



## **MAKING EDUCATION MORE INCLUSIVE**

**Report of the seminar of the European Network of Education Councils,  
Bucharest, 18-19 May 2017**

Brussels, August 2017

EUNEC secretariat, Koning Albert II-laan 37, 1030 Brussels

**[www.eunec.eu](http://www.eunec.eu)**



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## INTRODUCTION

EUNEC is the **European Network of Education Councils**. Its members advise the governments of their countries on education and training. EUNEC aims to discuss the findings and recommendations of all European projects in education and training, to determine standpoints and to formulate statements on these issues. EUNEC wants to disseminate these statements pro-actively towards the European Commission, relevant DGs and other actors at European level, and to promote action by EUNEC's members and participants at national and regional level. EUNEC also has the objective that the councils should put internationalization and mobility high on the national agenda, that they should clarify the European policy in education and training towards all relevant stakeholders.

## PROGRAMME

Thursday 18 May 2017

***Chair of the day: Mia Douterlungne, EUNEC secretary general and secretary general of the Flemish Education Council***

<b>09.00</b>	Registration
	<b>WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME</b>
<b>09.30 – 10.00</b>	<b>Welcome</b> Ciprian Fartusnic, Institute of Educational Sciences, Bucharest Mia Douterlungne, EUNEC secretary general
<b>10.00 – 10.15</b>	<b>Introduction to the theme</b> Luminita Costache, Education specialist, UNICEF Romania
	<b>KEY NOTE PRESENTATIONS from an international perspective</b>
<b>10.15 – 11.00</b>	<b>Is Special Education Special?</b> Professor Mark M. Alter, professor of Educational Psychology, New York University
<b>11.00 – 11.30</b>	Coffee break
<b>11.30 – 12.15</b>	<b>International policy frameworks for inclusive education</b> Paula Frederica Hunt, Inclusive Education Consultant at the UNICEF Central and Eastern Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States Regional Office (CEE/CIS)

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<b>12.15 – 13.00</b>	Lunch
<b>13.00 – 16.00</b>	<b>School visit</b> to school no. 1 in Bucharest (director Iuliana Soare)
<b>16.00 – 16.45</b>	Meeting of the EUNEC Executive Committee (for Executive Committee members only)
<b>19.30</b>	Conference dinner

Friday 19 May 2017

***Chair of the day: Mia Douterlungne, EUNEC secretary general and secretary general of the Flemish Education Council***

<b>09.00 – 10.30</b>	<b>POLICY PRACTICES from different countries</b>  <b>Presentation about the situation of special needs education in Romania</b> , by professor Ecaterina Vrasmas, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Bucharest  <b>Presentation of a recent advice of the Portuguese Education Council on special needs education</b> , by Anabela Gracio  <b>Is inclusive education really included in the education? Lithuania's case</b> , by Assoc. prof. dr. Alvyra Galkienė, Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences
<b>10.30 – 11.00</b>	Coffee break
<b>11.00 – 12.00</b>	<b>Debate</b> between education councils, leading to <b>conclusions</b>
<b>12.00 – 13.00</b>	<b>Closing lunch</b>
<b>13.00 – 15.00</b>	Meeting of the EUNEC General Assembly (for General Assembly members only)

# Welcome

## ***Ciprian Fartușnic***

*Ciprian Fartușnic is director general of the Institute of Educational Sciences in Bucharest. The Institute of Educational Sciences is member of EUNEC and is hosting this seminar.*

Ciprian Fartușnic stresses the importance and relevance of the theme of the seminar: it is crucial now for policy makers, in Romania and at the international level, to put inclusive education high at the agenda. The Institute of Educational Sciences is glad to host this seminar, where representatives of education councils have the opportunity to discuss about common challenges and solutions, to exchange ideas and experiences.



## ***Mia Douterlungne***

*Mia Douterlungne is secretary general of EUNEC and secretary general of the Flemish Education Council*

Opening speech:

'I am very pleased to welcome all of you at the yearly seminar of EUNEC 2017. Mr. Manuel Miguéns, the president of EUNEC, is not able to attend this meeting. Therefore I was asked to take the honours as chair of the seminar.



For the first time we are invited here in Romania. Therefore first of all I would like to thank Magdalena Balica and Ciprian Fartușnic and the Institute of Educational Sciences for the kind invitation and the excellent organisation of this conference.

Not only the location is new for EUNEC members. Also the theme is new. On many occasions members mentioned during the tour the table that they advised on special needs education, on inclusive education and on the right of children with special needs to a qualitative learning support. But we never before had the opportunity to discuss the theme in depth.

## **Changing policy concepts**

During this seminar, we want to make a state of the art of policy concepts underpinning education for children with disabilities. At the moment we are facing different approaches and concepts on guaranteeing the right to development and to education of children with disabilities.

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There has been a clear evolution in those policy concepts during the last 50 years. This evolution is the result of a radical change in the way we look at the place of people with disabilities in society.

During the 1970s, awareness was raised that disabled people were entitled to education and development. At this stage, learning and developmental disorders were not explicitly labelled. They were often seen by teachers only as a personal failure of the pupil. They were –in the best case- an object to take care of but they were considered as individuals with an own identity, making choices and having development needs, general ones and specific ones.

During the last quarter of the last century, however, an explicit pedagogical vision came about dealing with children with disabilities. The development of orthopedagogy as a science supported these developments. There was a strong diagnostic practice that tried to describe and identify learning and developmental problems. As a result, in the 1970s and 80s, a network of specialized institutions provided education for pupils with disabilities. This was frequently based on a broad attestation, diagnostic and labeling of the pupils. Education for pupils with disabilities was categorical and segregated. Pupils with special needs were directed to different pathways.

The UNESCO Salamanca statement (1994) has lead, among other things, to a change in this way of thinking. The Salamanca statement was the outcome of the World Conference on Special Needs Education, and called for inclusion to be the norm. The same vision was also expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including education (2006). Both statements are based on a non-discrimination principle as expressed in human rights treaties. They assume the right of people with disabilities on inclusion in the 'regular' society. They are based on a new vision that sees disability as an inadequate alignment between the characteristics of a person and the environment (including the school structure).

The most recent evolution is the emergence of a link between education for pupils with special needs and the attention to diversity in education (a.o. education for children with problematic socio-economic backgrounds, education for children with different socio-cultural backgrounds). Some pupils have learning or developmental problems due to socio-cultural or socio-economic factors; for other pupils the problems are the consequence of mental, physical or psychological constraints. In reality, there is often an interference between the disability and the context in which the pupil is growing up. The new paradigms related to disability start from this finding. This interference remains one of the main questions in the debate: is it necessary that pupils with disabilities get a specific approach in education, or does a broad view on diversity in education offer enough guarantees?

Today we welcome prof. Mark M. Alter, professor of Educational Psychology, NYU Steinhardt. During a first key note speech he will reflect with us on the question 'Is special education really special?'

As we all know international organisations and treaties played a major role in the growing awareness and sensibility to an inclusive approach of people with special needs. Paula Frederica Hunt, Inclusive Education Consultant for UNESCO, will give a global overview of the international policy frameworks for inclusive education.

In the afternoon, we will go from theory to practice. We will see the daily life in the School no. 1, Bucharest. Director Iuliana Soare will share with us her experiences and challenges.'

# Introduction to the theme

## *Luminita Costache*

*Luminita Costache is Education Specialist at UNICEF Romania and has 25 years of experience in organizational and project management, consultancy, sociological research and training. She is currently coordinating UNICEF initiatives promoting early education, school attendance and access to inclusive and quality education for all children. Within UNICEF, Luminita has also coordinated initiatives on the social inclusion of the most vulnerable children. She has been working for UNICEF since 2007. Over time, she has participated in numerous studies, researches and training programmes as trainer.*

*She graduated from the Faculty of Sociology, Psychology and Pedagogy of the University of Bucharest, having a degree in sociology and a specialization in sociology of culture, and has a Master in Project Management at Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies.*

## What is inclusive education?

There are several definitions of inclusive education, but there are some clear benchmarks: the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education (1994), and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2006). Article 24 asserts the rights of persons with disabilities to inclusive education without discrimination and on an equal basis with other. The most recent achievement is the adoption of the General Comment on Article 24, in August 2016.

There is an international legal framework, but from the 80s until now, concepts still need to be defined more clearly.

When UNICEF mentions 'countries', this includes government and policy makers as well as civil society.



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In Romania, when talking about inclusive education, it refers mostly to education for children with disabilities. But the concept of inclusive education is broader, children facing different vulnerabilities: each pupil could have a special education need during his school career.

When talking about the benefits of inclusive education, the economic gains are more and more used as an argument: inclusive education fosters every child to become an independent adult.

### *Areas for improvement*

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Rather than to talk about 'challenges' for inclusive education, it is good to talk about 'improvement areas', to put it in a more positive way. One of those improvement areas is the need for a common definition in order to be able to define exact targets, common objectives. Another improvement area is cohesion between different policies addressing inclusion issues. But the biggest area of improvement is implementation. The laws and regulations are there, but often it is just paper. When it comes to the grass root level, there are many barriers.

An integrated approach is needed. Inclusive education is not only the concern of the education system. Different policies, different sectors are concerned. Usually, nowadays, the child and the family are running after the services, whilst the services should more work together and present an integrated offer to the child and the family.

Discrimination is rising. When we look at statistics in depth, we see disparities between different groups of vulnerable children: between boys and girls, between children from a rural or an urban background, between poor and rich.

It is important to pay more attention to real parental involvement and to participation of pupils. It is not sufficient just to inform the parents and the pupils, they have to be taken on board as real partners.

## Key note

# Is special education special?

**Mark M. Alter**

*Alter is a Professor of Educational Psychology at New York University and was the founding chair of the Department of Teaching and Learning and served as Chair for 14 years. He has an extensive record of publications, national and international workshops and funded grants in the field of special education. He was granted A Fulbright Senior Specialist award to Viet Nam and was awarded The NYU Distinguished Teaching award. Alter has an extensive background in the classroom, as well as a PhD from Yeshiva University in special education. He has an extensive international presence, most recently in Romania, Crete, Brazil & Argentina discussing special education, teacher education and early childhood education.*



Mark Alter has been preparing for this presentation over the past 47 years. He started his career in education as a teacher for severely handicapped children. He did research on curriculum development, became educator of teachers, doctor at New York University. In spite of all this experience, he is still struggling, still worried about the way inclusive education is going today. He is glad to share his thoughts with the members of EUNEC; he will not give answers, just raise issues.

The report 'Fixing the broken promise of Education for All', produced by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF states that:

'Education represents the hopes, dreams and aspirations for children, families, communities and nations around the world. Education is the most reliable route out of poverty and a critical pathway towards healthier, more productive citizens and stronger societies.'

How can a world deny the importance of education for all, knowing these effects?

### ***What is disability? What is inclusion?***

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According to Mark Rapley, in 'The social construction of intellectual disability', intellectual disability is usually thought of as a form of internal, individual affliction, little different from diabetes, paralysis or chronic illness. This study shows that what we usually understand as being an individual problem is actually an interactional, or social, product. The book shows how persons

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categorized as 'intellectually disabled' are produced, as such, in and through their moment-by-moment interaction with care staff and other professionals.

Mark Alter states that, rather than referring to personal limitations that are of substantial disadvantage to the individual when attempting to function in society, a disability should be considered within the context of the individual's environmental and personal factors, and the need for individualized supports.

