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**DEALING WITH DISABILITY
FROM A HOLISTIC APPROACH:
STRATEGIES AND PROCEDURES
IN SCHOOL INCLUSION**

**PRACA NAD NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIĄ
W UJĘCIU HOLISTYCZNYM:
STRATEGIE I PROCEDURY SZKOLNE**

Abstract

When stakeholders implement new measures in education Acts, they also involve changes at the school's organizational level. In the field of Didactics and School Organization, these changes allow improvements to offer quality in Education. Focusing on school inclusion, the treatment of students with specific need of educative support can be assumed through the praxis of specific methodological principles, promoting an individualized attention and human, social and material resources. To examine the role of stakeholders when dealing with disability, this chapter focuses on the analysis of how school inclusion is developed in a High School in the Spanish region of Aragón. Thus, this case study (Marcelo & Parrilla, 1991, Yin, 1994, Stake, 1998) has been conducted with an eminently qualitative and descriptive methodology (Cohen & Manion, 1990). The techniques applied have focused on group discussions (Krueger, 1991, Suárez, 2005). The results show there exists a lack of connection between the macro-political and the micro-political level.

Key words: School Organization, Management Team, school culture.

Streszczenie

Wprowadzanie nowych aktów prawnych dotyczących edukacji wywołuje zmiany w szkole na różnych poziomach jej funkcjonowania. W obszarze dydaktycznym i organizacyjnym zmiany te umożliwiają ulepszenie jakości oferty edukacyjnej. Nawiązując do szkolnej integracji, wsparciem edukacyjnym dla uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami mogą być specyficzne zasady promujące indywidualne podejście do człowieka przyjmujące kontekst społeczny i materialny. Tekst ten ukazuje, w jaki sposób realizowana jest integracja w szkole średniej w regionie Aragon (Hiszpania). Artykuł ten został zrealizowany z wykorzystaniem jakościowych i opisowych metod badawczych. Zastosowano technikę dyskusji grupowej. Wyniki badań wskazują na brak powiązania pomiędzy makro- i mikropolityką.

Słowa kluczowe: organizacja pracy szkoły, zespół zarządzający, kultura szkolna.

Introduction

Current Spanish Education Acts approved new measures to face the students' diversity, providing great importance to the process of the identification and assessment of special education needs of students, in order to incorporate them into the most appropriate course. This current Act aims to provide students with the specific education support they need. Inclusive education has been implemented with the introduction of new national education legislation (Organic Act 2/2006, of 3rd of May, of Education; henceforth, Organic Act of Education, 2006).

The main aim is to ease the integration of these students in the education system. Several steps have been taken: diversification of the curriculum, initial vocational qualification programs, hosting plans, tutoring, curriculum organisation and language immersion programs. In this chapter I will analyse the connections to be established between the stakeholders' prescriptions in the macro-political level, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the school needs and culture in the micro-political level – that is, how school organization is set out within the legislative acts and how it should be set out to accommodate with school needs.

Most of the times there exists a lack of connection between those two levels that leads to an individual school action in the development of inclusive education. Even though stakeholders launch new measures to face students' diversity, these measures seem to be far away from what the school actually needs.

Thus, this case study will show the implementation of these measures in a High School both with average students and with those who require specific support, assessing the strengths as well as the weaknesses arising from the institutional prescriptions. Stakeholders should not only be involved in this process; rather, they should promote support to inclusive education institutions.

In the macro-political level stakeholders have implemented the current measures of attention to diversity. Since the creation of these measures and their subsequent coverage and approval in the education legislation, stakeholders have included new ways to address students' heterogeneity. In addition, education inspectors likewise encourage attention to diversity with the creation of curricular adaptations. Last but not least, in the micro-political level, teachers fail to find themselves supported enough when assuming inclusive education.

To develop the measures raised by the stakeholders at the macro-political level in the micro-political level of the school, a joint education performance across the school community is required. Therefore, school staff does their best through the use of material resources, students' grouping and individualized support. If the starting point is far from what values, attitudes and purposes head for, the aim to achieve a genuine inclusive education cannot be reached.

With increasing frequency, we find in our Elementary and High School classrooms students with different learning difficulties and diverse ethnic back-

grounds. Most immigrants keep on arriving in our country in different periods of the academic year and are incorporated in the academic course according to their age. They do not know Spanish and cannot follow normal lessons.

Our Spanish Organic Act of Education (2006) focuses on all education levels but pays particular attention to this kind of student who really requires specific education attention. It pursues the incorporation of these groups of students in the education system depending on their capabilities and needs. In order to provide them with all the attention required, our education systems need specialists to teach these students.

