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Limits and perspectives for the promotion of the inclusive culture and paradigm within school context: Theoretical considerations and empirical findings from Greece and Hungary

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Abstract

The basic tenets of the "inclusive paradigm" in relation to pupils with Special Educational Needs are presented and analyzed in the first section of this paper. Also the findings from recent studies in Greece and Hungary referring to the perceptions of teachers regarding the possibilities of full inclusion of these students in mainstream schools are presented and discussed. Based on these data, at the final section of this paper, we also discuss the likelihood of building and "implementing" an innovative inclusive paradigm in mainstream school system, based on teachers' needs, and the demands and challenges of contemporary social and educational reality.

Introduction

A high number of pupils attending school in Western countries displaying various forms of social, emotional, behavioral and academic (Special Educational Needs) problems cannot become healthy, self-sustaining adults without immediate attention and, in many cases, without specialized support.

Special Educational Needs Students (SENS) and students with school problems in childhood are complex phenomena implying a variety of internal and external processes. Traditional scientific models such as those used in quantitative and qualitative methods are aiming for prediction or categorization of children's disorders, difficulties, and disabilities. These intentions, though rigorous and universal, are not able to always give insightful accounts of the structure of the personal experiences and the underlying processes and to thoroughly enlighten the multilevel and dynamic interactions of individual and contextual factors in childhood disorders/disabilities. Accordingly, the traditional medical intervention paradigm still remains dominant (Lloyd, 2008), though recent research shows significant results in improving the psychosocial functioning and the school inclusion of "vulnerable" children, when systemic approaches, child-, family-centered, and transdisciplinary/empowering partnership practices are used (Brehm & Doll, 2009; Dyson & Howes, 2009; Farrell, 2011; Greenberg, 2003; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010; McNab, 2009).

Research shows that pupils' difficulties, if not treated in an effective way within school context, could worsen and transmute into other more serious forms of broader social emotional and school-academic problems for factors such as the following (Farrell, 2011; Florian & McLaughlin, 2008; Goodley, 2007; Kourkoutas, 2010):

- A dominant intervention philosophy drawn on the bio-medical epistemological paradigm (which disregards the dimensional and developmental aspect of all children's disorders/disabilities by splitting the normal from the abnormal, by using the "syndrome psychiatric narrative" which is exclusively on external symptoms and deficits, failing to apprehend the child's personal experience and acknowledge, his strengths and assets);
- Absence of preventive thinking, reasoning, acting, and policy practicing;
- Extreme emphasis on the clinical individual-based intervention policy overlooking the dimensional and developmental/transactional aspects of children's problems/dysfunctions;
- Insufficient or distorted evaluation and awareness of child's social, emotional needs; a fragmentary overview of the child's problems from teachers and specialists;
- Little effort for an overall review of the child's function in regard to social and other contextual parameters;
- Pronounced inability of the parents to manage the problems-difficulties of the child, for a variety of reasons (psychological, economic, social et al.);
- Lack of interdisciplinary approach-cooperation among the school, the parents, and professionals;
- The absence, in the schools and in community, of psychosocial (non-medical) services that work cooperatively with school staff to support the inclusive policy;
- The absence of real inclusive both culture and policy within the educational community;

- Stereotyped perceptions of children's problems/SEN exclusively based on personal negative experiences or on the inability to deal with such students;
- Low-quality education, absence of psycho-education programs adapted to the needs of vulnerable or at risk children;
- Exclusive use of negative/reprimanding practices to respond to extreme challenges of 'dysfunctional' or vulnerable students (students with various forms and degrees of social, emotional, behavioral, and learning problems);
- Emphasis on competitive educational practice (individual knowledge-centered models and a performances-based educational philosophy) in the school system;
- Strong resistance of the community and parents' associations imbued with negative stereotypical thinking/perception about the possibilities, the role, and the academic trajectory within the school system of students with various difficulties, disorders, and disabilities.

Special Educational Needs Students (SENS) and relative educational practices

A pupil is considered having SEN when he/she presents greater difficulties than the rest of his/her classmates to access to learn according to the curriculum for his/her age. To offset these difficulties, SEN students need significant or not significant curricular adaptations in several areas of the curriculum. It is also important to mention that the emphasis in contemporary Special and Inclusive Education practice has been placed on how to support these students to resolve and overcome their multiple difficulties than to think about their origin (DFES, 2004). Special Educators and teaching staff in general should focus on developing the necessary strategies and pay the relevant attention to each child who is struggling with difficulties relevant to academic success and learning performance (Farrell, 2011).

