

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN GREECE AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Focus on pupils with hearing loss

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Key words

Integration, inclusion, hearing loss, education, teacher preparatory.

Summary

Students with and without hearing loss can be educated together. They work as a team. Encouraging an understanding of hearing loss is another effective way to break down barriers and uneasiness between students and educators.

An inclusion strategy may include a pre-teach lesson to students with hearing loss so they are prepared for it. “Friday centers” offer opportunities for student collaboration and a review of academic and social skills.

Introduction

In an inclusion model, students receive services within the larger general education classroom. Inclusion partners – a mainstream teacher paired with a teacher specializing in deaf education – share the planning, preparation and execution of lessons. The relationship between the mainstream educator and the teacher of the deaf is one of the most important elements of a successful inclusion program. It is necessary to give answers to questions as: Who will be directly responsible for meeting the designated needs of students with hearing loss and how will the teacher of the deaf and the mainstream teacher communicate and agree upon those needs? (Tracz, 2006.)

1 Hearing impaired children in Greece

People with special needs didn't have a fine educational training. They were thought to be dependent and invalid. The Ministry of Education has a major goal: the school integration of children with special needs. Unfortunately, Law 1566/85, on special education is less clear about inclusive education and much less specific on how inclusive education ought to be implemented. This means

there may be many mistakes trying to make inclusive education reality (Lampropoulou, Padeliadou, 1995).

A minority believes that deaf people should be educated in special classrooms and schools. The majority tries to integrate deaf and non-deaf children in the same classroom. Lampropoulou (2001) describes it as a pressure to include the deaf in the common school program, in which they can have the same opportunities with non-deaf children. A lot of things must be done first, if the Ministry of Education tries to integrate them. Firstly, handicapped children need specialized help (Lampropoulou, 2001).

In Greece inclusive education started in 1981 with students characterised with mild mental retardation who attended some school subjects at elementary and comprehensive level. This effort was motivated by people who catered for kids with special needs. It was not a state's policy (Lampropoulou et al., 1995).

From 1984 to 1989, there was a special classroom expansion. However, special classes function without specialist personnel, without specially selected material and often without special organizational arrangements. Nevertheless, placing children with special needs in that environment has seemed to increase pressures for more integration (Lampropoulou et al, 1995).

They should spend 80 % of their school time in their regular education classroom and merely go to the resource room for special help in reading and maths. What really happens is that the students stay full time in the resource room, because there are no special schools existing and parents are satisfied with this situation (Lampropoulou et al., 1995).

From 1989 to 1993, the state makes integration efforts for children with special needs who live in or near Athens and in some specific areas of Greece. The kids had visual impairments, hearing impairments, learning disabilities and mental retardations (Lampropoulou et al, 1995).

Inclusive education is based on the assumption that teachers can come to grips with students with special needs in their classes. A majority of regular teachers do not feel competent to teach students with special needs in their regular education class (Lampropoulou et al, 1995).

Nowadays, deaf children in Greece attend special classrooms and schools. Furthermore, there are special – boarding schools called “EIK”. Inclusion will be the future in the Greek system.

Boarding schools help the deaf develop emotional relationships with others who have the same with them problem. Sometimes they fall in love like all the

teenagers. They get socialized. They also have the opportunity to attend evening classes at their boarding schools.

The boarding school in Volos has been closed and the same might happen in Crete because parent cannot bear the situation living without their deaf children, especially when they are of small age. Another reason is the lack of quality in boarding schools. They choose to send their children to ordinary state schools or to specialized classrooms.

After an educational research it has been found that teachers at boarding schools do not have knowledge, effective methodology and the necessary equipment for their classrooms. Also curriculum for the deaf education does not exist.

2 Hearing impaired children in the Czech Republic

The first alternative for providing special needs education is to include deaf pupils in mainstream classes and, when necessary, provide special needs education in small teaching groups. Only when this is not feasible, the second alternative is considered: the provision of special needs education in a special group, class or school.

The general objective of education of deaf children both in the mainstream and segregated provisions is to give them equal opportunities to successful and efficient education in accordance with their needs and abilities. The main principle is the focus on each pupil's strengths and her/his individual learning and development needs. Education has to promote pupils' initiative and self-confidence.

