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SEVEN ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION



डॉ.सौ. उज्ज्वला के.सदावर्ते
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ABSTRACT

The goal is to eliminate all barriers in order to achieve learning (Lipski, 1998). Inclusion promotes quality and equity education for all, without any type of barrier or exclusion, including those who may be potentially marginalized due to disability, gender, emotional/ behavioral problems, family background, ethnicity, giftedness, migrants, poverty, hearing or visual impairment, language delay, among others. (Salamanca Statement, p. 6). This is a big challenge for all but, it is an opportunity to advance the school as a change factor that promotes dialogue and participation, making possible well-being through an education of quality for all without

exception, for the commitment of the community.

KEYWORDS : *emotional/ behavioral problems, family background, ethnicity, giftedness.*

CONTEXT

It is a fact, every educational system in the world needs to improve and work towards the best results. This is not an exception in Mexico. It has lot of educational challenges, combined with socially and economically complicated contexts. Mexico has signed every international statement about inclusion, and has promoted deep transformations. The author believes that the most transcendental has been The General Education Law issued in 1993. This Federal Law recognized special education as a part of Basic Education and specifies its mission. 'The Special Education is destined to individuals with temporary or permanent disabilities as well as those with outstanding aptitudes. It treats students in an appropriate manner according to their conditions and with social equity. For children with disabilities, education will support their inclusion into regular education through the application of methods, techniques and specific materials. For those individuals not able to be included in regular education classrooms, an educational program will be developed to respond to their individual learning needs. This will include the development of independent living and social skills supported by the use of programs and materials. This educational program includes orientation to parents and/or guardians as well as to teachers in basic education that receive students with special educational needs' (Article 41). In consequence every special education service was transformed mainly into two

services; The Services Support Unit for Regular Education (USAER), a group of diverse professionals in regular schools, and the Multiple Attention Centers (CAM), attending children with profound needs, promoting independent life, and occupational inclusion, but both start from the General Curricula as a core. Another important feature of the Mexican context is the fact that every educational Programme is the responsibility, by mandate, of the Federal Department of Public Education (SEP), including all Teacher Training. In this way the Schools for Teachers (Escuelas Normales) that are public institutions of higher education and also the private schools for teachers must implement the Federal Programmes for Teachers. The SEP has made important efforts in terms of changes in all teachers' education programmes, promoting common and general assignments for all, and also including some subjects for familiarization to inclusion, e. g Special Needs Education or Adolescents at risk.

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSION

Inclusion requires a large vision and specific competencies for all teachers. Now the teachers need to know that diversity is present in the classroom, and that they should attend to learners with a range of diverse needs. In this frame, it is imperative to prepare teachers for inclusion in all curricular plans for pre-service teachers, also for teachers in services, with the following professional aptitudes:

1. Researcher. Always searches for explanations about their educative reality, has intellectual skills to propose diverse hypothesis, solve problems, generate innovation, and face challenges in the education field.
2. Strategic. Is a professional with strong self- regulation, skills for planning, guiding and assessing, not only their own intellectual resources about the learning of curricular issues but also in their performance as a teacher. Always has an attitude to learn and improve. Faces uncertainty with creativity.
3. Resilient. Always moves towards the future, in spite of their difficult situations, by making healthy adjustments against adversity.

The knowledge, skills and attitudes for all inclusion teachers must emphasize that the purpose of all teacher interventions is the students' learning. They also need to have high expectations for all (inclusive vision), develop inclusive projects including diverse teaching strategies and support systems (inclusive practices) and participate in a collective work (inclusive language).

The author identifies three important educational aspects that every teacher needs to be inclusive: Equality; promoting the same opportunities for all, quality; offering functional and meaningful learning and equity; responding to special educational needs.

The Implementation Process

Teachers are the key to success in inclusion. Here, seven essential components for Teacher Preparation Programmes are introduced based on the experience of training teachers

1st. The Inclusive Teacher is a professional in education with a strong commitment to his/her community. The Teacher Preparation Programme should include subjects with high social and community content because they need to be sensitive to the needs of students and the environment; It is important to recognize the school as a point of encounter among different people, it promotes agreements among all the members of the community and meaningful relationships among the components that impact the learning of the students by removing barriers, promoting high expectations and a positive environment characterized by continuous improvement and values. The dialogue, participation and collaboration allows full awareness to all as a community and, in consequence ensures successful experiences in inclusion. For this reason the teachers need to be

involved.

2nd. The Inclusive Teacher recognizes individual differences and implements learning strategies for all. The educational intervention is oriented to diversity and promotes learning strategies for all (equality), for quite a few and for only one (equity). These are other essential aspects in the teacher Preparation Programmes. Quality, equality and equity concepts should be translated into specific actions of educative interventions.

In order to illustrate the individual differences in the classroom, the author follows a tridimensional view. Every inclusive teacher needs to move among these three realities in his/her classroom – seeing his/herself as being like all others, also like some others and finally, in some ways unique. This idea allows co-teaching or concurrent participation. Inclusion promotes co-operation in the classroom. I believe this representation helps us to understand the diversity concept as well.

