

Teaching challenges in inclusive classrooms

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Abstract

Greater attention and new spaces are given to the process of teaching children with special needs in the Albanian school settings. The growing numbers of this target group is developing awareness of many actors that are responsible for developing a normal process of education.

The presence of children with special needs in "inclusive" classrooms makes teachers more alert to work with them and to better understand their individual characteristics. When each student is perceived as a person With individual characteristics, then teaching needs to adapt to the skills and needs of any student. Thus adapting teaching to any student skills and needs leads to "differentiated instruction", and each student with special needs requires an individualized education plan (IEP). In each class the teacher needs to collaborate with a multidisciplinary group so as to design and implement IEP.

But how is this reality presented in our classrooms? Do teachers have sufficient knowledge to develop an IEP? Is the multidisciplinary group active in the process of planning and implementing?

This study's aim is to evaluate how IEP is implemented in inclusive classrooms while its nature is qualitative. There have been used surveys, interviews and focus groups to collect the qualitative data.

Key terms: IEP, Differentiated instruction, adaptation, Inclusive Classrooms

Introduction

The growth of the number of children with special needs in our classes, deserves and requires more attention. This flexible growth of these children has shown new challenges not only for the teachers, that are really involved with their profession directly with these children, but it involves our educational system as well. The increase of the number of children with special needs is obvious not only in our schools, but in the preschool system either.

The characteristics that these children have, make them more 'specific' and as a challenge itself if we speak about the management of these classes 'inlvoled'. It is necessary that the staff that works with them should be more 'specialised' and the work should be

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more real according to the abilities that each of them has to learn.

This research will deal with the perception of the necessity of the teachers'accomplishment in the preschool system and the elementary levels in 'the included' classes. As we know the education of the children with special needs in our country offers two ways: in the special schools and the normal schools, state and private.

The new contemporary methods in education, as it is the digitalised teaching, have found an obvious usage due to the involvement of ICT. These new aplications have found a suitable environment even in Albanian schools. A precious contribution that brought about a renew in the Albanian education and are almost aplied in a ready environment are the Turkish Colleges. These colleges apply successfully the new models.

As a new and advanced practice, the usage of these methods, has had a great influence in the Albanian education so that it has changed not only in form but even in the content. The usage and the application of the digitalised teaching, by invoving the Smart Board in the class (a renew for Albanian schools), can and should be overspread in all our educational system in the preschool and schooling system.

The application of Smart Board creates a climate so that the teaching process becomes more convenient and acceptable for the children with special needs as well.

This "Magic Board" offers the advantage of being an open window in the enciclopedic contemporary teaching. It increases the active involvement of the students in the teaching process and it is valso highly influenced for a sustainable learning for all the students, for the children with special needs either.

This research overtakes the analysis of the preparation of the teachers as far as the accomplishments of the programs by a 'suitable' education for the students with special needs, and every type of 'support' will help them.

The acknowledge of the problem:

The awareness of the parents to accept their children as they are, and the precise diagnostication of the child for these 'characteristics' of the early childhood makes the work of the educator difficult. As we are aware of the fact that the number of the children diagnosed is smaller with the real number of the children with special needs in our classes.

In appearance it seems as 'a well known problem' but what is important to mention in that research is: 'the possibilities' that the teachers possess to match this teaching method with the abilities and the needs of each one. It is important because in that way the usage and the accomplishments of these contemporary techniques and the latest technology involvement like different types of Smart Boards. They give a hand to these academic knowledgewhich makes it easier to be assimilated even for this type of children.

This is also one of the challenges that we have in connection with the education of these children in the involved education. From the experience and the observation we notice that some teachers do not have the slightest formation on 'the limited ability' or even on 'the problems' that different children have, these children we call 'students with special needs'. But there are also teachers that do not involve these children and abandon them by sitting them in the end of the classroom.

Parents should not be pleased only by the fact that their children are involved in the normal schools but they should insist on involving and integration of the children with special needs in the educational process. They should be active and play a vital role and helpful in the great mission with these children by having a present information on the

development or the changes that his or her child has, and what is more to be an active part in the working plan accomplishment for the development of their children.

