

Inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract: This paper describes the different challenges faced by all members of the local community who are directly or indirectly responsible for the educational reform regarding the process of inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Yugoslavia education system is regulated in canton legislature. Each canton has its own law on preschool, elementary school, high school and university education, with more than 30 laws covering the area of education. General and special education are separately regulated, thus violating the rights of children with special needs to be educated in the mainstream schools closest to their home. Negative attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes, educational standards non supportive for the inclusive education, lack of engagement of university facilities and negligence of scientifically based research are also considered in this study.

Key words: inclusive education; special education; children with developmental disabilities

1. Introduction

In all countries of the world, people with handicaps live on the edge of the society. As many experiences of different countries confirm that they are additionally hit by poverty and social elimination. According to UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) exploration (2007), over 85% of children with special needs live in developing countries, but only 2% of them are present in schools. Thousands of children with developmental disabilities still spend most of their lives in institutions.

For understanding existing institutional models in Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to people with developmental disabilities, it is necessary to be aware of political and state arrangement established by General peace agreement since 1995 and by the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina is separated as two entities, Serb Republic and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and District Brcko, while Federation was additionally divided into ten cantons. This kind of segregation has serious impacts on education, because it resulted in creating more educational authorities that are Ministry of education of Serb Republic, and Ministry of education of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, ten cantons Ministries of education and Department for education of Brcko District. These structures not only are expensive, but also make harder the standardization of practice of financing the schools.

At all levels and within all institutional organizations, different models of concern, support and help have been developed for people with developmental disabilities, the members of their families, environment they living

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in and professionals who help them. There is no unique politics about these people and there are no common standards to establish legislature in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are no advisory authorities at the state, entity and canton level, which would offer advices to authorities and plead for the creation of laws for regularisation of politics in the area of disability and rights of them. There are no established communication and cooperation among entity legislature, canton legislature and entity and cantons, which have differences in approach to the development of basic institutional models as a consequence, then have different standards, conditions, inequality in planning and using institutional models, inequality defined by place of living, inequality in judgement, etc. Legislature in individual systems does not recognize specific needs of people with handicaps, and that is the reason why they do not make presumptions for development of models or programs that response on the needs. Legislature in every system has its own systems of registration and data about people with developmental disabilities. Those systems do not have mutual parametres which enable minimal of mutual information that anyone can use. There are no developed communicational systems about using all data, so that complex administrative procedure disables normal and effective process of exchanging information.

There is no unique definition of handicap in Bosnia and Herzegovina which would be accepted by the most of participants involved in different procedures that refer to handicap. Bureaucratic procedure (collecting all demanded documents) is very demanding and pretty irrelevant for the process of assessment. On the other side, for collecting the documents for the assessment process it is often necessary to have financial resources, which are limited for certain number of families.

In a process of dividing and assessment of handicap level of children with developmental disabilities, there are significant deficiencies. Principles for dividing and assessment of handicap level and imperative principles are incompatible, and legislations which are used as a base for forming and work of commissions are mostly taken over by Regulation of Socialistic Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1986. In this way, the process of evaluation, as a base, uses typically medical model, which is the most illustrative in composition of commissions, where doctors are dominating. In Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, giving responsibilities in this category to cantons brought to unequal institutional constitution of “corps” responsible for estimating, and it goes so far that some of cantons and commissions for estimation are not formed yet. Although the Council of Ministry defined “Standard rules for possibility of equal treatment for disabled persons”, the document itself mostly was not implemented.

According to this fact, it can be concluded that, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a dozen of rules for children with special needs are broken, for example, education, help in education, inclusive teaching, lack of conditions for education of people with developmental disabilities in regular schools, inadequate educational level of teachers, right for a high level education and support in inclusive environment.

2. Inclusive education of children with developmental disabilities

Nowadays, it is regarded that education is crucial part of social work, and it should be a starter for implementation of the idea of inclusion through education for children with developmental disabilities as well as the other children, which we call the inclusive education. Social isolation and discrimination of children with developmental disabilities are still present, by all means, in education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Lately, when it comes to the children with special needs, in the society, three terms are usually used: children with developmental disabilities, children with handicaps and children with special needs, but another term is also used: disabled

persons.