Special education is specially designed instruction, support, and services provided to ANY student and especially students with an identified disability requiring an individually designed instructional program to meet their unique learning needs. The purpose of special education is to enable students to successfully develop to their fullest potential.

Inclusion is than the commitment to a process:

- Inclusion expresses a commitment to educate all students, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom in the community where all the students attend school;
- Inclusion brings the support services to the child, rather than moving the child to the services;
- With inclusion, the student is always in the general education environment, and removed only when appropriate services cannot be provided in the general education classroom.

Inclusion concerns all children: the blind ones, those with spiny bifida, those in a wheelchair: no child can be denied. Special education is not a separate category, in fact all teachers should be 'special' teachers.

The 'full life' model below shows what defines the quality of life. It is clear that knowledge of the French language or being excellent in mathematics don't figure in the model. Transferring this model into education does not happen overnight; it covers a lot more than just curriculum redesign, it's about values and beliefs.



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The future is dependent on education. While it might not be possible to change 'social factors' in the short run, focus on a path to the future by ensuring: desegregation, enrollment in facilities for early childhood education and improvement of learning strategies of socially excluded students. Overall, it might be beneficial for a system to refocus **on learning for all**, as opposed to selectivity and supporting the best students.

As an illustration, some 'brain stuff' from Cambridge University:

'Olny srmatt poelpe can raed tihs. I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacitly uesdnatrnd waht I was rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid, aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rgh it pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig huh? yaeh and I awlyas tghuhot slpeling was ipmorantt! if you can raed tihs psas it on !!'

### *The legal framework*

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The **Education for All Handicapped Children Act** (sometimes referred to using the acronyms EAHCA or EHA) was enacted by the United States Congress in 1975. This act required all public schools accepting federal funds to provide equal access to education and one free meal a day for children with physical and mental disabilities. Public schools were required to evaluate disabled children and create an educational plan with parent input that would emulate as closely as possible the educational experience of non-disabled students.

These are the major points in the law:

1. Zero reject. No child shall be refused an appropriate education by public schools.
2. Non-discriminatory evaluation. Evaluations must be conducted in the child's native language.
3. Least restrictive environment. Each child must be mainstreamed whenever possible.
4. Due process. Fourteenth Amendment rights of the Constitution which guarantee privacy, confidentiality of information, and protection of personal rights, are extended to those identified as handicapped or disabled.
5. Individualized education programme. Educators must plan individually tailored educational programmes for each exceptional child.
6. Preschool programmes. Early intervention programs for children from birth through age 3 must be developed and operational.
7. Individualized transition programme. Educators must plan individually tailored transition programmes from school to employment and adult life.

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The idea has been reauthorized five times since 1975. These are the key changes:

1. Changed term from handicap to disability;
2. New eligibility category for 'autistic condition' (this is in fact not a new category, but until this change it was not a separate category);
3. New category for traumatic brain injury;
4. ADD and ADHD have been listed as conditions that could render a child eligible under the 'other health impaired' (OHI) category (ADD and ADHD are not separate categories in the US);
5. The term 'limited strength, vitality, or alertness' in the definition of OHI, when applied to children with ADD/ADHD, includes a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment;
6. Transition services: 'coordinated set of activities which promotes movement from school to post-school activities'.

The 1997 reauthorizat on required the following:

- High expectations
- Access to the general education curriculum
- Participation in general education assessments
- Partnerships between parents and schools
- Special education aligned with school improvement
- Whole school approaches
- Resources focused on teaching and learning
- High quality, intensive professional development

Below is a list of 'disability categories' (some states only count 13 categories, and don't count 'developmental delay' in):

1. Autism
2. Deaf-blindness
3. Deafness
4. Developmental delay
5. Emotional disturbance
6. Hearing impairment
7. Intellectual disability
8. Multiple disabilities
9. Orthopedic impairment
10. Other health impairment
11. Specific learning disability
12. Speech or language impairment
13. Traumatic brain injury
14. Visual impairment, including blindness

Educational settings serving school-age students with disabilities are well-defined, as demonstrated in the table below:

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Table 2.5	Definitions of Educational Settings Serving School-Age Students with Disabilities
Regular Class	Students who receive the majority of their education in a regular classroom and receive special education and related services outside the regular classroom for less than 21% of the school day. This placement option also includes individuals who are provided with specialized instruction or services within the regular classroom setting.
Resource Room	Students who receive special education and related services outside the regular classroom for at least 21% but less than 60% of the school day. Students are “pulled out” of the regular classroom and receive specialized instruction or services in a separate classroom for limited periods of time. Services may be individualized or offered in small groups. A common placement option for children with less severe disabilities.
Separate Class	Students who receive special education and related services outside the regular class for more than 60% of the school day. Commonly known as a self-contained classroom wherein pupils, usually those with more severe disabilities, receive full-time instruction or, in a modified version, participate in nonacademic aspects of school activities. Classroom is located in regular school building.
Separate School	Students who receive special education and related services in a public or private separate day school for students with disabilities, at public expense, for more than 50% of the school day.
Residential Facility	Students who receive a special education in a public or private residential facility, at public expense, 24 hours a day.
Homebound/Hospital	Students placed in and receiving a special education in a hospital or homebound program.
SOURCE: Adapted from U.S. Department of Education. (2000). <i>Twenty-second Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</i> (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office), p. II-14.	

Every state must provide options from the least restricted to the most restricted environment, from the regular class to the hospital. In spirit, this is a good concept: pupils go to an environment where they can learn. But in reality, pupils become prisoners of this environment. Resources have to be brought to the pupils, instead of transferring the pupils to the most appropriate environment.

The message Mark Alter wants to bring is that all these terms, all these categories disable the child. When you build a table with categories, you lose the child. You find the label, you lose the child.

When you build a table with categories related to health problems, the objective of education risks to be seen as to cure, rather than to educate. Education should forget the labels, look rather at the learning characteristics of each child, and build a curriculum based on heterogeneity, not on labels.

### Some facts

There are approximately 67.529.839 students ages 6 to 21. Of these students, 5.693.441 or 8.4 % received special education services under individuals with disabilities act.

Of the 6,364,555 youth ages 3 to 21 who received special education services under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:

- 729,703 (or 11.5 percent) were 3 to 5 years old;
- 2,568,920 (or 40.4 percent) were 6 to 11 years old;
- 2,713,584 (or 42.6 percent) were 12 to 17 years old;
- 352,348 (or 5.5 percent) were 18 to 21 years old.

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Percentages per category in the diagnostic table:

- 2,188,413 (or 38.6 percent) in specific learning disability;
- 1,080,790 (or 19.1 percent) in speech or language impairment;
- 958,751 (or 16.9 percent) in other health impairments (including ADD);
- 476,058 (or 8.4 percent) in autism;
- 411,048 (or 7.3 percent) in intellectual disabilities;
- 350,870 (or 6.2 percent) in emotional disturbance;
- 140,209 (or 2.5 percent) in multiple disabilities;
- 65,502 (or 1.2 percent) in hearing impairments;
- 49,909 (or 0.9 percent) in orthopedic impairments;
- 24,988 (or 0.4 percent) in visual impairments;
- 1,269 (or 0.02 percent) in deaf-blindness;
- 25,266 (or 0.4 percent) in traumatic brain injury;
- 133,698 (or 2.4 percent) in developmental delay.

The biggest category is the first one, pupils with specific learning disability. However, this group contains a lot of pupils for whom English is their second language. It is not sure they really belong in this category of 'learning disability'.

Systems are being built around the categories. Once again: education focuses on labels, and risks to lose the child. Every child should be able to have special education in the classroom, and every teacher should know how to deal with it.

### *Quality education for all, from early childhood*

The Pennsylvania Early Learning Investment Commission states that a key factor in economic growth is the quality of the workforce. Children who attend quality pre-kindergarten are more likely to be employed and have higher earning, thus positively contributing to the task base. The point is that this early childhood education and care should be for all children: children are innocent, are non-discriminating, they learn from each other.

Students who develop a broader set of competencies will be at an increasing advantage in work and life. Based on employer surveys and other evidence, the most important seem to be

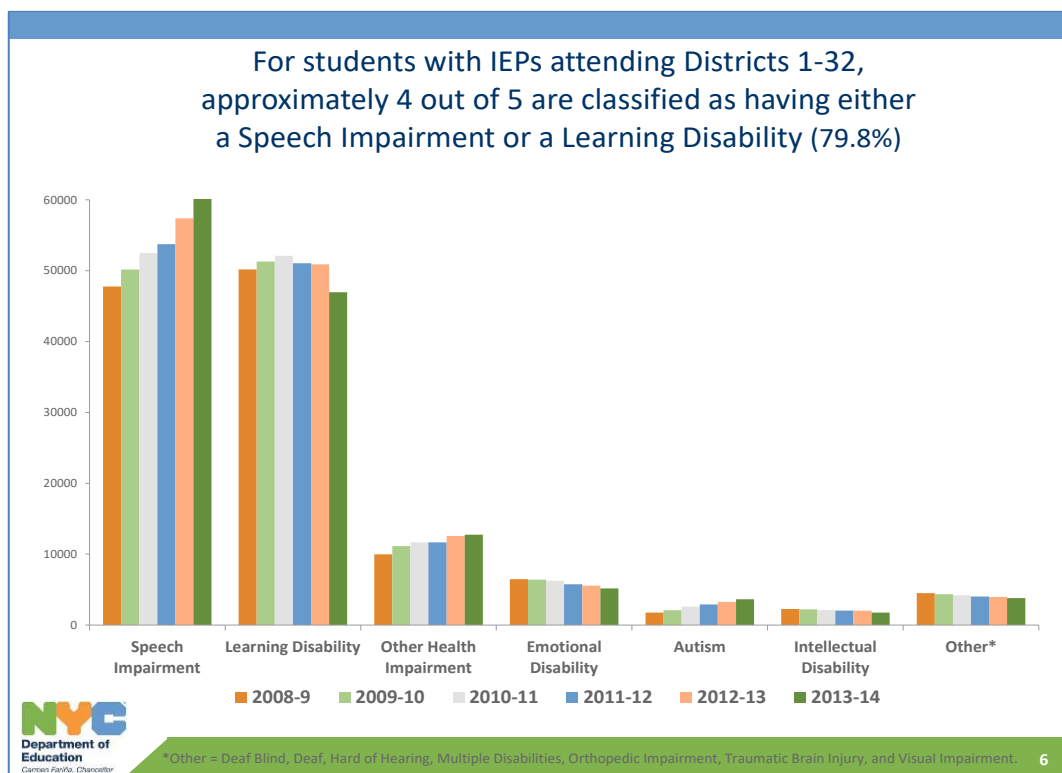
- The ability to solve new problems and to think critically;
- Strong interpersonal skills, necessary for communication and collaboration;
- Creativity and intellectual flexibility;
- Self sufficiency, including the ability to learn new things when necessary.

These skills have to be developed for all children, and developing these skills can start from playing in Kindergarten. All children are gifted in a way, education has to take the time to assess, to discover, before labeling.

## *The picture in New York City*

The following facts draw a picture of the situation in New York City. About 40 % of students in the city's public school system live in households where a language other than English is spoken. One third of all New Yorkers were born in another country. The City's Department of Education is translating everything (report cards, registration forms, system-wide alerts, documents on health and policy initiatives for parents) into Spanish, French, German, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Persian, Arabic and Haitian Creole. This is done in order to try to enhance parental involvement. But unfortunately these translations don't necessary enhance parental involvement: parents are not really included. Only on paper it looks good.