Overall, Special Educational Needs (SEN) do not only refer to a certain group of students, such as those displaying learning difficulties, but to a wide range of social, emotional, behavioral, and developmental difficulties/disorders. SEN might be permanent or temporary and can be caused by a variety of reasons and factors. In fact, it is believed that they derive from a continuous and dynamic transaction between a wide range of endogenous (individual) and exteriors (contextual) factors. In this perspective, it is thought that disability has an interactive and social origin. This means that if schools and parents reach to a creatively collaboration and provide the necessary assistance and provision, students with special educational needs might be successfully included within school context and socially promoted (Turnbull et al., 2006). Educational staff should try to find solutions, contribute information about the child and his or her environment, avoid pejorative connotations and focus their attention in the (external or contextual) problem, not in the deficit.

Special Educational Needs students can also be classified according to their prognostic and the educational adaptations they need to positively respond to school challenges. Cases of High Capacity Intellectuals (Gifted) are also considered as students with specific educational support needs, because in this case, the curriculum is often easy or even boring for these students, who have greater capacity. Therefore, it is claimed that a curricular adaptation is a modification or change that takes place in the mainstream curriculum to find a solution for the learning needs of each student. This is, in fact, an individual response for each student, one of the principal bases of an inclusive schooling.

In Europe, at the beginning of the twentieth century there was a 2% of children with SEN, whereas in our days is around a 20% or 25% of the total student population.

Overall, one of the basic premises of inclusive education is that schools should become places where all children, with and without special educational needs, can freely play, learn, perform, and interact in constructive ways. Moreover, it is believed that children should be taught in educational environments that permit them to fully develop their social-emotional and academic competencies. Inclusive education focuses on organizational, structural, and cultural changes within school contexts and education policy in order to respond effectively to social-school exclusion of pupils with various difficulties (Ainscow et al., 2006). The theoretical background and the policy philosophy of inclusive education has primarily been developed over the last decades as a social activism, and also as a scientific endeavor to struggle against social and school stigmatization and exclusion.

Schooling and social pathway of SENS: assets and risks

Social contexts and social-educational parameters within school system are important factors in promoting or hindering pupils' psychosocial and academic development and inclusion. In that sense, it is imperative to abolish the educational inequalities and ensure a cooperative and accepting educational environment. From the other hand, it is also important to develop micro-strategies that help teachers, parents, and children better cooperate and overcome or cope with their own personal barriers, limitations, and internal or external conflicts and difficulties. Children and youth in conflict and with disruptive behaviors need positive guidance and support from concerned and competent individuals and specialists who are adequately trained in a variety of techniques and models that allow them to have a thorough and complete idea of the children's internal and external difficulties. Integrating a systemic thinking in our practice may elicit important systemic modification in the school units and in our way to operate as specialists and educators. In addition, the

use of evidence based eclectic (psychosocial) techniques at micro-social level melded with the basic principles of the inclusive education framework can be a crucial strategic option to respond to the specific challenges that teachers, families, and children with problems meet in everyday life. It is suggested that educational psychology can contribute to the conceptualization of the nature, appropriateness and effectiveness of inclusive education practices for children with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN) when practitioners are committed to the inclusive project and use analogous counseling/intervention techniques (Farrell & Venables, 2009).

The inclusion approach does not concern children with special needs only (the traditional group) but all children who might, for one reason or another, present psychosocial or educational problems, and who are in need of psychoeducational interventions and of new manners of approach to their particular needs (Terzi, 2005). Additionally, the goals of the inclusion philosophy encompass on one hand the development of special techniques for dealing with children with complex difficulties, and on the other hand introduces systemic changes to the (competitive and one-sided) educational system, and full acceptance of diversity, which will be made possible in the context of a new philosophy of education and a new (open) school.