The term “special needs” is still not strictly defined in official documents in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This term is used in General Law Rule and it defines primary and secondary education (2003): In Article 19 of this Law it has been said that:

Children and young people with special educational needs gain their education in ordinary schools consisted of programmes which are adjusted to their individual needs. Individual programme adjusted to their abilities is going to be made especially for every pupil with obligation of making defectologic and logopedic status. Children and young people with serious handicaps and progress difficulties can have partly or the whole education in special institutions for education, in cases when it's not possible to give them appropriate education in ordinary schools. Categories, identification method, planning and the way of work, profile and professional progress of experts for working with children and youth who have got handicaps and other questions which are closely arranged by entity rules of the cantons and Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in accordance with principles and standards set by this law.

The Article 35 of the same law emphasises that:

Schools must not discriminate approach to children and their education, or their participation in educational process according to their race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or any other opinion, national or social origin, just because of the fact that these children are handicapped.

In Item 1 of this Article:

Institutions and jurisdictional authorities, together with schools, are especially responsible to ensure functional accommodation and infrastructural items for unobstructive access and participation in process of education for children with developmental disabilities, youth and adult persons as well.

Some of the main “tickets” for inclusion of children with developmental disabilities in educational system, are commissions for categorization which existed and are still existing in the whole region. These Commissions are mostly attached to centres of social work. The aim of the commissions is to establish diagnosis of child's damage and to recommend the programme of education. This usually happens when a child is six or seven years old, which means that an early intervention and preparation for education of a child is mostly neglected. Work of commissions for categorization of children and young people who are disabled in mental and physical progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina is regulated by regulation about detecting, estimating of abilities, dividing and making evidention of children and young people disabled in their physical and mental progress (1986). Only in area of Tuzla canton, The Regulation about estimation of abilities and determination of giving support for children with physical and mental handicaps has been adopted (official newspapers of Tuzla canton, 2004), which is still not completely applied. The cause is that there are no official services of supporting, and competent supervision in a local area to involve the inclusion by experts (educator, rehabilitator), expert teams of pedagogic institute, or the Ministry of education.

According to *The Regulation* (1986), commissions for dividing different instruments and unequal methods to estimate children who have difficulties in their progress. Evidention and following of divided children are not uniformed, lack of reliable and uniform criteria and estimating instruments does exist. There is existing practice, as well as the pressure from educational system, that children with small difficulties in progress or children who are neglected in social and cultural life, are divided as handicapped children. The biggest problem is undevelopment, respectively non existence of appropriate services for supporting in local areas (multi-disciplined expert teams at different levels: kindergartens, schools, pedagogical institutes, ministries, cantons and state). Parents do not participate, or just formally participate in a process of estimation and making decisions and

commission recommendations, while sensibility of commission members and parents on children's rights for inclusive education is at very low level.

3. Existing practice

Primary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in accordance with rules, in national and international documents are treated as universal wealth for every child and every particular person. But still, there is a small increasing number of pupils, who are absent from primary schools (it is counted that nowadays the percent of these children is approximately 4%). That tendency has been present from 1997, and there are a number of reasons for this kind of situation: On the first place they are poor, and schools are often unwilling to accept the minority of children, and to meet their individual, group and cultural needs (Report of Human Progressing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2003).

According to the law about basic education and background of those children (1999), education of children with special needs at ordinary primary school could be implemented in small groups in ordinary schools, or through individual work with a teacher specialist (defectologist with particular point), according to the suggestion of commissions for categorization and Agreement of Ministry for Science, Culture and Sport. But there are not many similar examples in the whole region of State of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The best example for this are information that come from Tuzla city, where the idea of inclusion was evolved and where experts at university have been studying for years, so they know very well about all specifics and problems of each handicap category, education of children and rehabilitation at educational rehabilitating faculty. There are 22 schools in Tuzla where every year just two defectologists could be engaged, although majority of schools have needs for this profile, Ministry of Science, Culture and Sport does not approve the engagement of defectologists, because children are not categorized into the group which needs these experts, and that is not compatible with principles of inclusion.

