Beauty in Diversity – Our Special Children

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Abstract: The integration of the children with disabilities is a strong point of our kindergarten, which wants to ensure a warm and welcoming space for all the pupils, irrespective of their functional diversity, so they can achieve individual and social growth through the journey of the preschool cycle. The true inclusive education happens from people and between people. Every teacher that works in any kindergarten or school must have the desire to accept the special children, to accept their uniqueness and respect their right to be different.

Knowing how to grasp and enhance the differences between children is indispensable in an effective educational environment, capable of bringing up the motivation, the energy and the engine of learning and gaining new acquisitions. In order to be inclusive, we - teachers need to accept responsibility for special children learning and for their proper integration by using the most relevant methods and techniques, respecting every disabled child's needs. Our daily activity needs to be based on an individualized, calibrated and detailed work plan, built in a strong connection with to the needs, potential and skills of each pupil.

Being part of an international Erasmus+ Project and local partnerships on the subject, we become more skilled and opened in our work with special children and we strongly desire to spread our experience to our colleagues from Romania and Europe.

We want to put an end to all the stories of non-acceptance in the educational systems.

Keywords: *Inclusion; diversity; acceptance; tolerance; uniqueness.*

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1. Introduction

In the kindergarten, an education for all means not only the integration of the special children, but a totally different approach of the curricula, capturing two basic concepts: uniqueness and diversity (Gherghuț, 2016). The inclusive education means the access of all children to all the educational programs and also the proper training of the teachers to perform these tasks.

For the children with special needs, the recommendation to integrate in the mainstream nursery schools may be the first step in the long process of the social inclusion as an adult because early socialization has a positive influence on the development of individual personality and adaptation to life as we know it.

Most of the scientific research in the field of the inclusive education, indicates the importance of the early detection of any deviation in development of the children and the assurance of a quality intervention process.

2. The inclusive education at the preschool level

The inclusive education at the preschool level must meet the following minimum conditions:

- providing an welcoming environment for each child enrolled in class;
- the teachers must accept the special children, accept their uniqueness and the right to be different;
- the special children must be included in the mass system and the healthy children have to accept them as any other colleagues, be tolerant, be cooperative and friendly;
- the teacher has to value and make the most of the differences between the children enrolled in his / her class (David & Roșan, 2016);
- the teacher will use the most relevant working methods and techniques, respecting the needs of each child;
- the daily activity must be based on an individualized, calibrated and detailed work plan, built in a strong connection with the needs, the potential and abilities of each child (Enea, 2016).

3. Frequent disorders at preschool children

3.1. Hyperactivity

From our personal experience, the fact that a child that is hyperactive can be identified based on the following types of existing behaviour:

- leaving his place often during activities, incapacity to stay in one single place more than one or two minutes and focus on a certain activity;
- running and climbing through inappropriate places;
- encountering difficulties during silent and soothing games or activities;
- the vociferation is continuous and usually high pitched;
- nervousness, agitation, impulsivity;
- lack of attention, inability to wait their turn;
- avoid or disapprove the activities that require mental effort;
- frequently interrupting other people and expressing one inappropriate behaviour.

So, what do we, the inclusive teachers do when we have hyperactive children in class?

Strategies for capturing and maintain attention:

- we provide a quiet working environment that will not stimulate him in a negative way;
- the working materials and the working techniques must be as attractive and modern as possible to arouse the child's interest and to keep his attention as long as possible;
- there must be very frequent changes in the interior design, the arrangements of the work centers, the available materials, as well as a great diversification and alternation of the types of activities carried out, in order to avoid boredom, agitation and total lack of attention (Russel, 2016).

3.2. What do we do when the hyperactive child has a moment of anger and an aggressive, agitated, difficult to control behaviour?

Proposed solutions:

- removing the child from the environment that became stressful for him and;
- a walk in the fresh air;
- carrying out activities in the quiet corner, specially arranged, where there will be games, toys and favourite objects of the hyperactive child;
- activity with the psycho-pedagogical counsellor (if possible) (Roșan, 2015).

3.3. Autism spectrum disorders

The most important symptoms fall into two categories:

3.3.1. Problems in communication and social interaction:

- socio-emotional reciprocity deficiencies (abnormal social approach, failure of a social conversation even at the simplest level, failure to share emotions and areas of personal interest, lack of response to social interactions);

- non-verbal communication deficiencies, that can be manifested as lack of gestures and mimicry, until the absence of facial expressions;

- deficiencies of development, maintenance and understanding of social relationships, difficulties in adapting behaviour to different contexts, lack of interests for others (Barbera, 2016).

3.3.2. Repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests of activities:

- stereotypical or repetitive motor movements, using his own body, objects or speech (echolalia);

- the insistence of the similarity, the need to respect, with the same strictness, daily work, a fix programme;

- fixation on restricted interests to which it has an intense, abnormal concentration;

- hyper or hypo reactivity to certain stimuli (pain, odours, light, various textures).

Barriers in the inclusive education.

- the insufficiency or the absence of the support teachers and psycho-pedagogical counsellors;

- lack of the necessary working materials;

- the refuse of the parents to accept the special situation of their child, to go to neuropsychiatric diagnosis and to start supportive therapy and medication;

- lack of acceptance of the special children by certain teachers, children in class and by the parents of the healthy colleagues (Barbera, 2016);

- teachers are not trained to work with children that have special educational needs and they don't know how to help them or how to include them in the group.

3.4. Possible solutions:

- the identification of some partners for support or for the exchange of good practices in the area, by building educational partnership projects in the field of scholar inclusion;

- identifying sponsors available to help inclusive kindergartens with working materials needed during the work with special children;
- seminars and lectures given to parents and teachers;
- fun activities (dramatizations, role-playing games, dances) involving both special and healthy children in class;
- training programmes for teachers.

4. The role of the partnerships projects in the process of inclusion

We currently have two implemented projects:

4.1. Support project:

“Different children, special children” - project developed at the Dâmbovița county level.

During the implementation, our kindergarten received free support from the Day Center for children with Autism and Down Syndrome “Saint Mary” and from the Inclusive School of swimming “I can” from Târgoviște city.

4.2. Exchange of good practices international project:

Erasmus+ - THE RAINBOW OF DIVERSITY - 2017-1-TR01-KA219-045747- România, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria with a duration of implementation of two years, funded by the European Commission through Erasmus+ Programme.

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We put our work and continue uploading our good practices using the project website that will always offer free access to the public and can be consulted on the-rainbow-of-diversity.webnode.ro

5. Conclusions

In order to achieve good results in the inclusion process of our special children, we must assure for them equal chances to education as for their colleagues, make them feel loved, accepted and important in our kindergarten group.

We must never forget that kindergarten teachers and parents are important role-models for the children and that our behavior towards both

special and healthy children will have a huge impact on their personality future traits and adult life.

The teachers are representing the professionals and the key role in progressing towards inclusive education because, most of the time, they are the bridge between the learner (with disabilities), the family and the kindergarten or school.

With the right skills and experience, the teachers can help both children and parents to gain more and more confidence in the possibilities and chances to succeed in life that a special child can have.

A wide range of benefits for the children with disabilities can be provided involving funding agencies at a local, national and international level, because special children and their teachers should and will never be alone in this fight for a normal, happy and fulfilled life.

The Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union offered a great support, setting the inclusion of the children with disabilities as a priority of Erasmus+ for many years. Working in international partnerships we shaped an unique approach that benefits the child and is in his highly interest by allowing a better organization of the whole educational-recovery approach, collaboration and permanent communication.

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