FOR A PEDAGOGY OF INCLUSION. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract: *Research on inclusive education began in 1990 and involved various organizations and professionals. Researchers looked at inclusive education as a complex and controversial concept, a direction of change for the educational systems. This study presents a synthesis of the research on inclusive education covering three periods. The first studies have analyzed which place is better for schooling of children with disabilities (the question where?). In the second period, the preoccupation was to find ways for teaching all children together (the question how?). Nowadays researchers are looking more for individual solutions and new pedagogical perspectives to understand children learning in order to suggest new changes. More recently the need for constructing a pedagogy of inclusion appeared: multidisciplinary, non-categorical, and based on individual support and cooperation and providing effective learning environments for all.*

Key words: *research, inclusive education, pedagogy of inclusion.*

1. Introduction

Inclusive education has concerned schools and educational systems in the last decade of the last century, both in Europe and in the United States of America. The first attempts were made to change the special education to meet the needs of the children with disabilities. The more recent studies highlight that it is time for inclusive education to be no longer considered just a problem to be solved for the special schools and, respectively, for the optimum integration of the children with disabilities or other special education needs, but rather a challenge - problem for all schools reaching out all students (Ferguson, 2008). This is perceived as a GOAL, a continuous improving PROCESS of education institution or as a set of practices for learning and maximizing the potential of all students (UNESCO, 2008).

This study aims to make a synthetic international overview of the concerns of researchers in the area, and to highlight the current directions and trends. The research and studies, briefly presented here, reflect both the European vision on inclusive education and the vision in the USA and Canada. Desktop analysis of the research and

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studies on inclusive education and identification of the building trends for a new pedagogy was performed, based on three criteria: progress steps, analysis perspectives & main themes and defining the tendencies.

2. Progress Steps of Research

   Starting from the definition of inclusive education, as a social and individual process, being built step-by-step, through the evidence of practical application, three periods can be identified in the development of research and studies on inclusive education:
   1. The best (optimum) schooling environment. The first period, starting with the '90s, uses research and studies as a basis of argumentation on the reconstruction need of the educational policies and practices. Various models have been launched and, starting from the practical applications, the dimensions, particularities and requirements of the inclusive education have been identified. In this stage, research have sought to demonstrate the benefit of this approach, through the school results, particularly of the children with disabilities attending in the most inclusive environments. Such research focused on the school environment and on the advantages and disadvantages of the school types, reflected in the results of the disabled children (mainstream school vs. special school). We can call this period as a period of argumentation of the value of the educational environment and the period of seeking answers to questions: where is the better place for schooling children with disabilities and how big are the differences between the results of the students in different schooling environments (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994; Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1994). This remains a topic still concerning the researchers although the arguments are very clear for the mainstream schooling environment. The most extensive longitudinal study on the effects of the education of children with disabilities was conducted in USA, included 11,000 students and showed that the time spent in the regular school environment is positively correlated with high scores in standardized math and reading tests and negatively correlated with school absences and inadequate behaviors. Long-term effects have also been identified through their participation in higher education, employment and living an independent life (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006).
   2.   Solutions and practical methods for challenges. In the second period, after 2000, the characteristic of the research was to seek for ways to respond to the educational needs of each student. It is the analysis stage of strategies, methods and instruments / tools for addressing individualities against diversity but also the stage of formalizing actions, to support the individual needs of each student, based on beneficial interactions for all. Research has extended to find economic, social, individual and psychological arguments of inclusive education. It can be called the period of research of practice and approach of pedagogy from diversity (Sheets, 2005, 2009) and multiculturalism perspective (Rasheed & Anci, 2005), where the main concern is to identify successful and good practices, as well as the existing barriers and to find ways to remove them. An outlined direction is the study that highlights the value of collaborative practices - co-operation among pupils, between teachers, co-teaching and peer support (Farrell, 2000; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Mikulovic, Vanlerberghe, & Bui-Xuan, 2010). It

identifies the need for research-action, as well as the development of certain research to build a coherent pedagogical approach (Farrell, 2000), paving the way for a major change of approach and a pedagogical reconstruction.

