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# Practical strategies to improve learning and achievements of pupils with special educational needs in elementary school

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## Abstract

Permanently, in recent years in R. Macedonia is more often promote characteristics of good schools including the necessity of inclusion of children with special educational needs in compulsory education system. The modern school of us need to go to the following aspects of working with this category of children, their acceptance in regular classes, building socio-emotional climate and learning assessing their achievement the selection and preparation of appropriate methods, techniques, instruments, use of flexible, balanced programs. In this paper will present lessons learned from the school practice in teaching at first cycle with emphasis on their monitoring, checking and evaluation.

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*Keywords:* inclusive education; socio-emotional environment; teacher competences; formal assessment; anecdotal notes.

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## 1. Introduction

International concept of Education for the 21st century starts from the basic humanistic principles of democracy, humanization, tolerance, equal access to education for all. This comprehensive program covers and complementary educational changes priority of quality education that affirms the concept of equal educational opportunities for the education of all children regardless of their intellectual, social-emotional, linguistic, cultural and personal potential.

The new curriculum modelled on a coherent, flexible and relevant basis, aimed at the selection, organization and evaluation of the learning experience (to be taught how to teach, how to organize successful teaching how to evaluate the learning experience), stems from individual differences and needs of students that creates an opportunity for acceptance and satisfaction, and special children's educational needs, inclusive practice. Differences must be respected. Inclusive education as a continuous, integral educational process is the way to acceptance, care, respect for children with special educational needs in regular schools, promoting socio-emotional learning environment where children who have different needs and capabilities will enable a level learning what is acceptable and tailored to their individual characteristics whilst using different strategies of learning.

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Classroom should be a true place of respect and support individual development in accordance with modern psychological structural and humanistic theories of learning. School community as a contemporary microorganisation should build open, cooperative, flexible, socio-emotional environment in which will accept and respect the different needs, values, abilities, beliefs, stimulate optimal development of the entire student potential environment that will seeks to influence interpersonal behavior, opinions, values, behavior of all entities involved in the training process, where depending on their roles to participate and influence the development of students.

Modern trends in education posed by the need change of the traditional role of teacher. Teacher with his professionalism and emotional competence has important role in the acceptance, monitoring, evaluation of children with special educational needs in regular schools. Inclusive schools promote broad targeted list of responsible, moral roles of the teacher who actually represent a series of personal, professional, ethical and human qualities that will help teachers work with pupils with special educational needs.

### *1. What is the role the teacher with students with special educational needs?*

*If it was an ideal world there would have been a teacher for every child, and so would be sure December is done perfectly harmonize the education needs of the individual.*

Initiated a process of change in education is aimed at improving the work of the teaching process. In the center of all these reforms is the teacher as a bearer of change. Profession of teacher in pedagogic literature is defined very broadly. The teacher's professional, pedagogic educated person, competent to implement educational activities.

The current school has traditionally characterized many weaknesses and inconsistencies. The classroom is cultivated style that dominated hierarchical, authoritarian roles of teacher built on:

- Strict-conventional academic environment;
- Insulation, formalism, improvisation, triteness, mediocrity;
- Stigmatization of children as different;
- Absence of a contribution to optimal utilization of the pupil potential;
- Limited access-inclusive traditionalism of slavery;
- Lack of proper implementation of inclusive educational methodology, learning strategies;
- Low level of interaction and cooperation;
- Discriminatory support of school policies;
- Limited material, human and financial resources;
- Poor material conditions, poorly designed school buildings without architectural solutions for the needs of children with special educational needs;

1. • Undefined models of permanent training for inclusive education.

