

## TEACHER TRAINING NEEDS: DIDACTIC STRATEGIES TO APPROACH SCHOOL INCLUSION IN THE SPANISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

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### Abstract:

Changes that occur after the implementation of new education legislation do not always have negative aspects that involve changes at the organizational level of schools. With increasing frequency, we find in our Elementary and High School classrooms students with different learning difficulties and diverse ethnic backgrounds. Many immigrants continually arrive in our country during different periods of the academic year and are incorporated in the academic course according to their age. They do not know Spanish and cannot follow normal lessons.

Our Spanish Organic Act of Education (2006) focuses on all educational levels but pays particular attention to these students who really require specific educational attention. It pursues the incorporation of these groups in the education system depending on their capabilities and needs. To provide them with all the attention required, our education systems need specialists to teach these students. Most of the decisions undertaken are adopted regarding the psycho-pedagogical assessment that the counsellor performs. This procedure implies an improvement on previous legislation in the treatment of students with disabilities.

Until 2006, the regulations which the Spanish education system had developed education in all compulsory levels consisted of four education acts: General Act of Education (1970), Organic Act Regulating the Right to Education (1985), Act for the General Organisation of the Education System (1990) and Organic Act of Participation, Evaluation and Government Schools (1995). Yet, even with all the implementations prescribed by the still Organic Act 2 / 2006, of 3rd of May, of Education (2006) in Spain, have we reached school inclusion in publicly founded schools?

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**Key Words:** School inclusion, school organization, legislative framework, students' groupings, didactic strategies

### Introduction:

The current Organic Act of Education (2006) offers significant conceptual changes in our education system which is no longer a mere tautology. So far, the conceptual categorization of Special Education in our country referred to students with specific educational needs. Language immersion programs and education enhancement programs help Students with Specific Need of Education Support who incorporate late, who have serious linguistic and cognitive shortcomings or who lack sufficient knowledge of Spanish. They have been recently developed and are being introduced in Primary and Secondary classrooms. Similarly, Therapeutic Pedagogy specialists and counsellors provide individual attention to students who require a different teaching.

The concepts of inclusion and integration have been taken into consideration by any education discourse for a long time. However, most of the time, students with specific education needs are segregated from the rest of the class group. The principles of inclusion, integration, normalization and equity are present in any pedagogy speeches and legislative education texts. Authors like Stainback, Stainback and Jackson already showed in 1999 the conceptual change that was introduced in Spain in 2006. This change replaced the old term of *integration* with the more current term of *inclusion*. The reasons were varied. On the one hand, *inclusion* denotes more precisely the need to include all students in different social and educational tasks developed in schools. On the other hand, *integration*, created by the Act for the General Organisation of the Education System (1990) was implemented and indeed involved the reinstatement of students at school, accepting the previous exclusion that some had suffered.

Subsequently, the expression of *inclusive schools* was introduced, a concept that refers to the consolidation of an education system susceptible to include each and every student by offering individualised educational support. Integration implies the need to adapt to students who have been previously excluded returning them to the average groups. Inclusive educational responsibility lies within the professional development of teachers in charge of students with specific education needs in an attempt to satisfy their requirements.

### ***1. Inclusive education in a national and regional perspective***

Stainback, Stainback and Jackson (1999) indicate that the change created is not only verbal but also conceptual. Under the expression of *inclusive schools* there are other priority parameters such as facing the needs of all students, not just those diagnosed as children with specific educational needs. The trends in the field of Education aim at creating a sense of community, an awareness and mutual support to promote the success of all students, by providing equal opportunities for all. There are other concerns in the development of school inclusion. Gartner and Lipsky (1987) and Stainback and Stainback (1990, 1992) show special interest in determining the type of work required to develop an appropriate inclusion. They are the defenders of the ethical paradigm and are interested in the issues required to offer an inclusive education. Their interest lies not in ensuring the success of students with special education needs, but it is rather to ensure that all students are a part of a group class, regardless of their abilities, interests, skills, attitudes, family origins, etc.

The goal of the ethical paradigm is to consider that inclusion is the fairest way where all students should be treated with dignity, without having to adapt to specific patterns or be subjected to the standards of the institution. Rather, the ethical paradigm must contribute to the students' diversity. Inclusion is a basic right, not a privilege. In the context of the ethical paradigm, Stainback and Stainback (1990) identify three reasons that support the creation and development of the inclusive school. Firstly, to give each student the chance to learn to live and work with their peers as something natural that happens in real life. This means that they are integrated into an educational environment and community. Secondly, they aim to eliminate the inherent effects of segregation when children are placed in separate rooms, for example schools and/or special education rooms. Finally, to do what is fair, ethical and equitable.