The following graph shows that, for students with IEP (Individualized Education Programme) attending districts 1-2-3, approximately 4 out of 5 are classified as having either a speech impairment or a learning disability (79.8 %):

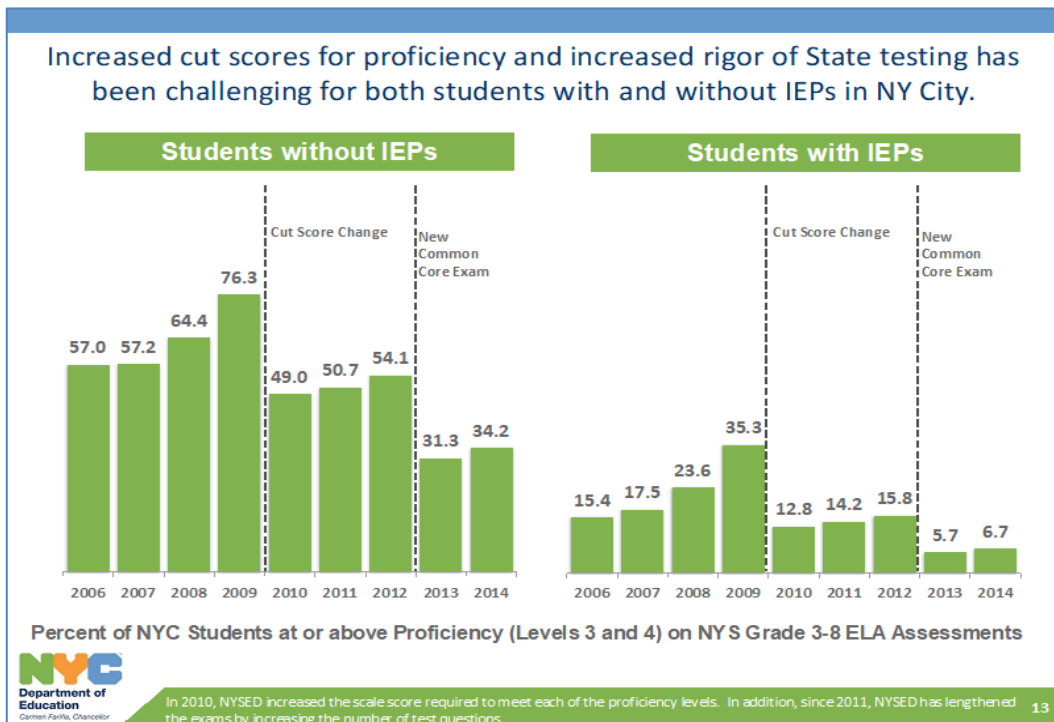


The next graph is disturbing. Until 2009, results on ELA assessments (English Language Art) were good. 76.3 % of students without IEP had a good proficiency level, and 35.3 % of students with IEP. The problem was that this percentage of pupils graduated, but some of them were as good as illiterate. So in 2010, the cut score was changed, and from 2013, the new common core exam was introduced. These increased cut scores for proficiency, together with the increased rigor of state testing, has been challenging, for both students with and without IEP in New York City. Now only 6.7 % of pupils with IEP reach

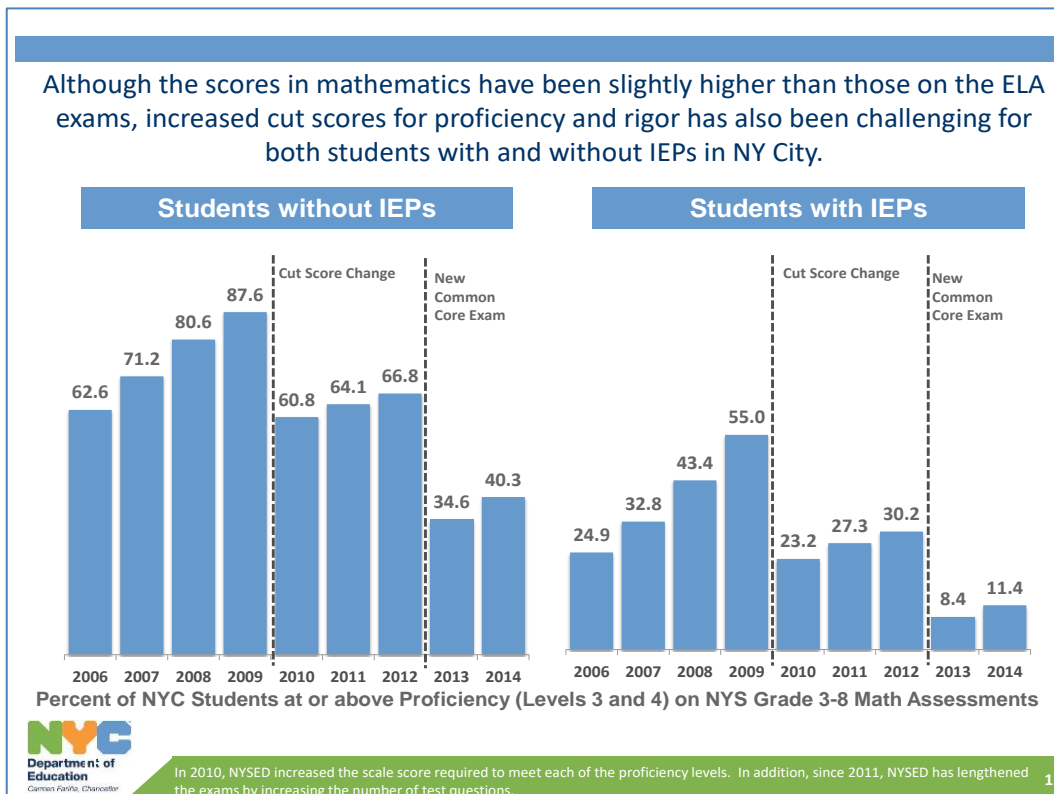


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a sufficient proficiency level in 2014! This group contains also children with mild disabilities, so the score is really too weak.



Same situation for math assessment, although the scores are slightly higher here:



### *Recommendations*

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The picture drawn for the city of New York is not very optimistic. Education has not yet found the answer.

Inclusive education is possible: there is the legal framework, there is the passion from teachers and educators. Unfortunately, structures are still defined per label, per category; the aspirations of the pupils are not enough taken into account. Barriers for inclusive education are very often not in the child, but in the teacher, who is not enough prepared and not enough supported to deal with diversity in the classroom. It is rather easy to teach teachers how to teach the curriculum, it is much more challenging to teach them how to be change agents. Teachers often lack transferable skills, such as:

- Communicating
- Making Decisions
- Showing Commitment
- Flexibility
- Time Management
- Self Direction
- Curiosity, Creativity & Problem Solving
- Being a Team Player
- Ability To Work Under Pressure

#### *Recommendation 1*

Create standards-based **professional development programmes** and incentivize principals, assistant principals and teachers to develop additional skills in and knowledge of special education practices and content.

#### *Recommendation 2*

**Conduct research** and collect data on special education programmes, services, initiatives and outcomes. This research is not limited to research at university level; teachers should be educated to observe and to conduct research themselves. By collecting data and conducting research, the system can focus on improving special education instruction and developing curricula and instruction that take into account students of different ages and varying needs. The system can also focus on outcomes instead of simply compliance. The system will also develop greater transparency, sharing of information, and comprehension of the implementation and ultimate success/failure of special education initiatives.

#### *Recommendation 3*

Develop **early childhood interventions** and **parent outreach** pilots in target schools. Evaluate them, and, if they are successful, implement them countrywide.

### *Recommendation 4*

Encourage effective and accountable **parent-school collaborations** to enhance students' academic and social performance.

### *Recommendation 5*

Each school system should establish **small research units** (e.g. early childhood, primary, secondary form one unit) to conduct proactive investigations into **best school-based practices**.

### *Setting a special education research agenda*

What are some questions that should be asked? The following list of a dozen questions is grouped in three categories: pre-referral interventions in general education; referral for special education; and special class services. There are countless other questions that could have been raised, basic questions that have a direct impact on educational practice.

Mark Alter does not believe we know the answers to the questions. But he is sure that, if schools could obtain answers to the questions, not only may the performance of students with disabilities and at risk students be improved, but all children would benefit!

#### *Pre-referral interventions in general education*

1. Do pre-referral interventions reduce referrals for special education? If yes, which services/programs are effective and under what conditions in terms of personnel, frequency, intensity and duration?
2. Are direct pre-referral services, where a certified professional delivers instruction, more effective for student performance than indirect pre-referral service where suggestions are made for the referring teacher to implement?
3. If students do not benefit from pre-referral instruction in general education, what is learned from the pre-referral intervention or service that will increase the chance that the student will benefit from special education?
4. If a student receives behavior management interventions, what are the effects of improved behavior management practices on academic achievement? Are the effects more or less powerful in classes where teachers are inexperienced?

#### *Referral for special education*

1. Other than low IQ score and poor achievement, what are the operational defining characteristics of the high-incidence disability classifications. For example, how does a learning disabled youngster or child with autism differ from an emotionally disturbed child? Or, what clinical or observations assessments are employed to rule out social maladjustment as a diagnosis?

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2. Other than it being a general education classroom, why is a particular class placement the least restrictive for an individual student with disabilities? What are the defining objective characteristics of a classroom that renders it least restrictive for an individual student?
3. How do teams use assessment data to generate goals and objectives and their corresponding mastery levels?
4. What specific written decertification criteria exist to decertify a student from special education, or for moving him/her to more - or less - restrictive environments Are these the correct criteria as determined by teachers, parents, and supervisors?

### *Special class services*

1. What specific assessment data are used to determine placement in a class and/or a school?
2. What impact do students with disabilities have on the academic performance of their classmates?
3. Are push in special education services more effective than pull out services for students' academic and social performance?
4. To what extent, if any, do testing accommodations help students with disabilities?

# General Comment N° 4 – Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education

**Paula Hunt**

*Paula Frederica Hunt M.Ed., Ph.D. is owner and principal consultant of DED – Disability, Education and Development – Lda, ([www.ded4inclusion.com](http://www.ded4inclusion.com)) and has been an expert consultant on Inclusive Education with UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS since 2011, and served as the Regional Disability Focal Point until 2016. In her capacities at the Regional Office she provided capacity development related to Inclusive Education and children with disabilities in various countries in Europe, Central and Southeast Asia and supported the conceptualization, development and implementation of all work related to Inclusive Education and children with disabilities at Regional and country levels.*



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## PART 1: The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

### ***Setting the context: the CRPD, Article 24 and General Comment N°4***

The **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD) has been adopted by the United Nations in 2006. It was a huge leap forward. The Convention marks a paradigm shift in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are not viewed as 'objects' of charity, medical treatment and social protection; rather as 'subjects' with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society.

**Article 24** of this Convention asserts the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive education without discrimination and on an equal basis with others.

However, significant challenges remain in the field of implementation, exclusion and discrimination. There is confusion in concepts: disabilities and special

education needs are understood in different ways. There are multiple barriers, there is a poor understanding and lack of data, leading to a failure to understand the case for inclusion. Despite the progress achieved, profound challenges persist. Many millions of persons with disabilities continue to be denied the right to education, and for many education is available only in settings where persons with disabilities are isolated from their peers.

