

SUPPORT FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION

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Abstract: The last few years our educational policies have outlined the problems of and followed the changes in regards to children and students with special educational needs in order to provide opportunities for them to develop their potential along the side of their peers in kindergarten, preschool and schools. Inclusive education is incorporated in different regulations as a part of the solemn right of every child and student with special educational needs to have access to education and ensuring the proper environment allowing their personal development. Keeping that in mind we can easily state that schools and kindergarten is for all children and students. They take on the responsibilities to provide quality education, general support for the personal development of children and students with special educational needs. The inclusive educational environment provides equal chance and opportunity for children with special educational needs to learn, play and to be accepted by the rest of the children in the educational system. This would be a good place to point out that inclusion is a right, philosophy and policy. The philosophy of educational system has changed. The child- as the main value-is at the center of the educational process. This allows us to point out that inclusiveness is a right, philosophy and a policy. Therefore it should be looked at as a process and as a result.

We look for the current researched issue in the application of the support for personal development as a new component of educational inclusiveness of children and students with special needs in kindergartens and schools. The support ensures adequate physical, psychological and social environment for the development of their skills and abilities and for their inclusion and participation in the community of the kindergartens and schools. In order to gain the needed support in the educational process, each child and a student with special educational needs goes through an evaluation process which determine the specification of each individual's needs by a team for personal development support in the kindergarten and schools. The team collects the data and analyses the information regarding the functioning of each child and in particular any/all kinds of difficulties, strengths and the potential for optimal development, participation in the educational process and the opportunities for realization so that additional support for their personal development is provided. This is why we could say that the main concept in the education of children and students with special educational needs is the support for their personal development, because it provides the access to quality education and activates the additional resources aimed at the removal of all obstacles for learning and education.

Keywords: children with special educational needs, support, inclusive education.

INTRODUCTION

The main focus of the current paper are the issues in the education of children with special educational needs in the inclusive educational system.

The last few years our educational policies have outlined the problems of and followed the changes in regards to children and students with special educational needs in order to provide opportunities for them to develop their potential along the side of their peers in kindergarten, preschool and schools. The philosophy of educational system has changed. The child- as the main value-is at the center of the educational process. The Law for pre-school and school education and the Inclusive Education Ordinance allows the children and students with educational needs to be equally included in the educational process. Bulgarian Ministry of Science and Education has implemented all EU Directives for educational standards and models of inclusive education and by doing so our educational system is aligned with requirements of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the EU Directives, diligently laid out in the European Disabilities Strategy 2010 – 2020 (Zh. Yankova, 2013). The regulations named above determine the requirements and the means for ensuring the support for personal development, equal access to quality education and reaching one's potential as a child and student in order to promote his/her personal, professional and civil participation and contribution to society.

The inclusive educational environment provides equal chance and opportunity for children with special educational needs to learn, play and to be accepted by the rest of the children in the educational system. This would be a good place to point out that inclusion is a right, philosophy and policy. It should be viewed as a process and as a result, and follows the basic principle that „All children have to learn together, wherever and whenever it is possible regardless of their differences and difficulties”. In relation to that, it could be pointed out that inclusive education is a process of becoming aware, accepting and supporting individuality of each child and student and their

differences and the diverse nature of their needs by activating and inclusion of recourses, aiming to overcome any and all obstacles which may prevent learning and the creation of opportunities for personal development and participation of all students in all parts of education and society.
<http://www.mon.bg/?go=page&pageId=7&subpageId=57>

We look for the current researched issue in the application of the support for personal development as a new component of educational inclusiveness of children and students with special needs in kindergartens and schools. Looking at the assistance it could be stated that it is related to and unites the resources of educational environment and all levels on the vertical and horizontal axes of the system. Just like it is with cooperation between a classroom teacher and the special educational teacher; the teacher-psychologist-speech therapists-speech and hearing rehabilitator- parent, the child and the student with special educational needs is the leading factor.

Keeping this in mind it could be highlighted that there is a strong tendency for humanization which we are looking for in the process of inclusive education for children and students with special educational needs, as it is not an aim of its own but a meaning to achieve a higher goal. As Barton (2010) states, it contributes to establishment of an inclusive society where human rights are the basic component of public policy.

MAIN PART

The theoretical and practical importance of the issue dictates the goal of the current paper. .