These 'challenges' are connected with the possibility of the matching of the services, that in the real case means the matching of the teaching in connection with the abilities and the needs that these students have. It has also to do with the matching of the curriculum which these children work with. This 'matching' should be realized and act with 'special' programs since the early childhood.

Research goal

The goal of this research is to analyse the perception from the teachers part, for a 'differentiated' contemporary teaching based on the needs and the abilities of each student for a highly sustainable teaching. The awareness and the constant training of the teaching staff towards the usage of the methods and contemporary strategies will make this teaching process more worthful. The perceptions that will be analysed will include the characteristics of these children within the class; how well prepared seem to be the teachers to make it possible a contemporary teaching suitable depending on the needs and the abilities that these children have to learn and evry kind of support that should be helpful for them.

This research will create the possibility for a real useful information, to help those that are responsible for the decision making that has to do with the teachers in the involved classes. A great help will even be for the students that are training themselves in the schools. Despite the fact that the research is limited mostly in Durres city, its results are helpful even for the other cities. It is helpful because the involvement of these children in the involving classes is almost similar to that of the Durresi Quarter.

Research questions

The questions of the research addressed to the perception of the teaching work connected with the involvement of the children with special needs in the normal classes are:

- What are the needs that the teachers think the students with special needs have if they are integrated in normal classes?
- What are the challenges that these students will face for the findings of these needs for example PEI?
- What kind of support do these teachers need for the discovery and the conception of these children?

The focus of this research is the perception of the teachers connected with the preparation and the efficiency of their educational work even the children with special needs.

The first question refers to the academic aspect as well as the aim for an interference' in the teaching programs based on the abilities and the needs that these children with special needs in the preschool system and the elementary system; interference that the teachers should think for the possibility of the involvement in the educational process and the matching of the educational equipments in a way that these children become active in the class.

The second question has a look on the time that the teachers pay on the process of planning and predicting the specialized services (Individual Educational Planning) for the children with special needs.

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The third question analyses the access of the equipments and materials from the part of the teachers for the creation of the specialized activities, as well as the access of the teachers and students towards the new technology in the teaching process (the presence of the Smart Board in the class). Not forgetting the accesss of the teachers towards training on the usage of the techniques and the new methods for the education of these children etc.

Data collection

The information is gathered by the interviews, observation and the focus group with the teachers of the preschool system and that of the Elementary level. The interviews made are gathered in the schools of the Durres Quarter. A great help in the collection towards the number of the students with the special needs spread in the respective classes based on the age has given: the figures given by The Regional Educational Directory of Durrës, ZA Kruja and ZA Fushë-Kruja. But by observations resulted that the number of these students in these classes is bigger than the number declared from the statistics office. This happens because not all the students are shown with the medical report based on the 'problem' that they have.

Sample aim and population

The research is limited only for the preschool system and that of the Elementary Level in the Durrësi Quarter (involved the classes of the city and those of the villages of Durrës and Krujë). The aimed sample: *teachers and the involving classes*. The aim of this selection is to study the work and task of these children and the way how they perceive the work with these children. The research will be qualitative where will be given research cases (the classes where are integrated the children with special needs)

The timed frame of the the gathering of the datas involved the lasting time: The 2nd Semester Academic year 2010-2011 as the Academic year 2011-2012, involving the research work of the collection and the working of the datas. The permission for this study to make interviews, observations and the focus group is declared by (Regional Educational Directory Durrës). The analysis of the datas developed simultaneously with the development of the interviews (evidences on the interviews). Materials from the meetings with the focus group are archieved in the form of CD/s and the printed photos. There can't be classified the datas if we can't explain the meaning of each classification and category, so that in the direct way the interpretation of the datas from the interviews, observations, and the focus group, has made it possible the classification of these datas. The gathered datas for this study are interpreted with the goal to analyse the topics and the general concepts. This is a process that is developed simultaneously with the process of the datas gatherings.