The text of Article 24 assumes that all stakeholders had a common understanding of the meaning of disability, of inclusive education. As this was not the case, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities took the decision in 2015 to elaborate a **General Comment on Article 24**. The General Comment has been adopted by the Committee in **August 2016**.

The General Comment intends to clarify what Article 24 means. The text, about 10000 words, is easy to understand and accessible. The text is the result of a process of deliberation and public consultation that took about one year and a half. The most important achievement is that it details and defines what an inclusive education system should look like, so that there is no more confusion. The General Comment wants to support governments and stakeholders in the implementation of an inclusive education system.

The General Comment applies to all persons (including those) with disabilities who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The shift in thinking is in the second part of this sentence: the Comment does not only refer to access to school for all, but to full participation of all in the education system.

Although the focus in the presentation is on pupils with disabilities, it is important to keep in mind that the Comment applies to **all** persons, which is broader than those with disabilities.

### **Article 24**

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Inclusive education is not just about a moral imperative, it is about a commitment governments have made towards obeying to international legal frameworks.

Article 24 of the CRPD states that States must ensure for persons with disabilities:

- the right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity;
- an inclusive education system at all levels;
- provision of reasonable accommodation, and individualised support measures; this means that the system has to provide accommodation and support allowing every person to enter the system, not regarding his/her disability. This support has to be tailored to the individual.

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- opportunities to acquire skills to ensure equal participation in education and community; this is not about just access anymore.
- access to teachers qualified with appropriate skills; teachers are essential actors of change and have to be included in the decision making process.
- progressive realisation, recognising that rights are influenced by the availability of resources. There has to be a forward movement though.

This is the full text of the Article:

### **Article 24: Education**

*1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and life long learning directed to:*

*(a) The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;*

*(b) The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;*

*(c) Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.*

*2. In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that:*

*(a) Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;*

*(b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;*

*(c) Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;*

*(d) Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;*

*(e) Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.*

*3. States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:*

*(a) Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;*

*(b) Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;*

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*(c) Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.*

*4. In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.*

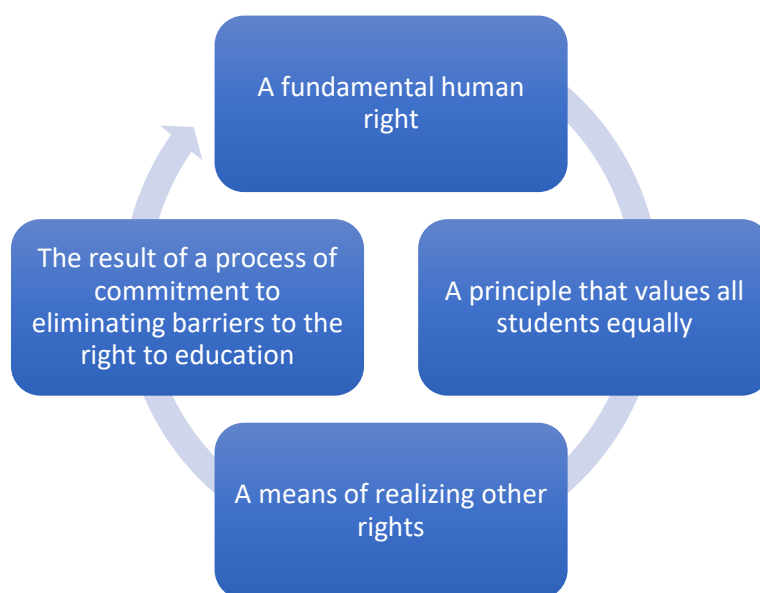
*5. States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities.*

### ***What is inclusive education?***

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#### ***Core features of inclusive education***

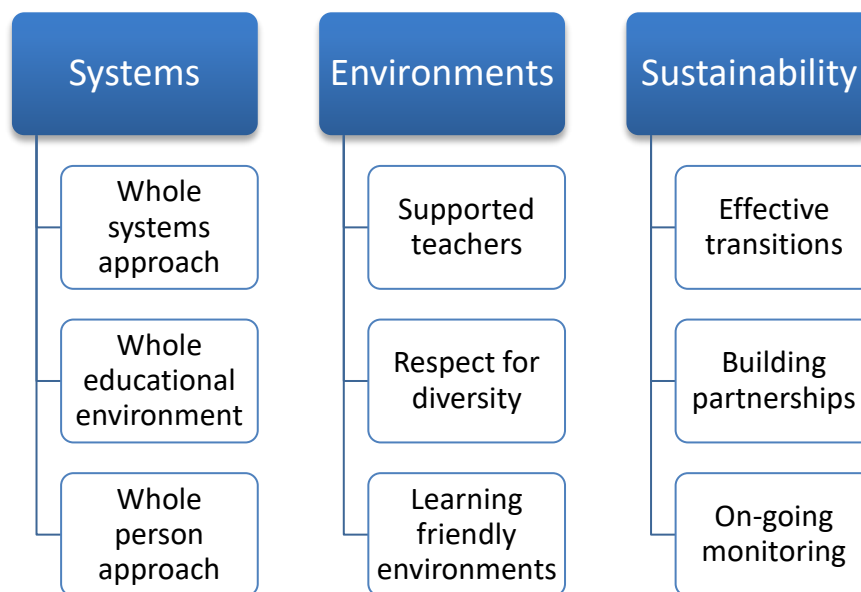
Inclusive education is a process that includes four areas. It is a fundamental human right. It is a principle that values all students equally. It is the result of a process of commitment to eliminating barriers to the right to education. And education is a right in itself, and at the same time a vehicle for realizing other rights. Inclusive education is a matter of systemic reform not about inventing something new but rather about improving the existing system.



In the General Comment, nine core features of inclusive education can be clustered in three groups: systems, environments and sustainability.



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### Whole systems approach

Education ministries must ensure that all resources are invested in advancing inclusive education.

### Whole educational environment

Educational institutions have to embed the culture, policies and practices needed to achieve inclusive education not only in the classroom but in all areas (such as board meetings, counselling services, school trips, ...).

### Whole person approach

Inclusive education offers flexible curricula and teaching and learning methods adapted to different strengths, requirements and learning styles. Inclusive education does not focus on the impairments of the child, but at the whole person from a multidisciplinary perspective.

### Supported teachers

All teachers receive the education and training needed to give them the core values and competences to accommodate inclusive learning environments.

### Respect for diversity

Disability is seen as just one characteristic, such as age, race, sex, language, religion.. All students must feel valued, respected, included, irrespective of these characteristics.

### Learning friendly environments

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In inclusive learning environments, there is a strong emphasis on involving students in building a positive, dynamic school community.

### Effective transitions

Learners with disabilities receive support to ensure the effective transition from learning at school to vocational education and training and/or work.

### Recognition of partnerships

Inclusive education is a community projects, involving teachers associations, organizations of persons with disabilities, school boards, parent associations, ... The entire machinery is necessary to move the education system forward.

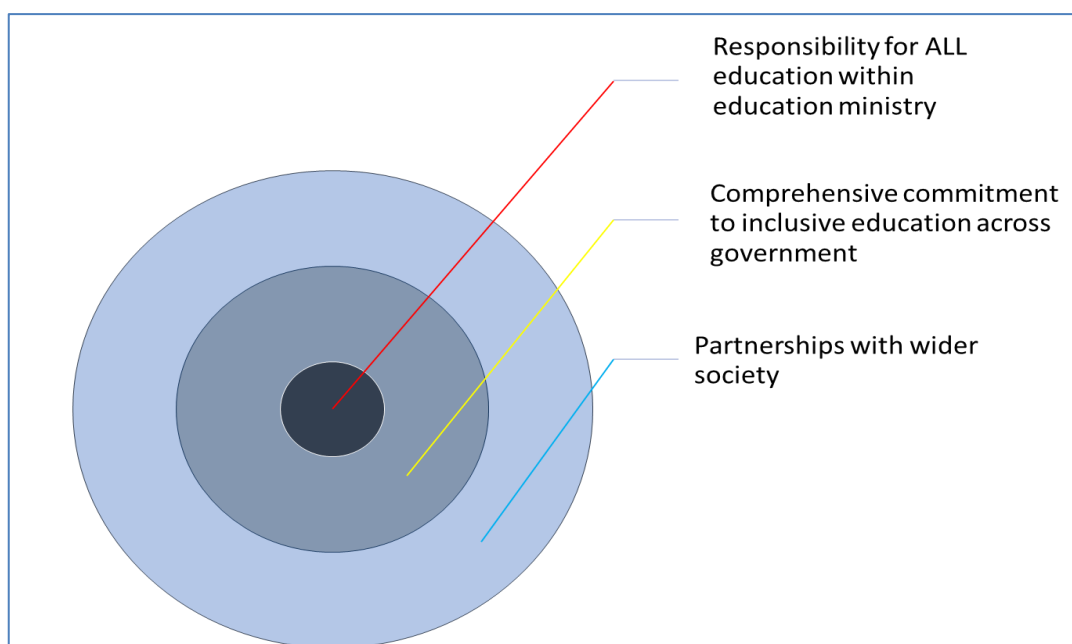
### On-going monitoring

Monitoring as a continuing process must ensure that neither segregation neither integration are taking place, formally or informally. The objective of this monitoring is not to punish, but to steer.

## ***Action required for implementation***

### Structures and systems

The governments of States committed to Article 24. Inclusive education is not only the responsibility of the ministry of education, but the comprehensive commitment across the government (health, labour, social protection, finances, ...). The other way around, the ministry of education is responsible for all children, whilst sometimes now children with disabilities are nowhere in the ministry of education, but under the responsibility of the ministry of welfare, or family affairs.



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### Legislation and policy

It is important to look at what the commitment to CPRD in general and to Article 24 in particular, means. It includes that governments must assure:

- Compliance with human rights standards;
- Definition of and affirmation of the right to inclusive education;
- Commitment to de-institutionalization;
- Guarantee of access and appropriate support;
- Comprehensive quality standards;
- Recognition of need for reasonable accommodations;
- Framework for early identification and support;
- Obligation on local authorities to plan and provide for all learners;
- Guarantee of the right to be heard;
- Creation of partnerships with key stakeholder.

### Planning and data collection

The planning of the education sector needs to be based on collection of accurate data, consultations with persons with disabilities including children, analysis of the local context, a clear timeframe and measurable goals, and a process for implementation.

### Resourcing

Resourcing is usually the tricky point. Nevertheless, it is cheaper to have an inclusive system than to have two parallel systems. There is no need for new money, there is need for a commitment of reallocating the money.

Partnerships with the private sector are a way of reforming governance and financing systems.

Resources can be transferred from segregated to inclusive environments in order to promote accessible learning environments, to invest in inclusive teacher training, to provide accessible learning resources and assistive technology and to address stigma and discrimination.