Most of the decisions undertaken are adopted regarding the psycho-pedagogical assessment that the counselor performs. This procedure implies an improvement on previous legislation in the treatment of students with disabilities. Until 2006, the regulations with which the Spanish education system had developed education in all compulsory levels consisted of four education Acts: General Act of Education (1970), Organic Act Regulating the Right to Education (1985), Act for the General Organisation of the Education System (1990) and Organic Act of Participation, Evaluation and Government Schools (1995). But still there is much to do to help disabled people appropriately integrate in society, starting from the education they must receive to be able to participate in the citizenship.

1. An overview of the latest trends in the Spanish education system: stakeholders' prescriptions

Roughly speaking, the current Organic Act of Education (2006) offers significant conceptual changes in our education system that no longer are mere tautologies. So far, the conceptual categorization in Special Education in our country referred to students with specific education needs. The Act for the General Organisation of the Education System (1990) established this label, under which it included normal students and those that, although having education needs, were able to follow the official curriculum in different conditions than the whole class group.

However, the Organic Act of Education (2006) extends that label and incorporates a generic category: Students With Specific Need of Education Support (ACNEAE in Spanish language), formed by five kinds of students with disabilities: those who require an individualized attention different from the ordinary one due to their specific education needs; students who have been incorporated lately in the education system; gifted students that according to the environment where they are grown up need a different education (gypsy students); children who suffer family trauma, and those who have adverse personal and familiar conditions. These four categories can be found in the *Article 71 Principles* of the Organic Act 2/2006, of 3rd May, of Education (Organic Act of Education, 2006).

This Organic Act of Education (2006) defines this category of Students With Specific Need of Education Support in its first section: aimed to Students With Specific Need of Education Support, those who require for a short period of their schooling, or apart from it, certain specific education support and care arising from their disability or severe behavioural disorders¹.

This typology deserves at least a specific counselling intervention depending on the student's characteristics. Therefore, this proliferation of diagnostic categories in the field of Therapeutic Pedagogy shows how old and recurring tautologies have been used over decades in the field of education, more specifically, with reforms or previous education acts. These terms are concepts *ex novo* created with an empty meaning that do not clearly define or even specify core disabilities. Therefore, what kind of education intervention is required for Students With Specific Need of Education Support? Beyond stylistic values, the problem of terminology is evident.

An unnecessarily complex terminology is created, which confuses more than it helps, accompanied by a wordy prose that does not invite reading. However, this terminology suggests that by saying new words, we create new procedures. These procedures do not solve the problems found in Secondary School classrooms. In the present case this is obvious. In 1990, a new group of diagnosis was created with the Act for the General Organisation of the Education System (1990). Gifted students had a quality education tailored to their intellectual needs. Until that time, they had received no specific attention and were trained in the same way as the rest of students of the class group.

Even more, they were considered a nuisance more than a blessing by the teaching staff. This launched a series of measures to create special classes where specialists could teach these students a specific curriculum. However, the Organic Act of Education (2006) includes gifted students in its wide typology of Students With Specific Need of Education Support. It considers that if there are students with great cognitive potential, they should receive an education adapted to their intellectual possibilities. Otherwise, it would be a setback in education.

2. Case study: inclusive education

To achieve an inclusive education and provide students with the specific attention that they need, the school has to develop a real education project according to the students in schools. It should start with an analysis of the social context to confirm reality in a properly contextualized approach. María Moliner High

¹ Official Bulletin of the State: Organic Act 2/2006 of 3rd May of Education: http://www.boe.es/aeboe/consultas/bases_datos/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2006-7899 (Accessed: 14.12.2009).

School² is located in a lower class district in the city of Saragossa. It schools 392 students, 89% (gypsy and immigrants) have special education needs and require specific individual teaching, while 11% attend standard lessons with no specific support. Bilingual students follow a bilingual curriculum promoted by the British Council in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science of Madrid and with the Department of Education, Culture and Sport of Saragossa. They learn 50% of the official curriculum in English and 50% in Spanish. Bilingual groups consist of 13 students. Non-bilingual groups are mostly composed by gypsy students and immigrants.

The diversity prevalent in the Spanish public education system requires highly skilled professionals and the provision of material resources by the Administration. Do we have to reject this kind of population due to the marginality they live with? Is segregation of these students in separate classrooms a solution?

