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THE INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND FACTORS THAT MAKE THIS PROCESS SUCCESSFUL

One of the broader goals of integration is to create a school for all that will meet the special needs and capabilities of all students with and without special educational needs. The dimension of the term integration is not achieved by the simple coexistence of children with and without special educational needs (spatial integration). Functional integration begins in the classroom and depends on the use of effective strategies and practices by the teacher, so that children with special educational needs are actively involved in both academic and social learning.

The main aim of this article which refers in – the integration of children with special education needs and factors that make this process successful – is to analyze and investigate the integration practices that teachers use in special education, their concern about the integration of all the children and to present the factors that make this process successful.

For this purpose, a bibliographic search of descriptive-analytical nature took place, through the offered bibliography and articles. In particular, a search was made on the Internet database, law libraries and in electronic libraries of domestic and international level using the keywords. Due to the interest of the topic and its current character, a plethora of material, books, articles, as well as practices of international and pan-Hellenic conferences and magazines were identified.

The study of the integration of children with special education needs and factors that make this process successful is an important undertaking, as the last decades have been marked by an attempt by the wider society to get rid of prejudices against people with disabilities.

It is concluded that pedagogical inclusive practices as well as applications of inclusive education can ensure equal access for all to the general school and eliminate the chances of stigmatization of students.

The teacher plays a dominant role in the implementation of inclusive education. By guiding and facilitating students and effectively applying pedagogical inclusive practices the modern teacher can achieve inclusion by providing opportunities for two-way communication. A basic condition for its practical application is its continuous training in issues of inclusion.

Key words: integration, children with special educational needs, inclusive education, spatial integration.

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ІНТЕГРАЦІЯ ДІТЕЙ З ОСОБЛИВИМИ ОСВІТНІМИ ПОТРЕБАМИ ТА ФАКТОРИ, ЯКІ РОБЛЯТЬ ЦЕЙ ПРОЦЕС УСПІШНИМ

Однією з більш широких цілей інтеграції є створення школи для всіх, яка буде відповідати особливим потребам і можливостям всіх учнів з особливими освітніми потребами і без них. Вимір терміна «інтеграція» не досягається простим співіснуванням дітей з особливими освітніми потребами і без них (просторова інтеграція). Функціональна інтеграція починається у класі і залежить від використання викладачем ефективних стратегій і практик, щоб діти з особливими освітніми потребами брали активну участь як в академічному, так і в соціальному навчанні.

Основна мета цієї статті, яка стосується інтеграції дітей з особливими освітніми потребами та факторів, що роблять цей процес успішним, – це проаналізувати та дослідити інтеграційні практики, які вчителі використовують у спеціальній освіті, їх турботу про інтеграцію всіх дітей і навести фактори, які роблять цей процес успішним.

З цією метою було виконано описово-аналітичне дослідження запропонованих літературних джерел та статей. Зокрема, за ключовими словами було досліджено джерела з мережі Інтернет, бібліотек.

Вивчення інтеграції дітей з особливими освітніми потребами та факторів, які роблять цей процес успішним, є важливим заходом, оскільки останні десятиліття були відзначені спробою суспільства позбутися упереджень щодо людей з обмеженими можливостями.

Зроблено висновок, що педагогічні інклюзивні практики, а також застосування інклюзивної освіти можуть забезпечити рівний доступ для всіх до загальноосвітньої школи та усунути шанси стигматизації учнів.

У реалізації інклюзивної освіти домінуючу роль відіграє вчитель. Направляючи та допомагаючи студентам та ефективно застосовуючи педагогічні інклюзивні практики, сучасний учитель може досягти інклюзії, надаючи можливості для двостороннього спілкування. Основною умовою його практичного застосування є його безперервне навчання із питань інклюзії.

Ключові слова: інтеграція, діти з особливими освітніми потребами, інклюзивна освіта, просторова інтеграція.