To be more specific about the psychology of inclusion and the inclusive education paradigm, the principles arising from it could be summarized as follows (Dyson & Howes, 2009; Farrell, 2011; Farrell & Venables, 2009; Greenberg, 2003):

- Adaptation of the detailed curriculum and of the goals of education to the heterogeneous needs and particularities of each individual class;

- Suitable spatial planning to cover the basic needs (play, socialization, elective activities, safe development of mobility, et al.), and also the difficulties of all children;
- Individualized and personalized teaching — use of pluralistic multi-dimensional teaching methodology — alternative psychoeducational programs;
- Use of support structures in close cooperation with the school;
- Advancement of the coexistence-collaboration solidarity model;
- Reversal of the shortcoming model; emphasis on the special capabilities of children — all children benefit from pluralism;
- Inclusion not limited to the “traditional categories” of children with special needs, but extending to all groups of children threatened with exclusion;
- Inclusion philosophy against exclusion philosophy; against conventional classification-categorization models (iatrogenic paradigm); emphasis on causes;
- Adaptation of the inclusion models-practices based on the needs of the schools and/or the communities;

It follows that the inclusion philosophy does not limit itself to advancing yet another model of special education, but offers a new way of organizing the reality of education and, mostly, changes in the conception and implementation of educational policy (Terzi, 2005). Yet at the same time it also requires and presses forward for changes in the social representations concerning the dysfunctional/problematic

behaviors, the school-adjustment difficulties, and the academic incompetence of a high number of students. In the context of this philosophy it is nevertheless considered that it is possible to educate and train teachers in a way that would help them understand the nature of difficulties and risks, “vulnerable” children and their families are facing; and mostly help them intervene in a consistent and reliable way, applying supportive (empowering) strategies that would aim at reducing the children’s dysfunctions and developing a positive atmosphere of acceptance and cooperation in the classroom (Cefai & Cooper, 2009; Terzi, 2005). In many aspects, research shows that although many important modifications have been realized during last decades in the way teachers work and deal with “problematic” students’ many problems, such as behavioral dysfunctions, for example, are a source of heightened reactions, stress, and emotional counteraction on the teacher’s part (Copper & Jacobson, 2011).

Epistemological and pedagogical issues in SEN education and inclusive practice

The education of students with SEN has long been the subject of considerable controversy. In fact, massive debate in the last two decades that has encapsulated issues such as how SEN are defined and understood has been advanced. In fact, strong critics against a technocratic and competitive educational system and policy have been often addressed. The mainstream education culture was often thought to create disabling conditions for children who are “different” and have other learning style or needs. The radicalization of school and educational culture and the ideological shift towards a wider inclusive perspective that encompasses “different” (diversity) and socially excluded students have been advocated.

Another important issue which is often a source of confusion is the difference between *inclusion* and *integration*. The integration is based on the *normalization* of

life of students with special educational needs. The inclusion raises the recognition and appreciation of *diversity* as a *reality* and as a *human right*; it makes their goals be always a priority. From the perspective of inclusion *heterogeneity* is seen as *normal*, so that the inclusive approach is aimed at all students in general. The integration is based on pupils with special educational needs that are enabled for certain support, resources and professionals, while the inclusion model is based on a social framework in which the school and the school community are heavily involved; this is thought to lead to the improvement of the quality of education as a whole and for all students. This is an inclusive organization itself, which assumes that all members are trained to meet *diversity*. The *integration* proposed *curricular changes* as measures of overcoming diversities of students with special needs. Inclusion proposes an *inclusive curriculum*, common to all students, which will implicitly incorporate these adaptations. With the *integration* is considered that a group of students have been excluded or segregated, in the past, from the ordinary school system. Otherwise, the *inclusion* is based on the premise that students with SEN are part of the regular school and they do not have to be included in it, as there is a single curriculum for all. No segregation is justified; all students learn in the same way and with the same educational system and the methodology that this entails. Educational inclusion requires careful consideration of every aspect of schooling and the social context in which children function and live. Innovative approaches to educational inclusion will need to address issues at the macro, micro, personal and interpersonal levels. Connections between school and community cultures have to be drawn, as well as between educational and community programs of inclusion. Inclusive education extends beyond special needs arising from disabilities, and includes consideration of other sources of disadvantage and marginalization, such as gender, poverty, language,

ethnicity and geographic isolation. The complex inter-relationships that exist among these factors and their interactions with disability must be also a focus of attention. Inclusive classrooms promote the participation of all students. To do that, everybody has to take part in the lesson and all the activities they do in that lesson, including opportunities for pupil participation in decision making, positive attitudes, teacher knowledge about learning abilities and difficulties of all children.

One of the most important things along with the others listed above is that students with special educational needs must respect all the standards of living and requirements like the rest of the children, both inside and outside the classroom, as well as inside the school and outside of it. It is unacceptable for society to treat disabled children or with some kind of educational need differently than the others. This implies a secluded and antidemocratic school system which usually makes those students feel slighted injured or excluded from the rest of their classmates leading them to social disability (Lloyd, 2008).