The goal of the current paper is to establish how are children and students with special educational needs being helped in the educational process.

The goal determines the choice of means and methods: theoretical analysis, observations, interviews and questionnaires.

Based on the theoretical sources, observations, interviews and questionnaires the current status of the problems related to the assistance of children with special educational needs receive in the kindergarten and schools was analyzed. The scientific concept developed in the coordination of the statements in the mentioned above aspects of the problem, lead us to the planning, preparation and the execution of the research.

This knowledge-searching course/motion follows how children with special educational needs assist the process of education in schools and kindergartens in following levels:

Phase one: unites the activities directed at the support for personal development. In order for every child to become a part of the inclusive education they have to undergo a special evaluation by a team for support of personal development in kindergarten and school and to receive the needed *general* and *additional assistance*. The support provides the needed physical, psychological and social environment for development of their skills and for their inclusion and participation in the community- both kindergarten and school communities.

General assistance is directed at the development of the personal potential of each child in regards to his/her individual educational needs in order to guarantee their participation and performance in the educational process. The main focus of general assistance is directed at team work, where people discuss the activities in each case in order to get support from each pedagogical specialist to improve their work with the children with special educational needs. The family is an important participant in general assistance (Zh.Ynkova, K. Дамянов, 2013), because it is the secure resource through which the equality, the feeling of belonging and taking on the responsibilities in the educational process of children with special educational needs are being supported.

During the educational process the *additional assistance* for children and students with special educational needs, children at risk and gifted children and/or children with chronic diseases depending on what their personal evaluation has concluded regarding their individual needs. In this paper we look at the provided additional assistance for children and students with special educational needs.

In order to provide additional assistance for children and students with special educational needs a comprehensive evaluation is needed to determine their individual needs. The evaluation is performed by the professionals in the team for personal development in the institution the child is about to attend. The team collects the data and analyses the information regarding the functioning of each child and in particular any/all kinds of difficulties, strengths and the potential for optimal development, participation in the educational process and the opportunities for realization so that additional support for their personal development is provided. The evaluation is functional because the disability and the functioning are looked at as a result of the interaction between the health conditions and the environmental factors including:

- General health status of the child or student, physical development;
- Emotional and social development – play-related skills, peer relationships, relationships with adults, socially accepted behavior; self-esteem; level of autonomy; age-appropriate behavior; self-reliance skills and independence, risk of injury, hyperactivity;
- Cognitive development - memory; attention; thought process; intellect;

- Language and speech development and communication skills;
- Education – achievements in educational process; learning in the general educational curriculum and subjects, learning in the special curriculum for subjects or modules for professional education and training, participation in therapeutic programs;
 - Family interaction and relationships – contact with parents and other members of the family, frequency of interaction, quality of interaction; basic care and protection; emotional attachment and vitality of family relations; parenting style and discipline;
 - Social environment.

The evaluation is done in accordance with the Child/student Evaluation map of individual needs and it contains the following components:

- Evaluation of the child's /student's functioning;
- The evaluation team's opinion on the necessary resources for additional assistance for the child's /student's personal development;
 - A definition of the specificity and the type of the additional assistance- short and long term. Due to the fact that providing both type of additional assistance is related to the participation of teachers, psychologists, speech and hearing therapists, special education teachers in order to adapt and modify the curriculum and to implement IT in the education and development;
 - A recommendation for the use of additional services including social services, and other activities.

Based on the conducted evaluation the team determines the level/amount of additional assistance for the child. That includes:

- Working on a specific case with a child or a student;
- Psycho-social rehabilitation, speech and hearing rehabilitation, vision rehabilitation, communication disorders rehabilitation, or physical rehabilitation;
- Providing accessible architecture and common specialized environment, different type of aids, technology in the education, specialized equipment, didactical materials, methodologies and specialists;
- Provision of education in special subjects for students with serious disabilities;
- Resources.

During the conducted interviews and discussions with the teams for personal development in the kindergartens and schools, the pedagogical and parental communities several main areas were outlined as problematic:

- Each child and/or student with special education needs has to be included in the inclusive educational system in the schools of kindergartens;
- Inclusive education required very well preparation in advanced in order for the kindergartens and schools to be ready to accept and integrate the children with special educational needs because this is not a short process which requires complex and systematic efforts on teachers' and parents' side as well as those of society in general;
- For the education of children and students with special educational needs the provision of general and additional assistance are required.