Introduction

The inclusion of children with special educational needs in general schools has been the subject of debate around the world in recent decades. It is a process that aims to create a school suitable for all students, in which the difference in perceptions and lifestyle of each child will be accepted (Zoniou – Sideri, 1998). However, if we look back a few years, we would be faced with issues of intense racism, but also feelings of shame and guilt. They were and sometimes continue to be the cause of the social stigma of their family, as well as the pole of attraction of strange comments or even pity, on the part of their "normal" fellow human beings (Vlachou – Balafouti & Zoniou – Sideri, 2000).

The relevance and the latest publications. The most recent law on special education (3699/2008, article 6) in Greece states that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities have the right to attend general school always with the support of properly qualified teaching staff. In other words, it is the coexistence and co-teaching of all children regardless of individuality and educational needs (Liodakis, 2000). In Greece the model of co-teaching is called parallel support.

Literature Review

The image began to become visible during the 20th century, when developments in the sciences of psychology, sociology and pedagogy put every child – regardless of mental, physical and emotional development – at the center of social becoming. Thus, for the first time, the most discussed issue in politics, but also in every school of general education, especially in foreign countries, is the integration of "disabled" people in all their fellow human beings with formal development.

The modern trend of Pedagogy is now based on the principles of co-education of children with and without special needs, as well as the creation of a "school for all", where all children will be educated and will not be distinguished from each other due to mental, linguistic, physical or their emotional specificity. Children with some disabilities are no longer characterized as "disabled" or "sick" as was customary in the past but as "children with special educational needs" (Zoniou-Sideri, 1998).

As Vislie (2003) and Ballard (1995) argue, inclusion in education describes the process by which a school seeks to meet the needs of students as individuals by reviewing and restructuring its curriculum. Several studies show that children with special educational needs can progress to a general school as long as the necessary differentiation is made in their curricula and their way of teaching (Manset & Semmel, 1997). In addition, Hegarty (1993) concludes that children attending special schools do not show greater academic and social progress than children with special educational needs attending general schools.

Therefore, attending general schools seems to benefit both these children and their peers of formal development as they daily recognize the needs of these children and form a positive attitude towards disability (Sebba & Ainscow, 1996). It is clear that the more complete and comprehensive the investigation of the perceptions and attitudes of children of typical development about their classmates with disabilities, the more representative is the image we have of their attitude towards children with disabilities in general and the factors that they shape it. However, although education can be particularly effective in the field of special education, research findings show that children with special educational needs may

experience rejection and bullying in general schools not only by their classmates but also by teaching staff (Thompson, Whitney, & Smith, 1994; Mayberry & Lazarus, 2002).

In short, an integration program to be considered successful must activate the academic and social integration of children with special educational needs in a group of peers and socially adequate children of typical development.

However, the problems persist and mainly focus on the exact definition of integration. In the education system, the term inclusion is often alternated with the term integration in order to describe the education of students with special educational needs with typical students in the general school (Draper, Aleknavicious, & Crooks, 1998). The common feature of the two definitions is that they support coexistence at the educational and social level for people with or without disabilities. The integration excels from the fact that it maintains the characteristics of the team while the integration does not project them so strongly (Zoniou – Sideri, 1998). This fact, the multitude of definitions, through which the definition of integration has passed, also highlights its complexity. According to Florian (1998) there have been various definitions from time to time to convey the concept of integration. There were definitions that placed particular emphasis on the fact that integration initially promotes interactions between children, as it values all children as active members of the school team and secondly addresses all those necessary organizational arrangements that should take place in the school space, so that learning does not exclude any student.

Integration in particular does not seem to accept the concept of assimilation, but to consider each child as a functional member who actively participates in a school environment, in all activities and in a constantly changing classroom environment, in terms of the quality of his / her practices, to emphasize the child's abilities and not only aim at the coexistence of students with and without educational needs in common school contexts, but also to provide incentives for the formation of their interpersonal relationships (social inclusion) (Odom, 2000). It is that process that appropriately shapes the Curriculum to meet the needs of all students with the ultimate goal of avoiding the separation of students with special educational needs from their classmates with typical development (Florian, 1998).