3. Pedagogy of Inclusion

In the current stage, the researchers' concerns are for the reconstruction of a well-defined field/ domain within the education sciences, started from the values and principles initially brought into the inclusive approach of education, to come up with multidisciplinary solutions and development paths for the education systems, on the dimensions of a pedagogy of inclusion. The studies start from clarifying the concept of inclusive education to recommending solutions for training new attitudes and social perceptions to enable the implementation of the inclusion model. This stage develops a pedagogy of inclusion, much more complex than the pedagogy of diversity and multiculturalism, which tends to be confused with (Lewis & Norwich, 2005; Florian, 2014; Ferguson, 2008; Burgstahler, 2012; Allman, 2013). Research looks for and proposes solutions for concrete cases but equally promotes the multidisciplinarity of the domain (Allman, 2013), analysis and shaping of new concepts (universal design, assistive means, reasonable adaptation, etc.) as well as reformulation and clarification of the main concepts: inclusive education, educational inclusion, social inclusion, so on. The construction of inclusive education is a continuous adapting process of education and school to individual and social needs through policies, practices and ethos.

It is currently emerging that the development of inclusive education systems can only occur if schools, as central / core education institutions, become more inclusive. In other words, the inclusive practices, demonstrated and efficient, lead to inclusive cultures that lead to adequate and dynamic policies, as policies deeply influence practices and attitudes.

The research findings of over 50 studies in the USA show that inclusive education at school level involves the restructuring of the entire educational program and requires continuous and constant and continuous measurement of the practice models and outcomes/ results. Thus, it highlights the need for more and more research and reflection on the proposed solutions. Extremely interesting are the conclusions of the current research that redefines the purpose of school through the child's perspective and not just through the social perspective - to make all children happy at school and become further active citizens of society (http://weac.org/articles/specialedinc/).

The delimitation of the three stages is not strict, the current research being mixed, focusing on the above-mentioned types. In this respect, there are numerous current studies which value the efficient and good practice examples to find the ways to motivate teachers and politicians towards a key change of the educational model that is equitable to all students, focusing on quality inclusive education.

3.1. Analysis perspectives

The analysis perspectives capture and analyze the main key elements (as a process, principle, action and attitude) of this educational approach, as well as the priority

aspects of the progress of special need education and beyond. Much research focuses either on identifying the importance of promoted values and principles, or on analysing the concrete practice aspects centred on identifying the barriers that prevent the realization of the fundamental right to education of children/ people with disabilities and for others with special educational needs. As nowadays the definition of disability starts from the human rights perspective, inclusive education also seeks ways for equal opportunities, to eliminate discrimination and remove all barriers to ensuring everyone's right to education in a complex and changing world.

An important thing, identified by individual researchers but also by the numerous reports of international bodies and of the states of USA and Europe implementing inclusive education, is related to the complexity of national and international contexts. Depending on this awareness, the discourse on inclusive education is increasingly linked to, but not limited to, education of diversity and intercultural education (Armstrong et al., 2009 cit. in National Center on Inclusive Education at the Institute on Disability, 2011b). Thus, the socio-cultural, political, historical and economic context differences that differentiate inclusive education models are analysed and listed. The research identifies a certain specificity of the implementation of the international legislative provisions in each country and different current manifestations. With regard to the challenges of each country, studies highlight common values and principles, examples of different application and hence, different interests, pressures and priorities (Winter & O'Raw, 2010; Smyth et al., 2014).

3.2. Common theme of research

Analysing the literature and research of recent years, a UK meta-study synthesizes (with generalization value) the following research themes that are based on the principles and values of inclusion (Winter & O'Raw, 2010): Definition of inclusion, efficiency evidence of the educational model, the analysis of principles, the solutions to have success and the inclusive school model.

In the research of practices in different countries, the study above mentioned identifies common elements (Winter & O'Raw, 2010): the priority themes of each system, physical characteristics of the environment, school policies, individualized educational plan, student interactions, personnel policy, school staff, school external relations, progress measurement and assessment, teaching-learning strategies, curriculum.