These principles that encourage the development of such schools allow, according to the authors studied, a set of advantages over traditional approaches that try to help students with disabilities or deficiencies and so forcing their inclusion (Ibid.). If schools really developed an inclusive education, the benefits would be for all the agents involved in the educational process and not just for students with special education needs (Bennett, 1997). Thus, learning communities would be created in order to meet the students' needs with appropriate education support, whether these are immigrants, special education students or students with learning difficulties.

Moreover, teachers' resources and efforts would aim to assess education needs, such as adapting the teaching-learning processes and providing the necessary support to students who request it. Note that in inclusive schools all students are in the regular classroom during the school day; they do not leave and go to a support education classroom. Rather, they get support and individualized attention in the same classroom (Slavin, Leavey & Madden, 1984).

The third advantage that Stainback and Stainback (2001) list refers to the possibility of providing social and educational support to all students as far as inclusive school provides support, and promotes student's independence, mutual respect and responsibility. Faced with the definitions that have extended on the inclusive school (Ardanaz, 2004, Gartner and Lipsky, 1987; Stainback and Stainback, 1990, 1992) we must rather define in what respects it differs from traditional integration specially developed in public schools. In this sense, Carrión (2001) states that one must start from the conception commonly shared by the different education agents.

The micro-political level will condition the development that the institution undertakes. It is not likely to identify issues subject to differentiation between the practice of school integration and the development of the inclusive school. Rather, the fact that the factors which show the development of this new approach depend on the configuration of the micro-political level, beliefs and perceptions that school agents share. What issues differentiate school integration from inclusion? Basically, the term integration refers to the educational response that the school provides to pupils with special

education needs. That is, students with learning disabilities, aggressive behavior, mental disabilities, sensory impairments or physical disabilities (Carrión, 2001: 53). In fact, the use of the term *special education needs* often specifically excludes other pupils, for example, those who were socially, culturally, economically disadvantaged, who had different ethnic backgrounds, etc. In other words - those who are referred to as *late incoming students* by the current Organic Act of Education (2006).

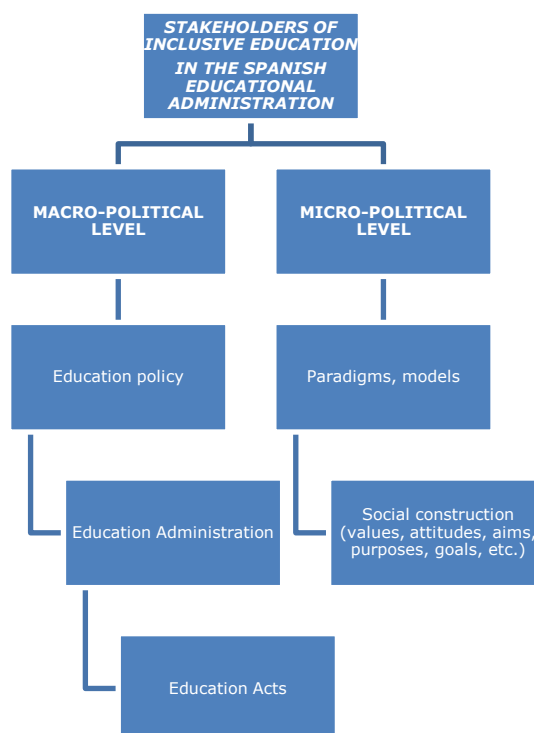
A key aspect of inclusion is the individual and tailored attention provided to students with special education needs, whatever their situation is, and especially to those who are disadvantaged, regardless of their origin. This development undoubtedly represents a forward step in the treatment of students who are in social vulnerability. Moreover, it states a redefinition of the term *special education needs*, parallel to the definition of the expression *special education needs* of the Warnock Report (1978), though substantially different regarding its development. To get real inclusion, the education services must provide the attention that each student requires without causing trauma. As Carrión suggests (2001: 59) "avoiding the fact of having negative consequences in those systems who are not able to develop the change it implies".

