

Why Inclusion? Let's think together about what it means to have inclusion, and not just integration of children with special needs in regular schools

by

Professor Dr Vesna Varunek
University of Mostar Washington D.C. Metro Area
Email: varunek.vesna@gmail.com

Abstract

This article will discuss the main differences between integration and inclusion, and provide some clarification with the aim of helping the educational community better understand each of these approaches. We will briefly look at the difficult treatment that people with special needs have had to endure in the past. The way our society has treated them went from complete exclusion and segregation, through integration to – finally - inclusion. The article focuses on inclusion in the education of human beings, as defined by humanistic theories of understanding of education and child-rearing. The basis for such statements is found in contemporary educational theory as much as in international legal documents that have been dutifully adopted, signed into law and ratified by many countries around the world.¹ This article will further explain who exactly belongs in the category “children with special needs”; could it be that we all are children or persons with special needs? We will lightly touch on the subject of parents, as well as partnership between school and home. This topic is very broad in its own right, but we will only briefly discuss it as it pertains to inclusion.

Key words: integration, inclusion, human needs, children with special needs.

Introduction:

As humans, we are social beings by nature. An individual lives immersed in the community of other human beings, and in their common natural environment. The individual creates changes in the community and the natural environment: they are a product of the curious, imaginative and active human being seeking challenges, exploring the existing reality and creating a new one. An open, creative mind forges new ideas, which are nothing but new combinations of the old ideas.

¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (<https://www.un.org › universal-declaration-human-rights>); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination Adopted and opened for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX) of 21 December 1965 entry into force 4 January 1969, in accordance with Article 19 (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx>); The Convention on the Rights of the Child (<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>); The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action Adapted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education (1994) (www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF); UNESCO: EFA Education For All (<http://www.unesco.org>); UNESCO EFA Quality Education for All (<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000137333>). Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975) <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/RightsOfDisabledPersons.aspx>

The forming of the personality, however, as well as the complete realization of self, both depend on the relationships with other human beings from the environment.

Scientists such as Maslow (1943) and Glasser (1998) are firmly convinced that persons, in order to be happy, satisfied and successful, must first satisfy their own nature, or, in other words, their own physiological, societal and other needs. These needs can be met only in relationships with other persons, Glasser emphasizes (1998). If these needs are met, a person is feeling self-realization, and both the society and the individual are gaining. If these needs are (even after many attempts) not met, or are only partially met, the individual is not satisfied, is unhappy, can become destructive even, and shows a tendency to act in socially unacceptable ways. Such an individual is usually not understood and not accepted by the society. We can even argue that human nature is in a certain sense bi-polar: to be good or to be evil depends on our ability to have our needs met in relationships with people from our surroundings.

These basic human needs are divided into two groups by Maslow (1943): physiological needs, and social needs. Physiological needs are our basic biological needs (Glasser, 1998) that are first met at home with parents (such as the need for food, water, movement, safety, etc). The need for safety is met in stable families, and later in positive environment at school or workplace. Social needs are also first met within the confines of the family: parents raise their children in context of love, and they feel that they belong to each other. This feeling of love and belonging is important to an individual throughout their whole life (at school and workplace) and is of utmost importance for mental and physical health of each individual. If the family is not functioning well for any reason (divorce, death, illness), peer support becomes very important, as do teachers who understand, and offer help instead of judgment.

Stable, successful individuals are a reflection of the stable, successful society they come from. Satisfied young people lead initiatives, they explore their abilities more freely and responsibly. On the other side, those who are unsatisfied, are also not independent, act in a destructive and revengeful ways, and show a tendency to develop substance abuse issues. Here we see how having one's basic needs met is not only of great importance for that individual, but for the society as a whole.

Each individual has these basic needs, but they are somewhat magnified in people with special needs. The importance of having the basic needs met is unquestionable, and it is clear that they can only be met in relationships with other individuals from the social environment. However, persons with special needs have been historically pushed to the sidelines of society and (often brutally) segregated. They were quite literally deprived of interactions with peers. Under such circumstances, how could have they had their basic human needs met, established relationships, and thrived mentally and physically? How can one love and be loved, and feel s/he belongs to the social environment, if one is completely or partially cut off from that society?