Today, teachers are placed in front of more complex tasks and problems which led to changes into the traditional style of work. If we want to achieve optimal results in inclusive practice is necessary to differentiated didactical-methodical following components:

- Openness to inclusive practice;
- building a learning environment oriented to trust and support;
- planning and programming of the priority objectives of inclusive education (for different needs and interests, their adaptation of content and tasks, extra help) in school curriculum, school development planning, individual programs;
- Initiation of more forms, many methods in teaching (work in small groups, differentiated and individual work, tutoring, child-child);
- Exchange of ideas and experiences with teachers who have applied in inclusive practice (Council of teachers, specialized assets, class Council);
- Collaboration with professional active, team, manager, local environment, parents;
- Interpersonal impact on attitudes, opinions, beliefs of parents and other entities inclusive education;
- Guidance on capacity-observed interests, needs, care, incentive and management of children with special needs;

- Self-control of emotions and their impact on control of the emotions of students, strengthening self-esteem, self-evaluation capabilities, achievements, attitudes;
- Participation of more lasting and effective seminars, workshops, projects in this area;
- Maintenance and reproduction of ideas from the seminars in the classroom;
- Inclusion and adoption of new teaching materials;
- Teachers to accept new knowledge, learning strategist at areas close to this matter;
- Ability to assess and evaluate the achievements of children with special educational needs;
- application of techniques methods, instruments of assessment: Diagnostic evaluation, formal assessment, summative assessment, inventory of interests, semantic differential, scale, portfolio, evident lists, check lists, anecdotal notes.

## 2. *How can we evaluate the achievements of pupils?*

Scientific studies that are inclusive oriented show sequence inconsistencies in the way of monitoring, assessment, evaluation of the achievements of students. Namely, the notes refer to the traditional teaching that it's inefficient non cooperative, conventional and manage the identification and monitoring of individual abilities, interests and needs of students. Current organization of the educational system in Macedonia was directed to didactical average, while caring for children with special educational needs is reduced to a minimum. Changes in education inevitably impose the necessity of inclusion of inclusive practice in our schools. The program bases are developed elements of participatory practice, which is more declarative and insufficiently efficient to develop differentiated and individualized approach to planning. It is necessary to create a new model of balanced curriculum that allows flexible, methodical-didactic framework in planning teaching activities and the activities of all entities involved in the school that affect the achievements of students. Teachers should focus on the needs of students, to stimulate and assist students to receive feedback, relevant information on its development, progress, achievements, the process of their learning that is their motivation for further guidance. Common to all professional considerations of our educational practice is that children with special educational needs often in school environments:

- haven't equal opportunities to affirm their achievement as other children;
- To set goals too high;
- Summative assessment is oriented on the amount of saved and played facts;
- Curricula are inadequately adapted to the individual characteristics, needs, interests and abilities of children;
- Most goals and indicators for monitoring are arbitrary, insufficiently clear, be formulated by the actions of teacher and curriculum content;
- disclaimed joint responsibility for children with special needs by professional services, the director, teachers, in decisions about school curriculum, due to the absence of professional development, lack of knowledge, absolutism in operation;
- Teachers are lonely, insecure, overloaded, no choice of defined models for monitoring and evaluation;

Assessment is an essential element of a good school, that goal is through the collection and interpretation of valid and reliable feedback on the achievements of pupils to improve the teaching process. It is permanent, planned, analytical process integrated into the school curriculum. Through the process of evaluating the most common practical performance have diagnostic, formative, summative and evaluation. Formative assessment is continuous, stimulating assessment. Combined with other approaches allow the student to progress and development needs. This kind of assessment allows a priority application in the teaching process.

Formative assessment determined:

- Degree of achievement of objectives;
- is oriented towards positive activities and values of students;
- Equal importance given to each student;
- The student is an active entity in the process of monitoring;
- offered alternatives to improve learning;
- provides high quality, reliable, valid feedback to parents;
- encourage interpersonal influence thinking, behaviors, attitude, the entities involved in the teaching process;
- Parents are included in the evaluation process;
- enables the planning of future activities;

In teaching practice commonly used methods and tools of formative checking achievements are: observation, collecting information, talking, recording the child's file (portfolio), anecdotal notes, and partnership with parents.