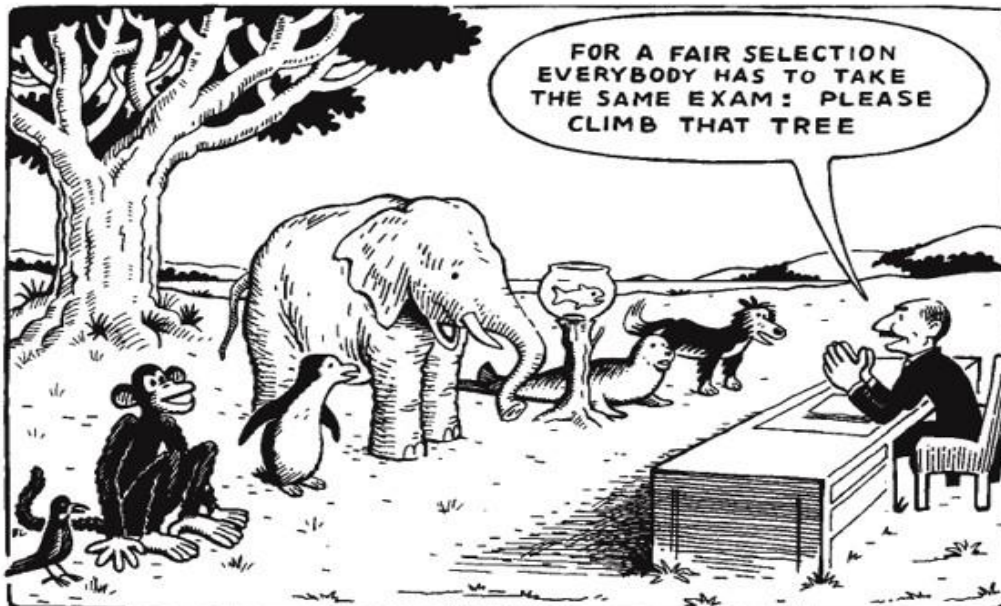
### Teacher education and support

The system cannot expect a teacher who has never seen a child with a disability, to teach children with a disability. A change of attitude and perception is needed, so that teachers open their hearts and their minds and see the potential in each child.

All teachers need training at all levels of education, pre- as well as in-service, including dedicated modules and experiential learning. Content of training can be, amongst other things, human diversity and human rights, inclusive pedagogy, forms of communication and adapting teaching methods, provision of individualized instruction. Teachers need continuous support, which can be made possible through partnerships between schools, team teaching, joint teacher assessment, engagement of parents and links with local communities.

### Student assessment

Assessment of pupils with disabilities is challenging. Sometimes they are simply not assessed, as if they don't 'count'. Assessment is needed, but connected to an individualized approach.



### Accountability and monitoring

Stakeholders and policy makers have to be well informed about their rights and obligations, and how to challenge violations. There must be safe, accessible, transparent and effective mechanisms for complaint and redress, with access to justice systems.

### ***Conclusion: Inclusive education is a fundamental human right***

Inclusive education is fundamental human right and a moral imperative. It is not an optional extra, not a matter of good will. It brings social, economic and educational benefits – a win-win investment.

It needs to be recognized as a process involving both legal reform and transformation of cultures, values and policies.

Inclusive education requires systems change, it cannot happen just at school level. Good inclusive schools do not make an inclusive education system.

The General Comment provides the framework and guidance for States. Now is the time to invest in making the right a reality.

### ***The European Disability Strategy***

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CRPD is the first human rights treaty of the 21st century and also the first one to be signed and ratified by the European Union. The European Disability

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Strategy, signed in 2010, outlines EU's commitments towards the implementation of the CRPD and a renewed Commitment to a barrier-free Europe.

From the introduction to the European Disability Strategy:

'One in six people in the European Union (EU) has a disability that ranges from mild to severe making around 80 million who are often prevented from taking part fully in society and the economy because of environmental and attitudinal barriers. For people with disabilities the rate of poverty is 70 % higher than the average, partly due to limited access to employment.' (EDS, introduction, pg. 3)'

The European Disability Strategy focuses on eliminating barriers, with eight main areas for action:

- Accessibility
- Participation
- Equality
- Employment
- Education and training
- Social protection
- Health
- External Action

For each area, key actions are identified.

Part 2: CEE/CIS Key Milestones in inclusive education
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CEE/CIS stands for Central, Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. The following list shows which countries from CEE/CIS have signed and ratified the CRPD and/or the optional protocol. The optional protocol is a side-agreement CRPD, adopted on 13 December 2006; it establishes an individual complaints mechanism for the Convention.

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	Signature		Ratification	
	Convention	Optional Protocol	Convention	Optional Protocol
Albania	2009	-	2013	-
Armenia	2007	2007	2010	-
Azerbaijan	2008	2008	2009	2009
Belarus	2015	-	2016-	-
BiH	2009	2009	2010	2010
Bulgaria	2007	2008	2012	-
Croatia	2007	2007	2007	2007
EU	2007		2010	
Georgia	2009	2009	2014	-
Kazakhstan	2008	2008	2015	-
Kosovo*	-	-	-	-
Kyrgyzstan	2011	-	-	-
Moldova	2007	-	2010	-
Montenegro	2007	2007	2009	2009
Romania	2007	2008	2011	-
RF	2008	-	2012	-
Serbia	2007	2007	2009	2009
Tajikistan	-	-	-	-
TfYRoM	2007	2009	2011	2011
Turkey	2007	2009	2009	2015
Turkmenistan	n/a	n/a	2008	2010
Ukraine	2008	2008	2010	2010
Uzbekistan	2009	-	-	-

### *The 2010 Inclusive Education Round Table*

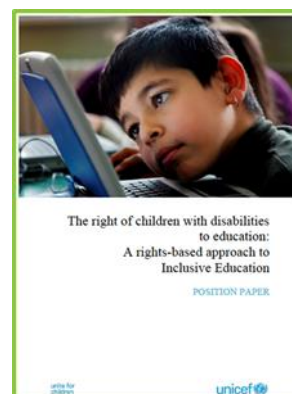
This Round Table (Geneva, 2010) took stock of the interest, the current situation at regional and at country levels, the available capacity and needs. A medium-term plan for the region was developed.

### *Full time consultant*

In 2011, a full time consultant was hired to support and encourage a collaborative engagement across the region. Concurrently, the headquarter created a disability section and established positions for this section.

### *Regional position paper*

In 2011 the regional office developed a regional position paper on inclusive education, providing a conceptual framework aligned with the UNICEF's human rights mandate. The title of the position paper: 'The right of children with disabilities to education: a rights-based approach to inclusive education'. The paper focuses on specific legislation, policies, strategies and processes to introduce and sustain inclusive education.



### *Moscow Conference*

In 2011 the first UNICEF Ministerial Conference on Inclusive Education was organized in Moscow. It was attended by 13 countries from the region, who committed to spread the word on inclusive education.

### *Technical capacity and country support*

- Involvement in various headquarter initiatives related to inclusive education and/or children with disabilities, for instance the REAP project (Rights, Education and Protection).
- Introduction of the ICF-CY International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth, as a tool for compliance with the CRPD and a common language for inclusive education.
- Concurrently the development of a Regional Framework for Monitoring Out of School Children and Adolescents leading to a global manual.
- A web-based regional education database: [www.inclusive-education.org](http://www.inclusive-education.org).

### *Compact on inclusive education (2013-2017)*

Under the head quarter's REAP project, the regional office for CEE/CIS developed an inclusive education orientation module, as well as a series of 14 webinars/booklets on specific themes and technical areas pertaining to inclusive education (end June 2015).

These are the themes addressed by the 14 webinars/booklets (<https://vimeo.com/channels/842958>):

- Conceptualizing Inclusive Education and Contextualizing it within the UNICEF mission;
- Definition and Classification of Disability;
- Legislation and Policy for Inclusive Education;
- Disability Data Collection;
- Mapping Children with Disabilities Out of School and Child-Find Responsibilities;
- Partnerships, Advocacy and Communication;
- Financing of Inclusive Education;
- Inclusive Pre-school Programmes;
- Access to School and the Learning Environment I;
- Access to the Learning Environment II – Universal Design for Learning;
- Teachers, Inclusive, Child-centered Teaching, and Pedagogy;
- Parents, Family and Community Involvement and Participation;
- Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation.

These booklets are disseminated worldwide through translation in Russian, Portuguese, French, Arabic and Spanish.

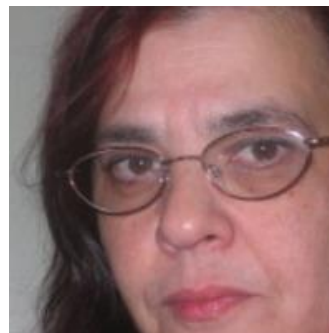
The regional office also supported the development of 4 teacher education modules on inclusive education, piloted in Macedonia and improved and finalized by the Zurich University of Teacher Education in September 2015:

- Module 1: Introduction to Inclusive Education;
- Module 2: Inclusive Education: Vision, Theory and Concepts;
- Module 3: Working together to create inclusive schools;
- Module 4: Enabling environments for individualized learning.

## The situation of special needs education in Romania

### *Ecaterina Vrasmaş*

*Professor Ph.D. Ecaterina Vrasmaş is professor at the department of Education Sciences at the University of Bucharest. Some of her courses: Special Class Requirements, Inclusive Education, Inclusive Practice Development, Support Teacher, Learning Difficulties, Counseling Children with Learning Disabilities, Education and Counseling Parents with Children with Disabilities, Disability Announcement, Curriculum for Children with Deep and / or Severe Disabilities, Staff Training Children's and children with disabilities, Adapted Kindergartens, Musical Therapy.*



*She coordinates research projects on early education, integrated education, inclusive education, parent education, career counseling and guidance, transition and integration into work. She is president of RENINCO Romania Association (National Network for Information and Cooperation to Support Community Integration).*

### **Background: after 1990...**

Until 1990, Romania had been disconnected from the other countries. As a consequence, the possibility of disseminating and/or translating information and research for professionals and other stakeholders was very important. Improving the life of children in residential institutions and special schools was a big challenge. There was the need for the development of (new) training for professionals (psychologists, pedagogues, sociologists, social workers, ...). New research on special education was started up.

The start was an action-research on integrated community education for children with special needs. This research took place from 1993 until 1994, mainly in two towns: Timisoara and Cluj. The two pilot projects focused both on special classes and ordinary classes (individual integration) and thus explored two new ways for the education of children with disabilities, outside the special schools, and on the idea of itinerant teachers.

Important steps towards inclusion from 1990:

- The United Nations Convention on the Children Rights, 1990;
- The seminar on handicap and inclusion, 1991;
- The movement to integration: RENINCO association 1993-1998;
- The development of integration pilot programmes 1993-2000;



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- Information and training materials on inclusive education 1995-2016;
- PHARE project for inclusion by the Ministry of Education 2003-2006;
- Developing practices for inclusive education with the involvement of UNICEF 1995-2016 (trainings for teachers, translations, elaboration of materials, workshops, conferences, ...);
- Support for teachers, school counsellors and resource centers and educational assistance in each county, 2000;
- A new perspective in the evaluation of children with disabilities (inter-ministerial decision), 2002;
- Curriculum for children with severe disabilities, RENINCO, 2002;
- Translation and adaptation of the international classification of health and disability (2006, 2011);

The **Education Law from 1995** (the first law for general education after 1989) was an important support for inclusive education. The law outlines important new general education principles: democratic education, the differentiation of education, pluralism in education, the possibility of educational alternatives.

The Law has a whole chapter on special education and introduces the new concept of 'special education needs'. There is a wider range of educational opportunities for children with disabilities:

- Special schools;
- Special classes in ordinary schools;
- Individual integration in ordinary classes.

