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The inclusive university - a desideratum and part of the state of normality

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Abstract

This investigative approach starts from our concerns and from the desire to clarify theoretical and practical aspects regarding certain attitudes and behaviors observed at the community level such as segregation, isolation, and, sometimes, even rejection of certain groups and social categories that we call "at risk" or "disadvantaged". This is why we advocate in this article for an inclusive university. The key principles of inclusion consider fundamental concepts such as: valuing diversity, the right to be respected, the dignity of the human being, individual needs understood as individual requirements, planning, collective responsibility, the development of relationships and professional culture, professional development, and equal opportunities. In the field of education, inclusion requires universities and the entire educational system to change and adapt to the needs of the student. Inclusive education must be seen as a permanent process of improving the higher education institution, with the aim of exploiting existing resources, especially human resources, to support the participation in the educational process of all people within a community.

Keywords: education, normality, disability, inclusion, students, university, models.

Introduction

The inclusive university is an accessible, high-quality university that fulfills its mission to address all young people, to train and empower them with the essential elements necessary for their social integration. When the university is unable to meet the challenges of the different needs of young people on its own, it needs support. Here is a fundamental concept from which our theoretical construction starts regarding the development and improvement of educational services that support students, the university and the family when needed.

The conceptualization of inclusion has come a long way since Bengt Nirje (1969) formulated the principle of normalization and its eight steps.

During the period of the notoriety of normalization, segregation was the usual way of selecting individuals regardless of the field of human activity considered, whether it was education, health, professional training or employment. Segregation expressed the belief, popular among decision-makers, as with the general public, that the differences between disabled and non-disabled (i.e. "normal") people were irreconcilable. Later, through integration, some children and/or young

people with mild disabilities were redirected to the general education system and, respectively, to regular jobs, with full or partial support from special education services. The creation of reverse integration (i.e., turning special education locations into "general schools") has sent a distorted message to many uninformed parents and teachers that all enrolled children have some type of disability that requires special attention. Although integration and mainstreaming essentially mean the same thing, European and North American legislators have produced different sets of laws, stemming from different historical contexts of special education (Danby & Cullen, 1988).

As Skidmore (1996) stated, a major paradigm shift occurred in Europe, by the fact of moving from the psycho-medical approach to the sociological one, and recently to the organizational paradigm.

Findings and discussion

In some specialized studies, a low correlation is found between joint mobility and functional scores. In this context, the notion of disability corresponds to the limitation of activity, and to that of handicap, the restriction of participation.

To understand and explain disability and functioning, a variety of conceptual models have been proposed. These can be expressed in Fig. 1. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) model and its components: the model establishes the three levels of human functioning: (1) at the level of body or body part (body structures and functions domain), (2) the whole person (activities domain), and (3) the whole person considered in a social context (participation domain). In this classification, disability implies a certain degree of dysfunction at one or more of these same levels: impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, respectively. It also includes additional information on personal and environmental factors (World Health Organization, 2002). The figure is open access courtesy of the National Academies of Sciences (2021) (Trang et al., 2020).

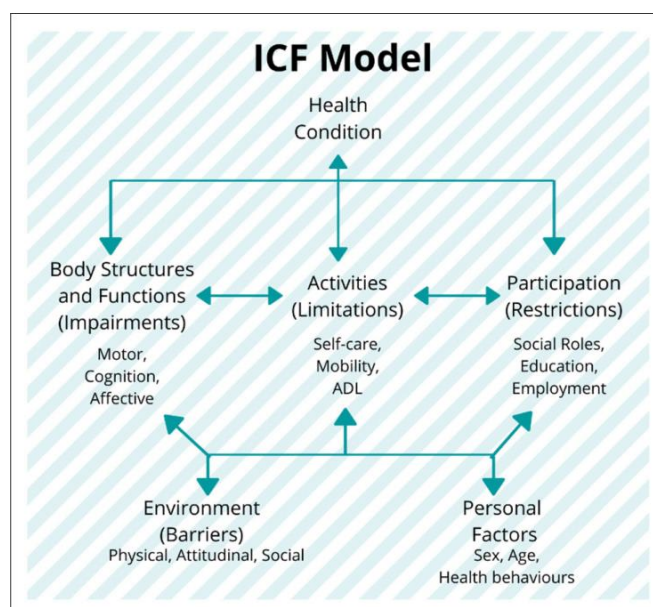


Fig. 1. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) model

The educational environment offers various opportunities for training young people with disabilities in socialization skills and sustained participation in the life of the community in which they live and work. In the case of students with disabilities, the active social position is part of the professionalization and social integration program; without it, after graduating from the faculty, it is impossible to be hired and successfully activate in the field of work.