In 2012, Sheila Riddell coordinated a study on inclusive education and its interrelations to disability and special educational needs in Europe, as requested to NESSE (a professional network of experts in UK) by the European Commission for Education and Culture. Among the conclusions to be reminded is the concern of all states for the implementation of inclusive education but also the many barriers in implementing the values and principles of inclusion, the diversity of definitions and the variety of concepts (even confusions) related to the implementation of inclusive education practices in education, as well as the different models for identifying special education needs (SEN). The first place of the recommendations is the training of teachers and necessity of auxiliary equipment in school.

By analysing the situation of inclusive education in Europe, the French Council dealing with people with disabilities / handicap (CFHE, http://www.cfhe.org/) together with the FIRAH organization (2015), identifies, in a synthesis study (requested by the Education and Culture Directorate of the European Commission) from all the analysed documents, a general tendency of transition from integration to school inclusion, while the common model is given by the adaptation of the school environment to meet the specific needs of the students. There are four inclusive education vectors in Europe: types of schooling for students with disabilities, identification of special educational needs (CES), elaboration of the Individualized Educational Plan (PEI) and teacher training

4. Frequently asked Research Questions

During this period, among the important research questions asked all over the world in analysing inclusive education (centred on the issue of people with disabilities and other SEN) we mention:
• What are the legislative provisions illustrating the political will to apply fundamental rights (including access to education) to all people, centred on people who are vulnerable by disability and / or belonging to a marginalized and discriminated group?
• How are schools organized and what resources they have to receive all children?
• How do schools use existing resources to meet the educational needs of all children and of each individual child?
• How is reasonable adaptation for children with disabilities and / or other SEN and how is the curriculum adapted for these students?
• How the Individualized Educational Plans, are designed and implemented as a tool that covers both the student's educational needs and provides the personalized adaptation of the curriculum?
• How is each student's participation in learning planned and implemented?
• How the collaborative practices are achieved?
• How assessments are adapted and how is the progress of students with learning difficulties certified?
• How are teachers trained to respond positively to the different needs of the students?
• How do all educational actors interact and collaborate within and outside the school?
• How is the positive attitude towards inclusion formed and maintained?
• How do parents and the community involve, how is the educational partnership formed at school level?
• What are the steps of the universal design?
• The basic question of a pedagogy aspiring to inclusion: How specialized is teaching to children with disabilities and / or other special education needs?
The question regarding the benefits of separate learning environments seems to be overcome in the international research. Moreover, in the USA, studies indicate that, after 1970, no study has demonstrated any benefits in cognitive learning for students with intellectual / developmental disabilities when educated in separate environments. (Bunch & Valeo, 1997; Falvey, 2004 cit. in Mikulovic et al., 2010).

An important topic and question is related to the practical ways to approach the education of children with severe disabilities within the mainstream schools. Overall, research has led to the conclusion that, if the necessary adaptations and changes are made to the classroom environment, students with severe disabilities are more likely to be involved in activities appropriate to their age and to the general curricular tasks. A study considered by UNICEF (2012) as a comprehensive review of all evidence of research on children with severe disabilities in inclusive education in the USA demonstrates that, despite a better teacher-student relationship in segregated contexts, children in inclusive classrooms have better results, although it has been found that the time allocated for education for those with severe disabilities is longer. This time is partly needed because of the mobilization of students without disabilities who help or even provide the teaching-learning process for their colleagues (Boyd, Seo, & Ryndak, 2005).

Much research analyses the conditions and effects of support received by students with disabilities and/ or other SEN by engaging social relationships with peers of the same generation. In terms of this, a research question commonly found in the current studies refers to the benefits of inclusive education for typical students and, generally, the answer is positive. American, Canadian and European research has the same results on the benefits for typical children. The analysis of over 50 studies and meta-studies conducted in 2011 at the US National Center on Inclusive Education (2011a) demonstrates the value of interactions with children with disabilities for the typical children.