The idea of integrated education for children with disabilities is there, the idea that children with learning problems can be in the regular school. Before, there was a special school for every problem.

The 'itinerant teacher' (now called the support teacher) was introduced in the Teachers Statute Law in 1997.

### ***RENINCO involvement in special education needs integration***

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RENINCO is the National Network for Information and Cooperation to Support Community Integration.

RENINCO was at the beginning an informal structure of collaboration for seminars, meetings and experience sharing since 1994, inside the framework of the two pilot projects – initiated and coordinated by the Ministry of Education, with UNICEF support. RENINCO became an independent non-profit organization in March 1998, with UNICEF support.

RENINCO Romania is a national non-profit organization composed of active NGOs and other organizations (including parent organizations of persons with disabilities), various professionals and parents active in promoting community involvement responding to the special educational needs of children and

youngsters, derived from a disability or other conditions. The general aim/mission of RENINCO is to support and encourage community integration and the inclusion of children and youngsters with special educational needs, derived from disabilities or other conditions, through educational and social measures. RENINCO is one of the leading NGOs in Romania fighting for the educational and social inclusion of all children and youngsters. RENINCO has had a solid cooperation with international and European organizations (UNICEF, UNESCO, European Disability Forum), with national ministries (National Education, Labour and Social Protection), national organizations of people with disabilities, universities and research institutions, educational authorities as well as schools.

In June 1994, when the UNESCO Salamanca conference on special needs education has launched the inclusive education vision worldwide, the Romanian Education Ministry was represented and active afterwards. In Romania, initiated by the Education Ministry, due to UNICEF support, the Salamanca Declaration was translated, published and disseminated in 1995. The inclusive education idea was introduced and has been used in parallel with integrated education. The UNESCO pack on Special Needs in the classroom was also translated, published and disseminated by the Education Ministry, with UNICEF support (1995-1996). Some pilot projects on developing inclusive school practices took place between 1996 and 2001.

In Autumn 1998, RENINCO and UNICEF published 'Integrated education for children with disabilities', a reference for the following decade, as well as many other publications, translations, courses and small research focussed on integration (1998-2007), such as the booklet and video 'Developing inclusive practices in schools'. This is a rather small study, but it was an important one because it was an attempt to define inclusive education. The definition of the inclusive education from here was taken and stipulated in a Romanian Government Decision from 2005.

RENINCO developed the following publications based on local experiences. The support of UNICEF has been crucial over the past 20 years and cannot be stressed enough.

- 'Including the excluded. Meeting Diversity in education', a Case Study from Romania, published by UNESCO, in 2001;
- Contribution on 'Open File on Inclusive Education', UNESCO, 2001;
- Publication of the UNESCO Guide 'Understanding and responding to children needs in the classroom' (2001, in Romanian, 2002);
- Publication by RENINCO and UNICEF of a Guide for Support Teachers (2005);
- A study on Support Teachers in 8 counties of Romania, undertaken by RENINCO, in cooperation with the ministry of education, with UNICEF support (2005-2006, included in a book from 2008);
- A RENINCO project with OECD and Romanian education ministry on data collection for SEN in schools (2006-2007);

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- A study on 'Good practices in inclusive education', included in the 2008 book on inclusion;
- 'Steps towards inclusive education' (UNICEF and RENINCO publication, 2008);
- Several training courses on inclusive education initiated by the education ministry took place all over Romania, 2000-2007;
- PETI, project on inclusive early education, developed by the education ministry;
- Training of trainers for 'inclusive Kindergartens', 2009 and inclusive networks with Kindergartens, 2010-2011 (RENINCO, UNICEF and education ministry);
- RENINCO publications from 2010 (with UNICEF support and cooperation with education ministry):
- 'The educational inclusion of children with special needs', 2010;
- 'Premises for inclusive education in kindergartens', 2010;
- 'Models and ways of educational support in inclusive contexts', 2011 (RENINCO with French Embassy support);
- Inclusive education in the Kindergarten: dimensions, challenges and solutions', 2012 (RENINCO, UNICEF and education ministry);
- Promotion of inclusive education in primary education, 2013 (RENINCO, UNICEF and education ministry);
- Best practices in Kindergarten in inclusive education, 2015 (RENINCO, UNICEF and education ministry);
- 'Education for all and for everyone. Access and participation to education of children with disabilities and/or special education needs', 2015, a research report by UNICEF, RENINCO and the Institute of Educational Sciences;
- In 2016 three RENINCO publications with EEA (Europe Economic Area) funds from Norway: 'Multidisciplinary intervention methodology for special educational needs', a research report on discrimination for special educational needs, a multimedia kit for schools on special educational needs).

### Legislative developments

In 2001, the first methodology on itinerant and support teachers was published.

In 2005, the government took a decision on special education issues, with a definition of the concept of special educational needs, and the introduction of 'integrated special education'.

New educational structures are preparing for inclusion:

- The county resource centers for educational assistance. They offer psycho-pedagogical assistance to all children in need. They provide speech therapy inside Kindergartens and primary schools. They involve a school mediator, to make the connection between the schools and the

families and communities. They do the methodological coordination for the school centers for inclusive education.

- The school centers for inclusive education.

The education law of 2011 stays in line with the previous developments.

In 2016, three ministries worked out an integrated approach on assessment and intervention for children with disabilities.

### *Some statistical data*

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The number of children in special schools has continuously declined, between the school year 1998/1999 – 55.237 pupils – and last year (the school year 2014-2015: 25.514 pupils).

In the school year 2013-2014 there were 32.060 children with SEN in ordinary schools/inclusive settings (ISE, UNICEF, RENINCO, 2015).

The number of itinerant and support teachers has increased; only between 2001 and 2006 their number has increased by 1000.

### *Lessons learnt and conclusions*

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There were, and still are, many barriers toward the implementation of an inclusive vision in education.

Key issues are the training of ALL teachers on special needs and inclusion, on child centred pedagogy, together with research on this field and the strengthening of resource (support) units for learning in ordinary schools.

Developing strong partnerships, involving all stakeholders (parents, teachers, managers, NGOs, ...) and lobbying the authorities are vital and continuous challenges.

Challenges for the future are situated in the fields of policy and legislation, of culture, and of educational practices.

### *Challenges in the field of policy and legislation*

- Need for coherence;
- Need for continuity.

### *Challenges in the field of culture*

- More cooperation and collaboration between parents, professionals and children;
- Empowerment and participation of parents;
- Positive attitude on differences and particularities;
- Tolerance and understanding of the human value and dignity of everyone;

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- Value the individuality;
- Building more on children self-esteem.

### *Challenges in the field of educational practices*

- More cooperative practices on school education, sharing practices;
- Collaboration and networking with other schools;
- Working in team;
- A multidisciplinary team for disability;
- Training on the job;
- Planning of individual activities in the school's every day programme;
- Differentiation and individualization of methodologies;
- Alternative means and tools, assistive technology and augmentative communication;
- Early intervention;
- Children participation and valorisation of all progress;
- Curriculum transformation, with room for flexibility and adaptation.



## Public policies on special education. Advice N° 1/2014 of the CNE (Portuguese Education Council)

### *Anabela Grácio*

*Anabela Grácio holds a degree in English/German from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Coimbra. She has a master's degree in Education-Administration, Monitoring and Regulation of Education. She began her career in Education as a teacher of English and German in 1990, and after some experience as a teacher, class director and member of the Pedagogical Council in the various schools where she worked, she started the Constancia Group of Schools. She is member of the CNE, the Portuguese Education Council. Since May 2016, Anabela Grácio works in Brussels, after being seconded by the European Commission as a national expert for the European Schools unit.*



### *Recommendation N° 1/2014: why and how?*

Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is very clear: ALL children have the right to inclusive quality education. It lead to changes in culture, in policies and in practices.

With the Deliberation N° 2-PL/2014, the Portuguese Parliament requested the Portuguese Education Council (CNE) to produce an advice on 'Public policies on special education' and the use of ICF (International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health) for the elaboration of the individual education plan.

The recommendation was prepared through a technical report gathering information on

- (Inter)national concepts and practices of special educational needs;
- International conventions/statements/declarations;
- The legal framework;
- A review of literature and research.

Next, hearings of stakeholders were organized: teachers, directors, administration, ministry of education, support teachers, special school staff, therapists, ..

### *The current situation in Portugal*

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The rate of inclusion in Portugal is over 90 %. Integration is not the guiding principle, inclusion is the guiding principle. Pupils are mostly in mainstream schools, and entitled to support in order to receive quality education. There are no special classes. During the hearings, it was clear that all representatives heard were in favour of inclusion. There is inclusion in Portugal since the first decree in 1991. With the law from 2008 even multi-disabled children are included in mainstream schools, and have more than 60 % of their education in the regular classes. This offers opportunities for all children to see the rainbow of diversity.

How is this inclusion realized? Portugal has a system of early intervention. From birth, support is offered to parents and families to cope with difficulties of the child. ICF (International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health) is used. Inclusion Resource Centres support schools. There are special units for structured teaching and multi-disabilities. Specialized teachers are more than support teachers: they are attached to the schools, they work in the schools. A teacher needs to take specific training in order to become a specialized teacher.

There is thus a major consensus regarding the assumption of inclusive education as a principle, which is also stated in all key public education policies. There is also consensus on the centrality of the school in the process of construction of responses to special educational needs: schools must be at the centre. However, the road to inclusive education is not at its end, inclusiveness is not reached.

Inclusive schools have the responsibility to have all children and young people with special educational needs in schools as places of genuine inclusion. They have to create the conditions to build educational responses for all and each of them, with equity, without which inclusion is a merely rhetoric construction. If there is no equity, there is no inclusion.

### *Major issues*

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#### *The legal framework*

The legal framework can be a barrier for inclusive education.

There is the issue of eligibility of special educational needs students; there are normative and non-normative disabilities. Current legislation leaves helpless one considerable group of children who have manifest need of special education but are not eligible within the current framework. Some disorders are not considered as special educational needs, and this has budgetary implications. An example: if there is a child with special educational needs in the class, there is a maximum of 20 pupils, while classes count 30 pupils on average.

There is the focus on permanent educational needs, whereas there are situations of transitory needs. Emphasis on the criterion of 'permanence' may



mean that the lack of response to these children leads to the accumulation of transitory needs, which, lacking specialized intervention, become chronic difficulties and therefore permanent.

And there is the issue of certification and recognition of the individual specific curriculum and of the functional curriculum.

### *Coordination and transition*

The transition between early intervention and inclusion of special educational needs students in primary and secondary schools has to be smooth.

External and standardized evaluation has to be put in place in the context of inclusion education. Even if a child cannot go through the academic curriculum, it needs the tools to function in society, to make the transition from school to working life through a functional curriculum.

Sometimes parents have support from outside the school, through a special education allowance, which is spelt out in parallel with the work carried out in schools.

In Portugal, there is lack of coordination of the action by the central services and the ministries responsible for special education, which involves constraints in developing educational responses in a timely manner. And time is crucial in the context of special educational needs!

Moreover there is absence of clear criteria for allocation of resources and funding to schools and partners schools, and special education teachers. There are a lot of support teachers that are 'borrowed' to a school; but it is important to have the knowledge on inclusive education IN the school.

There is inequity in the provision of educational responses: the early intervention system and the national net of inclusion resource centers. The principles of relevance and urgency of intervention are not always followed both by schools and services.

