



Inclusive education – the process of assimilation or emergence?

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Abstract:

The article attempts to analyze issues related to inclusive education perceived as a process of multi-faceted, multi-factorial complex determined by many factors.

During considerations, author assumes that the process of shaping inclusive education can be according to two models. Model of assimilation in which both of the groups: disabled and non-disabled tries to integrate without planned and less effective adaptation measures, without preparation to functioning in common environment.

Emergent model, in which education is quite a new quality, created on the basis of preparation, refines educational strategies to students with special educational needs.

On the basis of research, the author draws attention to the quality of some selected factors of the educational process, i.e. competences of teachers or evaluation of the type of interaction between teacher and student.

The author stressed with anxiety the barriers that hinder the execution of a complex process of inclusive education. The conclusion of the discussion is the proposal for the implementation of inclusive education by learning dialogue strategies, as complex activities of teachers, students and other dialogue partners. It will permit education to run as an emergent model and take the form of new, increasingly complex but also as integrated structure.

According to the research and practical education there is still a need of deep reflection on the concept, essence and the range of inclusive education, constantly involved with school and preschool organisation. Dynamic changes in educational tendencies coming from the human philosophy underlying human subjectivity are the factors determining this reflection and research. Preschools and schools had to become friendly for all the children, also for these with special educational needs, which are the results of physical, psychical, intellectual or social disability, cultural differences and the significant skills and talents. In this analysis and reflection the answer for the following question is searched. Do the ranges of functioning of inclusive education in school space adopt the form of assimilation or emergence process? This issue is priority in the presented work.

This research has its reflection in pedagogy field under perception of the inclusive pedagogy as a very complex process. Changes occurring in that process are the basis for numerous transformations of its structure, functions and roles. Due to the contextual character all the elements of this configuration change, move and are correlative, mutual (Brzezińska, 2000, p. 58). Within this meaning the inclusive education process may be considered a cyclic phased process with inclusion as the type of change occurring in education development. Education may be considered as a number of processes, actions and effects affecting human being, as the state or level of the results of these processes or as the modification of the functions, institutions and social practices roles, which in the result of inclusion become new, integrated system. Thus this is very complex process. Nowadays the complexity appears to be one of very significant terms both in science and in philosophy. It appears that despite searching for simple rules, strategies, solutions everything is still more complex. Complex



is the environment, the organism living in it and exploring it, and just the exploration itself is a complex phenomenon, much more than this could initially seem to be.

The entire world is the collection of complex states of affairs, processes. In this manner I perceive the education, because *Education is not a Sorcerer's Stone, once discovered, solving all dilemmas, releasing us from responsibility, uncertainty, anxiety, making difficult judgements and undertaking complex activities. The question that we should inevitably ask concerns what we choose and how will we choose* (Moss, 2009, p. 3, see also: Karwowska-Struczyk, 2012).

Considering the main issue, assuming that inclusive education is the process of assimilation or emergence, it is useful to clarify the basic terms. *Assimilation* is, without doubt, the process reflecting the complex of occurrences involved with the transformations dynamics. The first sociological theories of assimilation were created in the 1920s. One of the main and dominating was the approach of Park describing “race-cycle”, when there were the contact, rivalry, accommodation and assimilation the one group to another (as cited in Barkan, 1995). This linear concept assuming one-wayness and irreversibility of the process was modified twenty years later by Wirth. According to the author, assimilation was more complex and required active involvement from both sides, the assimilating and the assimilated group (Barkan, 1995). Dominating group had to, according to Wirth, be ready to assimilate the minority group, and the minority group had to be ready to “be assimilated”. The important contribution to assimilation processes perception became the concept by Glazer and Moynihan, who observed that not the entire groups, but single persons are influenced by assimilation factors (Barkan, 1995). The assimilation process enables organising the information, stimuli according to existing elements, like in theory of J. Piaget, to existing cognitive schemas. Assimilation, although is one of the development factors, usually generating quantitative changes, rather than qualitative.