The Organic Act of Education (2006) provides a very broad procedure in school inclusion. But is it possible to provide students with a specific education according to their education needs with the available staff and didactic resources? Are we moving towards a normalized education and school inclusion in High Schools as established in the Organic Act of Education (2006), and seen in the multicultural population of this 21st century? It seems a simple task but it is not.

Any legislation states that schools must take into account their context but this type of schools need to focus not just on the acquisition of specific contents prescribed by legislation but also on realism, globalization of all curricular areas, cooperative education, group work, intercultural education, etc. Some of this aims are promoted by stakeholders but in a quite theoretical level, not answering school needs even not considering their culture.

2.1. Stakeholders of inclusive education: national and regional perspectives

The concepts of inclusion and integration have been taken into consideration by any education discourse for a long time. However, most of the times, students with specific education needs are segregated from the rest of the class group. The principles of inclusion, integration, normalization and equity are present in any pedagogy speeches and legislative education texts.

Authors like Stainback, Stainback and Jackson already showed in 1999 the conceptual change that was introduced in Spain in 2006. This change replaced the old term of *integration* with the more current term of *inclusion*. The reasons were varied.

On the one hand, *inclusion* denotes more precisely the need to include all students in different social and education tasks developed in schools. On the

² Educaracon: http://www.centroseducativosaragon.es/Public/buscador_simple.aspx (Accessed: 20.09.2011).

other hand, *integration*, created by the Act for the General Organisation of the Education System (1990, known as LOGSE in Spanish) was implemented and indeed involved the reinstatement of students at school, accepting the previous exclusion that some had suffered.

Subsequently, the expression of *inclusive schools* was introduced, a concept that refers to the consolidation of an education system susceptible to include each and every student by offering individualised education support. Integration implies the need to adapt to students who have been previously excluded returning them to the average groups. In inclusive education responsibility lies within the professional development of teachers in charge of students with specific education needs in an attempt to satisfy their needs.

W. Stainback and S. Stainback³ indicate that the change created is not only verbal but also conceptual. Under the expression of *inclusive schools* there are other priority parameters such as facing the needs of all students, not just those diagnosed as children with specific education needs. The trends in the field of Education aim at creating a sense of community, an awareness and mutual support to promote the success of all students, by providing equal opportunities for all.

There are other concerns in the development of school inclusion. Gartner and Lipsky⁴ and Stainback and Stainback⁵ (1990, 1992) show special interest in determining the type of work required to develop an appropriate inclusion. They are the defenders of the ethical paradigm and are interested in the issues required to offer an inclusive education. Their interest lies not in ensuring the success of students with special education needs, but it is rather to ensure that all students are a part of a group class, regardless of their abilities, interests, skills, attitudes, family origins, etc.

The goal of the ethical paradigm is to consider that inclusion is the fairest way where all students should be treated with dignity, without having to adapt to specific patterns or be subjected to the standards of the institution. Rather, the ethical paradigm must contribute to the students' diversity. Inclusion is a basic right, not a privilege.

In the context of the ethical paradigm, Stainback and Stainback⁶ identify three reasons that support the creation and development of the inclusive school. Firstly, to give each student the chance to learn to live and work with their peers as something natural that happens in real life. This means that they are integrated in an educational environment and community. Secondly, to eliminate the inher-

³ W. Stainback & S. Stainback (ed.), *Support networks for inclusive schooling: Interdependent integrated education*. Paul Brookes, Baltimore, 1990.

⁴ A. Gartner & D.K. Lipsky, *Beyond special education: Toward a quality system for all students*. "Harvard Educational Review" 1987, no. 57, pp. 367–395.

⁵ W. Stainback & S. Stainback (ed.), *Support networks for inclusive schooling: Interdependent integrated education*. Paul Brookes, Baltimore, 1990.

⁶ Ibidem.

ent effects of segregation when children are in separate rooms, for example, schools and/or special rooms.

Finally, to do what is fair, ethical and equitable. These principles that encourage the development of such schools allow, according to the authors studied, a set of advantages over traditional approaches that try to help students with disabilities or deficiencies forcing their inclusion. If schools really developed an inclusive education, the benefits would be for all the agents involved in the education process and not just for students with special education needs.

Thus, learning communities would be created in order to meet the students' needs with appropriate education support, whether these are immigrants, special education students or students with learning difficulties.

Moreover, teachers' resources and efforts would aim to assess education needs, such as adapting the teaching-learning processes and providing the necessary support to students who request it. Note that in inclusive schools all students are in the regular classroom during the school day; they do not leave and go to a support education classroom. Rather, they get support and individualized attention in the same classroom (Slavin, Leavey & Madden⁷).