The systematic integration policy in the Czech Republic has started only after 1989. During this period the development of integration has changed towards broader social acceptance of integration of persons with disability, mainstreaming, and better educational and technological support for pupils with special needs in integrated settings. The main principle of education of pupils with special needs is to create equal opportunities for this target group and minimize the negative impact and consequences of the disability to the pupil's access to appropriate level and quality of education. The main goal of integrative education is to create possibilities for building independent life, for social integration and social participation of a person with special needs.

Integration of pupils into regular schools is a practice at all levels of education. Additional provisions tailored with regard to the pupil's needs support the success of school performance of each integrated deaf pupil.

The group integration (special class/unit) within regular schools is eligible, too. Within the group integration pupils are often educated together with other pupils of the school in some subjects and are involved in all extracurricular school activities.

Although the situation of inclusive education has been improving, there are still some difficult areas to be dealt with. The problems are partly caused by the limited resources for additional support teacher into the mainstream class with these pupils. Traditional thinking patterns of teachers (parents) and their resistance to changes has also influence.

Strategic documents on national level deal with these issues and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports grants schools for improving conditions for deaf pupils and for supporting their inclusion.

3 Living with two languages and two cultures

3.1 The Deaf Bilingual

Bilingualism in the Deaf community remains a poorly understood topic despite the fact that most Deaf people are indeed bilingual. The bilingualism present is a form of minority language bilingualism in which the members of the Deaf community acquire and use both the minority language (sign language) and the majority language in its written form and sometimes in its spoken or even signed form.

Sign language bilingualism can, of course, also involve the knowledge and use of two or more different sign languages, but this form of bilingualism is less common in the Deaf community and has been the object of fewer studies. Thus, given the definition of bilingualism presented of above, most Deaf people who sign and who use the majority language in their everyday lives (in its written form, for example) are indeed bilingual.

Deaf bilinguals share many similarities with hearing bilinguals. First, they are very diverse. Depending on their degree of hearing loss, the language(s) used in childhood, their education, their occupation, their social networks, and so on, they have developed competencies in their languages (sign language and the majority language) to varying degrees. This, of course, is no different from hearing bilinguals who are also very diverse in their knowledge and use of their languages. Second, most Deaf bilinguals do not judge themselves to be bilingual. In some countries, some Deaf people may not be aware that sign language is

different from the majority language, and in general many Deaf do not think they are bilingual because they do not fully master all the skills that accompany the majority language (or, at times, the sign language). This is a well-known phenomenon found among many bilinguals, be they hearing or Deaf, who have a tendency to evaluate their language competencies as inadequate.

3.2 The Deaf Bicultural

Two questions can be asked about biculturalism in the Deaf community. First, are Deaf people bicultural, and second, if some are, what is being done to help them come to terms with their bicultural identity? As to the first question, there is little doubt that many Deaf meet the three criteria that we put forward above: they live in two or more cultures (their family, friends, colleagues, etc., are members either of the Deaf community or of the hearing world); they adapt, at least in part, to these cultures; and they blend aspects of these cultures. Of course, such factors as deafness in the family, degree of hearing loss, or type of education may lead some Deaf people to have fewer contacts with the hearing world while others have more (their bicultural dominance can thus differ), but it is nevertheless true that most Deaf people are not only bilingual but also bicultural. (This is also the case for hearing children of Deaf parents and for some hearing people who have developed strong ties with the Deaf community.) Of course, most Deaf people are Deaf-dominant biculturals in that they identify primarily with the Deaf community, but many of them also have ties with the hearing world and interact with it and hence, in a sense, are also members of it.

As for the biculturalism of Deaf people, it is especially important that Deaf children and adolescents given every opportunity to learn about the Deaf and hearing cultures, that they be able to go through the process of choosing the cultures (or the culture) they wish to identify with. It is the task of parents, family members, educators, and members of the cultures involved to make sure this process takes place as early and as smoothly as possible.

Conclusion

Inclusion is like a bird. The body represents the role of the deaf child and its parents. The body is the most important part. The wings are symbols for education. One of the wings stands for ordinary education the other one for special education. Only when both of them are used and kept well balanced the bird can fly high. But the bird also needs the right environment to survive. The

environment can be associated with society. Proper legislation and finance are critically essential to create the ideal circumstances for inclusion to blossom.

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