In inclusive education, the school and classrooms are very dynamic and have a lot of interactions and roles. The exchange and experience enrich individuality. Diverse contexts indicate diverse relationship and interactions.

3rd. The collaborative work among educators, facilitates inclusion and needs to be promoted in the Teacher Preparation Programme. The author believes that inclusion is funded on a collective of teachers, a team sharing knowledge, making decisions, solving problems together and generating actions in order to improve the school and to increase the learning for all. In consequence, the collaborative work is a source of dialogue, co-teaching and updating. Information on the process of collaborative work now follows.

La Escuela Normal de Especialización de Monterrey, the Institution of Higher Education that trains teachers in special education, promotes collaborative work in all faculties. Nowadays learning this way is invaluable and considered as a fundamental component on inclusive education. All pre-service teachers should know and develop skills in this way because:

1. The teacher learns when teaching and the students teach when they learn.
2. Everyone assumes tasks of leadership because we assume as protagonists.
3. Outcomes increase when we make synergy and identity is strengthened when we make joint decisions, shaping teams in the resolution of problems, allowing everyone to learn or re-learn social skills.
4. The results begin when we work together because nobody will do it for us – whatever we must to do, let's do!
5. The economic resources are a result of collaborative work and not a condition.
6. Heterogeneity provides a great richness.
7. Collaboration boosts accountability and recognition processes in all communities.

The process is shaped in six important steps as follows:

1. Building a common vision. Who are we? Who do we want to be? What are our goals, expectations and interests?
2. Recognizing our reality. How are we? Why are we like this? We need to analyze our beliefs and precise data information.
3. Decision-making. What are our proposals to improve our present? We need to build and establish agreement about participation.
4. Developing proposals. What are we doing to change the situation? Who? Everyone needs to know all the actions.
5. Evaluating our actions. How and how much have we advanced? Are our agreements functioning?

What needs to be modified, strengthened or implemented? We need to make necessary adjustments. 6. Beginning anew. Which areas do we need to improve? What do we do? New actions for improvement.

4th. All programmes for pre-service teachers and in-service teachers must be based on the interpretative and critical paradigms. Allowing encounter with others, and the collective and interpretive insight into environments and circumstances and the development of research activities are fundamental. The inclusive teacher has strong skills in action research methods. The author believes that this paradigm generates conditions for dialogue and collaboration. The dialogue needed for relationships and the essence of collaboration is the recognition of otherness. Recognizing that the other, is not a continuation of me, but has its own worldview leads teachers to explain, interpret and act from their personal background. Collaboration takes the value of the other as implicit – this implies strengths, occupations and concerns. This vision then transforms from two ideas (you and me) to a new figure (us). Such dialogue and collaboration are key elements in inclusive education.

5th. Contextual Preparation. Connecting with the educational services, allowing identification of diversity as an enriching element has three great steps outlined below. For teachers to promote inclusive education, their training should link directly with the educational services in so called contextual professional practice. This approach, in our experience, must be presented to all throughout the training process structuring with multi-directional flow between theoretical and experiences close to educational field. Three important steps are proposed:

a) Re-significance of own school experience of future teachers.

This period of time is essential. Each future teacher should discuss his/her own experience as a student, analyze emotions and be aware of school and pedagogical theory made by teachers, allowing them to 'see' those components that were previously 'hidden' such as school's culture, school's type, teachers, uses and customs that marked the dynamic school and the values that predominated, characterizing the experiences from other angles and points of view. It certainly requires time to work individually and collectively, interchange coincidences and differences of experiences. This time must be in the first and second semesters of teacher education programs.

b) Approach to various contexts of school children.

- This consists of visiting previously selected schools, taking part in observation activities and educational practices in three stages:
- Planning activities: after assessing the educational context, it is important to develop instruments of work; observation guides, questionnaires, interviews and to make teams to provide all aspects for implementing the planned approaches.
- Critical route implementation.
- Presentation of experiences: This is done in the classroom where all of the evidence and results are presented from the previous phase.

As a result of these activities, each student keeps a portfolio and checks research to support their actions. At all times they are accompanied by an experienced teacher. Certainly, they should include diverse environments, contexts, and educational services that characterize the educational system.

c) Professional practices in real environments.

In the teacher's training, the student must remain for a long period of time, in a school under

the tutelage of a teacher.

This teacher must exert mentoring activities, to enrich their teaching experience with the knowledge of a mentor who attends and promotes inclusion activities.

At this time, the Faculty holds an agreement with diverse educational centers. Partnerships with the training institutions for teachers and schools are necessary. This enriching experience also enables the development of educational research in the corresponding professional options. The last two semesters are ideal for this important step.