Anecdotal notes are brief, effective, written reports on specific sequences of activities, attitudes of students in the classroom. These notes are made in a long time in the process of observation of the child, and provide quality feedback to parents on children. The essence of anecdotal notes specifically for children with special educational needs in what is a descriptive-analytical feedback to parents given objective, timely progress and development of student support will be stimulated to prevent weaknesses and improve learning. Benefits of anecdotal notes:

- They are continuous, consistent, economical, descriptive evidence;
- More integrated strategies for evaluation: observation, port-folio, interview, partnership with parents;
- Effective, fast, exit strategy for designing differentiated learning programs for children with special needs;
- Objectively informing parents about students behavior;
- have a permanent insight into the behavior and attitude of the student;
- marking the weaknesses and shortcomings of the student;
- Preventive maintenance and offer a solution;
- Facts are marking the advance made in applications that are marking: location, time, description, interpretation, proposal of measures for support;

In order to investigate the opinions and attitudes of teachers and their experience and knowledge of inclusive educational practice (providing education to children with special educational needs) into regular primary schools in our country, R. Macedonia, and to realize the necessity of using proper methodology, technology and strategies in inclusive practice, approached the survey of 126 teachers from the first cycle of primary schools in the Republic. Macedonia. It got the following results:

Most teachers are female and 118 teachers, 8 teachers, who tell us that teaching profession is exclusively a female occupation. Of them 117 are employed in urban schools and only 9 in the regional schools in rural areas. Most of them, exactly 45 tutors with experience of 20-30 years, 42 tutors with experience of 10-20 years, which implies that it is for teachers with more experience.

Most of the teachers specifically 67 teachers during their experience working with children with special educational needs. Interesting is the fact that half of respondents would accept, and half would not have accepted children with special educational needs in the departments whose class managers they are.

Asked whether the schools in which they work are open to inclusive practice they gave the following answers presented in the table that speeches in favor of the fact that their schools are not sufficiently open to inclusive practice for various reasons, architecture, low equipment schools, misfit space, lack of staff for expert assistance and support (Table 1)

Table 1. Openness of schools for inclusive practice

Openness of school for inclusive practice	Answer of respondents	%
Complete	16	12.7
Enough	23	18.25
Lack	67	53.17
Do not care	20	15.88
D not know	/	/
Total	126	100

Also, came to conclusion that the teachers participated in training on inclusive practice, but realization of it depends on the personal efforts of the teacher, reading professional literature, consulting and exchanging experiences with colleagues and others.

The analysis of the table which involved ranking the didactical-methodical elements based on their importance showed the following: *Very important* for inclusive practice: Creating a learning environment that includes all: Raising the level of training of teachers, strengthening of cooperation between school teams, building an atmosphere of respect, support, trust, experience exchange, cooperation, resources, support from teachers, principal, parents, Amendments to the curriculum that will incorporate inclusive teaching practices, teachers with special training to implement inclusive Practice: Improving working conditions is an important factor in participatory practices, individual approach is stimulate: Increasing the awareness of parents of all students for acceptance of children with

special needs, children with disabilities are not included in regular schools; How insignificant noted the inclusion of professionals in inclusive educational practices, and *significant* are: Integration of children with special educational needs in regular classes, professional development of teachers, co-operative learning is stimulating;

As the necessary elements for the implementation of inclusive practice noted: manuals, space and material conditions in the school and classroom, parents meetings, co-relation of teacher-director-specialized services, wider society, seminars, training, fewer students class.

In the creation of inclusive practice teachers, but in smaller numbers, t.e.19.84% suffering pressure from parents of children included in regular classes. (Table 2)

Table 2. Pressure from the parents of children from regular classes for inclusive practice

Pressure from the parents of children from regular classes for inclusive practice	Replies of teachers	%
Yes	25	19.84
No	101	80.16
Total	126	100

During training, teachers are faced with problems: maintaining the concentration of children, motivation, setting goals, objectives and content, teaching, and have no capacity to monitor teaching.