We argue that December 10, 1948 marks the starting point of establishing equality of people with special needs. On that day, the UN General Assembly has ceremoniously adopted and proclaimed the General Human Rights Declaration. This document provided a firm basis for thinking of all persons in terms of equality, and the situation for persons with special needs has been clearly improving since then. These past few decades have seen great changes at the global level in regards to the education and treatment of children with special needs. The social and educational support and help has increased. Developing countries, who have adopted new

legislation based on the internationally adopted, signed and ratified laws, have finally started to implement it.

But, who are children with special needs? Authors Vade and Moore (1987:15) consider that all children have special needs and that all of them present specific differences. More recently, pedagogical literature (Zovko, 1999) Jurcic – Devcic (2017) established that children with special needs were actually all children who – in a positive or negative sense – deviated from the norm or median (Zovko, 1999 : 371). Children with above-average intellectual abilities, or talented children, are part of this group just as much as children with learning disabilities or difficulties. Numerous American authors take this stance even further, talking about the education of talented children in the framework of special needs education: while discussing children with hearing or speech impairment, children with autism, they also discuss talented children. Grgin (1997) argues that talented children represent a particular group within the category of special education.

Children With Special Needs – Historic Overview:

Throughout history, societies have provided support to persons with special needs at varying degrees, and almost always at the detriment of that particular societal group. History of the treatment of persons with special needs presents several phases.

During the first phase, persons with special needs were considered monsters, non-human, undeserving of life as human beings. In this period, they would almost certainly be killed or left to perish in the wilderness. Tribal communities did not like them, and would find different ways to be rid of them, fearing gods' anger. Neither Aristotle nor Plato were very fond of children with special needs. In their opinion, it was useless to take care of such children. Luckily, there have always been people of opposing opinions. Ancient Egyptians did not allow killing of people with special needs, while the ancient Hindu had a great understanding for these children. They believed in their ability to develop, and had devised some efficient methods for working with them. However, as a whole, this period can be called the Dark Period of harsh and primitive treatment for persons with special needs (Zrilić, 2013, str. 142).

The second period sees the opening of asylums, the first institutions or homes for children with special needs. This brought about the segregation of children with special needs: they were taken out of their families and brought to live in institutions that were specifically designed for them. They were provided with living arrangements, far from sight of the society, but their educational and other needs were neglected. This period is usually called the Asylum Period. Authors Daniels and Stafford find that the different types of care for people with special needs all the way into the 20th century were based on the principle of separation from the “normal citizens” and confining the persons with special needs to special institutions. Children were confined to special homes or institutions, as it was deemed that children with special needs are a burden on the parents (Daniels and Stafford, 2003).

The third phase brought a more humane approach and more quality and systemic care for education and upbringing of children with special needs. It is at this time that many institutions were opened, this time providing not just basic living arrangements, but also education and training for children with special needs. This educational isolation continued and persisted until the 1970s, when developed countries started to treat persons with special needs equally as all the other people.

This last period has brought many positive changes: international organizations started taking steps that benefited persons with special needs, international documents were drafted and adopted, and new concepts in educational theory were developed (such as integration and inclusion). Inclusion came as the most distinguished approach, as it ensures upbringing, education and quality of life for all people, in line with their needs, abilities, and possibilities.

In truth, it was only in 1960's that the society has started figuring out how to successfully socialize with children and youth with special needs. At this time, on the global level, we have started questioning the ethical justifications for separating people with developmental difficulties from the rest of the society. What was particularly noticed were the negative consequences of separation of children from their parents, and some researchers have attempted to offer new methods that would help overcome these problems (Dokecki and Zaner, 1986).

Simultaneous developments in the field of cognitive psychology have certainly contributed to this trend, in particular the advances in the understanding of significant impact that the environment has on learning and development, such as offered by Bronfenbrenner (*The Ecology of Human Development*, 1979), Vygotsky (*Mind in Society. The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, 1978), and Glasser (*The Choice Theory*, 1991). All of these authors have emphasized the need for inclusion of children with special needs in an encouraging environment, which truly represents the social paradigm of the idea of integration. Such calls for action have quickly found their way into documents and recommendations issued by reputable international organizations and bodies such as UN and UNESCO. This was the basis for developing new ideas and more modern points of view, which led to the demand for closing the institutions where people with special needs were isolated from the society, and for finding ways to include this population in all forms of social life. These demands were, at least in the majority of European countries, technically marked as calls for "integration" (which emphasizes the need for their integration with the world of the majority).