What changes can be introduced in inclusive schools to develop a truly inclusive inclusion to students with special education needs? What do stakeholders propose to face diversity? What values and attitudes must be shared to reach a genuine education? Firstly, it is essential to use adequate human resources, for example, teachers who really believe in the inclusion of students. They may also have received specific pedagogic training. Secondly, the use of education materials tailored to the students' needs. Thirdly, the implementation of appropriate methodology, such as active and participatory approaches, that prompts students into an active role and so on. Fourthly, we must not forget the involvement of parents in their children's education processes, encouraging an active collaboration, supporting the teacher's work and offering advice. These assumptions for a deep development of inclusive education should be based on school consensus. From the macro-political level the central government in Spain (the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports<sup>240</sup> located in Madrid) through their legislators create education acts. Then the Autonomous Communities, due to the education competences they have, adapt national acts to the reality of each community. For instance, some of them introduce a co-official language, as Catalonia or the Basque county.

At this point an Autonomous Community, through its Regional Government (Provincial Service in the case of Zaragoza) includes in the approved curriculum changes or adds issues to the national guidelines. Education inspectors, consultants, those responsible for the development of education programs, stakeholders, should share values, attitudes and common purposes (Avramidis & Norwich, 2000). When this does not happen the resources to face diversity are ineffective. Many programmes can exist, such those listed below, but they may still be non-practical for inclusive schools if they do not focus on students' needs. Legislative Acts implement specific measures and resources to develop inclusion but they are no longer developed at schools. When the stakeholders focus on the achievement of those measures, students' learning highly improves. They are made legal through the adoption of autonomous curricula but lack any efficiency:

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<sup>240</sup> <http://debateeducativo.mec.es/paginas/convocatorias.html> (Accessed: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2011).



The curricula developed in the different Autonomous Communities in Spain are those which the different Elementary and High Schools assume in their didactic projects. As they are prescribed by each Autonomous Administration, the teaching institutions must meet the principles, contents, methodology and assessment criteria stated in those regulations. However, if the arguments exposed in those texts do not take into account the improvement of human and material resources provided to schools, teachers' efforts towards the development of inclusive education to face students' diversity will be fruitless.

On the other hand, the teacher's work in the classroom, as mentioned above, depends not only on his/her didactic performance, but also on the methodological line assumed by the school. If the teaching staff is not able to develop the principles, values and aims proposed by the stakeholders, if they do not share a common ground to develop their teaching-learning, teaching is not directed towards the same goal: to provide each student the support he/she requires. In this sense, we cannot state that a real inclusive education is reached even though the legislative acts implement it. Most of the time what is prescribed by legislation is far from what schools need or what can be assumed in the institution.

Moreover, there is another issue that has to be considered. Multiculturalism is one of the characteristics of our present-day society. As such, schools have a huge variety of students coming from very different countries. Thus, teachers need specific tools and resources. The school, as an integral part of society, must face these new socio-educational demands. The need to provide each student with the attention he/she requires is a constant challenge for teachers. Diversity can be manifested in different orders: unflattering family situations for the student's personal balance, mental or physical disabilities or diseases, interests, preferences and learning rates, etc. Among others, these factors differentiate students even though they belong to the same class group. In order to cope with this heterogeneity, teachers have to undertake specific methodological principles that are not always established by the stakeholders but need to be developed in the micro-political level as those in charge of education are not especially concerned with them. When a foreign student is schooled he/she has to share his/her values with his/her peers, his/her culture, interest, knowledge with the aim of getting integrated in the group. Even his/her abilities could be different from others. But it will be one of the teacher's tasks to try to encourage an appropriate social environment in the classroom.

If the school system does not know how to deal with these socio-educational demands, it can no longer provide quality in education. To make a proper inclusion in mainstream schools, curricular,

pedagogical, didactic changes are required. This means that organisation changes must be generated in accordance with the real possibilities and current needs. When this does not happen, if there is not any suitable education management from the school, inclusion can become a special education subsystem that only shares certain organizational and space arrangements with the regular education (Carrión, 2001).

The measures of attention to diversity that the current legislation implements through different stakeholders (inspectors, education policy makers, school advisors, etc.) are meaningless if limited to fragmentary interventions both at the Elementary and High education levels. The inclusion of students with specific educational support needs to be shared at school, in the shaping of the micro-political level. If it is only prescribed by the macro-political level and even not considered, schools are unprotected towards the new incoming students. Teachers should share common policy principles, goals to be addressed, and also methodological guidelines related to students' diversity.