Emergence means appearing of new features and characteristics on higher levels (or dimensions) of organisation. It may be recognised ontologically, as the occurrences feature appearing on different levels, or epistemologically, as feature of knowledge (thinking) about reality. Occurrence named emergence is involved with many fields and contexts, but not always is named the same way. General explanation of this term is that *the entirety is not just the sum of its components*. In its entirety usually appear new features and occurrences, which do not exist in its components. There is nothing strange – functioning of the entirety results not only from functioning of each simple component, but also from mutual relations and interactions between the components. Thanks to this, is possible to create from simple “building blocks” systems characterised by richer behaviour and functioning than in case of its components. In a number of cases in unpredictable way the new characteristic, quality is formed (Sawyer, 2005). The characteristics of emergent occurrences is the interaction of simple components, the mutual integration between them, synergy, joint action of different factors, cooperation and synchronisation, which may occur in peculiar, specific and complicated manner. Emergence is also the result of consolidation of the efforts increasing the probability of meeting the target of higher social and educational level of integration in general education. Thus, it is appropriate to get away from the conception of assimilation in education while enhancing the conception of emergence.

Understanding education as a significant component of social change, shall be noted huge complexity of educational mechanism in the perspective of social world changeability. All the education subjects, particularly teachers, students, and parents not only do participate in these transformations, but also have to meet new challenges. Are they ready for these changes? Do the current conditions of inclusive education realisation facilitate only assimilation of attributes forming education, or due to emergence process, will be formed new quality of education? How to treat the inclusion of the student with special educational needs?

The interesting view on inclusion in education was presented by Mittler. “The inclusion is the process, rather the journey not the destination point (...). Despite the fact that well managed and carried out inclusion takes place, first of all in the class” (2000, p. 177). Thus, it is very complex process, which should provide students with special educational needs the opportunity to realise the developmental tasks and functioning in the bigger society with the feeling of belonging. It appears that the inclusion, as a process, strictly depends on how the direct and indirect environment is flexible, ready for changes and ready to meet individual needs. Inclusive education should take place in normal school, ordinary classroom, and with normal, but prepared properly, teachers who get proper substantive and organisational support. Inclusive education development should be the process, which starts already in preschool education. The key to inclusive approach is the differentiation, diversification of teaching content and methods according to student's needs, which is the essence of respect



for individual differences. Simultaneously, the obstacles for changes are misperceptions of teaching children with special educational needs and special equipment for them. Inclusive education challenges the school system and the functioning of particular schools by mobilizing them to improve and make more flexible the programs and teaching methods, stimulating teachers competences development and popularization of an atmosphere letting them meet the needs of all the children from the given society with greater flexibility. Such atmosphere may encourage the teachers to perceiving the students having problems with learning not as a problem, but as a stimulus to improve and develop their own teaching methods (Ainscow, 2000). The considerations presented above allow understanding the inclusion education as “the process of joint teaching of students with special educational needs and their efficient peers in public school. Prerequisite for effectiveness of this process is providing school society with the feeling of belonging, and psychosocial, methodical, organisational, technical support allowing them to meet their special developmental and educational needs resulting from their individual development” (Głodkowska, 2010, p. 74).

Such understanding of inclusive education process includes a range of actions involved with personalities of teachers, parents, specialists, deciding persons and also the attitudes to their job and to the students with special educational needs. They consist of changes of teacher education, wide range of competences, law regulations, and they are necessary for dynamics of this process. It may be assumed that inclusive education process occurs starting from full isolation/exclusion/exemption, through including: occasional, incidental, legislatively regulated, legally providing students the support in the student competence training process, leading to inclusion, which is a natural stage of the entire inclusion process. The last stage of natural and spontaneous inclusion process is involved not only with aims of the parents of children with special educational needs to provide them the best opportunities to develop, but also with general positive attitude to inclusion, according to the principle that every person is Different. The inclusion is no longer the process controlled by both the institutions and the persons appointed to its implementation, and becomes the obvious and spontaneous occurrence. This means that the systems of teaching persons with special educational needs passes from the stage of incidental and legal inclusion to the stage of legal and spontaneous inclusion. It is possible only when, apart from activity of authorities, parents in particular of children with special educational needs and teachers, the greater part of society is involved and the inclusion becomes common.