What is integration?

Integration (lat. Integer – untouched, whole) generally means putting pieces together to make a whole. Integration of children with special needs in schools implies that a child spends some of its school hours with a special needs educator (separated from the rest of the classroom, where she/he works with the special educator following a special curriculum), and the rest of it with her/his home teacher and peers in the classroom.

In theory, we know of several degrees of integration: total integration, partial integration, and what I call false integration. In the scenario of total integration the child with special needs is taught according to the regular curriculum, with some individualization, or application of individualized or adjusted curriculum. In this type of integration, the child is not separated from the rest of the class or the home teacher, but certain subject matters or certain topics are taught to him/her differently, or to a different degree.

Total integration is achieved when students with special needs who are included in the regular curricula learn according to individualized curricula made by teachers of the school with the assistance from special teachers who know the children very well (Guberina-Abramovic, 2008). The curriculum must include: adapted teaching methods, adapted assessment tools and valorization of achievements, adapted work space, pathways for establishing excellent

communication with the students, usage of tools to help with the learning (Opći, Bilić and Jurčić, 2015). In such a situation, the child does not leave the classroom and the teacher. Total integration is really just a step away from inclusion.

Partial integration happens when the child with special needs spends time in a special classroom for most academic subjects, and returns to the home class to his/her teacher and peers for subjects such as PE, music and arts. In this type of integration, the child with special needs is a part-time member of the class (Zrilić, 2003). In this scenario, the children will talk about “us” and “them”, referring to the children with special needs as separate.

False integration, as I call it, happens when the integration is purely physical, in the sense where the physical space is shared: a regular school has a separate classroom for children with special needs. Such a class is small in size, and comprises of children with special needs of different ages, who only get to interact with the rest of the school children during recess and school-wide events. This is an illusion of integration, as children with special needs are never positively and truly interacting with their peers. In practice we have seen that this type of integration only fuels further societal divide, bringing all the ugly side-effects with it. The children walk away acutely aware of the huge divide between “us” and “them”.

What is inclusion?

Inclusion means that all people regardless of their abilities, have the right to be respected and appreciated as valuable members of their communities. Inclusion does not mean that we are all the same; on the contrary, each of us is unique, and thus different.

Inclusion creates a new relationship between us and everything else that might be new and/or different. Inclusion prefers to talk of differences in abilities, about a *different other*, re-defining such notions as normalcy and averages.

At its core, inclusion brings added value in terms of respect for differences among people. This needs to be used to broaden the understandings, enrich experiences, and develop humanity.

Basic postulates and attitudes towards inclusion:

- i. At the level of each individual school, implementation of inclusion depends greatly on the teachers’ and parent’ attitude towards inclusion and towards children with special needs, (Ceric & Alic, 2005; Varunek, 2009).
- ii. All children are capable of learning, and all children have a right to education in heterogenic classrooms together with their peers, at the school that is geographically closest to their home. The educational system has to recognize academic and psychological needs of all students, and ensure that they receive the necessary help and support (Ceric & Alic, 2005).

In the framework of inclusion as a general movement, we find inclusive education. One of the biggest challenges and initiatives in education that educational communities around the world are facing, is inclusive education (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman 2008).

Booth and others (2000:12) point out these important thoughts to keep in mind as we discuss inclusion:

- i. inclusion in education increases the student participation and reduces their exclusion from schools, curricula and local community;
- ii. inclusion means re-structuring of culture, policy and practice in schools, so that they all adapt to the diversity of the student body in each institution. UNESCO defines: “Inclusive Education is a process that involves the transformation of schools and other centers of learning to cater for all children”;
- iii. inclusion takes into account education and participation of each and every student who could be the target of exclusion, and not only those students who have certain disabilities or those who are categorized as “children with special educational needs”. UNESCO defines Inclusive Education as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners (UNESCO, 2005:9)²;
- iv. inclusion aims to improve schools for all staff (teachers and others) just as much as for the students;
- v. as we strive to overcome challenges and obstacles to access and student participation, it is possible to determine certain shortcomings when a school tries to generally treat everyone equally;
- vi. all students have a right to be raised and educated near their home.;
- vii. we should not view differences as a problem that has to be overcome or solved, but rather as a rich tool of support to education for all;
- viii. inclusion results in improvement of relationships between school and community;
- ix. inclusive education is just one aspect of inclusion (including a person into a society).