From the observations, interviews and the meetings of the focus groups that are organized, there are collected worthfuland valuable information from the concrete work of the teachers that have had or have got such students in their classes. The given experience a great and interesting evidence of the work full of passion and devotion but very difficult of these teachers. The attitudes of the teachers towards their work with these children will be grouped in two groups. In the first group will be involved those children that work with passion where these children have found success even small but promissive. In the second group will be involved those teachers that 'abandoned' these children with special needs, or they do not integrate them in the classes.

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Perceptions

People perceive the information by the sense of seeing, hearing, tasting, standing and the smelling. For the aims of this study, perception will refer to the inner interpretation that the individual does himself, the gathered information from the numerous experiences in the environment around that means the class (the students) – teaching process – learning. In this way, every student (teacher), reaches the conclusions and reacts towards the environment around based on the personal perceptions. This 'subjective reality' involves perceptions, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and the confidence of the persons. A goal of this study is to understand the subjective reality of the teachers in connection with the presence of the students wih special needs.

The restrictions of the research

This research is restricted because of the numbers of cases of the study of the students with special needs.

To minimize this restriction, it is selected the Case Study as a qualitative research method. From the wide spectrum of the cases that contains the grouping 'students with special needs' are selected cases where in the class are taught the authistic and Down children. This research is focused on the perceptions of the educational task of the teachers in the Preschool System and the Elementary Level. The results can be considered as specific or as capable of reaching the general conclusions. This happens because Durrësi Quarter offers the most diverse population of the country, with the 'migrations' that have happened in these last 20 years. Every effort is made to avoid the mistakes by using as much information as possible. A research of the perceptions of the personal work, can be called selflimited. This teaching was observed in 'real conditions' in the classes where are integrated even children with special needs. This research will deal with the perceptions of the subjective realities of the teachers in these classes. Yet, it is carefully shown the datas as representative of the feelings or the perceptions of the teaching task by these teachers

Reconsidering of the literature

The increase of the number of students with special needs, and especially of the children with authism, means not only a national problem but even international. That is the reason why we think to stop in details to make a summary of this 'global problem'.

This reflect the attempts of many researchers to reconsider the right literature, to answer the requests of this situation. A beforehand analysis of the literature discovers a worthful information for the identification and the diagnostication of the children with special needs. In the literature it is stressed the identification of these 'problems' since the early childhood, even before the age of three, as we can not pretend for the cure of this 'problem' but to lessen this 'problem' and the integration in a gradual way of the child towards a more social life.²

These datas and the increasing number of these children as well makes it necessary the scientific research about the current programs and the educational strategies for the Preschool System and that of Elementary Level. Most of the information collected from the different literature seem to be general, while the necessary information for the teachers on the 'Differentiated work of the teachers with these children' and the way how

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to act in the specific practices' seem to be more difficult to be found out, but there is a lack of information in connection with the perceptions of the teachers about their work with these children as well as the needs these children to learn . This kind of information will be more valuable for the teachers' work with these children because they have a lot of difficulties in the framing of Individual Educational Planning. What is more there are cases when it worked without this Individual Educational Planning. Various information focus mostly on more grown up children than those of Preschool System or Elementery level.

The previous research studies performed in this field show the characteristics of these children. One of the challenges noticed is the early identification of the phenomenon and the early intereference (in the early stages). The literature shows that there are positive steps from the physicists and specialists of this field in the early identification of the 'problem' at children. But we can also pityingly find that there exist miss-conceptions and misunderstandings connected with the phenomenon of the children with special needs, as well as the following services towards this category of children. The literature points out the needs for a better treatment more detailed of the pediatrician, as well as other specialists: psychologists, psychiatrists etc, and this will make them capable of identifying the symptoms since the early childhood, 'specific' problems that are shown in each case.