My understanding of inclusive education as an emergent process should include the steps, preceded by complex preparations. The first stage should involve psychological and pedagogical work with the aim of training the appropriate attitudes, beliefs among teachers, parents and students, which are involved with cooperation in dialog and knowledge, the terms involved with disability. This is the basis for real actions involved with adjustment of public schools environment to special difficulties of the persons with disability. Unfortunately, the Polish education is not prepared for implementation of planned changes. It prolongs the process itself, and number of gaps and defects can be observed. Inclusive education is not perfect, due to for example generating high stress of children and teachers, heterogeneity of class and the necessity of significant differentiation of working methods and the requirements with the same time and number of lesson units. Simulated or imposed actions constitute the most serious difficulty in development of this kind of education, and in the case of students with intellectual disability demonstrate significant lack of cohesion still existing between intentions, possibilities and real actions. If the inclusive education is perceived only as a slogan of positive and necessary changes, and we stop at the level of imposed tasks, which are the results of legal acts, this will result in the secondary segregation without direct and functional integrating opportunity.

The aim of inclusive education is extending access to education, promotion of full participation in education system by all the students at risk of exclusion, and promotion of the opportunity of realisation of their own potential. Participation in general education system should be involved with: proper preparation of all the teachers, active involvement of all students in educational process, which must be understandable for them. Supporting parents and shaping pro-social attitudes and values, choice of effective teaching methods considering alternative education pathways. Developing teamwork system by engaging students, their parents, peers, other teachers working in school, supporting staff and the members of team consisting of specialists in various areas, choice of an evaluation system, which supports the education process, considering holistic perspective of student progress measurement (Al-Khamisy, 2013).

The efficiency of actions of teachers working in inclusive schools depends on their acceptance of the attitudes and values system. To rich this goal, teachers must obtain the following competences and skills: ability



to recognise and meet various educational needs of students, openness to cooperation with their parents and families, ability to teamwork facilitating cooperation with other teachers and specialists, both at school and outside school.

Some issues involved with inclusive education have to be considered, according to the perspective of guaranteeing the individual learning pathway. The aim of learning should not be mastering the content by the student, but developing existing competences and new abilities, and also forming habits and behaviours. This requires more personalised participation in learning process involved with developing individual learning programme. This should be facilitated by developing Individual Education Program (IEP) which is the chance for student to adjust to realisation of indicated goals, provides more specialist intervention and extending cooperation with parents, specialists and teachers. The teaching-learning process should be based on teamwork system, cooperation with other students, parents, peers, teachers, and specialists.

Inclusive education focuses on modification of evaluation methods used commonly in public schools. Apart from universal evaluation, should be used the so-called inclusive evaluation. This is an evaluation method in public educational establishments, focusing on the best supporting the learning processes for all the students, effectively contributing to participation of all the students at risk of exclusion, including children with special educational needs in general education. There is a number of elements of complex education process requiring constant development, improvement. Jacson, Ryndak and Billingsley (2007, pp. 51–60) distinguished nine areas in inclusive education, which require developing special action strategies. These are: promoting the values of inclusive education, planning, coordination, and offering the inclusive education services at school, choosing and planning education material (Individual Education Therapeutic Program, IETP), coordination between general pedagogues and specialists, cooperation between pedagogues and persons offering other education services, teaching strategies, regular evaluation and monitoring of student progress, family engagement, assistance for students in need, often called “difficult”.