SENS represent a significant proportion of the school-aged population, and as such the development of effective models of intervention/ or of significant changes in the school/educational system and in educators' culture is needed. SENS are widely considered to be the most vulnerable group of learners.

The SEN students might experience: (a) increased risks of experiencing significantly worse academic and psychosocial outcomes through the course of schooling; (b) increased risks of being victimized (physically/verbally) and socially marginalized or academically excluded; (c) risks of developing additional psychosocial and emotional difficulties that might turn to more serious mental health or social professional problems and exclusions in adolescence or early adult life.

Inclusive Education: Implications for educational practice and critics

Inclusive Education (IE) emphasizes and promotes an epistemological and social-political-cultural shift on philosophy and scopes of educational policy, on content and directions of curriculum, on teaching methodology, on teachers' professional role, on moral values, on educational community culture, and on teachers' education/training in order to achieve a fully democratic school climate which would enable all students with and without disabilities to fully develop their potential (Ainscow et al., 2006; Mittler, 2004). IE has advanced strong critics of the "standards" paradigm imposed by the mainstream prevailing educational policy. IE stresses that the idea that better educational standards are the key to an equal opportunity is mostly based on the needs of industry and has nothing to do with the achievement of individual potential, equity or social cohesion (Gillard, 2005). The central principle of IE is the importance of social justice in and equality of access to education. The difficulties for the rise of a socially equitable education system begin where, under the guise of pragmatism, normalizing 'standards' acted to reinforce a highly competitive and hierarchical education system in UK and all over Europe (Cornwall, 2013). From the other side, Shelvin et al. (2008) in their report, referring to UK OFSTED, found that despite certain progress towards inclusion many seemingly intractable difficulties remain as barriers to the realization of the inclusive policy. Furthermore, there is a gap between legislation and implemented practices /inclusive reality all over Europe (Crucic, 2009). It has been argued -against IE- that well intentional but simplistic ideological arguments may serve as distractions from the real life problems experienced by pupils, families and staff in schools and reinforce instead of challenge the status quo (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Kourkoutas, 2010). In other terms, the main critic against this movement is that IE, drawing from a

purely sociological stance, seems to prioritize general societal and systemic changes than building evidence based practices to promote the psychosocial and academic development of all students. In fact, although there is a broad consensus and understanding that inclusive education is '*a process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion from the culture, community and curricula of mainstream schools*' (Booth et al., 2000), this process can take many forms and little is known about the detail of practice at the classroom level (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

In addition, IE has been criticized for the following (see Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Hornby, 2012; Lindsay, 2007; Terzi, 2010): a very board definition of inclusion (its definition and use are seriously problematic (Norwich)); prevalence of the ideological discourse over scientific evidence ("too much ideology than science"); ideological rigidity ("change the system first in order to change the reality of pupils in need"); extreme rejection of the expert model and idealization of teacher's role to resolve all student's difficulties; a rationale (for inclusive education) which is seriously flawed; and a lack of empirical evidence to support its effectiveness. Many scholars suggest that the IE model better fits to physical disabilities than to other groups of students (e.g. with social, emotional, behavioral problems).

Despite many justified or less justified critics, "Inclusive Education», as a new epistemological and philosophical "paradigm" in education and pedagogy, represents a real challenge for a shift in expressed or underlying ideology, rhetoric, agenda, and, above all, in the (research or intervention) practice of many related disciplines (such as special education, school psychology, childhood psychopathology, sociology of education). The question is if it is possible for IE to challenge the dominant "medical" paradigm which focuses on categorizing and labeling students with complex

difficulties by promoting a new intervention culture/engagement and resist to the ideology of the educational system “*marketization*” (Thomas & Loxley, 2008).