On the other hand, parents have to participate and support the educational process. Education policy should encourage this process of inclusion, not only as keywords that govern the legislation texts, but by providing human and material resources. Many schools need support from administration, not only in terms of staff but also by considering external resources in order to support the teaching-learning processes. Schools are mainly characterised by a diverse educational reality which is quite difficult to be assumed. They do not only need more material resources, but often human resources are not sufficient or the most adequate ones in such an increasingly diverse and multicultural environment as the current one. In this sense, schools have to undertake common principles to effectively manage the centre through a coherent and coordinated action of all members of the education community. This view must be shared by stakeholders in order to support education in each stage.

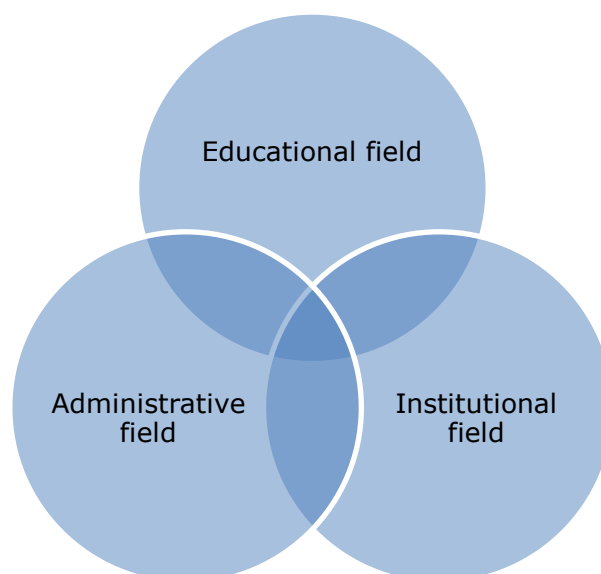
In Spain, specifically in Aragón, the assumption of these common principles, values and attitudes is usually reached in schools to offer the education required by each student. However, even though sometimes they are stated in the legislative text and are orally extended by the stakeholders, they use to remain as perfect words, legitimate words teachers must use in their speeches. As an example of how stakeholders' indications are somehow reflected in official education documents we necessarily have to mention the School Educational Project. If designed appropriately and coherently on the basis of the schools' needs and the stakeholders' prescriptions, it will favour the development of an appropriate school inclusion.

The School Education Project is a document that shows how the school conceives education, what values, aims and structure it has and how education is developed. It is created in schools following the stakeholders' prescriptions. If the information reflected in this document were truly assumed in schools, we would state that the stakeholders' guidelines were efficient and functional at schools as far as they were developed.

Unfortunately, this document does not always show the real development of the educational process. Even though the main aim of the guidelines stated by the stakeholders is to improve education, by offering the right answer to all students, the macro-political level is not always related to the micro-political level.

To give an example about how this document shows a coherent development of the education assumed by the school staff, and prescribed by stakeholders, we should mention the three fields it focuses on: a) the educational field (how the school assumes the education process, what values, attitudes and purposes the school develops); b) the institutional field (school management, organization, resources, etc.); c) the administrative field (teachers, specialists in Therapeutic Pedagogy, number of students per class, timetable, etc.).

The norms to create this official document are stated by the legislation implemented by the stakeholders in the macro-political level. Furthermore, the development of this document has to deal with the micro-political level as far as it is going to be developed in a specific school.



First of all, if we focus on the educational field, we may pay attention to the school organization, cycle equipment, level staff, specific methodology, the assumption of common criteria for students' promotion, students' grouping, evaluation, etc.

Secondly, the institutional field is conditioned by the school external relationships (relationship with the Parents Association, Administration, etc.) and the internal relationship in the school (government/management bodies, functions they assume, commissions, degrees of participation, etc.).

Third and finally, the administrative field related to school economic management, accountability, uses of space, mass-media rooms, etc. Human resources and interpersonal relationships (motivation, communication, and conflicts), regulation of coexistence, selection and promotion of teachers, etc. should never be overlooked. These aspects and the actions involved in education policy hinder the effective management of the school.

The school needs tools to support the actions of the educational community. The teacher that faces multiculturalism and students' diversity acts as a facilitator of the teaching-learning processes. Thus, the development of the educational practice starts from the requirements of prevention and the settlement of students' difficulties, understanding that both conditions must be implemented as soon as possible in the school environment.

The attention to classroom diversity must be assumed in terms of cognitive abilities and in terms of cultural backgrounds. It is therefore imperative to understand that differences and inequalities should be addressed through affirmative strategies and not by universal or standardised solutions within the framework of an inclusive school. This implies the assumption of the principles of intercultural education in line with the growing multiculturalism and diversity that characterizes our society. These actions will favour citizenship education to let students acquire an integral education, a life-long learning process.