The placement of children with special educational needs in general schools can be done in various ways in the context of integration. These range from partial to full integration. The main models of school integration are the following:

a) integration in special schools that are co-located in the same school complex as the general schools, in which children with special educational needs are the largest percentage of the day in the special school classroom,

b) integration of the child in the regular class for a few hours of the week,

c) the integration of the child in the regular class for most of the school day, where all children are considered members of the class,

d) the full integration of the child with special educational needs in the regular class, with the provision of supportive assistance from a specialist scientist or team (psychologists, school counselors),

e) the child's inclusion in the regular classroom with the assistance of a special educator (special educator), ie co-teaching (Polychronopoulou, 2003). This assistance provided by the specialist staff in the integration departments can cover some and / or all courses depending on the needs of the student.

Integration is divided into three forms in terms of its content: spatial, social and functional (Zoniou – Sideri, 1998). The term spatial integration refers to those cases where children with and without special educational needs attend the same school space but in different buildings and their contact is almost non-existent. Social inclusion aims to develop social interactions between all children not in the classroom but at school events (eg breaks, celebrations and excursions). The last form, the functional integration excludes any discrimination and integrates the child in the regular classroom by activating his participation in educational and social activities while he is provided with the appropriate supportive help (by a special educator or teacher of general education). We conclude that the form of functional integration offers services to both students with simple and students with serious and multiple special educational needs. The purpose of functional integration is to lead students to cognitive and social development, so that they function as active members not only in the school but also in society as a whole.

Taking into account the multiple definitions of integration, we should note that in the context of this dissertation we will be concerned with the importance of functional integration for children with special educational needs, to all their classmates, in general schools and integration departments. This form of integration can not be understood in a school context that is distinguished by: lack of support services, traditional teaching methods, inappropriate space construction (Kochhar, West & Taymans, 2000). As much as integration is something desired by all teachers, so is the need to find methods and practices through which it can be successfully completed.

The teacher, in his effort to meet the needs of all children, needs to use a variety of teaching approaches in order to be effective in educating his students. The teaching approaches that will be chosen should promote active learning, encourage collaboration between students, cultivate critical thinking and provide incentives for participation in the learning process (Ainscow, 1997). A necessary condition for carrying out the work of teachers is the provision of material assistance (Arbeiter & Hartley, 2002). The need for more classes and teaching aids is considered urgent. The appropriate equipment for students with special educational needs would favor their smooth integration: accessibility to the school, suitable seats, appropriate teaching material adapted to the needs of the child.

Rose (2001) research examines the views of primary school teachers regarding the situations that must prevail for the smooth integration of students with special educational needs. In terms of classroom support, it was argued by both groups (teachers and principals) that the inclusion of a student from the general to the special school is more likely to be achieved if the child is accompanied by support staff. The principals agreed on this, emphasizing the fact that the contribution of the support staff is necessary as if the teacher dedicates more time to the special student he will neglect the rest. Teachers also focus on an ideal environment for children with special educational needs, without exclusions (Proctor & Niemeyert, 2001). They emphasize that their priority is the child (children first) and whatever they want to implement for this primary goal will be to meet his needs. The provision of assistance to the general class teacher by the special educator also plays an important role (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). This relationship should be characterized by cooperation and mutual respect. All specialties (teachers, school principal, psychologist, social worker) that exist within a school with students with special educational needs should form a functional group. The interdisciplinary staff of an inclusive school is called upon to develop cooperative relations with the parents of children with special educational needs, especially in the context of the individualized educational program of the child (Vlachou, 2006). This is because parents are the first to know their child's growth rate, what is important to him and what his abilities are.

In addition, it is necessary to have a curriculum that will be addressed to all students in the class and will recognize the differentiated opportunities and learning needs of each child individually regardless of the educational context in which he is (Rose, 1998).