The specialized teachers with whom they work in separate environments cannot supplement the regular, normal relationships that all children need. The advantage is thus identified both for children with disabilities and other SEN, as well as for typical children. The latter, since they teach and communicate with the others, acquire new forms and means of understanding and communication. Most of current studies identify the benefits of a common development environment for all children and the short and long term social benefits for the typical children working together with disabled children and other SEN.

Thus, we can conclude that, if at first, evidence was looking for to highlight the advantages of children with disabilities and other SEN through their schooling with the typical ones, now, especially from the social perspective, more and more advantages for all students are identified (Waldron, Cole, & Majo, 2001, cit. in Mikulovic et al., 2010).

The support received by children with disabilities and other SEN involves and train both students and teachers and helps develop successful schooling practices for all. Research also demonstrates the support required for ordinary class teachers through their initial and continuing training, as well as the need for teachers to have their classroom experiences valued (TASH, 2017).

4.1. Common characteristics and research specifics

The definition of inclusive education proposed in various studies and research is made in the already recognized dimensions: international and national educational policies; educational practices at school level, the development of as inclusive as possible cultures.

The concept of inclusive education is viewed differently and even in controversial terms in the vision of the education sciences. Its connection with the special education, where it started from, makes you often forget its comprehensive essence, open to all children. Controversies also arise from the degree and modality of acceptance and implementation of the values and principles promoted by inclusive education.

Another important feature of research and studies in this field is their internationalization and positive comparative analyses that value each country-specific experience. Current research conducted by the international organizations concluded, in a comparative and correlated way, the implementation of inclusive education, emphasizing the good practices, successes and barriers that have particular solutions in each country. The conclusions of this research highlight the value of the socio-cultural context in the implementation of inclusive education and the concrete aspects of implementing the values and basic principles in these frameworks. Therefore, we can exemplify with research from prestigious USA and European universities, professional associations (Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education - USA), as well as European and international organizations (UNESCO, UNICEF, OECD, EURYDICE, FIRAH, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education- EASNIE, so on). As an example, EASNIE has made 22 large-scale studies over the last 12 years. Studies made in a broad and extremely complex context, characterized by many differences, policies, practices and components of the didactic process from the perspective of the principles of inclusive education formulated in the existing international documents and assumed by most countries in Europe and in the world. For the education system in our country these results are extremely useful. Unfortunately, the data in Romania is missing from these studies because we are not a member of the said European agency (EADSNE, 2013; OECD, 2012).

It can be easily identified that the purpose of all research on this educational field is to provide evidence of the importance and need for a major paradigm change in the implementation of education but also for finding the most appropriate pathways and education solutions for the new generations, focusing on children requiring additional support.

In short, all research that examines this area identifies and validates the importance of inclusive education through a multitude of aspects highlighted in the implementation of this approach. Thus, inclusive education is seen as:

 • Principle governing the activity of the entire education system and of the whole school,
   • The process of changing educational systems in all components,
   • How to build new cultures,
   • How to organize and design educational environments,
   • Attitudes of teachers and educators, in general,
   • Effective sharing and use of resources,
   • Identifying barriers in learning and finding ways to overcome them,
   • Identifying and using all resources that can support learning,
   • Relationship between formal and non-formal education,
   • Newly built relationship between school-family and community,

• Complex solution to the major changes of the current world and society (Winter & O'Raw, 2011)

The nature of the concept of inclusive education is referred to as non-categorical (Peters, cit. in Burgstahler, 2012) because, it is not the student's particularities that matter but the learning process and its characteristics. Learning (individual and social) is in the core of the inclusive education. It does not label students, it does not start from the problems they face, but it is concerned with the complexity of the learning process and the different ways in which student development can be supported. Looking at the students' learning styles, research demonstrates that the educator develops his / her own understanding and enriches his / her means of teaching, creating new contexts and learning situations for the different students. Conceiving education in this way, the dynamics of the learning act is perceived, the models and practices are multiplied and an infinite number of situations where learning can take place are accepted for each individual and all, in the most common life contexts.