The role of teacher in Inclusive Education

As schools become more inclusively orientated the role of the teacher changes and different approaches to teaching in an inclusive classroom become more prominent such as the collaborative-consultation model (Eissman et al., 2011). Mittler (2003) noted that the major obstacle to the progress of inclusive education worldwide was the negative attitudes of teachers, parents, community leaders, and politicians. Teacher’s role becomes crucial in realizing inclusion of SEN or excluded students. Teacher’s training on Inclusive Practices is essential in building inclusive communities/environments (Rouse, 2008). The teacher-student with SEN positive relationship is vital in helping these students develop their own potential. In contrast, research has indicated that students who have been identified as having ‘special’ or ‘additional’ educational needs are especially vulnerable to the negative effects of deterministic beliefs about ability, hold by teachers (Hart et al., 2007). This vulnerability is compounded when teachers also believe that such students need specialist teaching that they have not been trained to provide, a common finding reported in the international research literature on teacher attitudes towards inclusive education (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Overall, an essential element of inclusion is a shared responsibility on the part of all educators in the school for the student with SEN. Teachers’ beliefs towards inclusion might reflect their willingness or denial to engage in *inclusive* practices and in actions that support the social and academic insertion of SENS within ordinary schools. The traditional way of investigation in teachers’ education and school issue is

to explore teachers' attitudes, views and beliefs about specific subjects. The limitation of this approach lies in the eventual gap between teachers' reported beliefs and their real attitudes.

Previous studies on inclusion and teachers' attitudes

Many studies have been conducted in order to detect the factors that might contribute to determine general teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and their eventual engagement in inclusive curriculums. It would be impossible to summarize all studies' results regarding the factors that mediate teachers' attitudes (e.g. age, experience, gender, training, qualification, forms of disabilities, forms of inclusion, academic expectations from SENS, etc.). Contradicting different results depending on the methodology, on instruments used, and on study's sample, some indicative findings are (see Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Avramidis et al., 2000; Boyle et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 2003; Curcic, 2009; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Ross-Hill, 2009; Rouse, 2008; Sharma et al., 2008; Shevlin et al., 2008; Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006).

Demographic variables might impact the attitude of in service or prospective teachers towards inclusion (Forlin et al., 2007). Teachers with higher educational qualifications (undergraduate or post graduate) were seen to be more optimistic about students with disabilities in their classrooms than their counterparts with lower qualifications (Sharma et al., 2008). Age did not have an effect on how positive or negative is people's attitude towards inclusion (Loreman et al., 2009). Furthermore, qualification and gender (female teachers more positive) generally seem to play an important role in developing positive attitudes towards inclusion.

In terms of barriers and concerns related to inclusive project, previous studies have revealed that teachers express concern about inclusive education because of (a) their limited involvement in the process of *integrating* students with disabilities, (b) the progress of all students within the inclusive classroom (Avramidis et al., 2000; Hurley, 1993), and (c) the time and attention required to include students with disabilities (Avramidis et al., 2000).

In summary, the following conclusions, among others, can be drawn from most previous research studies:

- a) The successful implementation of inclusive reforms depend largely on the devotion of educators to create positive environments within school contexts;
- b) Teachers with more positive views of inclusion are more confident about accommodating students' diverse needs by adapting suitable classroom material/practices;
- c) Teachers with more negative attitudes are found to have low expectations for SENS;
- d) A positive school ethos was found to be a significant factor in ensuring inclusive practice;
- e) The complex mix of positive teacher beliefs combined with fears and perceived inadequacies is quite common in the evolution of practice towards inclusive learning environments;
- f) Social and specialized support is required by most 'ordinary classroom' teachers in order for them to successfully work with teachers with SEN;

- g) Inclusion is a reality for students in certain societies while in others it remains an aspiration for many.

Findings regarding teachers' perception about inclusion of SENS in Greece and Hungary

Findings reported in this paper come from three recent studies conducted in Greece and Hungary (Gerassis, 2009; Kourkoutas, 2011; Németh Tóth, 2011). Methodologically, these studies built on previous approaches of international studies and on both qualitative and quantitative study design. We were interested in looking across the interviews and questionnaires we have used to explore some key assumptions we had made about inclusive education and practice (see also Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). These were that inclusive practice requires: (a) rejection of deterministic beliefs about ability and disability (and the associated idea that the presence of some will hold back the progress of others); (b) a shift in focus from the pathology approach to an educational model that is concerned with the promotion of the SEN students' well-being and social-academic development; (c) a collaborative and partnership work with other professionals and families; and (d) the use of alternative and innovative teaching and psychoeducational methods to strengthen all students (with and without SEN) capabilities. We used these assumptions to support a deductive approach to the preliminary analysis of these studies' data.

Hungary

The results of the Hungarian study are quite illuminating. In fact, no more than half of teachers at the mainstream schools said that they were informed in terminology of SEN or methodology of integrative education. It is not feasible to

make stretch inclusion nationwide (for more details on the Hungarian inclusive education system, see Németh Tóth, 2014) .

