La importancia de la participación y la asociación en el aprendizaje. Una definición operacional de inclusión

The importance of participation and partership in learning. An operational definition of inclusion

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Resumen

Los desafíos que cotidianamente se plantean a los profesionales del equipo del Centro de Recursos para la Inclusión (CRI) y la necesidad de la Asociación de Solidaridad Social de Lafões (ASSOL) de alinearse y consolidar una reflexión sobre su participación en el proceso educativo de los niños y jóvenes con necesidades educativas especiales (NEE) llevaron al equipo del CRI a desencadenar un proceso de reflexión, cuyo resultado fue compilado en la edición de un libro así como a compartirla en este artículo. En este sentido, en el presente trabajo se abordó la temática de la inclusión escolar, teniendo como enfoque los conceptos de pertenencia, participación y derechos. Se pretendió delinear un concepto operacional de inclusión escolar de alumnos con NEE, que fuera pasible de ser práctico, claro y sucinto. Así se presenta aquí una lista de verificación, basada en 11 criterios, que se fundan en tres ámbitos: inclusión, planificación centrada en la persona y el derecho de las personas con discapacidad. En este trabajo se buscó marcar un momento de concienciación de cuál es y de cuál podría ser la contribución del CRI para que las escuelas cumplan su misión de incluir y educar a todos sus alumnos.

Palabras clave

Inclusión, Perteneciente, Participación, Equidad, Derechos.

Abstract:

he daily challenges faced by the staff from the Resource Centre for Inclusion Team (CRI) and the need the Association of Social Solidarity of Lafões (ASSOL) have had in order to align and consolidate its role in their involvement in the educational process of children and adolescents with special educational needs (SEN) were what led the CRI team to start a process of reflection. Its results were compiled in a book that will include this article. This assignment shall address the subject of school inclusion by focusing on the concepts of pertaining, participation and rights. We have aimed to outline here an operational concept of school inclusion for students with SEN that we believe can be practical, clear and concise. A Checklist, based on 11 criteria, shall be presented in three areas: inclusion, person-centred planning and people's with disabilities rights. This work seeks to trigger a moment of awareness concerning "what is" and "what could be" as a contribution of the CRI, so that schools fulfil their mission when implementing inclusion and education of all their pupils.

Keywords

Inclusion, Pertaining, Participation, Equity, Rights.

1. FOREWORD

When one speaks of inclusion, one's first challenge is to outline a definition for its concept.

While ASSOL, is seeking an operational definition in the educational context, it is important to look for a concept that can be used in the practical world, since to most institutions it is considered difficult to teach someone to become more inclusive when we take into account generic and abstract theories, concepts and methodologies.

From the ASSOL perspective, inclusion is defined by two terms: pertaining to and participating in. In contrast to the difficulty of teaching inclusion in abstract terms, ASSOL believes that it is possible to teach children and young people with SEN in such a way that they all are part of their natural community and that both they themselves and their colleagues must share their educational experiences. (McGee, s.d.).

Inclusion can be measured by a degree of participation of a certain child/youth with special educational needs (SEN) from the activities they perform in different life contexts. Thus, school inclusion implies that all children attend their classes, regardless of their condition, in which it is guaranteed that they have access to a quality education that fits their needs (UNESCO, 2017).

Since ASSOL, both as a whole and as individual departments, has to gauge itself against the principles of the EQUASS standard (taking into account the elements presented by each of the 50 criteria topics), we tried to reflect about the CRI, looking for observable indicators that show the results of their actions. In addition to the EQUASS norms, we also assessed several scales of evaluation of adaptive behaviour and functional curricula (Costa, 2000).

The Index for Inclusion, developed by UNESCO (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), is an excellent document to help schools self-assess the evolution of the inclusion practice of all their students.

This theoretical research gathered a number of interesting elements but still remains without a universal response to the main purpose of inclusion. These elements are very focused on the behaviours and actions of students as individuals, and do not evaluate the extent to which a child or young person is actually included; that is, in accordance with the Pedagogy of Interdependence, whether they are part of the group, participating in and learning from (McGee, et al., sd).

 The challenge that ASSOL presents here is whether or not we should create a document that allows students, their family, their teachers, their support teachers and their CRI technicians to safely assess to what extent students belong to, participate in and learn, provided that the indicators correspond to observable students' behaviours instead of the behaviours of the school as an educational community.

By following this line of thinking, it led us to come up with a document called Checklist, which aims to highlight both the students' behaviours and activities, and reveal the level of school and social inclusion that exist.

2. EVOLUTION

Inclusion happens when...