Usually public school is defined as the school for everybody. This means preserving unity in educational diversity or unity in educational differentiation. Thus, a school with such structure provides every student high quality of education services, and considers diversification between students as so-called goods activating the highest quality of this service. In such school everyone should achieve optimal development level and have the best conditions to learn. All children are equally significant member of the “being together” society – the school culture. Such inclusive aims presume development of integration to be the main general education aim in such school.

The process of developing integration may take place according to one of the following two models:

- according to the model formed on the basis of assimilation principle, where people with disabilities are prepared to functioning in the environment of people without disabilities, without any adjustment measures,
- according to the emergent model, where the integration is the new quality formed on the basis of balanced partnership; the formed society has equal chances for meeting its needs, accepts the diversification of all members, the religion, appearance, abilities, lifestyle (Al-Khamisy, 2006).

Unsatisfying effects of inclusive education indicate that it was established according to assimilation model. Students with special educational needs included to schools, despite the attempt of individualisation of the education process, are not taken into consideration in school efficiency evaluation, which means that they are not considered an integrated part of the system. Still there are too many students in classes, in which are the students requiring special support, there is no adjustment of teacher work to possibilities of students, there is inappropriate attitude and strict following the education program (core curriculum), group teaching takes place. There is also the problem of incompetence and permanent fear of failure of teachers, and the emotional functioning of children with intellectual disabilities is still unsatisfactory.

These observations are confirmed by research of the author. Among public schools teachers (240 respondents) most frequently chosen for student with disability was the option of form of integrative education (52.2%). The second place was taken by special education (22.4%), the proposition of public school was chosen very rarely (5.4%), and individual teaching is preferred (17.3%). It appears that the group of respondents do not see the opportunity of education of students with disabilities in inclusive education. First of all, stereotypical perception of student with disability is still popular, and, in consequence, causes lack of faith in his success and rightness of the actions taken. It appears that there is high resistance to inclusive education among teachers. Providing special assistance is obligation of teachers, in particular in integrative and special



education. The results clearly indicate lack of acceptance for meeting the obligation of compulsory education by students with disabilities in public schools. Such opinion is not beneficial for inclusive education, which is on early stage in Poland. It is particularly worrying that such approach to education of students with special educational needs is present among teachers starting their professional work.

More positive is the fact that the early education teachers are most favourable to inclusion of students with disabilities to general schools. 52.3% of them sees the possibility of success of inclusive education, but also significant part (47.7%) does not note such chance. Unfortunately teachers of higher classes are significantly less keen on (69.4%) participating in education of student with disability. The most significant objection to inclusive education of students with disabilities is present among respondents from big cities (78.5%), the second place is taken by respondents from mid-sized cities (72.3%) and villages (62.3%). In particular the answers of group from villages is reasonable due to difficulties in contacting specialists, who are present in schools in the cities. What kind of barriers in teachers beliefs discourage the process of inclusion of student with special educational needs, so that this process is efficient and represents new quality? These are the following barriers: institutional, and among them: architectonic non-compliance of schools, lack of funds for recommended forms of psychological and pedagogical help, lack of specialist facilities, too many students in class, insufficient number of hours intended for support of students, too high and unprofitable costs of supporting students incurred in the Polish education. Other social barriers include: lack of acceptance of students with disability among peers and adults, treating the differences as something worse, treating the presence of students with disabilities as a risk for other students and their feeling of safety, teacher's feeling of coercion toward the student, which goes beyond the limits of children's rights or human rights, the belief that student with disability will have problems in public school and will have to change school, which will be disadvantageous for social development and the belief of regress in student development, and the feeling of loneliness due to disability among persons without disabilities.