Inclusive education should be built in an educational community as a general action framework integrated by all agents involved in the education process. A cooperative endeavour of all education agents and every moment of the school life is essential. In order to achieve these aims, we should promote the students' interest in school work, by reinforcing the previous motivational processes. Moreover, it is also necessary to support the students' learning processes by seeking individual attention, without affecting the group dimension in the classroom work.

Similarly, it is advisable to keep an adequate environment to favour coexistence in the classroom and in the whole school as a prerequisite for the appropriate development of the school work. We do not have to forget that it is necessary to help to reduce school absenteeism and the subsequent students' failure. We should also strengthen cooperation with families, other neighbourhood institutions and other social settings. Therefore, inclusive education in school needs to

establish links that extend and enhance the educational efforts beyond the school environment. Finally, it is also convenient to enhance the process of education innovation, further evaluation and investigation that should feed all innovative proposals.

If schools contribute to the development of inclusive education, the existing measures to address students with specific education needs increase as long as the learning processes are based on their interests and this creates motivation in students. These principles not only sustain the so-called "inclusive school" but also favour integration and inclusion of disabled students.

## ***2. Didactic strategies to approach school inclusion in the Spanish Education System***

Once the stakeholders of inclusive education have been identified, we should analyse how teachers implement the educational processes when dealing with diversity. Obviously, the principles, values and objectives that are reflected in the School Educational Project must be coherent with the educational line of the Administration. It is not enough to establish pattern behaviours but it is a much more complex matter.

To be able to state that a school really develops inclusive education, the school has to combine in its Educational Project and its practice of the education policies, established by the stakeholders and the creation of a school community, concerned with how to deal with multiculturalism, diversity and heterogeneity. This is only possible if teachers build the school reality from their daily interactions. In this way they share a culture which will undergo changes over time as actors or agents also shift.

The school, therefore, is a social construction of its members but it is conditioned by the ideological pressures that come from the macro-political level. These pressures are generated by the stakeholders who implement new education activities, methodologies and principles reflected in the legislation documents. But the common culture shared in a school leads to share values, attitudes and aims that must be related, in turn, and be compatible with those prescribed by the stakeholders. Otherwise, these actions would make no sense.

In the high school where this case study has been developed, an exhaustive and systematic observation to detect the school's culture has been conducted. This observation has allowed us to affirm that inclusive education, with all the issues it implies (values, principles of the didactic process, methodology, tutoring, etc.), has been implemented in a correct way. Not only by what is prescribed by stakeholders, but, rather, thanks to the collaboration of all staff in the assumption of a set of values that govern the teaching-learning processes and that are made explicit in their School Educational Project.

The school methodology focuses on the improvement of a way of learning based on realism, close to the students' foci of interest in order to increase their motivation and promote their autonomy in the development of school tasks as well as in the learning of educational values.

First of all, it is essential that both the school and the environment, and the social reality that it belongs to, are in a close and constant interaction (life-long learning, functional learning...) (Canals, 2004). In this way, the teacher has to know, seek and properly use the possibilities offered by the environment, either in educational, social, cultural terms, tasks, resources, etc. This aspect is essential in the educational process as it determines the effectiveness of our action, and may increase students' motivation, by improving educational services for incoming students or completing the teaching-learning processes in real contexts through meaningful learning.

Second, the didactic process must be based on globalization as an essential methodological principle, as far as it is a mandatory enrolment period, and so far as it is prescribed by current legislation. The contents that the student with specific needs of educational support works on must be closely interrelated with other curricular areas. This means creating educational materials and activities that proceed from the student's reality and which are developed through interdisciplinary projects. In this way, his/her motivation will increase as well as his/her perception of integration in the class group. Therefore, the tasks have to move towards interdisciplinarity, being developed through workshops, specific programs, stories, role-plays, etc.

Third, closely related to the principle of globalization, we highlight cooperative learning. Since the transmission of knowledge is conditioned by the students' diversity, it is necessary to promote the student's socialization. The social dimension of learning is implemented through

cooperative learning, since it is a construction that we do not develop alone but interacting with others. Therefore, it has a social component.