To be successful in school implementation of inclusive practices, teachers suggested the removal of architectural barriers, the existence of adequate teaching aids and resources, cooperation with professional staff, performance seminars, workshops, individualized training, professional approach, more games, care, training programs -specific, greater attention from society, municipalities.

Monitoring, evaluation, assessment of children with special educational needs teachers realize most independent 77.78 % from the respondents, and very rarely receive assistance from professional school teams and parents (Table 3)

Table 3. Assistance in monitoring, assessment and evaluation of the success of children with special educational needs

Assistance in monitoring, assessing and evaluating the success of children with special educational needs	Answered of respondents	%
Professional school staff	10	7.94
Advance individual training plan drawn up by professional	12	9.52
You have no assistance from anyone at the school	98	77.78
Parents	6	4.76
Total	126	100

As the most common technique for collecting data used observation, specifically anecdotal note (attached)

Depending on the capabilities and time available to the teacher uses a different approach in working with these students; the most common approach is individualized.

For successful monitoring and evaluation of children with special needs teachers offer: frequent seminars and training assistance defect log approach, as well as educators especially when making instruments fore monitoring of students?

## 2. Conclusion

Based on everything we outlined to bring the following conclusion:

The analysis of theoretical debates about this problem and the empirical data that came as a result of using the survey technique and anecdotal notes presented by the teachers, do not lead to the following conclusions:

- Questions that set the beginning, in the introductory part, and the examination and found the answer in theoretical discussions and results from survey,
- The conclusions of the research should not be accepted because they are categorically related to concrete sample and specifically for some time. This means that they should take to find ways and means for successful

implementation of inclusive practices in schools. Teachers of primary schools have a constant need for training necessary for successful implementation of the teaching process with these students;

- To developed systematically collaboration between school and the other institution who work and have experience in work with this children, etc;
- Constant development of educational personnel through training that would apply to learning strategies, and strategies for monitoring, evaluation and assessment of children with special educational needs and development of their implementation within the classroom,
- Greater involvement of the community in raising awareness and creating support groups and the setting and create new and new working groups that will work and contribute to the achievement of global European idea of improving education.

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## Appendix

### Report No.1

Beginning of school year. Martin is a student in grade 1 and it is a child with difficulties in psychological development. Martin was nervous, crying, every five minutes asking when you go home and opens the door. Nothing matters of hours, anxiously scribble the book. Out in the hall outside and wants to go. His mother waits in the lobby of the school, every departure to convince him to return to the classroom. Other students want to help him, play with him briefly and he convinced to remain in the classroom. Required communication with Pedagogical-psychological services in school and with parents. The conversation was necessary for Martin's new, is visibly afraid of the school environment, children, teacher. Expert teams not worked with him for his adaptation to school.

### Report No.2 - End of first half

Martin sits in snuggery with 4 children. Martin is a step forward, not nervous, not cry, not required to constantly go home. His mother did not wait in the lobby. Children are in close relation with care tacitly feeling the need to assist, to play with him, to share toys, markers. Include in the games, while Martin wants. Martin continues to scribble his books with marker. He scribbles bench and books of friends. Martin sometimes wants to go home but Martin cries and leaves the classroom. We are in constant communication with his mother; each activity has been notified of his mother. The mother wants is to be informed of his needs, interests and behaviour. Administrative Services Director, as to not hearing about this problem. They, ignore the problem as it occurs in another school. Several parents from the Department of which one is a teacher employed at the school are of the opinion that Martin should leave the school grounds: they regarded the progress of their children. We need coordination with experts.

### Report No.3

Nicholas is in second grade and has a child with learning difficulties. Nicholas is diligent, each task accepts, but he needs help from the teacher. Follow with interest the reading of various texts and understand their content. Story retold and written texts with the teacher and parents. He has difficulties with oral expressing. Detects and counting numbers to 100 but with the help of the teacher. Nicola needs constant encouragement and encourages additional activities that will improve the process of his learning.