6th. Cross Categorical/Multi-tiered formation. Diversity needs a global and common vision; philosophy, values, legal frame, language and shared knowledge as learning theories, special educational needs, support systems, educational intervention; strategies for large and small groups and individuality, tutoring and curricular adjustments. Inclusive education must characterize all training teacher programs, offering skills and common benchmarks for everyone regardless of education level to be entered (e.g. Primary, Secondary and High Education). This versatile training enables various teachers, regardless of their field or level of training, to collaborate and participate in the diversity of educational contexts together. The common reference on inclusive education frameworks that must be present in all Teacher Training Programs are:

a) Common vision. The philosophy of inclusion, legal frameworks that enable an education for all with quality and equity, educational policy that promotes attention to diversity, the historical evolution from marginalization to inclusion and conceptions among others, are fundamental aspects in educational programs.

b) Language and common knowledge. Emphasize the student's possibilities and support systems, with a clear vision that all children can learn. In this way the school needs to prevent the barriers and limitations for learning that could marginalize children and young people from their potential. It also includes learning conception, individual differences, the values of solidarity, respect, and collaboration. Cognitive and affective elements framed in the conception of collectivity and community empowerment as well.

c) Educational attention to diversity practices. Includes strategies for large or small groups and one-on-one, mentoring, curricular adjustments, alternative support systems, diversity assessment actions, collaboration with other professionals and co-teaching, trans-disciplinary action, among others. They are essential for the development of the professional skills of attention to diversity.

7th. Mentoring. New teachers must participate with experienced teachers at least during the first two years. This includes dialogue sessions, reviews of situations, decision-making arrangements and work plans, among others to provide the following to the new teacher: intervention (guidance), facilitation (advice), and cooperation (co-responsibility).

The new teacher needs counseling and mentoring actions to consolidate his/her skills as an inclusive teacher. Whereas educational dynamic is intense and complex, it is necessary that new teachers participate under the accompaniment and mentoring of experienced teachers to enable consolidation of an inclusive vision in those teachers. It seems that this is essential to ensure the best results in the first years of teaching work. Many education systems face the phenomenon of 'burnout' among their teachers, often causing the abandonment of the teaching task, or loss of enthusiasm and commitment. This is a terrible loss to any education system or country.

Mentoring are actions carried out by a teacher, preferably of the same school, or networks of teachers that assume this important task. It requires a lot of creativity and a clear and definite plan for the monitoring of such actions. The time should be defined by each environment, however this task

should be carried out at least in the first year very closely and the second year in a more distant way. Nieto (2004) identifies three models of advice that characterize actions of accompaniment and mentoring:

- a) Intervention. The role of the experienced teacher is directive and assumes a leadership position, where instruction is given through interpersonal behavior which provides materials and ideas to be adapted, and so dominates the transmission of information with an emphasis on the explanation and application of knowledge and skills.
- b) Facilitation. The role of the experienced teacher is consulting. His/her interaction with the novice teacher provides advice and listens, encourages and clarifies. The experienced teacher provides materials designed for this purpose and promotes the discussion and review of diverse conceptions. The experienced teacher assumes a role of coordinator of decisions and is a strong observer. This model focuses on interactive work methodology and improves the quality of action processes.
- c) Cooperation. A critical friend or colleague is the experienced teacher role and their relationship is interdependent and a source of mutual learning, shared responsibility, experience or convergence of perspectives. Materials and ideas are developed together. There is an awareness of reaching agreements and reaching a consensus on courses of action. Cooperative research is promoted. Both input to the improvement plan. There is shared leadership and promotion of interdependence, reciprocity, collegiality and solidarity. The best features of accompaniment and mentoring are developed under the facilitation and cooperation approach.

Key Outcomes

The inclusive teacher should be accompanied in his early professional development by a mentor, following the facilitation and cooperation models.

The profile for the inclusive teacher should be as follows:

- The inclusive teacher is a professional educator committed to his/her community, who recognizes individual differences and considers them in his/her educational intervention actions. S/he participates in collective teaching because it is essential for collaboration and dialogue and is also creative in implementing education by facing the challenges of diversity in specific educational project interventions.
- The inclusive teacher by their multi-tiered formation has a holistic educational view with strong skills and experience in order to participate in diverse contexts.

In our teacher programs, we are promoting each one of the seven essential components; combining the federal program (by mandate) with our complementary program. The focus of all the actions is to develop an approach to inclusive education teacher. Some conclusions are:

- a) Work together with other institutions to build a collaborative network, connecting colleagues and diverse professionals, interchanging knowledge and making new friends.
- b) Promote educational research projects to develop innovation.
- c) Participate in diverse social and educative programs in each community.
- d) Support the collaborative work of all teachers because it is the best way to attend to the diversity of our schools. In this sense, the mentoring process has a transcendent role.
- e) Choose the best student profile for teacher education.
- f) Enrich the Teacher Preparation Programs, with transversal competencies along the curricular plan.
- g) Increase all professional skills in term of alternative and augmentative communication systems such

as Braille, Sign Language and Communication Board through a supplementary program.

h) Make educational proposals to the Federal Education Department in order to improve the Training Teachers in Mexico based on action research.

i) Collaborate with academic centers to share knowledge.

Inclusion has been incorporated into almost every educational system, but we still need to learn and understand the real meaning of Education for All with quality and equity and recognize the fundamental role of teachers in the advancement of social justice, human rights, and opportunities for welfare. Each one of us needs to face the challenges in order to consolidate inclusion for the benefit of our community.

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