The teacher, from the interpretation of his/her classroom reality, diversity and heterogeneity, from his/her background, will decide what to do -mediational paradigm centered on the teacher (Pérez, 1983)-. He/she is therefore a "reflective planner" (Ibid.: 118) of the teaching-learning process. He/she abandons the standard models -typical of the traditional process-product paradigm- and understands that the teaching-learning processes have to be planned ahead with the aim to develop an initial assessment and provide students with adequate individualized attention.

Cooperative learning involves the development of cooperative skills in students that encourage and improve communication styles, which are essential especially in the disabled students in order to enhance their socialization in their group-class. This learning methodology also involves the use of language as an instrument of dialogue and communication, by building confidence in students when it comes to expressing their opinions and minimizing the consequences that may pose conflict.

Fourth, so as to be cooperative, learning has to be based on a well-done classroom space distribution, according to the characteristics of the task and using the resources required. Therefore, the allocation of roles, resources and space will encourage the development of cooperative skills as well as communication styles. In fact, the direct correlation that develops between the tasks of instruction and classroom management (Doménecht, Traver, Odet & Sales, 2006) brings new ways in the use of classroom spaces. The homogeneous or heterogeneous students' grouping either determined by teacher's selection or through the teacher's instructions, conditions the interaction between students, their cooperation in learning and their socialization.

The classroom is a social space for exchanging experiences, culture, autonomy, communication and socialization (Ibid.). Thus the coexistence of students' heterogeneity and diversity must be improved. In this sense, this social space ought to promote active participation of all students, interaction, exchange, dialogue, etc. Attitudes of acceptance or rejection may arise but it will be a teacher's task to ensure that these are transformed into bonds, self-knowledge and mutual learning.

Thus, the development of guided learning processes will determine the classroom social environment (Arnáiz, 2003). This constitutes the fifth methodological principle, as it is essential in the establishment of techniques, principles and strategies in the teaching-learning processes. The social classroom environment is an essential element in the establishment of interactions and cooperation among students. While a number of factors are involved in its configuration (such as the political-economic-administrative agents, social relationships, communication, culture and architectural features, temporal sites, etc.), its marked complexity provokes the generation of new instruments of mediation. These instruments follow models of social relationships dependent on instructional tasks, on the teacher's and student's roles, as well as in the classroom setting itself (Slavin, 1986).

These relationships established in the classroom can be of cooperation, competitiveness, self-reliance, empathy, rejection, activity-passivity or equality-inequality (Ibid.). Proposed in a dichotomic way, they always set undoubtedly the prevailing culture of the institutions, its beliefs and interpretations of learning. Therefore, the classroom is not an enclosed space, but it is open to dialogue and interaction, in which knowledge is built from experience, reality and students' mediation-intervention. In this sense, the teacher must foster a flexible social classroom environment, open to students' diversity, interests, abilities, skills and attitudes. In other words, it must promote interaction and cooperation among students as an essential element for learning.

The group distribution in the creation of the social classroom environment to develop specific tasks will condition the social relationships among the students and thus promote the inclusion or not of disabled students. If learning is the acquisition of new knowledge from the establishment of social relationships, educational experiences that are generated in that social classroom environment are essential for the acquisition of concepts and the integration of students in society and ultimately in public life (Gimeno, 2008).

Sixth, the teacher should promote the principle of activity. That is, the student has to be the main protagonist of his/her own learning, which appeals to his/her intense cognitive activity, more or less accompanied by motor or manipulative skills and always facilitated by a logic gradation of complexity in tasks. The student becomes an active element in the teaching-learning process. This

implies that the teacher does not fulfil the role of transmitting knowledge; s/he rather acts as a facilitator of the student's learning (Montero, 1991). The student then learns to learn.

This methodological principle, especially widespread in current times with the introduction of the eight basic competences in the Spanish context, allows students to learn and build knowledge with the teacher's input. Thus, independent learning is promoted. If our social classroom environment is adequate, and disabled students feel included in the class-group, they can share and build knowledge together.

However, the teacher should encourage student's activity. If not, there is no learning. If we want a stimulating and attractive task, we have to focus on the student's centres of interest, on his/her reality. Therefore, the teacher must find out the students' concerns and build new relationships with the contents of the curriculum. To promote the principle of activity in the student, to provide his/her with an active role in the development of tasks, implies to select those that arouse more motivation, which are tailored to his/her skills, cognitive level and addressing towards self-learning (Perret-Clermont, 1988). Tasks involving classroom research, experiments, interaction, debates, brainstormings are useful in this regard.