Another point of concern is the involvement of families in the educational process of the students. Parents and families are often just recipients of information, and not really part of the process of building the support right from the beginning.

### *Professionals and training*

Teachers are the ones who allow the learning. In an inclusive environment ALL teachers must be prepared to teach students with special educational needs and to coordinate their individual educational plan. However, teacher education curricula don't include compulsory modules on the conception and implementation of strategies, methodologies or curricula development tools in order to accommodate and effectively include all students. Teachers should be more prepared to deal with the rainbow of diversity. It is not sufficient that teachers know 'about' special educational needs, they have to know how to



intervene. There is a clear lack of quality of specialized training for teachers, mainly in practical intervention and technical knowledge.

Specialists (such as speech therapists, psychotherapists, ...) are involved in order to improve the learning. It is important to stress that those therapists are not in the schools to cure the pupils (this is a health issue); we are talking about education: their role is to enhance the chances for learning.

### *In short...*

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The main threats to the establishment of inclusive schools in the context of a whole school approach are:

- The mismatch between the establishment of policies and their implementation;
- The placement and organization of resources and professionals;
- The quality of teacher education and training in special educational needs.

The Portuguese Education Council considers this recommendation as part of a broader set of recommendations contributing to build a democratic, inclusive school system, oriented towards the educational success of all and each of its students.

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## **Is inclusive education really included in the education? Lithuania's case.**

### *Alvyra Galkiene*

*Alvyra Galkiene is an Associated Professor at the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, with her field of interest in inclusive education, heterogeneous groups' didactics, and strategies of universal education. She was one of the pioneers of inclusive education in Lithuania, the co-founder and former principal of the first inclusive school in Lithuania. She has authored or co-authored two monographs and over 40 articles on the topic of inclusive education.*



### *What is inclusive education?*

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Alvyra Galkiene refers to the definitions of inclusive education by three scholars:

- Tony Booth et al. in 'Inclusion in education – A process of putting values into action', 2006;
- L. Florian in 'The community cares about everyone's personal success', 2015;
- D. Rose in 'Universal design for individual differences', 2000.

Upon agreement of Member States delegations in 2017, the Council of the European Union indicates that ensuring inclusive high quality education should be seen in a life-long perspective covering all aspects of education. It should be available and accessible to all learners of all ages, including those facing challenges, such as those with special needs or who have a disability, those originating from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, migrant backgrounds or geographically depressed areas or war-torn zones, regardless of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

### *The situation in Lithuania*

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During the Soviet period, there was a high level of segregation in the Lithuanian education system. The system was unified and centralized, ideologized and politized. Discipline and indoctrination were important characteristics, and the aim was to shape collective consciousness. Teaching methods were unified. There was a widely spread institutionalization, and an artificial homogenization of society.

The ideas of educational inclusion were brought forward by humanist education scientists, at the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet regime.

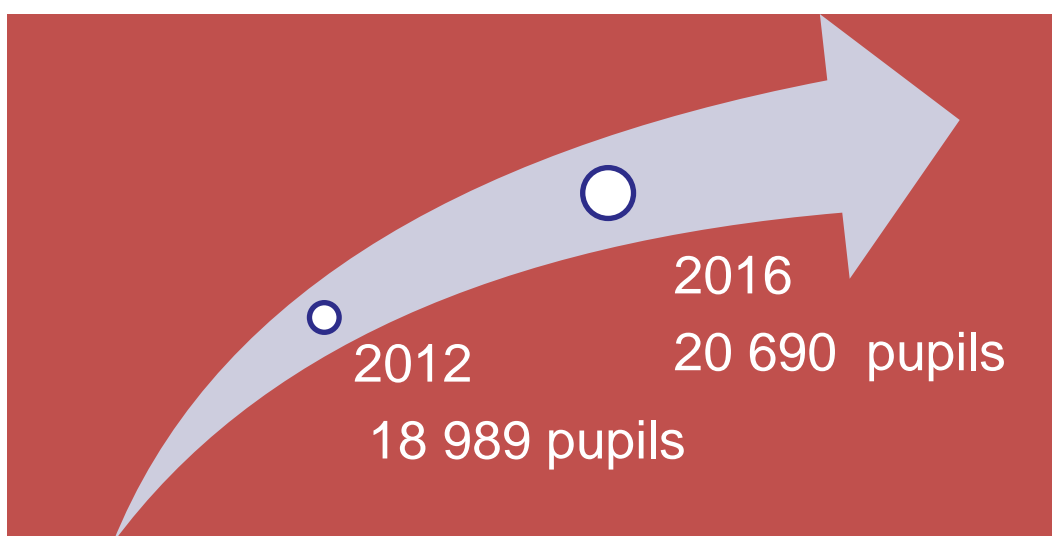
In 1989, the National School Conception was published. The fundamental goal of the mainstream school was declared: to recognize human being as an absolute value, to cherish his physical and mental nature and to create conditions for his individuality to unfold.

In Lithuania, education system transformation takes place as social consciousness is still transforming from sovietisation consequences, which encouraged the development of conformist and dissident attitudes, into attitudes based on freedom and responsibility. The pivot of the education reform in independent Lithuania is recognizing every person's individuality and freedom to develop in equal conditions according to individual needs. It is affected, on the one hand, by declared ideas and, on the other hand, tradition or habits still vivid in society. The idea to replace the strictly segregated education system of pupils with special needs with an open one, accessible to everyone and ensuring equal rights was established by the first Law on

## MAKING EDUCATION MORE INCLUSIVE

Education of the independent Republic of Lithuania in 1991. Today, favourable legal basis exists for the development of inclusive education but practical realization of the idea is localized in separate education institutions engaged in implementing the idea.

Education in Lithuania is now facing an important increase of the number of pupils with special needs over the last years: from 18989 pupils in 2012 to 20690 pupils in 2016, an increase of 8.2 %. This can maybe be caused by the fact that there is a better system now of recognition of special educational needs.



Education is taking place in mainstream schools. Most pupils with special educational needs are in mainstream classrooms (about 90 %); a minority of pupils, those with (very) severe special needs (7-8 %) are in special classrooms. The educational environment is inclusive. There are special classes within mainstream schools. This model offers the possibility of individual approaches. Pupils with even severe special needs have the opportunity of interaction with other pupils, also during non-formal occupations.

In 2016, 30 special classrooms were established. The total number of special classrooms in Lithuania is 433. There are classrooms for pupils with intellectual disability, classrooms for pupils with complex disability, and also classrooms for pupils with a high level of behavioural disorders.

In 2016, 4249 specialists worked in mainstream schools, of which 21 tiflo-pedagogues, 34 surdo-pedagogues and 4194 special needs teachers. Schools have a team for 'child wellbeing'. Special needs teachers, psychologists and social pedagogues work in all Lithuanian schools, and offer support for the teachers, also in the classroom.

Are schools ready for inclusive education? There are 70 study programmes training pedagogues. Study programmes of pre-school and primary teacher training include separate subjects focusing on inclusive education strategies. However, study programmes of subject teacher training do not include a

separate subject of the kind. This is a problem: those teachers lack knowledge about inclusive education, and will have difficulties meeting special educational needs.

### *Research: Factors promoting school transformation towards educational inclusion*

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It is important to unveil the meaning of school transformation towards inclusive education and factors facilitating good quality process of the transition by analyzing the attitude of teachers. This research aims at revealing factors that promote general school transformation towards the implementation of inclusive education.

The research question is: 'In educators' view, what education reality factors promote inclusive education development in mainstream schools?'

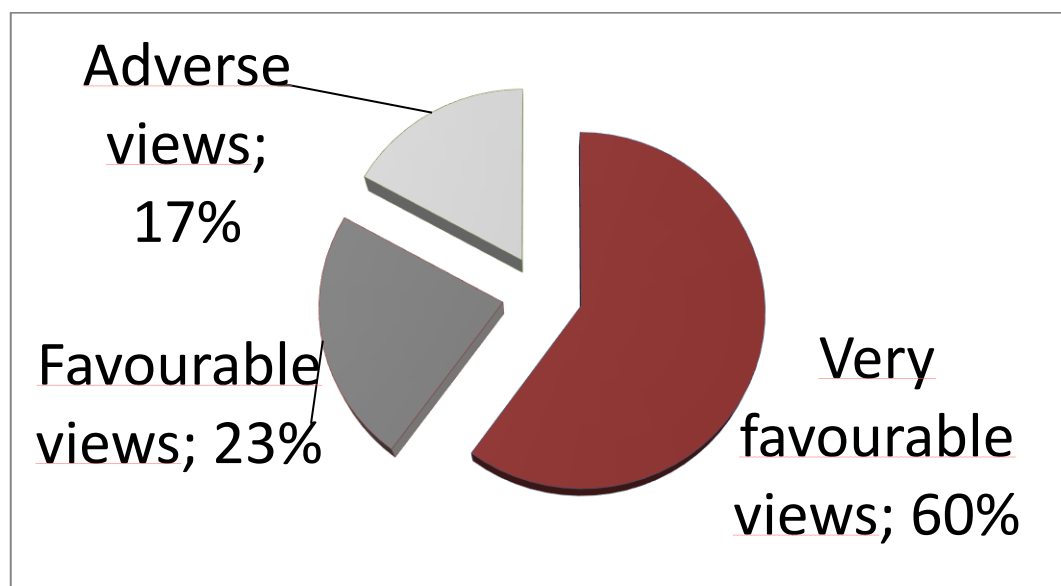
For this research, data has been collected through a written survey of teachers working in Lithuanian mainstream schools. Two open questions were presented for teachers' consideration:

- Is it meaningful to introduce inclusive education in Lithuanian schools, and if so, why?
- What conditions must be met for inclusive education to become a natural reality at your school?

355 teachers working at rural and urban schools in various Lithuanian regions participated in the research.

### *Research results*

The graph shows that a large majority of the teachers is (very much) in favour of inclusive education.



### Inclusive education as a precondition for society's development

Teachers state that inclusive education is a precondition for society's harmonious development. Their arguments:

- It is a natural life-driven reality. The possibility of forced segregation is reduced. Every pupil's dignity is observed. And every child is guaranteed the right to live in their own family.
- Inclusive education as a precondition for societal change. When learning together, pupils acquire knowledge on multiple societal variety and learn to act within it. Pupils acquire motivation for mutual assistance and volunteering; thus, a well-educated and public-spirited society is formed.
- Inclusive education as a driver for pupil partnership. Cooperation between pupils enriches social and educational interaction with empathy and trust. Cooperation culture develops, new cooperation models are created in the education process.

### Social and educational preconditions for inclusive education to become reality in schools.

Inclusive education is only meaningful when the following conditions are met:

- Providing schools with assistance professionals;
- Adjusting the number of pupils in classes;
- Education pupils with behavioural disorders or severe intellectual disorders in special classrooms, or even in special schools.

Inclusive education has no chances to succeed if there is lack of didactic solutions in personalizing education, or lack of focused provision of educational tools.

### Value based attitudes

Research results also show that the value of recognizing the variety of pupils in the educational process is a fundamental factor that encourages the school transformation towards inclusive education. 83 % of the teachers that took part in the research emphasize this exceptional value of inclusive education.

### The values of inclusive education in education policy

It is important that the values of inclusive education should penetrate into education policy, because when education policy aims at creating conditions for the success of pupils with disabilities at school, conditions are built for the practical implementation of inclusive education: providing the process with specialists, tools, methodical material, adapting physical environment etc. However, when the values of inclusive education, provided for in education policy, remain at the level of legal statements without creating conditions for

their practical realization, tension arises within communities of teachers, which hinders a smooth system transformation process.