It can be concluded that inclusion is just declarative for children with handicaps and children with developmental disabilities and chronic illness as well. Ordinary school is not easily approachable, mostly because of lack in law regulations, unwillingness of schools and school personnel to work with these children and give them appropriate support. But the fact is that inadequate programmes, buildings for settlement and education of these children, disconnection of school, and parents and local community make impossible more successful and effective work for school, to compensate needs, interests and possibilities for every person, family and society.

Attempts for forming special classes within all schools usually have economical difficulties because the number of disabled students is insufficient (one or two students) in certain classes, which brought to closing those classes. That is the reason why pupils with special needs have to travel to school distant over 15 kilometres, because special classes are formed only in those schools, and that, in addition, causes economical or other problems to their parents (one parent had to leave the job for a couple of hours to take his child to distant school, and the child was exhausted and was not motivated enough in school, etc). Children who live far away from the schools with special classes were taken away from their families and put into special institutions for living internats, which only made worse existing socially-emotional problems. In some cases parents are forced to deny the treatment and education of their children because of the earlier mentioned problems. From that point of view, education becomes privilege for certain number of children.

Primary schools are slowly including marginalized groups of children in their programs. Till now, teachers were unprepared for giving particular treatment and appropriate care to children with developmental disabilities.

Similar situation is with Roma children, poor children and any other kind of children who represent the minority in any kind of way, and where majority of students are dominant. Because of the misunderstanding and unwillingness for solving these problems, existing practice for children is going to schools of “their culture” and environment, surrounded only with children with the same characteristics (special needs and body damages).

According to this, disabled children need to accept language, culture, history and all other ways of adjustment to dominant culture. Muminović (2000) says that situation is serious even for aptitude children, because teachers are not enough prepared for recognising individual pupils needs, neither for developing school programs in a way that could enable those children to grow faster in academic way, and use their extraordinary potentials in adequate way.

Educational system today has more additional difficulties the national, entity, and canton segregation, and differences on the national level. There are three different school programs and segregation is everyday phenomenon, as well as dualism, differences in breeding goals and tasks that bring to the national and religious differences which cause problems between the students. Because of the war, devastation of educational system and unwillingness for the new reforms in schools where majority of children study using typically socialistic school programme that adjusted programmes, classes and teaching strategies to characteristics of majority, stayed in majority if not in all schools. It means that school programme stayed mutual: same tasks for all children (no matter if they have different individual characteristics), same programme contents, one ordered text-book, clip board and chalk as an ordinary equipment, and also discipline as well as the dominated acception of reproductive knowledge.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, segregation model for education for children with special needs is still dominating. Though their education for becoming a teachers, ordinary teachers are not educated for work with children with developmental disabilities and have no experience in work with these children. It is possible to expect that teachers have permanent and consequent behaviour with negative, emotional reactions against them. Except that, quick changing of negative attitudes is impossible, because once made attitude is hard to change and it is often not available to control the results of that kind of attitudes that are dangerous, harmful and very resistant stereotypes with tendency to discourage children with handicaps causin wrong opinions—unfriendly relationships, abusing, conflicts, discrimination and prejudices.

The current prevalent exclusiveness of raising-educational system in Bosnia and Herzegovina disables pupils to gain priceless experience, get acquainted with different cultures, individual characteristics, (abilities, interests, needs) and different history that “multicultural” Bosnia and Herzegovina make homogeneous. Special needs of pupils are still not taken serious, and basic requests are not fulfilled yet, even if they are emphasized in Convention of Children Rights (1989), World Declaration of Education for All from Jomtien (1991), Salamanca Framework for Taking Action (1994). These acts strictly consist for education for all children, in their closest surroundings, into small restricted environment, including conditions that will meet their needs. Educational plan and programme and instruction themselves are strictly divided by subjects, without connecting different subject contents mutually, and with a real life, because children who completed primary and secondary school despite of their enormous academic knowledge are not capable to “endure” basic and everyday life problems. Incapability for a real life has got the most serious consequences, especially when it is about children with handicaps, and also for other children at regular school systems, regarding that pupils at schools are mostly “armed” with theory (too often mechanically accepted), but their use in practice and bringing knowledge in a relation with solving problems of everyday’s life are often deficient.