The competence and organisational barriers in inclusive education process listed by teachers also have to be taken into consideration, for example: clear feeling of lack of specialist knowledge, lack of believing in possibilities of student with disability and defining them by "does not meet the requirements" category, belief of too high level of requirements in reference to possibilities of student with disability, and thus the reduction of core curriculum requirements, particularly in higher classes of primary school and in gymnasium. Teachers of higher classes claim that individual work with student with disability is not possible in class, in which there are students without disabilities. Moreover, there is the belief that National Education Ministry increases the requirements for teachers due to inclusive education, and this results in the belief that it is enormous challenge for the so-called normal teachers. Deficiencies in establishing the strategy of special support cause the feeling of mercy for the student and reduction of requirements. According to the teachers not every disability may be subject to efficient integration with people without disabilities, and only specialist centres guarantee competitive assistance (Al-Khamisy, 2013).

It appears that in the process of education evaluation of students with special educational needs is significant problem for teachers. The most frequent problems listed by teachers are involved with attitudes towards students with disabilities, which makes it significantly difficult to accept the student as is. This is not conducive to preparation of tasks suitable for the student and for using the positive reinforcements, even for the slightest achievements. Significant group of problems decreasing the chance of inclusion the student with special educational needs is involved with communicational difficulties related to length and clarity of messages. It is difficult for teachers to keep calm and quite natural tone of talking, and to control their emotions. They use stereotypical, generalising phrases incorrectly describing student behaviour, i.e. "You always, often, never". They often underline undesired behaviours of child/student which are the result of disability, which makes it difficult to praise the student for small achievements. They use such phrases in the verbal evaluation, which contribute to reduction of therapeutic value of evaluation. These are frequent allusions and ironies like "this time", "finally", "lastly", "oh, finally", "just", "you could always do this", "it appears that you can do it, if only you want it", "oh, it could be done", "you almost did it", "you finally did it".

In the new for a number of teachers educational reality, which is result of inclusive education, they expect assistance, not only indirect assistance, but in particular direct assistance. They want specialist assistant (special education teacher) to accompany them during work with such students. They think that work with students with and without disabilities in large groups causes problems with noticing and understanding



individual needs of both students without disabilities, who lose during such lessons, according to some beliefs, and students with disabilities. Definitely the teachers should be prepared to introduce other evaluation strategies, letting the teachers appreciate the motivational function of evaluation of student's work and freeing them from obligation to pursue high level measured by external schools ranking, at any cost.

Centralised and still authoritative education management, regulated by prescriptive directives, obligatorily imposed tasks and a number of new directives, teachers start to treat their job as involved with planning, realisation and evaluation of education process, and it has to be performed according to pathways, guidelines and is present obedience to education managers. Most of teachers of subjects declare very poor knowledge of law issues regarding education or special pedagogy, in particular involved with competences to work with diverse groups, to cooperate with specialists or parents (Al-Khamisy, 2013).

Realisation of the idea of inclusive education requires responsible resignation of routine, conservatism, stereotyping. Teachers usually agree with changes, but not always do they accept the solutions proposed. They are sure that their postulates and opinion were not taken into account in conception of changes in directives involved with organisation of psychological and pedagogical help in school. Directors associate changes with numerous problems to solve. Proposed and organised continuous teachers training, which aims at preparing teachers to undertake new educational tasks is not approved among teachers.

Changes in directives, which are involved with psychological and pedagogical help are the challenges for teachers and for local councils. Actions of local councils, aim of which is to save money on education are also noticed. Statutes changes clearly regulating financing of the help for students with special educational needs directly in their schools are needed. It is commonly known that according to Polish law the financial subsidy is directed to local council. Directors of educational establishments know that they are obliged by education regulations to achieve recommendations and to adjust the education process to needs of the children. At the same time they are not sure, if they will be able to obtain additional funds involved with remuneration for specialists, supportive teachers and purchase of additional equipment, etc. In many cases communal authorities claim that they are not able to provide additional support, and the local councils introduce limits of support of one child. Thus, lack of support from education authorities generates measurable costs.