Many authors of the referring literature, express the need for a better research on the educational practices and underline the multi variations of the methods that can be used regarding this 'individualised' teaching. The Applied Behaviour Analysis and its associated techniques are considered very effective at most of the children. Anyway, the literature states that the programs for children with special needs must be individualized and to take into consideration 'individuality' that each child shows. It is required an intereference with scientific and research origine. In this research will be described and analysed a number of interefering methods on the 'models' of the differentiated teaching in the involved classes.

About the involved education

It is said and discussed a lot on the involving education. Its concept varies from the narrow point of view, as: 'involved' education considered as a 'attempt to educate people with intellectual disabilities by integrating them closer to the proper structure of the educational system". Seen from a wider point of view the involving education is considered as 'leading' principle to defend the education for all the education systems that profit from the diversity, intending to create a society simply more democratic.'.

The involving education in the wide point of view is meant as a process by means of which the school should try to answer all the tudents as individuals and accepting them and integrating them in the education process with the diversity that they are.

Involvement, in its broader meaning, is the process of the increasing of the participation and the decrease of the excluding, which means to participate, to know acceptance and respect for all and the involvement in the process of learning and the social activities, it means the maintenance of the individual development, feeling that they are part of this society. The system of the involving education, which not only involves a wider range of students, it differentiate the education according to that variety.

The difference between the concepts "involvement" and "integration' is very important. Involvement means a wider concept, even though integration is an attempt towards involvement of the children with special needs in the general system of education,

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it is not the same with involvement.

Different authors (Soder, 1991; Jordan and Powell, 1994; Major, Pilj dhe Hegarty, 1997) stated that integration is performed after leaving the child out of activities, as a way of avoiding him.

Integration can result in the association of the general school program, facing the needs of the students with special needs, but this is not enough regarding the involvement. In the worst case integration leads only to physical presence of the children with special needs in the normal schools (unfortunately as it is happening in some classes that have already been noticed).

But integration does not mean simply the movement of the students from special schools into normal schools and not even matching of the children with special needs to school, but it means the matching of the school towards the needs of all the students.

The term involving education is mostly used nowadays in our country, but in most of the cases it is meant as integration rather than involvement of the children with special needs in normal schools. Involvement means affiliation which means that the children with special needs belong to the community of school students, that participate emotionally in this community and are accepted by them equally. The classes inside the normal schools (as the model of the ex/school "Maliq Muço" in Durrës City, October 1974), are examples of the integration. The inclusion of the students with special needs in normal classes, without the cooperation of other students, is a bad example of integration.

Advantages of the involving classes:

- The students of the normal schools are a precious help for the academic achievement of the students with special needs in education;
- Normal students, with the help of the teachers, are very good helpers for the students with special needs;
- A student in the involving classes offers more help to a student with limited abilities regarding his or her association;
- The coliving in the schools with the children with limited abilities, teaches other children that the human values are foundamnetal for the social cooliving, such as compassion, sympathy, and solidarity.

Not only for the students but also for the teachers involving education is very important and helpful because it makes them more aware of their role in the citizenship formation of the children. In this the education of the children is better to be common; so the children raised together, learn how to colive as adult by accomplishing common tasks. Furthermore, the involving education has a longliving effect not only for the academic formation, but for the psychological development and the wellbeing of the children as well.

Disadvatages of the involved classes:

Warnock (2005) stated that in the involved education it can have negative circumstances for the children with special needs, as they feel that:

- Excluded from their peers, (influence of their parents as well), while in the special small schools they are involved and try the feeling of affiliation that is so important for them, (p15).

- Yet, Warnock, defend the idea that the special education is favourable, especially for the children with autism and the behavious disorder.³ These schools meet the needs of the specific needs, in comparison with general school.

About the integration of the children with the special needs in normal schools.

'The integrating education is very important not only for children with limited abilities, but even for the healthy children, — says Docent Catherine Katerina Carajova, lecturer in the Department "Special Pedagogy" University of Sofia. — In a class, where there are children with disabilities the other students are more tolerant, more human, and since the early age they are taught how to feel themselves more responsible to help their friends with disabilities. And all of this leads to the influence of their development as personalities'.