Basic philosophy of the holistic, inclusive perspective should make distance from teaching of isolated skills in isolated environment. That will make us closer to learn and engage children in usable and real life projects and activities where children have an opportunity to cooperate with each other. Programme activities represent just a sort of “vehicle” that brings them to understand, appreciate, adaptate, engage and use sources in their surroundings in a better way as much as possible. This is in accordance with their abilities that make them capable to live positive and productive life as members of the community.

4. Inclusion researches of children with developmental disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Lately, the number of researches, done in the whole area of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Muminovic, 2000; Ibralic, 2002; Hatibovic, 2002; Smajic, 2004; Salihovic, et al., 2007) have shown that, at our schools especially the primary ones, and at schools all over the world, in every class it can be found that a certain number of pupils facing with overcoming of teaching lessons, because of one’s difficulty in progress, learning and behaviour.

Problems that child is facing with, at the school, are often much bigger than progress difficulty itself (special need), because one’s “weak point” is prolonged and also includes a dozen of emotional pressures. They evolve as a consequence of unreal expectations of teachers and parents, inappropriate school plan and programme, misunderstanding made by their age fellows and non existence of adequate support that above mentioned people could provide with adequate organization.

Earlier mentioned researches done in ordinary schools throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina show that it is possible to meet pretty big number of pupils facing difficulties in overcoming and demanding class programme, because of the present difficulties in progress, emotional depriving, social and cultural discrimination. Most of the problems related to these factors have been solved mostly by teachers and partly by psychologists, but one part of the students with handicaps especially with mental difficulties represent unsolved problem for existing structure of teachers. Because of the disability of ordinary teachers to satisfy special needs of those children in class, and absence of (educator, rehabilitator) experts support for special needs. They often send those children to categorisation, even if there is no real progress distribution. After evaluating abilities and categorisation procedure, student is moved to special class or special school. His or her life is changing completely including separation from the children from ordinary population. This may have pretty bad influence on their basic rights, creating prejudices from social community and marginalisation as the consequence.

Anyway, even if it has come to certain changes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they are still partial and not systematic. For example, it is legal for children with special needs to go to regular schools, but at the same time some questions are still not defined, such as: teaching plan and programme, support for those children in ordinary schools, team work including parents and local communities being supportive. Educational issues of children with special needs in Bosnia and Herzegovina are comprehensive and complex. Planning and offering adequate and instructive procedures and learning strategies through individual ways of evaluation could be considered as a significant step of solving, at least one of the issues, and that would be sufficing, special educational needs of children with handicaps in regular classes.

In university units, which form special teams, working with typical children as well as the team working with children with special needs, many researches have been done. The researches showed that inclusion in education is helpful but it is not used enough in educational system with unexplainable and irrational reasons.

5. Unused resources

Actional plan of Council of Europe for promoting the rights and normal life for people with handicaps: improvement of quality of living for invalids in Europe in 2006-2015 in action direction number 4:

Education, as its basic agenda emphasise insurance of adequate education for persons with developmental disabilities. In the same way it is necessary to ensure the same approach to education for all persons. It does not matter whether the person has small or large difficulties in progress. Only by using relevant “corps” and by developing educational resources we can be assured that invalids might find their place in regular educational system, creating their personalities, talents, creativity as well as the intellectual and physical abilities as much as they can.

By supporting and promoting all life long studying for the people who have any kind of disability, they can easily cross over the educational phase till time they start working.

In all phases of the educational system, it is really important to respect persons with special needs, including children since their early ages. It actually means that regular schools must be fit out for recognising and answering on a different spectrum of needs including ones who have been traditionally eliminated from the access to school institutions, and their rights for equal participation at ordinary schools and the communities, as well with maximal respect for their individuality and personality.