New educational challenges couldn't really affect teachers' with inclusive attitudes at the analysed ten schools. It means for the researcher and also for decision makers it's not enough to prescribe something for schools like integration or inclusion without any promotion and /or particular orientation. Many teachers are still negative to students' integration/inclusion probably because of their classical "performance /result orientated" or "competition orientated" teaching practice. We assume they don't or hardly use any innovative methods of competence based teaching like cooperative and/or individual and /or project and social-emotional learning programs.

One in every five of secondary school teachers do not accept students with SEN neither in schools nor in classes oppose to elementary school teachers whom have a remarkable part and would undertake and deal with students with SEN, either in school or in their classes. Secondary school teachers' approach should be changed as soon as possible before a large number of students with SEN appear at secondary schools in the next five years.

Mainstream teachers who have experience in integrative/inclusive pedagogy are objecting to their limited teaching methodology, limited teaching tools, and limited knowledge in learning organisation and also in term of SEN. It is clear, namely they couldn't learn this kind of information earlier in their professional education at high school or universities. The situation of limited teaching tools is up to school management or its maintainer.

Teachers generally think negatively of postgraduate courses. It may be for many different reasons like the training is too long it contains too theoretical, maybe the

lecturer is not the adequate person to guide teachers and the courses. Experience show that there should be developed and new postgraduate training courses for practising teachers by our department but we must attend better to teachers' claims. So trainings must be short, practice orientated and lecturers must be selected by their performance abilities and by their teaching experiences. On the base of the research results we recognised that distance and/or digital learning must be offered to teachers training.

In summary, in Hungary, many teachers are still negative to the inclusive idea/process in their schools/ classrooms. Almost half of mainstream school teachers reported not being informed in terminology of SEN or methodology of inclusive education. New educational challenges can't really affect teachers with inclusive attitudes according to a sample of 10 schools.

Mainstream teachers reject postgraduate studies and require more specific support measures. One in every five of secondary school teachers does not accept students with SEN neither in schools nor in classes in contrary to elementary school teachers. Mainstream teachers with experience in inclusion adopt a broaden conception of teacher's role, teaching tools/ knowledge, teaching methodology, etc.

Difficulties to realize the inclusion of SENS are mainly related to: (a) issues of teaching pupils with SEN (67%) - (*methodological problems (20%), problems with teaching organization (19%), problems of teaching materials (16%), problems with the curriculum (12%)*) and, (b) problems of group dynamics in the classroom (15%).

It is impossible to realize a meaningful/comprehensive inclusion policy in schools, without adequate information, training, support, and genuine awareness/engagement in a large part of involved teachers.

Greece

A recent empirical study in a large sample of Greek mainstream schools has revealed that the majority of Greek teachers (55-60%) (in a sample of more than 450 mainstream school teachers) recognize the significance of inclusion and is well disposed towards it. However, there are reports of serious precautions/reluctances for both the capability of schools to receive all kind of SEN pupils and the ability of these pupils to attend a “mainstream’ curriculum. In terms of sex, more male than female teachers claim to a greater extent that there is a lack of adequate infrastructure which hinders the successful implementation of an integration policy (Gerasis, 2009). Furthermore, teachers with more years of service are of the view that the implementation of inclusive education will be an additional workload and would exert more pressure and anxiety on them (Gerassis, 2009). Finally, there is a difference in the mean attitude towards inclusion based on the level of qualification (having completed a module or course increases significantly the positive attitude towards inclusion when compared to someone with no special education qualification). In general, female teachers display a more positive attitude towards inclusion.

In another, more recent, empirical study in a sample of 160 Special Education teachers –conducted in Central Greece (Larissa, Trikala), Attica, and Crete (Heraklio, Rethimno)- on factors that promote or hinder the successful inclusion of SEN students results are equally very indicative on the quality of inclusive project in the Greek educational system (Kourkoutas et al., 2011).

In fact, regarding the factors that hinder academic inclusion of SEN the following have been revealed: (a) High number of children diagnosed as pupils with SEN and limited resources (e.g. lack of time, overcrowd classes, ill-equipped schools, etc.); (b)

delay of diagnosis delivery and lack of specific intervention guidelines for very difficult cases, by the Diagnostic Centres (KEDDY) officially charged with this function; inadequate or incomplete evaluation reports by the DC (KEDDY) in many cases; (c) high number of pupils with serious social-emotional, and behavioral problems for whom special education and ordinary classroom teachers are not prepared to deal with; (d) a general hostile (against inclusion of pupils with disabilities) climate; (e) a cognitive and performance oriented school system which excludes more vulnerable students; (d) a gap between official policy and rhetoric and practices targeting the full inclusion of many of SENS in the reality of school life.