There are practical components of educational inclusion (Karagiannis, Stainback, & Stainback, (1996):

- i. organizational component: existence of a support network for students and teachers;
- ii. procedural component: inclusion of teachers, parents and experts from different fields, in the planning and implementation process;
- iii. instructional component: cooperation of students within a classroom in the process of learning and other activities.

Pasalic-Kreso (2003) writes that “inclusion is a pedagogical and humane reform that aims to achieve full equality for each child, and ensure such conditions in schools that will enable optimal development of each student to his or her full potential”. In her words, “practice of inclusion will most likely be the only practice that will, when developed and perfected, bring about its own end.” To put it simply, true practice of inclusion will render superfluous any further fight for equal inclusion of each child in educational process. “Practice of inclusion will, as it develops, reach a point where it will become superfluous” (Pasalic-Kreso (2003:22). Here we can conclude that inclusive education means increased inclusion of children and reduction of the degree to which they are excluded from school, local community, or curricula. It is of great importance to state that

² 9UNESCO (2005) Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All Children, Author, 7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001402/140224e.pdf>

in this approach, the child does not adapt to the curriculum, but the other way around: the curriculum is adapted to the child. Skjørten (2001) argues that adaptations must be made in curricula and textbooks, as well as in the expectations for each child, taking good care to achieve and realize all the planned individual learning outcomes.

At the practical level, successful work of a teacher in an inclusive classroom depends greatly on the level of established quality peer support and parent-school partnership. Practice of inclusion has shown, and my research data has confirmed, that inclusion creates a community where everyone feels welcome, useful and not discriminated against: a community where we emphasize abilities, and not disabilities.³

Conclusion:

Keeping in mind that each child has a right to an education aimed towards reaching the highest degree of education possible for that child, this article highly recommends inclusive education led by highly trained and skilled teachers, supported by a very developed and strong partnership between school and home. In other words, adults (school authorities, teachers and parents) must be able to notice and understand a wide spectrum of needs for each child, and must be able to adequately meet those needs within the child-focused approach.

According to this article, inclusion is one of human needs. Each individual has a need to belong to a family, circle of friends, school, workplace community... to live surrounded by love, to feel respected, and be capable of ensuring that others have these same opportunities.

In conclusion, the main differences between integration and inclusion are:

- i. integration only deals with the children with developmental issues, whereas inclusion deals with children with special needs;
- ii. integration is limited to a classroom/school, while inclusion encompasses all relevant elements of a community;
- iii. integration only partially integrates a child with special needs in the community of peers, while inclusion finds the child continually in the midst of peers;
- iv. integration tolerates barriers of physical accessibility, while inclusion demands a school thoroughly accessible to all individuals;
- v. integration views the child with disabilities as a problem (therefore, the child has to change and adapt to the school/educational system), while inclusion views the school/educational system as a problem (thus it is the school/education system that has to be adapted, changed, and frequently re-evaluated).

Inclusion is not limited to just education: it is a choice, a life style in the sense that it enables every individual to live and work within the limits of his or her own abilities. This further means

³ Data gathered during two action research projects conducted by me personally. One research was completed in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 2006 “Research in the only inclusive class in elementary school in Sarajevo” presented in the work “Teachers’ Mediation in Initiating Positive Communication with Parents”. The second was conducted in two-step approach in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 2013, and the data is published in the work “Communication and Interaction Between Parents and Teachers in Elementary School – Existing Practice and Improvement Measures.”

that inclusion levels the field and creates an atmosphere where each person can reach a level of satisfaction and happiness that is possible for them.

Life conditions must be adapted to the specific needs of all, not just persons with special needs. Translated to the school setting, this means that we need to approach education in a more complex way, and adapt curricula to the individual needs of students. School must develop individualized teaching methods, and put an end to the subject-specific teaching by introducing the true integrated approach, where there is no strict separation between subjects taught.

Rules and principles that determine relationships between individuals, but also relationships of individuals towards the community, must be inspired and firmly rooted in the General Declaration of Human Rights. This is the legal tool that guarantees the basic human rights, protects human dignity, equality, and social inclusion, and prevents discrimination.