Unfortunately, currently full realisation of the rule of equal chances and School for Everybody is a populist, wishful slogan because full egalitarianism is impossible both in education and in society. However, this does not invalidate further explorations and solutions. Such view on education is involved with the obligation of its organisers to search for new solutions between megapedagogism and pedagogical reductionism, it means between empowering education in preparing to huge civilization challenges and personal space of every person subjected to the process of education, has right to live own life, here and now. In this view on education, there are tasks for teachers involved with linking social objectives and personal space of student, stage of his development including time and space outside school.

When taking the education of future teachers into consideration, cannot be omitted such competences like diagnosing, pedagogical projecting with consideration of holism in student education. This means that all the teachers should accept responsibility for all the students, receiving proper support and opportunity of professional development. Inclusive education requires from schools change in school culture and the teacher responsibility is significant, like never before. According to opinion of teachers currently education has assimilative character, and it is far from the school of new quality. Education reform leading from assimilation to emergence has to be treated like planned change and has its beginnings in axiological changes, theoretical searches meaning transition from theory to practice, from discovering to projecting changes, and then to implementing the changes, and finally establishing the new strategy (Gajdzica, 2013). Such complex process should take place according to inclusive education model.

So what model of education will contribute to emergent model of inclusive education? In my opinion it is the model of dialogue education (Al-Khamisy, 2013). Dialogue as a process takes place only when at least one element of this process becomes realized. So the process of dialogue may start from any element: cognitive (understanding), emotional (moving closer) or praxeological (cooperation), and may lead (or not) to reach other areas. Dialogue requires recognition and understanding subject of dialogue, rights of both sides, and also overcoming the egoistic attitude. According to Rutkowiak (1989, p. 39) dialogue is condition for understanding, which means permanent searching for new sense and meanings, and also recovering already established meanings. In this view the dialogue is widely understood as a way of teacher's being with students,



which is the sense of education. The attitude of dialog may be observed in constant readiness to treat another man like a person, as a goal in itself, not as a means to this end. It means that the teacher in educational dialog is a person with specific competences, who is for student, and not with student. Only in such a complex system there is an opportunity to be together and not next to each other. Education of future teachers should reinforce teacher calling of self-oriented young people, develop their internal maturity, which let them exceed their own "Self" and open to the needs of others. Educational dialogue is a special, complex behaviour toward each Other, i.e. teachers, students and other partners of dialogue. This experience of oneself and Others, being with oneself and with Others. This is the cognitive meeting with oneself and Others with maintaining the unique specificity toward other person. This is discovering the humanity of oneself and Other with full acceptance and offering of oneself and dialogue partner (Al-Khamisy, 2013). Proposed educational dialogue is not limited to teacher-student interaction. It is a real exchange with various education subjects, e.g. child with disability or the peers with various levels of ability, competences, culture. It makes a chance for reconstruction the knowledge, way of thinking, attitude of dialogue partners toward Otherness, which is disability. Proposed dialog should be considered as a system with the complex structure of mutual relationships.



Figure 1. Dialogue in mutual relationships system

To recognize means to obtain as much information about oneself and Other to lead the dialogue as it is possible. It is knowing that *I know who I am for and why*. **To understand** means to know what am I and what are YOU, it is the recognition and definition of my and your abilities, good sides and limits. It is *Understanding who I am for and why*. **To be together** means to meet like I am with You, I acts for You and I need You for my and Yours development. I am with You, I discover myself and Yourself, I acts for You and me. This understanding of dialogue will let the inclusive education follow the assumption of emergent model. This provides recognition of child in various areas of functioning to support the development, this requires searching for programs for specified recipients, not for universal, model students, this introduces in range of actions which are in zone of proximal development and lets real support of student, this treats student comprehensively and multilaterally as education subject, the teacher cooperates with students not always to evaluate and classify him, but to help him in organising the experiences and developing knowledge. This provides the guarantee of inclusive education as completely new quality.

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