

Chapter 1

Early Childhood Inclusion: From Understanding to Intervention

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ABSTRACT

The themes analysed in the present chapter ensure a better understanding of the issue of early childhood inclusion in order to provide a theoretical and practical framework to teachers, specialists and families: clarifications regarding the evolution of concepts and inclusion indicators described by UNICEF in 1999, which were adopted by education institutions from around the world; legislative documents facilitating inclusive education in Romania; the factors that influence parents and teachers' attitudes towards early childhood inclusion; the effects of inclusion on children with and without SEN; good practices and researches regarding early intervention and preschool inclusion for the main categories of children with special educational needs and the most challenging for teachers (intellectual disabilities, hearing and visual impairment, physical and/or locomotor impairments, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorders).

1. EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION: THE CORE OF A COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM BASED ON INCLUSION INDICATORS

Politics and services from the last years reflects the concern for paying careful attention for educational and social inclusion for children with special needs in

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regular education institutions (kindergartens / schools) in spite of segregation, discrimination and marginalization in special schools / institutions.

Inclusion is a value to consider in early childhood because it cultivates acceptance and understanding for human diversity as starting point that enriches educative practice and emphasizes the need for living, for interaction and for learning next to other children / peers / classmates. Of course that it is needed also to potentiate the individuality / the personality of the child that it is not able to assert itself and to become perfect by itself, because he / she needs the presence of others, the presence of a human group that he / she belong to through respect, encouragement and educational support.

The inclusion is a paradigm which creates a unity in differences, develops social values and designs solution so that every child to feel pleasant and to enjoy the same activities and experiences as his peers.

Inclusion on early ages consists in participation and implication of child in ludic and learning activities, acceptance and valuing in educational environment. In other words, the concept gravitates more around early education, perceived by the members of society as a form that is around formal education.

But *early education* doesn't only mean education in nursery and in kindergarten, but also addresses to children, parents, specialists and community members in order to build together projects, programs, and social events that stimulate proper development for the first years of the child (from 0 till 6/7 years old). As a consequence, we do not have to lose from our sight neither social inclusion, nor the importance of this age range that is crucial for a child development, including in this equation the child with special education needs. For that, *evaluation and early intervention* for children in risk and those with special needs has to become priorities during early childhood. *Early screening and assessment* of children with special needs has to even begin with antenatal diagnose, and then with observation from first days of their life, with primary medical services and with counselling services for parents. More, it has to be a diversity of evaluation and early intervention services, services that have to cooperate and build a multidisciplinary team, consisting of a physician, a psychologist, a social assistant, a therapist, an educator, a special psycho-pedagogue etc., in order to offer support for recovery and social and education inclusion for the child with special needs.

For children with special needs, "the phrase *education and early intervention* is more adequate and recommended because, in most situations, for ensuring optimal conditions for education there are also needed various forms for specialized intervention, without whom any educational activity would be inefficient or even impossible to put in practice" (Gherguț, cited by Stan, 2016, 216).

It is wanted to remove segregation and to eliminate social categorization and labels attached to special needs children, and this is the reason for their social and

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