The word integration is an English word which means: to link the part or the sides of something in one, as a component undividable part of it, link and blend them in one unit during the development⁴. The word 'integration 'in the context of the children with limited abilities, we will use in the meaning "The connection of this category of children with the other part of the society, as a component part undividable of this society".

The integration and the isolation are not two respectively exclusive concepts.⁵ Some forms of integration can be confused to an extent that it can be seen as isolation, and both of them can survive within the only school, in different forms.

Integration or involvement of the students with limited abilities is faced through a series of organisational systems, for example in the special schools, special schools connected with normal schools, units in the massive camping and in the normal schools which are called "special classes". It is required nowadays the interest about the quality of the education of the children with special needs in the normal schools where 'involvement' is the main strategy for the achievement of the goals.

Integration means the total acceptance of the children with limited abilities in the normal world. To integrate means to impose in all the aspects of the school, the burden of the evaluation of the social functions of the child, partly or totally not allowed by the incapability, as well as the usage of the other functions of the child. To integrate means to insert the child with special needs in the daily life of the school and the reality of every moment.

Lastly integration means to put the child in the world of the real motivations, to free him from the stimulated experience within the special school, to involve in the stages of the normal scool so that it can be considered closer to the normal environment, with the personality of the child, with the age and his needs for self identification and autonomy.

When we speak for integration as a concept it has to do with children with limited abilities, we should not confuse it with 'subject integration' which is known as 'an integrated learning', which is a successful practice that is being used more and more in our schools. This way of teaching, makes it possible, as for a single topic, to gather information from some other subjects at the same time, increasing the interest and their motivation.

We should point out the difference between the term integration that is a general concept and that which is called Involving Education. With integration we do not understand only the physical presence of the child with limited abilities in the normal

^{3.} Warnock, M. (2005)

^{4.} Turku, A. "Hyrje në edukimin Special"

^{5.} Hegerty, S. (1993)

world involving them in the normal schools, but integration has to do with the helpful role that the parents, sisters, brothers and other persons that are closer to the child with special needs, involving them as much as possible in their daily activities, by reaching in this way the social, linguistic and mental development of the children that need.

In fact this term is used even in other fields with other contexts. It has to do with all the people of the society, people with limited abilities or not, in this way we have economic, political, sportive, religious scientific and cultural integration etc.

To avoid the misunderstandings, it is advised to use the term involving education. This term has to do with the category of children with special needs, involving all these children with Special Needs in Education. (NSE), in the classes and normal schools, despite the nature and the level of the disabilities and difficulties.

The challenges of the contemporary teaching in Albanian

The application of the methods and contemporary technologies that are widely used in education, have been involved and has become part of the education even in Albanian schools. As a new and advanced practice, the usage of these new methods and techniques practice has influenced on our education, making it to change in form and in content. The usage and the application of the method Game Based Learning, as a renew, can and should be overspread in all our educational system and especially in the Albanian Language subject in the Elementary Level, so that it can be more suitable and assimilated even for the children with special needs.

Smart Board – a new brand interactive tool – an equipment where is learnt by playing in groups, it is used in class as 'the smart board with its magic stick'.

This "magic class" where it is worked with the moto: PLAY-THINK- DANCE -ENJOY- SING -LEARN, should be the philosophy of our school. Smart Board, connected with internet, placed in front of the students between two classical boards, is closer and further for the students, that are eager for global knowledge.

"Magic board" offers the advantages of being an open window of the world contemporary encyclopedia that is every time directed by Web, a hardworking assistant of every teacher and which is more a friend and a game mate for children.

The implementation of this contemporary technology has the disadvantage because it has a higher financial price and a noncorresponce with the proper level of the teachers with the advanced educational technology.

The model of the contemporary educational involving Digital Technology.

Smart Boards are:a combination of class board with the power of a computer, which has reached the participation and the involvement of all the students with special needs. The educational activities can be blended and structured to create interest and in this way the students can use the ideas and skills learnt and especially the different illustrations in Albanian Language based on Game Based Learning, (GBL).

