achievement and early school leaving. Positive expectations and a supportive school environment can greatly improve the learning experience of children.

Inclusive teaching means not discriminating against students, directly or indirectly, creating an inclusive education climate in order to capture and strengthen the competences of the learners, their academic, and personal development (learning to learn, portfolio), improving teaching strategies (re-engineering educational programmes, assessment forms), and guidance. It is teaching in a way that respects the diversity of all students, and enables them to take part in learning and fulfil their potential, regardless of their backgrounds, learning styles or abilities, removing any barriers that prevent students from learning, using a variety of instructional formats (whole-group instruction, flexible cooperative grouping, paired learning, peer tutoring, and student-led demonstrations).

To ensure access to academic curricular content, teachers create accessible lessons, that include multiple ways of representing content to students and for students to represent learning back, such as modelling, images, objectives and manipulatives, graphic organizers, oral and written responses, and technology, caring for curricular adaptations (use of large print, headphones, calculators, draw a picture instead, or just to have extra time), instructional supports and participation, ensuring that all handouts, presentations and online course materials are accessible and meet the accessibility criteria (for example, using high-contrast text/background colours, legible fonts, and ensuring the text can be read correctly by screen-reading software).

Schools provide instruction in a wider range of learning modalities (visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic), which benefits their regular students as well, ensure access to appropriate learning materials and resources, including textbooks. Contents can be presented in interactive and practical ways (for example, using objects, images and video), not only having text-based materials. For example, children with vision impairments can use Braille texts, and sit at the front of classrooms; students with auditive impairments,

use hearing aids. Of course, support in the physical environment of schools is needed, overcoming movement barriers, making ramps for wheelchair users (accessible classrooms and toilets), etc.

Assessment and evaluation methods should help students to understand the standard of work they are expected to produce; participatory assessment forms facilitate self-evaluation and recovery plans, because they encourage learners to find their strengths and weaknesses and to look for improvement strategies.

There is a definite need for teachers to be supported in implementing an inclusive education. For there to be true long-term success necessitates formal training, starting from the pre-service curriculum, in general and special areas of competence necessary to be effective in inclusive classrooms (EASIE, 2012; EDA, 1997).

According to EASNIE (2012), the Profile of the inclusive teacher includes: valuing learner diversity, considering learner difference as a resource and an asset to education; supporting all learners, with high expectations for all learners' achievements. Promoting the academic, practical, social and emotional learning of all learners through effective teaching approaches in heterogeneous classes; working with others, collaborating in teamwork, with teachers, parents and families, other educational professionals; personal professional development, taking responsibility for the own lifelong learning. Teachers are reflective practitioners and initial teacher education provides a foundation for ongoing professional learning and development.

School systems are expected to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate their approaches to inclusion on a daily basis: governments must regularly collect and analyse data to ensure children are reached with effective services.

Inclusive systems require changes at all levels of society. Adopting a holistic model of inclusion means viewing it as a dynamic system that encompasses schools, and the wider community. Besides policy-makers and practitioners, parents and society have a big part to play; feelings and attitudes of parents of regular and impaired students influence the educational process. At the community level, stigma and discrimination must be tackled. Real inclusion is possible when communities and mass-media cooperate in this task, through acceptance, and inclusive behaviour.

Discussion

The potential of inclusive education has to be studied further, to widen the research basis. First, international agreement on definitions and on concept clarification is necessary to support comparability, the advancement of research, and synergy of educational measures. Secondly, detailed empirical studies have to be carried out in inclusive settings in such a complex field, especially to enquire about the impact of different support models on the main variables: quality learning by both regular and impaired students, the possible advantages of inclusion to counter early school leaving of all learners, the effectiveness of inclusive education in mainstream schools for students with severe and complex learning difficulties (Imray & Coley, 2017), socialization, the contribution of society, and of the world of work.

According to most authoritative experts, both students with and without disabilities learn more in inclusive settings (Alquraini & Gut, 2012). For students with disabilities, this includes academic gains in literacy, math, and social studies, better communication and social skills. There are even critical opinions. Inclusion works when it is quality inclusion, otherwise it can foster negative effects, such as marginalization of students with disabilities in mainstream schools (Nes, 2017; Nes, Demo, & Ianes, 2017), aiming at the implementation of research-based interventions and practices in inclusive schools.

Conclusion

Like all persons, children with disabilities and disadvantages have ambitions and dreams for their futures, they need quality education to develop their skills, realize their full potential, and make their contribution to the common development. In our information society high qualification is needed for all, keeping in mind both the human rights and the social costs of illiteracy. The ability to read and write, and to understand plays a vital role in the process of social progress and personal development.

To close the education gap for children in need, we must understand the importance of inclusivity, and we should implement measures to strengthen the competences of all learners, and their personal development, improving the organisation of the school systems, the teacher training, and the social commitment.

This issue is open to future directions in research and implications for the practice. For greater legitimacy based on empirical data, we need further efforts regarding different aspects of inclusive schools. Ongoing work can challenge and explore successful access to general education in inclusive settings preventing school failure in school policy worldwide. Respecting differences benefits all students because it values their individual strengths and contributions and makes the learning experience richer for everyone.

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