Seventh, students must reach a meaningful learning. He/she has to be able to integrate his/her prior knowledge to the new acquisition, so that the latter will be meaningful, both in the receptive and constructivist learning. Only if this condition is reached, can we talk about functional learning and enable the principle of learning to learn: "The main education paradigm to be followed should be to learn to learn and learning by doing". Meaningful learning is necessary to transfer knowledge to real life situations which involve problem-solving tasks" (Pérez, 2008: 136).

Eighth, the principle of individualisation must also be considered. In order to provide students with an individualized attention we may start from their level of cognitive competence, their previous knowledge, pace of work, etc. (zone of proximal development, Vygotsky, 1978). This involves a system of reinforcements, rewards, incentives... to the achievement of the learning aims that must be immediate and very tight to their interests. The teaching-learning processes must be adapted to the characteristics of each student, as they are different and have different cognitive processing.

Similarly, their interests, motivations and concerns are far from each other; thus teaching practice should include an individualized instruction tailored to each student's needs. The cards, individual work, concept of mapping, etc. are of great help in the process of individualized instruction. It is through the implementation of cooperative learning where individualization is made compatible with this methodological principle, by diversifying the teaching-learning processes. These kinds of tasks improve both the socialization and inclusion of disabled and immigrant students and the acquisition of learning.

These ten methodological principles must be developed by using different teaching resources, different means involving different languages (auditory, visual, audio-visual, body language, etc.). In this sense, we stimulate all students' senses, not just language. Especially relevant are Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in this education context. The computer, the digital interactive whiteboard are very motivating for these students, by allowing them to individualise their learning pace.

Moreover, classroom organization is especially relevant in the processes of school inclusion. Students with special education needs must feel comfortable. The classroom distribution may favour communication between the teacher and the students. There are different ways to group students in the classroom. The most suitable are essentially flexible students' grouping formed by appointment of the teacher, students' free choice, or with heterogeneous groups (always keeping in mind the gender) or homogeneous in terms of learning levels.

Groups can develop the same task or carry out differentiated tasks, which are then pooled. In this sense, work in pairs is also an option. Obviously, given the students' characteristics, the teacher may then establish working groups to be more effective for the purposes of socialization because they foster close relationships between their members.

However, depending on the aims to be pursued in each teaching situation and the characteristics of the task, a clever combination of all the options outlined above seems to be a most suitable strategy to keep a social classroom environment. However, besides organizing the classroom, the teacher should consider organisational criteria, such as teamwork and cooperative learning and

coordination with other collaborating agents (coordination of teachers with families and professionals involved in the education process).

To face students' diversity in any school, horizontal organization must favour the relationship between and among different forms of learning, by providing students with strategies to train themselves into adulthood, to let them acquire a social inclusion and reduce their risk of exclusion. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (1959), in the Article 28, established the right of all children to get a basic school education based on equality of opportunities, regardless of their cultural, social or ethnic backgrounds.

The current proposal aimed to promote the education of students with specific education needs should be based on continuous learning, on life-long learning, on cooperative learning. Thus it has to focus on respect and acceptance of individual differences. This involves the development of the principles of inclusive education stated in the School Education Project through the active involvement of the staff, through the human, material and technical resources required, and through the support of the stakeholders.

This educational action must promote the teaching-learning processes in a diverse context, sensitive to multiculturalism present in our society and reflected in the didactic intervention on the basis of the principles of multiculturalism. This project builds on the school culture and the values it assumes. It would be appropriate that these values, principles and aims were also undertaken by those raised by the stakeholders in the legislative acts.

The so-called schools of difficult performance are still a challenge for teachers. The principles of inclusive education contribute to the decline in the number of illiterate population. They provide a solid foundation in the establishment of inclusive education, adapted to the students' needs, their difficulties and being compensatory to reach equal opportunities in education. It is not enough to provide the conditions to make smaller groups in the classroom, or to obtain support from specialist teachers in Therapeutic Pedagogy and Special Education, as stated by the stakeholders of macro-political level.

### **Conclusion:**

Students' diversity and heterogeneity in Spain is endless, especially in Elementary and High Schools. Indeed, it requires highly skilled and motivated professionals to be able to meet that diversity. The specific pedagogical processes must contribute to the creation of a social classroom environment where the student feels comfortable enough and motivated towards learning.