On the other hand, most Special Education teachers do not seem to be aware of the problems related to classical psychiatric classifications. They are likely to consider pupils with SEN as homogenous categories and use general syndrome terms to describe the pupils' difficulties/disorders (e.g. ADHD) in all cases, without questioning the origins of such classifications, the contextual causes of the difficulties and the resulting practices.

Overall, most Special Education teachers do not challenge the prevailing/dominant (deficit centered) conceptions – models regarding the way pupils are categorized or labeled. Differently stated, most SE teachers of this sample are not at all skeptical of the traditional ways of treating students with complex difficulties (e.g. separating pupils with SEN from pupils without SEN, providing segregated treatment outside the classroom). In addition, they don't seem aware of the new approaches in the area of inclusion and childhood disability (e.g. ecosystemic and holistic character of the inclusive practice; contextual transactional character of many of the social-emotional problems; partnership work). They rather seem to adhere to the conventional mode of special education.

Summary of findings regarding Greece and Hungary

According to the pre-mentioned findings about the inclusion policy in Hungarian and Greek schools, the following basic points should be mentioned:

- There is a greater recognition of the positive aspects of the inclusion process and the need for schools to expand their respective practices;
- In relation to the full inclusion of SENS, there are differences depending on gender, level of education, the years of experience, the kind and degree of difficulty/disability of students, which cannot be adequately summarized and detailed in the present article;
- Most teachers in both countries in order to become better prepared and trained to deal with inclusive practices/challenges, report the need for a new extended academic curriculum containing/encompassing SEN inclusion issues, while teachers with more years of service believe to a greater extent that the role of the teacher in the "mainstream school" is not to "*educate SENS*";
- There is general acceptance of the need for in-service training and support, mainly when dealing with children with disruptive behaviors;
- Despite the potential of many teachers to perceive children's difficulties in a "personalized/individualized" way, many of them seem easily to adhere to the psychiatric model (tend to attribute causes of the psychosocial difficulties to biological factors) in order to understand their students' "dysfunctions";
- Therefore, many of them tend to "pathologize" their students' difficult or inappropriate behavior and consequently to refuse their own responsibility to find ways to deal with it/or to engage into alternative practices;

- Overemphasis is often placed by many teachers in search of ready-made specific solutions, as well as to the requirement of practical knowledge, which often deprives teachers the ability to understand the intrapersonal and family/systemic dynamics of the child's pathway/functioning (Kourkoutas et al., 2011).
- Many Special Education teachers in Greece seem to adhere to the conventional model of Special Education without questioning the origins of such classifications, the contextual causes of the difficulties and the resulting practices (Kourkoutas et al., 2011).

Suggestions based on Greek and Hungarian studies' findings

Though a considerable resistance in really working in the classroom with SENS has been revealed, there is now much more acceptance and understanding of what is expected with inclusion and SENS' education in mainstream schools. It should now be a compulsory part of all teacher-training courses, whether as a theoretical subject or more importantly as part of the practical element to the training course (see Booth et al., 2003). Interdisciplinary teams of specialists engaged/working in an inclusive perspective, contesting the medical model (that confuses teachers) should be attached to school units to ensure permanent teachers' support/guidance. Therefore:

- Both specialist and generalist teaching staff must be willing to compromise - accept that the curriculum involves various levels of interactions with SEN and students with complex or diverse needs, strengths, and weaknesses that might challenge teacher's role;

- Professionals should adopt a collaborative partnership model to work with teachers in order to realize inclusion of SENS, otherwise teachers feel unsupported and undervalued and less likely to engage in inclusive issues;
- Despite a push for inclusion of students with special educational needs into both social and educational perspective, there has been a lack of appropriate planning and training in and of supporting staff, as well as the SENS in meaningful and comprehensive ways (Boyle et al., 2013). That for if the key members of the inclusive process (the teachers) are unhappy (because they are not emotionally supported, neither trained and well guided), they won't be supportive of the fundamental principles of this change process;
- Increase teachers' positive experience of inclusion with successful implementation of meaningful and comprehensive practices;
- Top-bottom or imported models of inclusion fail to achieve important changes within school system and adequately serve the SENS' cause;
- Attachment to school is an important protective factor;
- *Social Relationships* and *Resilient* theory/model can be proved a very helpful framework in designing and promoting meaningful and comprehensive psychoeducational projects to assist students at risk and create a positive/protective and inclusive whole-school climate (Cefai & Jacobs, 2009; Hart et al., 2007; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010);
- Social support for teachers working with SEN is crucial as it has been found to be negatively correlated with teacher burnout in inclusive education; that is,

the less social support that the teacher experiences, the higher the level of burnout (Talmor, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005).