More recent findings of the researchers in the field come to confirm the need to structure the pedagogy of inclusion an inclusive education so that to respond to the challenges arising from the current experiences and to provide coherent solutions. Following an analysis of 50 research and studies in the American schools, one of the major professional associations in USA (WEAC) states the idea that inclusive education is a controversial concept, as it refers to both individual and social values, as well as to a new understanding and valorisation of the individual (http://weac.org/articles/ specialedinc/). At present, the idea of building a pedagogy of inclusion, with well-defined characteristics, is becoming more and more evident. It is promoted by individual researchers (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Sandri, 2014) and by international organizations (EASNIE).

On the other hand, it is recognized that research generally does not intend to impose a new approach and to justify it, but rather seeks the ways and means as need for a change at the level of the education systems and schools. In general, the international studies refer to social inclusion as the ultimate goal of inclusive education, and outline inclusive education as connected to the inclusive school, tending to make more and more clarifications about the development of the inclusive practices at all levels of education.

The new pedagogy of inclusion is defined by some authors as a special pedagogy in normal contexts (Norwich, 2010, cit. in Sandri, 2014). Its construction starts from the experiences that ensure the right to learning and full participation and it ends up in meeting the learning and development needs of each student. We are thus introduced to a particular normality (Ianes, 2006, cit. in Sandri, 2014), meaning the use of special measures for the most normal contexts (Canevaro, 2010, Canevaro et al., 2009, cit. in Sandri, 2014). It is seen as more and more efficient for teachers and students to work in normal contexts, setting common goals, using methods and techniques for all, with specific elements in this normal format able to ensure adequate strategies for the cognitive and affective characteristics of each student, including for those with disabilities and / or other SEN. This idea generates the understanding that any method that results in good outcomes, respects the child and its personal and learning particularities, can be listed as a successful method.

Following his research, Florian (2014) elaborates an Evidence collection framework of inclusive education in action, as an example of a tool able to go beyond different contexts and capable to provide relevant evidence on how the inclusive practices act.

In this respect, there are preoccupations for explaining the meanings and dimensions of the concept of educational inclusion as a step towards social inclusion, emphasizing on the one hand the need to find ways and solutions, but also to determine the meanings and particularities of the concepts. Thus, concerns about the clarification and delimitation of a clear area of research that is a pedagogy of inclusion (Florian, 2014) highlighting both the individual and social perspectives, the value and long-term effects of educational inclusion, and emphasizing the contribution of philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, economics, natural sciences, etc. to the development of the domain (Allman, 2013).

Inclusive pedagogy is multidisciplinary. Apart from the evidence of psychology, pedagogy, the studies reveal important sociological and philosophical arguments. Thus, many of the research on inclusive education start from a new definition of disability in the context of the definition of the human being, and this philosophical aspect is of great importance. The recommendations of the international study conducted by Human Rights Council (2013) on the education of the persons with disabilities (UN, 2013) illustrate the need to centre inclusive education on those most vulnerable - people with disabilities – and, on the other hand, the argument is given from the of human rights perspective, starting from redefining the concept of disability. The study focuses on inclusive education as the most appropriate measure to achieve the universal right to education, especially for people with disabilities.

Researchers believe that research into the field of inclusion pedagogy requires specific approaches and adaptations in the resulted analyses. Inclusive education research is an area in itself. This specificity comes from the multitude of variables, but also from the fact that there are elements related to attitudes, values and social perceptions, which lead to the complexity of the measured factors (Nind, 2014; Nind & Lewthwaite, 2017; Allman, 2013).

The development of a pedagogy of inclusion is also identified by defining or enriching/ enlarging some concepts that are analyzed and described by the research of the last few years. Here are examples as: universal design, assistive technologies, reasonable adaptation, educational partnership, monitoring indicators. The contribution of Joyce Epson's research on the educational partnership (approved as directions of federal education policies in the USA), Mel Ainscow and Tony Booth in Great Britain (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), or Mitchell (2015) in New Zealand, developed indicators of inclusion as an inclusive education monitoring tool, with Burgstahler (2012), redefining the concept of universal design in the context of inclusive education.