SMART BOARD in class: we can say that it is very important the facility that Smart Board create to the teachers which perform the method of the centered student teaching. In the Language class it will be much easier for illustrations during the lesson (using readymade figures from the different tales or from the characters that are mostly liked by the children of that age). I The student take an important role in the class and the teachers must avoid the direct speech and create activities that impress the students.

Above all what is an Interactive electronic Board (Smart Board)?

It is a presentational equipment that is connected with the computer. The computeric images are displayed on the white board by means of a video projector, where they can be seen and manipulated (changed/ worked out). The users can control the software in two ways: by computer and by the board. (white board). The participants can add items (signs,notes), or can state or underline by using a pen and other pointed means. Using the stick (a long stick that is led by a click) instead of a mouse, it is easier and more directed even for the children with special needs. The teachers and the students can act and work in the board directly from the board. So it can work simultaneously from the white board and from the computer. Every note or drawing during the explanation can be saved and printed from the Smart Board and from the computer as well

The importance of the differentiated education

The differentiated teaching or 'individualised' in the involving classes will be seen in an advanced way. This teaching is applied for the children with special needs on the bases of the knowledge that the teacher should have, the abilities and the needs of each student.;

PEI (Individual Educational Planning) or as it is called PTI (Individual Teaching Plan), should be considered as a necessity in the involving classes.

- Why do we say necessity?
 - Firstly: if in our schools the teachers have not got Individual Educational Planning, then the situation is a burden especially for the students;
 - Secondly: We find a noninvolvement of the students in the classes, so leaving them 'abandoned';
 - Thirdly: We have an influence on the individual results of the studenst with special needs.

The analysis of the situation in our classes

From the analysis of the present situation in our schools, there can be different thoughts and suggestions that are favourable and helpful for the climate in the involving classes. They can be considered as a solution to the situation more or less problematic that can be observed in these classes.

From the observations performed in the Preschooling and Elementary Level, in Durrës Quarter, we can notice that there are teachers that do not have the Individual Educational Planning;

- From this reality we can recomend:
 - The creation of multidisciplinary commissions that define the educational needs for the children with special needs, on the school base;
 - The matching of the program based on the needs and the abilities of each student. (PEI);
 - The necessity of the presence of the teacher (assistant) or specialist according to the 'problem' that the child shows in class;
 - The matching of the curriculum;
 - The matching of the teaching process based on the needs and the abilities to learn;

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- Constant training on the knwoledge of the teachers with the differentiated or individual education as well as the usage of the new technology, in accordance with the needs of the students;
- The awareness on the usage and performing correctly of the Individual Educational Planning;
- The widely usage of the Smart Board in schools, as they are facilitative equipments for the integartion of the studentes with special needs in the classes.

Advices for parents

- Please learn about "Limited Abilities". More you know about it, more you can help your child and yourself;
- Learn in team (teacher,psychologist,doctor etc), to understand the changes that your child has:
- Do not be ashamed to ask; Tell them (teachers, psychologists, doctors) what you think and what you know;
- Discuss hipothesis;
- Follow the training of your child;
- Talk with other parents that have children with special needs;
- The parents can share practical advices and emotional support;
- Ask the school to test in a continuous and periodical way, to see the achievement.

Advices for the teachers

- Find as many contemporary methods and techniques as possible that are valuable for the education of the children with special needs;
- Give the students much time to finish their tasks in school;
- Show the students the stages how to operate;
- Create a sustainable routine. This helps the students to understand what they expect if the daily routine changes;
- Verify if the students have learnt new attitudes. Give the students the possibility to accomplish his work himself.

What should the teacher predict when he makes the Individual Planning:

To define the short term objective for the child;

- To define the methods that he should use:
- To define the methods that the teacher should use
- To define the aspect that he will involve;
- To define the equipments and the tools that he will use;
- To verify the work that he has made in the accomplishment of this objective in the Individual Educational Planning.
- To make the conclusions in order to correct the lackings observed and to project the future.

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