The second phase is directed at inclusion of children and students with special educational needs in the school and pre-school educational process.

At this phase of the development of the educational system, the education of children and students with special educational needs follows the regulations of the Law for Inclusive education.

The education of children and students with special educational needs is organized and implemented in kindergartens and schools in special schools for education and assistance of students with serious disabilities and in centers for special educational assistance. The goal-oriented manifestation is in education and personal development of the student/and or the child and is implemented via:

- Program system for pre-school education;
- School curriculum and programs;
- Individual educational curriculum;
- Individual educational schedule;
- Educational programs for specific academic subjects for students with seeing and hearing disabilities;
- Plan for assistance.

The last listed point is extremely important. Analyzing the preparation of the plan it becomes clear that the plan is aimed at:

- The goals, tasks and specific activities for additional assistance for personal development;

- opportunities, strengths, potential of each child or student to be included and participate in the educational process in the institution;
- determines the type and form of education;
- determines the type of additional assistance and the time span for its provision;
- determines specific educational goals and anticipated results from the educational process;
- determines the means of evaluation of the progress;
- determines the specialists, therapies and special pedagogical and therapeutic methods to achieve the goals;
- determines the frequency for implementation of activities and additional assistance;
- determines the team work the child/student will participate, the role and responsibilities of the pedagogical experts and the parents, caregivers, when additional assistance is provided;
- determines the necessary resources for additional assistance and an adequate transition period between institutions or between separate phases and educational degrees and the coordination of work with the children/students, who are recipients of additional assistance for personal development;
- Determines the hours for resource assistance for a child and/or a student with special educational needs.

The knowledge for all the individual opportunities of each individual child and student with special educational needs is reached in the process of education between subjects and their interaction with the teachers of the given group in the kindergarten, by the teachers, psychologist, speech therapist, special education teacher, rehabilitator or the parent/caregiver while maintaining the rights of the child or/and the student.

The current research was initiated in relation to the newly implemented Law for inclusive education as a plausible center, fundament for ensuring inclusive education of children and students in the pre-school and school systems as well as the institutions' activities in the system for providing of assistance for personal development for students and children. An important stage of implementing inclusive education is the inclusion of all children and students with special educational needs. Currently K. Damianov (2017) notes that the cooperation between participants in the assisting the children and students with special educational needs in the educational process has not reached the desired level of development. This means that teachers have to obtain the required knowledge, skills and competencies in their professional preparation.

Keeping this in mind we conducted an inquire amongst 155 pedagogical specialists in kindergartens and schools in Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Burgas and Yambol municipalities in order to determine what kind of support and assistance do children with special educational needs receive in the educational process.

The results show that 98% of the participants state that the children with special educational needs who take part in the educational process ought to receive access to additional assistance from specialists – psychologists, special educational teacher, speech and hearing therapists, rehabilitator, pedagogical expert for children with vision impairment

Larger part of the participants (88%) show that the general and additional assistance are aimed at the personal development of children and students with special educational needs.

Almost all of the participants - 86% see the necessity for additional assistance, which the children and students need in order to achieve the set goals in the curriculum.

Other answers to questions in the inquire include „Is there a vital cooperation and team work in the school or kindergarten between classroom teacher-special education teacher-psychologists-speech therapists-parent? “ where 33% of the participants answer “yes”, 42% are not sure if the cooperation is helpful at all.

Summarizing the results from the inquire we have to note that 65% of the specialists who answered the questions support the inclusion of children and students with special educational needs in the kindergartens and schools and only 15% say that those children should be taught in special schools. This shows that there is still teachers who have not changed their mind toward the inclusive education. In order for the change of attitude to occur there must be many trainings and additional qualification of teachers for educational inclusion of children with special educational needs, because inclusive education is an inseparable part of education itself.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we would like to note that the assistance for personal development is one of the most important concepts in the education of children and students with special educational needs because each child and student is unique and requires providing of support for equal access to quality education, and also activating and inclusion of resources aimed at removing barriers in front of learning process. Additional assistance for children and students with special educational needs is an important determinant in inclusive education for personal development regarding their individual educational needs.

LITERATURE

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