Firstly, the stakeholders determine the most relevant aims, basic competences, contents, methodological principles and assessment criteria to be taught and reached at Elementary and High schools. As far as these are prescriptive, all schools nationwide must develop them. Subsequently, the different Autonomous Communities in Spain adapt those prescriptions to their needs. In the case of Aragon, the Education Administration provides more resources to face students' diversity. However, this lack of coherent development from the macro-political to the micro-political level keeps a handicap in the attention provided, especially to students with specific need of education support.

The main aim is to offer students the individualized attention they require to be able to develop their cognitive and social skills. The schools, on the other hand, set their aims and priorities, following obviously the prescriptions of the Autonomous Education Administration. Among them, learning to learn, being adult, responsible people and acting as such are key principles in any compulsory educational stage.

Other basic aims deal with the development of inclusive education, the improvement of students' achievements, the integration of disabled students, etc. The principles that the school assumes, through the sharing of a common culture built up through daily interaction of all staff members, are reflected in the aims pursued by the school, as they are reflected by the School Educational Project. However, the methodological principles that help in the development of inclusive school are far from the prescriptions and interests of the stakeholders, as the latter do not know the current needs of school. They are not teachers in any classroom, and everything they propose is more theoretical than practical.

Secondly, the teacher's work does not only focus on the students' assessment. He/she has to plan his/her teaching-learning processes create a syllabus design, consider the students' diversity to

propose specific measures to deal with that heterogeneity, etc. When planning the didactic processes, we must do it permanently throughout the learning process (continuous assessment). In this sense, we get the necessary feedback to introduce any changes that may be considered. In other words, teaching is "a decision-making" process, where the teacher is a permanent "decision maker" (Pérez, 1983: 116-117).

When we develop a syllabus design, we decide what to do in the classroom, on the basis of considering the students' characteristics. When carrying out our didactic programming, and depending on the incoming needs, we will consider whether we continue with those aims or we change them (formative assessment). This decision must be taken on the fly, while we develop our teaching-learning processes in the classroom, when we finish the session, the didactic unit, etc. Thus we can assess the learning achieved (final assessment) and once again we get new feedback from our programming for the next didactic process.

Certainly, the learning process of each student is different and so is the result. The knowledge that each one conquers is his/her cognitive construction, peculiar, possibly unique. The student is the mediator for excellence of his/her own learning, the main protagonist. While he/she is learning, a set of interests come into play, closely related to his/her previous life experiences. The knowledge he/she already possesses, and also the cognitive processes that enables him/her to activate them, depends on the input he/she receives. This is the fundamental premise of the mediational student-centered paradigm, in line with the approaches of the cognitive psychology, which understands the teaching-learning praxis as a process that should facilitate the construction of knowledge and the development of student's processing information strategies (Pérez, 1983: 120-122), both in his/her individual work, and in cooperation with his/her peers, and under the teacher's guidance and support.

Thirdly, schools that develop an inclusive education should refine the concept of teaching and learning and attune it to the real achievement of the students' priority aims. Only then can we say that the implementation of an innovative methodology in the treatment of compensatory education contributes to overcoming inequalities in education, to spread schooling to disadvantaged, marginal contexts, and to deal with the growing multiculturalism of the classroom. However, other actions to be undertaken by the whole of the school community could be considered to help in this process of education intervention.

For example, the creation of discussion groups, composed by staff members, and in other cases representatives of parents and other education agents, would feed a situation of permanent critical analysis of the school educational development process. The internal and external assessment of the School Educational Project would complement the performance of different education agents with the input of external agents, experts in education innovation, with the participation in dissemination and discussion forums on education innovations (with gypsy students, immigrants, disabled...). Those discussion forums could be developed both in school and online. Finally, the participation of teachers in life-long learning processes to improve their teaching skills, get more strategies when dealing with diversity, etc.

Moreover, the organisation of life in the classroom in such schools is especially relevant. It requires the assumption of methodological principles set out in the School Educational Project, in order to promote students' interaction, equality of opportunities and non-discrimination. Teachers must establish flexible student groupings, raised within the class group or groups, involving two different groups of the same cycle. Strictly speaking, a non-graduate teaching within each cycle could be implemented, provided that the non-graduation work would focus on the development of instrumental techniques. Depending on the aims of each didactic task, both strategies could be used.

Finally, flexibility in planning and the use of space and time must be open: flexibility in students' grouping requires acting in accordance with the classroom space distribution or cycle spaces and, in turn, teachers have to distribute time depending on the activities to be developed. As a general rule, short time periods are convenient for each subject, task, in order to avoid fatigue and students' disinterest.

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