For this category of young people, the formation of socialization skills requires the interaction between at least two factors of the social construct:

- a. student in person;
- b. social institutes.

The relationship between these two factors is all the more complicated, as both are in constant change, evolution, and interdependence. Taken as a whole, the ways of involving students with disabilities in active social life are diverse and aim to form an active civic position, an attitude of increased interest in everything that happens around, in ways to improve the situation. "We care!"- this would be the key slogan in the social activity of students in general, with and without disabilities.

It is very important for students to get involved in volunteering, to associate with the principles of common interests, and of belonging to an occupational group. In this context, it is necessary to establish emergency intervention teams in every inclusive educational institution in case of force majeure, or mutual aid, regardless of the nature of the requests - for counseling, assistance, protection, information, etc.

In the case of students with disabilities, the experience of other countries demonstrates the effectiveness of action groups formed by this category of young people, according to the "Help yourself!" principle. As a rule, students with disabilities know their problems best, and that's why solutions appear faster. Of course, the groups established on a voluntary basis will not replace the teams of specialists (professional or multidisciplinary), but will only notify them in case of necessity on priority issues, and mediate their contact with people who require a certain type of assistance.

The members of such support groups learn to be useful, to lend a shoulder, when necessary, not to remain indifferent to the problems of those around them, to ask for help from a professional, if they cannot manage on their own, to manage their time rationally intended for studies, rest, and social activity. In other words, they learn to live and act in society, for people, and with the help of people. These are basic principles of socialization, valid in the case of people with disabilities, as well as in the case of those without impairments. The most valuable advantages of socialization are the accumulation of common experiences with other people of providing support to those who need it; supplementing knowledge with new useful information; satisfaction following gratitude and positive feedback; increasing self-respect, and confidence in one's own strengths and one's own value.

Inclusive practices assume the permanent relationship of students from different categories in the name of a common cause. This inter-relationship stimulates communication on a verbal, affective, and intuitive level; the mutual exchange of competencies, knowledge, skills, and information, contributes, in the last instance, to the achievement of the expected goals. Working in a mixed team, students without disabilities learn to distinguish values and non-values in interpersonal relationships and acquire skills to judge people not by physical appearance or other superficial factors, but by facts.

Communication is vital for people who aspire to an upward social trajectory. Through communication and interested dialogue, the exchange of information takes place with a double meaning. It is a situation where each of the subjects involved in this process has something to gain - knowledge, experience, intense and unique emotional experiences, behavioral and thinking patterns, convictions, presence of mind, respect for those around you and for yourself, etc. Through the advantages it creates, communication is included in the list of priorities that every person who decides to persevere in the way of continuous training must follow. This is why communication is so important for young people with disabilities in the university environment. The ability to relate to those around you, to maintain a discussion, to obtain, through direct communication, the information you need, and to transmit the information that people expect from you is not always a native given but can be cultivated, and formed by continuous practice. From this point of view, for people with disabilities, communication is an effective tool for social integration and establishing interpersonal contacts. However, these can only be beneficial if they are of good quality, the exaggerated number of interpersonal contacts being a negative factor, which does not allow orientation towards really important things, dispersing the person's attention and ability to concentrate.

The "school" of communication has a rich arsenal of exercises, methods, and procedures, aimed at developing the ability to interact with people from a certain existential environment in order to achieve specific objectives, in our case - of people with disabilities: overcoming obstacles in the way of free expression, the unhindered manifestation of one's own feelings, opinions, intentions, aspirations, setting up a permanent exchange of experiences, information, convictions with a view to a constant and effective self-improvement effort.

Extended group communication is a superior variant of small group communication. It requires high skills, which can only be formed in the process of practice. At the "school" of communication, the young person with disabilities learns the standards of relationships with other people, the positive models of communication behavior, the positive perceptions of his surroundings, and the dignity and respect for his own person. These precious acquisitions later extend from the communication group to society as a whole, becoming effective tools of integration/inclusion.

In addition to communication, there are other forms of development of social activism among students with disabilities (and not only that!). One of these forms, developed at the confluence of sociology and psychology, is known in specialized literature as the "social test method". According to the definition, the social test represents "a conglomerate of consecutive actions, related to the social activity organized expressly based on the choice of the appropriate behavioral model for the respective activity, which is nothing more than a way of positioning self-knowledge and analyzing one's own possibilities in the context of the social functions performed" (M.I. Rozhkov).