In fact, the following questions are vital in realizing strategic inclusive policies through the use of comprehensive and innovative teaching methods and whole-school processes in Greek and Hungarian schools: (a) How can we provide a safe and supportive environment in which all students can maximize their learning? (b) How can we remain accessible and responsive to their needs? (c) How can we assist our students to develop their ability to cope with challenge and stress?

Innovative models should be grounded in the understanding that the professional development of teachers is fundamental to the success of any innovation. This means developing supportive structures within schools and between schools and their communities, as well as providing teachers with up-to-date knowledge about practice (Kourkoutas, 2012; Wyn et al., 2002). The curriculum materials should be based on the understanding that young students need to engage actively with ideas and concepts in order to learn. The classroom materials should place the student at the centre of activities, positioning the teachers as a facilitator. Educators should provide the most productive environment for all students, and the health professional specific intervention for selected students who are defined as 'at risk' or vulnerable or coming from very complex and dysfunctional family environments and struggling with intense emotional and behavioral or academic problems (Brehm & Doll, 2009). The need for social-emotional support in schools is so great that there is a temptation (seldom resisted) to 'do' mental health by bringing in an 'expert' for very short intervention (a session or two). The effect of this limited, intervention approach is that the school environment does not shift towards the prevention of social-emotional and school problems and the promotion of wellbeing of most vulnerable students

(Wyn et al., 2000). Intervention should be embedded and related to whole-school processes that take a holistic perspective of the problem in consideration (Weare, 2005). Such intervention models usually bring ‘small scale or insignificant benefits’ to school communities. On the contrary, Mind-Matters represents an ideal example of innovative whole-school programs aiming at enhancing the development of educational environments where young people feel safe, where they belong and where they develop the skills needed to participate fully with the support of educational and professional staff (Wyn et al., 2000).

Conclusions: from social political reforms to inclusive engagement

In fact, achieving inclusive education goals within ordinary school system requires a series of ideological and scientific critical changes and advances in the way child disorder/disability is considered (Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006). In fact, a considerable shift in academic training -education of teachers and other professionals working with SENS is needed to prepare the prospect teachers in accordance to the Inclusive Educational standards. In terms of intervention practice, it requires an interdisciplinary perspective, an engagement of all school professionals and staff in a collaborative perspective with families and children with SEN. In addition, integrating expert knowledge/experience in inclusive practice, values, and perspective presupposes a paradigmatic change in the way school and educational psychologist work. School psychologists should be trained and prepared to broaden their way of thinking and consider children’s difficulties. They need to develop comprehensive models of intervention that challenge the dominant (medical) taxonomic thinking. In addition, the “commercial” education philosophy, the technocratic pedagogical methodology, the bureaucratic school organization, school isolation from community and families, as well as the teachers’ and professionals’ traditional roles should be

seriously questioned and replaced by alternative and innovative modes of structuring the curriculum and teaching in ordinary schools (e.g. an emphasis on social-emotional learning curriculum). In fact, a curriculum that (equally) prioritizes social-emotional learning fostering relationship and resilient skills and nurturing collectivity and democratic rights values is priority for schools to be inclusive for all students with difficulties. It is also important to modify from inside the dominant secluded and exclusionary practice with the use of effective practices that adopt an inclusive perspective and are meaningful for the ordinary classroom teachers. In addition, it is urgently imperative to provide families and students with complex needs, the necessary support and specialized intervention when necessary in order to strengthen their social and school inclusion and improve their interpersonal and learning skills, their self-concept and self-esteem. Furthermore, it is equally essential to offer teachers the suitable support and guidance in order to develop the appropriate educational practices to respond to the wide range of today's children's problems.

In summary, important changes should be realized at (philosophical, cultural, and practical) micro- and macro-level in both countries and unhelpful ways of thinking and acting within schools about inclusive education should be abandoned.

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