References and Bibliography

- Barton, L. (ed). (2006). *Education and Society: 25 Years of the British Journal of Sociology of Education*, New York: Routledge
- Booth, T., Ainscow, M., Black-Hawkins, K., Vaughan, M. and Shaw, L. (2000). *The Index for Inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools*, Bristol: CSIE.
- Ceric, H. and Alic, A. (2005). *Basic principles for inclusive education*, Zenica Hijatus
- Daniels, E. R. and Stafford, K. (2003). *Curriculum for Inclusion – Developmentally appropriate curriculum for teaching children with special needs*. Zagreb: Step by Step
- Dokeeki, R. R.; Zaner, R. M. (1986). *Ethics of Dealing With Persons With Severe Handicaps: Towards a Research Agenda*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Florian, L. (2009). Preparing teachers to work in ‘schools for all’, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(4), 533-544
- Glasser, W. (1998). *Choice theory: A new psychology of personal freedom*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Grgin, T. (1997). *Educational Psychology* Naklada Slap. Jastrebarsko
- Guberina-Abramović, D. (2008). *Manual for working with children with special needs integrated in elementary school*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga, Croatia
- Inglis, Christine (2008). *Planning for Cultural Diversity*. Paris, UNESCO IIEP
- Karagiannis, A., Stainback, W., & Stainback, S. (1996). Rationale for inclusive schooling. In S. B. Stainback & W. C. Stainback (Eds.), *Inclusion: A guide for educators* (p. 3–15). Paul H Brookes Publishing.
- Levin, M. (2005). *Each Child is Smart in Their Own Way*. Beograd: Moć knjige.
- Lissmann, P.K. (2008). *Theory of being uneducated, misconceptions of the society of knowledge*. Zagreb, Naklada Jasenski I Turk

- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50, 370–396.
- Morin, Edgar (2001). *Education for the Future, Seven basic principles for education for the future*, Zagreb, EDUCA
- Opić, S., Bilić, V. i Jurčić, M. (2015). *Education in School (scientific monography)*. Zagreb: Učiteljski fakultet University of Zagreb, Croatia
- Pašalić Kreso, A. (2003). Genesis of the maturing of idea of inclusion, or inclusion in the function of diminishing inequalities in education. Editors: . A. Pašalić Kreso, M. Bevanda, E. Dmitrović, M. Kuorelahti, H. Muminović, M. Slatina (2003). *Inclusion in education of Bosnia and Herzegovina (str. 2-24)*. Sarajevo: TEPA – Teacher education and professional development, School of Philosophy, Department of Education, University of Sarajevo.
- Sharma, U. Forlin, C., Loreman, T. (2008). *Impact of Training on Pre-service teacher’s Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education and Sentiments about persons with disabilities. Disability*.
- Skjørten, M. (2001). *Cultural Activities as a Tool for Interaction Communication and Inclusion*. In B. H. Johanson, & M. D. Skjørten (Eds), *Special Needs Education, an Intraduction* (pp. 225 – 253) Oslo: Unipub forlag
- Varunek, V. (2004). *Jedan Model Integracije Primijenjen u Osnovnoj Skoli (One Model of Integration Applied in the Primary School)* In *Socioemocionalni Rast I Razvoj Strategije Učenja (Socio-Emotional Growth and Development of Learning Strategies)* proceedings from the 2nd scientific symposium with International participations. Tuzla, BiH, University of Tuzla, Faculty of Defectology
- Varunek, V. (2009). *Happy Family Happy Child. Contribution to the development of competencies for working with children with special needs towards their academic and social competencies. Competent Parent. (79-86)*. Association “Living with Down Syndrome” Sarajevo; Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Von, Hartmunt (2007). *What kind of education do we want?* Zagreb, EDUCA
- Von, Hartmunt, (2008). *What is Education?* Zagreb, EDUCA
- Zovko, G. (1999). *Students with special needs*. Mijatović, *Basics of Modern Pegagogy*. Zagreb: Hrvatski pedagoško-književni zbor.
- Zrilić, S. (2013). *Children with special needs in kindergarten and lower grades of elementary school – Manual for parents, teachers and educational staff*. Zadar: University in Zadar, Croatia.