The universal design of the training can be applied to all aspects of the training: classroom climate, physical environment and means, methods used, trained interactions, information resources and technology used, feedback and measurement of learning outcomes. Thus, the universal design in training is understood as a goal, a process, but also as a set of practices used in the classroom (Burgstahler, 2012). The goal is to maximize student learning by applying universal design principles to all aspects of

the training. As a process, the application of the universal design takes into account the variety of potential of the learners, depending on skills, learning styles, preferences, age, gender, culture, abilities and disabilities, to select the most appropriate work strategies and materials and resources for all activities. In activities, the universal design organizes the fair, flexible, simple and intuitive use, with perceptible information, tolerance for errors, minimal physical effort, measure and appropriate spaces for approach and use (Burgstahler, 2012).

In research, the shaped direction of research is the formation and development of appropriate attitudes, in adherence relation to the values and principles of inclusion, thus highlighting the psychological side to complete the philosophical side of inclusive education. Several international studies demonstrate that the implementation of inclusive education is interdependent with the positive attitude of teachers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2010). The issues are researched not only by identifying attitudes, but also by listing the factors that favor the adherence to the principles of inclusion. (Avramidis & Norwich, 2010), as well as stressing the role of management, in developing and promoting positive attitudes in areas that become less restrictive. In short, there is a lot of evidence of positive attitudes from teachers, but there is no evidence of total acceptance of inclusion or of total rejection of special schools (Avramidis & Norwich, 2010). Generally, teachers' attitudes depend on how they perceive the nature and severity of the child's disability, and less on the variables pertaining to themselves. Studies show that the favorable educational environment (physical environment) and the support received from other people are consistently associated with attitudes towards inclusion. The study also provides a synthesis of research methodologies, specifying future action directions for analysing the attitudes of the teachers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2010).

Numerous studies present the good practices and provide effective action models for working in regular classes. A synthesis of research demonstrating the effective ways in which teachers include children with SEN (including disabilities) in regular classes, based on these models of analysis from the literature, develops the characteristics of a teaching-learning approach that provides positive results for students in both academic acquisition and social involvement and improvement of behaviors. In analyzing such approaches, valuable remarks are for the practitioners, related to how group interaction and pairs work can be used by teachers as support in the learning process of all students (Nind & Wearmouth, 2006). The research on the development of inclusive practices is generally related to the use of support in the school, driving the co-operation relations among students, the analysis of the role of individualized educational plans (EIPs), the adaptation and modification of the curriculum, the role and dimensions of school management, the partnership and relationships with family and community , initial and continuous in-service training of teachers of the mainstream schools, professional networks, multidisciplinary teamwork at the level of mainstream schools, etc.

It should also be noted that, although the pedagogy of inclusion is becoming more and more a trend of the solutions found by the researchers, it is not neglected to focus the studies on the vulnerable population. Thus, the issue of disability in inclusive contexts is researched to identify the issues requiring reinforcement and barriers to be removed.

The recommendations of a recent international Human Rights Council study on the education of people with disabilities illustrate the need to focus on those who are more vulnerable - people with disabilities - with arguments from a human rights perspective, and from redefining the concept of disability (UN, 2013). From the perspective of the issue of people with disabilities, the inclusive education approach proposes that the analysis directions: non-exclusion, the right to inclusive and quality education, accessibility and elimination of barriers, reasonable adaptation, support in education, equal opportunities, capacity building and professional development through in-service training (UN, 2013).

5. Conclusions

We can assume that the results of research and current studies define the tendency towards a pedagogy of inclusion with clearer characteristics. It proposes new principles, values, concepts and a practical complex set of tools for training. It redefines the purpose of the school and its expectations from the humanistic perspective, promotes the flexibility and the adaptation of the educational means, respecting the uniqueness and the value of each individual. Based on the social model of education and the learning process, the area of action includes education for school professionals, parents and all categories of children focusing on the vulnerable ones.

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