The researchers talk about the method of social tests as an effective tool for forming an active social position, for the dynamic evolution of social roles, and for self-realization within social relationships that change at a rapid pace. The technology of social tests requires a thorough preliminary preparation in order, in the end, to really contribute to the achievement of the primary objective - the adaptation of the disabled person to the existential environment (M.I. Gubanova).

However, what is the social test? This represents a "psycho-pedagogical mechanism that places the student with disabilities in social conditions unknown to him, that requires him to develop a

new behavioral model, this fact activating his adaptation capacities at different levels - physical, mental, social, emotional" (M.I. Rozhkov).

The involvement of the student with disabilities in the social test leads him to inventory his capacities to adapt to the new conditions, to the new social roles, to develop an active social position, to adopt effective models specifically in the proposed situations, to develop his sense of responsibility towards the developments in society, to wish for change for the better and to take concrete steps towards it, thus becoming a co-author with an active contribution to the collective work of building a better world.

The efficiency of the social testing method is even more noticeable, the more its emotional component is accentuated. The student is invited to "try on" different roles, behaviors, solutions for the scenarios modeled by the pedagogue, and this demands the emotional sphere to the maximum, which makes the respective experience particularly effective and memorable. The social tests can be repeated whenever needed, this fact ensuring the necessary conditions of learning/acquisition for all those involved, in accordance with the personal rhythm.

The pedagogue elaborates the social tests in such a way that they include a wide area of relationships, possible situations in which people could be mentioned. In this way, the anticipation of social events is ensured, which means that the person will be prepared in the "simulator" to face the challenges of life before the respective events occur. This gives him more confidence in his own strength and in the real world around him, which is one of social connections and relationships.

Although the field of maneuver of the pedagogue who applies the method of social tests is unlimited, there are, however, according to the researchers, some rules that need to be respected:

- ⇒ The content of the test must reflect situations and phenomena characteristic of the existential and socio-cultural environment (community of residence, university collective, etc.) of the trained students.
- ⇒ The test must bring to the fore the student's latent potential, the existence of which even he does not suspect, activate it, and make full use of it.
- ⇒ The social test must reflect not only the possible new situations that would be possible in the student's life but also the already known situations, acting like benchmarks, starting points in the search for possible solutions.
- ⇒ The complexity of the tests must not exceed the student's natural abilities to identify the optimal solutions; finding himself unable to offer solutions for the given problem, the student could lose confidence in his abilities, which would cause him to lose interest or even give up. The complexity of the tests will gradually increase, the student involved has the possibility to adapt to the pedagogue's requirements, which will be more and more complex every day.
- ⇒ Characteristic for the social test proposed to the student, it must not assume only one solution or a concrete and unique way to overcome the modeled situation. The student will have a wide spectrum of possibilities to choose the optimal one.

Within an educational institution, the involvement of students with disabilities in social activities is handled by a large group of people - from teaching staff responsible for education at the university level, heads of academic groups, young professors interested in research and up to students - leaders of various voluntary formations from the student autonomy system, as well as members of socially active associations, established based on common interests. When developing

social tests, specialists from outside the university can also be involved (sociologists, NGO leaders, psycho-pedagogues, etc.).

Conclusion

The integration of students with disabilities into social life takes place at various relational levels: students with disabilities - students without disabilities; students with disabilities - administrative, teaching, non-teaching staff; students with disabilities - multidisciplinary team; students with and without disabilities from different educational institutions from the given locality and from other localities.

After having mastered the theoretical training courses and simulation classes (social tests), students with disabilities are allowed to apply in practice, in real conditions, the acquired knowledge and skills. For them, the most suitable fields of social activism are: charity actions; the socio-cultural events organized at the educational institution level and at the community level; resource and community centers for families, children and young people; creative and sports centers; organization of festivities, exhibitions, competitions, intra- and extra-university contests; volunteering activities under the auspices of specialized NGOs; collaboration with pre-university, special, inclusive educational institutions sponsored by the university, etc.

The efforts to form social activism in the environment of students with disabilities go beyond the framework program of educational activity, elaborated and implemented at the level of the educational institution. The educational approach aimed at this category of students has its specifics and methods of achievement, two of them - communication and social testing - are at the foundation of the community integration activity of students with disabilities, which is to be updated and perfected permanently, on the duration of the whole life, depending on the multi-aspect developments in society.

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