In summary, the factors mentioned that favor the integration process are: collaborative teaching, support from society, the provision of appropriate specialist teaching staff, the use of effective teaching strategies, the participation of children in teaching, the inclusion staff to always be available, working well with the parents of the children and setting individual goals for each child's special abilities (Gibb et al., 2007). All these conditions for the promotion of integration mentioned so far are the necessary elements that motivate participation in the learning process to all students. These conditions also enable children with severe disabilities attending special schools to go to general (Rose, 1998). However, many argue that general schools are not the most suitable to accommodate students with special educational needs due to the many shortcomings and obstacles mentioned in the next section.

Most schools in their current form are unsuitable to receive students with disabilities (Zoniou – Sideri, 1996). The research reported above by Gibb et al. (2007) also collected the factors that are an obstacle to the smooth implementation of integration. According to the findings, these factors are: inappropriate teaching strategies, lack of socialization of the student, low academic ability of children, diversity of staff views on inclusion, stress on the part of parents of students with special educational needs. Furthermore, the general education teachers claimed that the successful integration will take place only if the child participates in the regular curriculum, while the staff of the special school did not emphasize this. The teacher's negative attitude towards integration is

an obstacle to the student's successful integration. This denial may have to do with the new roles that the implementation of integration entails (Padeliadu & Lampropoulou, 1997).

An important finding is that children who have been taught by teachers with positive attitudes toward inclusion have been found to have significantly higher academic levels than children who have been taught by teachers with less positive attitudes towards education (Monsen & Frederickson, 2004). This understanding is particularly important as it will enable us to assess how and in what direction to intervene and strengthen the participation, interaction and development of meaningful relationships between children in the classroom, improving school integration and social acceptance of children with special educational needs. Another obstacle is the lack of cooperation between special and general teachers in the general class and the lack of knowledge of the latter (Vlachou, 2006). The ineffective implementation of the integration is due to the large groups of children, the lack of staff, the lack of training of teachers in matters of special pedagogy and inclusive education in the general school.

The above are obstacles for the successful integration of children with special needs and create situations that make it difficult for all children to attend. Attending general school is mentioned as an alternative in case the parents consciously give up securing a place in the special school or in cases where they can do it alone in a larger group (Zoniou – Sideri, 1996).

The school integration of children with special educational needs is a precondition for the smooth integration of these children in society. The role of the school is to educate all children taking into account their particular skills and personality, so as to promote their development: learning, psychological and social. Positive research results have from time to time highlighted the importance of integration into the social development of the child with special educational needs, as they state that:

a) it is a process that provides many opportunities for social interaction of children with and without special educational needs, something that can not be achieved if they are in separate educational contexts (Jenkins, Speltz & Odom, 1989),

b) significantly improves the social development and behavior of children with special educational needs (Kalambouka et al., 2007),

c) gives the opportunity for students with special educational needs to be active members of the curriculum as it promotes the cultivation of academic and social skills (Coster & Haltiwanger, 2004),

d) enhances the participation of people with special educational needs and in other contexts of meeting them fellow human beings of typical development (Coster & Haltiwanger, 2004) and

e) creates a positive attitude in typically developing children towards disability and the disabled person (Odom, 2002).

Conlusions

The necessity of the practice of integration lies in the fact that children with special educational needs go from dependence to independence, form their personal identity and expand the values, attitudes and social standards that govern the social system in which they operate and live. However, there are those who express strong concerns and concerns about the inclusion programs, as they claim that more time and attention is devoted to children with special educational needs, resulting in neglect of other students (Heflin & Bullock, 1999). In order to achieve the social development of children with special educational needs, the role of the school and especially of the special educator becomes essential. But beyond the integration efforts of special educators, an important factor in enhancing the social interaction of the students attending the integration department is the type of program that is followed and the extent to which it provides for social development activities. However, the effectiveness of such intervention programs, with social orientation, requires their start from the first school years.

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