The third advantage that Stainback and Stainback⁸ list refers to the possibility of providing social and education support to all students as far as inclusive school provides support, and promotes student's independence, mutual respect and responsibility.

3. Discussion and conclusions

The measures of attention to diversity are an invaluable attempt to improve the teaching conditions in schools. The role of the different stakeholders is essential to improve the education system, but this is not enough if it does not promote the assumption of specific values, attitudes and common purposes in schools. The Education Administration (macro-political level) prescribes aims, basic competences, contents, pedagogical and methodological principles and assessment criteria.

Unless these prescriptions foster teacher's development at school, by providing spare time within the timetable to meet and establish common aims and interests of the institution (micro-political level), they no longer remain as something written with no real implementation. Strategies to face students' diversity must be addressed not only in the legislative acts but also in real specific situa-

⁷ R.E. Slavin, M. Leavey & N.A. Madden, *Combining cooperative learning and individualized instruction: Effects on student mathematics achievement, attitudes, and behaviors*. "Elementary School Journal" 1984, no. 84, pp. 409–422.

⁸ W. Stainback & S. Stainback (ed.), *Support networks for inclusive schooling: Interdependent integrated education...*

tions. Elementary and High schools that have increasing multiculturalism need not only support provided by teachers of Special Education or Therapeutic Pedagogy, but also from the Education Administration.

Most of the times, those issues prescribed by the stakeholders are far away from the school needs. Rather, they must help in the development of education processes. The implementation of methodological principles to promote students' integration and inclusion is not enough.

To face students' diversity in any school, horizontal organization must favour the relationship between and among different forms of learning, by providing students with strategies to train themselves into adulthood, to let them acquire a social inclusion and reduce their risk of exclusion.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (1959), in the Article 28, established the right of all children to get a basic school education based on equality of opportunities, regardless of their cultural, social or ethnic backgrounds.

The current proposal aimed to promote the education of students with specific education needs should be based on continuous learning, on life-long learning, on cooperative learning. Thus it has to focus on respect and acceptance of individual differences. This involves the development of the principles of inclusive education stated in the School Education Project through the active involvement of the staff, through the human, material and technical resources required, and through the support of the stakeholders.

This educational action must promote the teaching-learning processes in a diverse context, sensitive to multiculturalism present in our society and reflected in the didactic intervention on the basis of the principles of multiculturalism. This project builds on the school culture, the values it assumes. It would be appropriate that these values, principles and aims were also undertaken by those raised by the stakeholders in the legislative acts.

Schools that develop an inclusive education should refine the concept of teaching and learning and attune it to the real achievement of the students' priority aims. Only then can we say that the implementation of an innovative methodology in the treatment of compensatory education contributes to overcoming inequalities in education, to spread schooling to disadvantaged, marginal contexts, and to deal with the growing multiculturalism of the classroom. However, other actions to be undertaken by the whole of the school community could be considered to help in this process of education intervention.

For example, the creation of discussion groups, composed by staff members, and in other cases representatives of parents and other education agents, would feed a situation of permanent critical analysis of the school educational development process. The internal and external assessment of the School Educational Project would complement the performance of different education agents with the input of external agents, experts in education innovation, with the participa-

tion in dissemination and discussion forums on education innovations (with gypsy students, immigrants, disabled...). Those discussion forums could be developed both in school or online.

Finally, the participation of teachers in life-long learning processes to improve their teaching skills, get more strategies when dealing with diversity, etc.

Moreover, the organisation of life in the classroom in such schools is especially relevant. It requires the assumption of methodological principles set out in the School Educational Project, in order to promote students' interaction, equality of opportunities and non-discrimination.

Teachers must establish flexible student groupings, raised within the class group or groups, involving two different groups of the same cycle. Strictly speaking, a non-graduate teaching within each cycle could be implemented, provided that the non-graduation work would focus on the development of instrumental techniques. Depending on the aims of each didactic task, both strategies could be used.

Flexibility in planning and the use of space and time must be open: flexibility in students' grouping requires acting in accordance with the classroom space distribution or cycle spaces and teachers have to distribute time depending on the activities to be developed.

The so-called schools of difficult performance are still a challenge for teachers. The principles of inclusive education contribute to the decline in the number of illiterate population. They provide a solid foundation in the establishment of inclusive education, adapted to the students' needs, their difficulties and being compensatory to reach equal opportunities in education.

It is not enough to provide the conditions to make smaller groups in the classroom, or to obtain support from specialist teachers in Therapeutic Pedagogy and Special Education, as stated by the stakeholders of macro-political level.

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