6. Conclusion

There is shown analysis of inclusive education of children with developmental disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, comparing with modern tendencies and principles of inclusion, and that is related to: promises given in Brusellex in November 21th, where Ministries for Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina had a meeting of Council for peace implementation. They presented, in public, a documented plan to reform education. They promised to civilians: Promise No.1, point 4.

We shall ensure including of children with special needs in all educational levels; collect data about children with handicaps and their facing with problems, when it is about asserting of difficulties; make the general plan of education, with an aim to include children with special needs at all educational levels.

For law regulations and pedagogical standards, existing practice, research results and advantage of existing resources in order to satisfy special needs and realization of basic children's rights, conclude that there is no clear vision and the strategy for establishing the inclusive school and classes.

All children, regardless of the level and sort of a special need, should be considered as capable for learning, and how much are they going to learn depends much more from those people who work with them (teachers, parents), and less of children themselves.

Inclusive education is the question of human rights. By democratization of the society in sixties of the past century, there are conditions for more tolerance and releasing of children with developmental disabilities from social isolation. The fact is that their rights to equal raise and education are ensured now. It can be said that social/inclusive model is based on the whole involving of handicapped person in all processes of society and it means having the same rights like other members of society. The main cause of their disqualifying is not a person itself, but community who makes different kinds of difficulties for their complete inclusion in society.

Unequality and indolence of educational politics, insufficiency and impossibility to implement positive law regulation, non existence of educational-rehabilitating personnel at ordinary schools, prevent primary school to

become truly reachable to all children, regardless to their origin, gender, language, religion and psycho-physical characteristics. Considering the fact that national (Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and also international documents (Convention of child's rights; Standard rules of making equal possibilities for handicapped persons; Salamanka Report) have emphasised that every child should get qualitative primary education, and have the same treatment regardless to the origin, personal characteristics (psychosomatic characteristics), or the fact in which country region child goes to a school. For there is an expressive need for reconstruction and development of flexible, opened and responsible schools for work with children with different abilities, cultures and languages. These schools must be well led, organized and enabled with staff who can put children and their abilities, needs and interests in the center of the activities, but not the content of pre-defined, rigid and too demanding educational plan and programme.

For the purpose of increasing the quality and making education available for children and young people with handicaps in the area of education of children with developmental disabilities, there are certain measures that should be taken as a priority above all:

(1) Making standards which would regulate as follows: Who are children with handicaps; composition of expert teams at the level of pre-school education (including parents);

(2) Composition of expert teams at school level (including parents); Monitoring and evaluation at the municipality, canton and state level;

(3) Enlarging the presence of the children with handicaps into educational system;

(4) Eliminating the problems in school institutions so that children with special needs could go to kindergarten, school and college;

(5) Including University Units for education of regular teachers and teachers helping children with special needs;

(6) Creating a model for providing technical tool, necessary for the progress of children with special needs; Free school bus for the children, increasing the number of inclusive classes (with decreasing number of pupils in classes);

(7) Enabling free choice and education in natural environment and neighbourhood for parents and children;

(8) Developing flexible individualised class programme of teaching and learning for concrete child; Developing services of support and advising in school centres for the children with troubles with studying, troubles in behaviour and social problems with their parents; Organising psycho-educational interventions for the needs of the children whose parents have some problems in mental health;

(9) Developing and improving programmes directed education for the youth with developmental disabilities; Developing programmes for crossing over the school into the working position;

(10) Offering similar approach to Informatical communicational technology (IKT) for the youth and children and to teach them how to use different computer programmes;

(11) Enabling persons with handicaps to study on college and offering help by giving them scholarships, accommodations and food;

(12) Improving educational system for adults and life-long education based on real needs and possibilities and developing them in direction of centres for life-long learning in the community.

In this country, development and improving inclusion represent current politics, in theoretically-scientific and practical way. Although inclusion in developed countries became ordinary practice, in Yugoslavia it is still considered as a news with a lot of unfamiliar facts, dilemmas and doubts, especially when it comes to its practical

application.

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(Edited by Nicole and Lily)