### Barriers impeding school transformation towards inclusive education

Research results show that the teachers' arguments denying the worthiness of inclusive education or the possibility to implement it are based purely on didactic problems and their consequences.

The worthiness of education is linked often to high academic results. Social and pedagogical interaction and its consequences in this case do not come up as a value. The results of this research allow to claim that focusing educational aims and goals purely on academic success leads to grouping pupils according to their academic skills and towards segregated education.

### ***Conclusion***

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The most important thing is to believe in inclusive education. Inclusive values need to be implemented in teacher education. Focus should not exclusively be on academic success of the pupils, but also on their wellbeing. Universal design for learning can help teachers how to do it, offer the tools.

# Statements

These statements are based on the lessons learnt during the seminar on 'Making education more inclusive' in Bucharest, May 2017. They identify key issues for further debate within EUNEC and within each education council, member of the network.

EUNEC wants to disseminate these statements pro-actively to the European Commission, the European Parliament and relevant DG's. EUNEC also wants to promote action by its members at national/regional level. These statements can contribute to the national advisory opinions of education councils. They should lead to reflection and action by relevant stakeholders in the field of education and training, such as providers of education, teacher trade unions, social partners, students, parents and experts in the field of education and training.

## *The concept of inclusive education*

### *An evolving concept*

There has been a clear evolution in the policy concepts during the last 50 years. This evolution is the result of a radical change in the way we look at the place of people with disabilities in society.

During the 1970s, awareness was raised that disabled people were entitled to education and development. Before this stage, learning and developmental disorders were not explicitly labelled. They were often seen by teachers as a personal failure of the pupil. Disabled people were not seen as learners with specific and general development needs. They were –in the best case- an object to take care of but they were not considered as individuals with an own identity. They were not entitled of making their own choices.

During the last quarter of the last century, however, an explicit pedagogical vision came about dealing with children with disabilities. The development of orthopedagogy as a science supported these developments. There was a strong diagnostic practice that tried to describe and identify learning and developmental problems. As a result, in the 1970s and 80s, a network of specialized institutions provided education for pupils with disabilities. This was frequently based on a broad attestation, diagnostic and labeling of the pupils. Education for pupils with disabilities was categorical and segregated.

The UNESCO Salamanca statement (1994)<sup>1</sup> has lead, among other things, to a change in this way of thinking. The Salamanca statement was the outcome of the World Conference on Special Needs Education, and called for inclusion to be the norm. The same vision was also expressed in the United Nations

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO (1994). Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including education<sup>2</sup> (2006). Both statements are based on a non-discrimination principle as expressed in human rights treaties. They assume the right of people with disabilities on inclusion in the 'regular' society. They are based on a new vision that sees disability as an inadequate alignment between the characteristics of a person and the environment (including the school structure).

The most recent evolution is the emergence of a link between education for pupils with special needs and the attention to diversity in education. This interference remains one of the main questions in the debate: is it necessary that pupils with disabilities get a specific approach in education, or does a broad view on diversity in education offer enough guarantees?

### *Inclusion in education is a legal commitment*

Inclusive education is not just about a moral imperative, it is a fundamental human right. It is not an optional extra, not a matter of good will. It is about a commitment governments have made towards obeying to international legal frameworks.

The **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD) has been adopted by the United Nations in 2006. The Convention marks a paradigm shift in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are not viewed as 'objects' of charity, medical treatment and social protection; rather as 'subjects' with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society.

**Article 24** of this Convention asserts the right of persons with disabilities to inclusive education without discrimination and on an equal basis with others.

Article 24 of the CRPD states that States must ensure for persons with disabilities:

- the right to education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity;
- an inclusive education system at all levels;
- provision of reasonable accommodation, and individualised support measures; this means that the system has to provide accommodation and support allowing every person to enter the system, not regarding his/her disability. This support has to be tailored to the individual;
- opportunities to acquire skills to ensure equal participation in education and community; this is not about just access anymore;
- access to teachers qualified with appropriate skills; teachers are essential actors of change and have to be included in the decision making process;
- progressive realisation, recognising that rights are influenced by the availability of resources. There has to be a forward movement though.

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations (2006), The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



### *Clarification of concepts*

In 2015, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities took the decision to elaborate a **General Comment on Article 24**, in order to clarify. This General Comment has been adopted in August 2016. The most important achievement is that it details and defines what an inclusive education system should look like.

The General Comment puts forward as a guiding principle, the following core features for inclusive education:

- a whole systems approach;
- a whole educational environment;
- a whole person approach;
- supported teachers;
- respect for diversity;
- learning friendly environments;
- effective transitions;
- building partnerships;
- ongoing monitoring.

The General Comment provides the framework and guidance for States. Now is the time to invest in making the right a reality.

### *Recommendations*

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Despite the progress achieved, despite the legal basis, profound challenges persist. Many millions of persons with disabilities continue to be denied the right to education, and for many education is available only in settings where persons with disabilities are isolated from their peers.

### *Need for creating the conditions*

Inclusion expresses a commitment to educate all students, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom in the community where all the students attend school. Inclusion brings the support services to the child, rather than moving the child to the services. The student is always in the general education environment, and removed only when appropriate services cannot be provided in the general education classroom.

However, the values of inclusive education remain too often at the level of legal statements, without creating the conditions for their practical realization.

On the road to inclusive education, alternative means and tools of teaching and learning need to be explored, including the use of assistive technology and of more cooperative practices in schools. Tools such as sharing practices, working in team, differentiation and individualization will have to become part of the school culture and practice.

Inclusive education calls for curriculum transformation, with room for flexibility and adaptation. Assessment of pupils with disabilities is another challenge.

Assessment is needed, but only if valuing progress and connected to an individual approach.

### *Need for empowering schools, school heads and teachers*

There is consensus on the centrality of the school in the process of construction of responses to special educational needs. Governments should empower the schools to develop a vision, make a plan, put it into practice. Policy should stay away from pedagogy and leave it to the schools. This also means that schools will be held accountable for the broad spectrum of learning, not only for the narrow test-driven results.

Barriers for inclusive education are often in the teacher, who is not enough prepared and not enough supported to deal with diversity in the classroom. The system cannot expect a teacher who has never seen a child with a disability, to teach children with a disability. It is not enough to know 'about' inclusive education, teachers should know how to intervene.

All teachers need training at all levels of education, pre- as well as in-service, including dedicated modules and experiential learning. Content of training can be modules on the conception and implementation of strategies, methodologies and curriculum development tools in order to accommodate and effectively include all students. The focus can be on human diversity and human rights, inclusive pedagogy, forms of communication and adapting teaching methods, provision of individualized instruction. Teachers need continuous support, which can be made possible through partnerships between schools, team teaching, joint teacher assessment, engagement of parents and links with local communities. Teachers often lack skills such as communication, decision making, flexibility, time management, self-direction, curiosity, problem solving, ability to work under pressure. Professional development programmes need to incentivize school heads and teachers to develop these additional skills.

There are a lot of great support teachers that are 'borrowed' to the school, but it is crucial to have the knowledge on inclusive education IN the school. The mainstream teacher has to remain at the centre of the process. Every child should be able to have special education in the classroom, and every teacher should know how to deal with it. Involving therapists with medical background also offers precious support, but it is important to keep in mind that the goal of education is not to cure, but to improve the learning process of all children.

### *Need for real involvement of parents and pupils*

On the road to inclusive education, it is crucial to invest in real involvement of parents, families, pupils. It is not sufficient just to inform the parents and the pupils, they have to be taken on board as real partners. Effective and accountable parent-school collaborations have to be set up. Parents and families are now often just recipients of information, and not really part of the process of building the support right from the beginning.

### *Need for an integrated approach*

The governments of States committed to Article 24. Inclusive education is thus not only the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, but a comprehensive commitment across the government (health, labour, social protection, finances, ...). The other way around, the Ministry of Education is responsible for all children, whilst sometimes now children with disabilities are nowhere in the Ministry of Education, but under the responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare, or Family Affairs.

An integrated approach is thus needed. Different policies, different sectors have to coordinate actions, so that they can present an integrated offer to the child and the family, whilst nowadays, often, the child and the family are running after the services.

### *Need for research*

Research needs to be conducted in order to investigate the benefits of inclusive education. When learning together, pupils acquire knowledge on multiple societal variety and learn to act within it. Pupils acquire motivation for mutual assistance and volunteering. Inclusive education can also be valued as a driver for pupil partnership. Cooperation between pupils enriches social and educational interaction with empathy and trust. Cooperation culture develops, new cooperation models are created in the education process.

There is need for data collection on special education programmes, services, initiatives and outcomes. Research needs to be conducted on how to implement inclusive education in order to guarantee maximum benefits, not only for students with disabilities or pupils at risk, but for all children, also those in situations of transitory needs. Emphasis on the criterion of 'permanence' may lead to leaving behind a group of pupils. By collecting data and conducting research, the system can focus on improving special education instruction and developing curricula and instruction that take into account students of different ages and varying needs. The system will also develop greater transparency, sharing of information, and comprehension of the implementation and ultimate success/failure of special education initiatives.

This research is not limited to research at university level; teachers should be educated to observe and to conduct research themselves, and to identify what is effective. Each school system could establish small research units (e.g. early childhood, primary, secondary form one unit) to conduct proactive investigations into best school-based practices.

### *Need for a change of minds*

Inclusive education covers a lot more than just curriculum redesign and innovative educational practices, it's about values and beliefs. Inclusive education is related to valuing diversity.

The above mentioned challenges can be overcome. What is even more challenging, is the need for a change in the minds. The most important thing is to believe in inclusive education. Not every stakeholder in education is convinced of the benefits of inclusive education: parents hesitate, teachers are reluctant, policy makers don't make it a priority.

Every person's individuality and freedom to develop in equal conditions according to individual needs has to be recognized. Education needs to focus on the potential of each and every child. The child with disabilities has to be seen as a child first. All children are gifted in a way, education has to take the time to assess, to discover. School must allow each child to develop his or her full potential, whatever that potential might be.

This is not yet the case in a society or an education system that values knowledge and academic outcomes more than social interaction. The worthiness of education is linked often to academic results. Social and pedagogical interaction and its consequences do not come up as a value. Educational success should reflect all components of the mission of education, which consists in imparting knowledge, but also in fostering social development.

Schools must have the necessary resources to offer all the students a quality educational experience. However, merely adding resources will not be sufficient to stop the cycle of inequality. Implementing inclusive education will require working on the beliefs, values and preconceived notions behind long-standing practices.

### ***The way forward: role of education councils***

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We are on the road to inclusive education. On that road, education councils can play an important role. Governments and policies change, but education councils, given their legal status, can offer stability and continuity.

Education councils are boundary workers, skilled in communication and policy analysis. They can lobby towards governments and point out their legal commitment to the implementation of inclusive education. They can also raise awareness among stakeholders, and disseminate customized supporting documents on inclusive education, in particular the General Comment.

As places of consultation and debate, they can offer a forum of interaction between educational stakeholders, stimulating mutual learning and conflict reduction. They can support partnerships that are crucial in the implementation of inclusive education.

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## **MAKING EDUCATION MORE INCLUSIVE**

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