In evolutionary-historical terms, the field of pedagogical assistance of students with SEN has been facing a conceptual clash between two notions: the notion of integration and the notion of inclusion. In this context, authors such as S. Stainback and W. Stainback (1999, cited by Serrano, 2005) point out that there has been a gradual replacement of the term integration by

the term inclusion. This was due to several reasons. Throughout time, a consensus started to be reached, acknowledging that the term integration reflects a more static meaning when compared to the term inclusion. Inclusion is the interactive involvement of children with SEN in all educational, social and school environments. Inclusion defends better and with greater precision the concept of "including all children in both the educational and social life of the educational establishments in their area of residence, instead of only allocating them to their regular classes" (Serrano, 2005, p.58). This way, the school, in an inclusive perspective, should offer education for all, which requires responsibility from the surrounding environment. In this manner, the school should be giving an appropriate response to each individual, which will mobilize a greater number of actors in the educational process (Correia, 2003 cited by Marcos, 2009).

As Voltz, Brazil and Ford (2002, cited by Gaspar, 2008) point out, "the concept of inclusion implies a sense of respect, belonging and acceptance. Therefore, inclusion has more to do with how teachers relate to the differences of each individual than with how specific educational principles are set up" (p.2).

 Nevertheless, one of the biggest difficulties that technicians have encountered is that it is not always possible to measure inclusion effectively. It is known that some behaviours can be measured, but this is not possible to do when trying to gauge feelings, emotions or memories that a certain student experiences. According to the ASSOL philosophy of action, it is believed that true inclusion happens when the student is able to generate positive and pleasant emotions and memories. In this perspective, literature points us to the necessity of drivers of change that can be used in education to promote both equity and inclusion. Research identifies, as the most important pieces of evidence, the students' presence, participation and achievement as the most important factors for success (Ainscow, 2005, cited by UNESCO, 2017). To decide what kind of evidence to collect and how to use it requires attention. For example, education systems are now very much focused on collecting statistical data on learning outcomes, in order to determine the efficiency of such systems.

This reflects a narrow view of education in the sense that it only evaluates the acquisition of functional skills. A well-functioning educational system requires policies that focus on both students' participation and students' achievements (UNESCO, 2017). Besides, Ainscow and collaborators (2003) goes further by pointing out that it is necessary that the definitions of inclusion have the equity as a starting point so that we can decide what to monitor. In other words, it is necessary to measure the value first instead of evaluating what we can measure.

Based on all the aforementioned bibliographic references, ASSOL's CRI technicians prepared a document that proposes to get all the educational agents involved in the students' with SEN teaching-learning process so that it should make possible to understand the extent to which the students' inclusion is real and concrete.

This proposal aims to provide important clues to guide all the teachers when working with regular class groups, support teachers and the CRI technicians.

It also aims to reduce the existing discrepancy between the school and the family.

An inclusive school should offer both possibilities and opportunities for the execution of various working methods as well as working with individuals to ensure that no child is left behind from either their fellowship or participation in school.

It is in this context that the checklist becomes more important, since ASSOL's CRI work suggests that students with SEN essential learning can only be achieved if they mingle with their peers without disabilities.

This requires the creation of rights-based schools. This type of education is not only academically effective but also inclusive, healthy and protection for all children, encouraging the engagement of all students, families and communities (UNESCO, 2005).

A checklist

Due to its complexity, the concept of inclusion can be interpreted from various perspectives.

The Checklist developed by ASSOL technicians aims to give a detailed view of the notion of inclusion, making it clearer and easier to understand the concepts of "what to pertain to", "what to participate in" and "what to learn from" (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Since it is not possible to talk about inclusion without specifying student-centred planning and their rights, we felt that specific indicators on these topics needed to be created. Hence, student-centred planning assumes that all people, in partnership with their family, friends and professionals, can imagine their future, make choices and make decisions. Support can begin, precisely, by helping them in this process, organizing them in such a way that makes it possible for them to fulfil their desires, regardless of their capabilities (Pereira, 2014).

This way, the Checklist comprises three sections that are divided into criteria. Each criterion is associated with some observable indicators.

It is believed that a child or young person who is able to show, even partially, the required behaviours for each indicator is more likely to become a socially-included adult in the future.

Section 1 - Inclusion happens when...

It embraces the following criteria:

- The Student with SEN engages in class activities and in class as a whole.

- The student tries to keep up with the learning achievements of their class.

- The student works autonomously at school.

- The student interacts with non-teaching personnel.

- The student is motivated to receive support.

- The student has both personal autonomy and a social life outside the school and these are adapted to their age.

Section 2 - Student-Centred Planning

Embraces the following criteria:

- The student contributes to the preparation of their Individual Educational Programme (IEP) and the school accepts their contributions.

- The student in Transition to Adult Life (TAL) participates in the elaboration of his/her Transition Individual Programme (PIT).

Section 3- Recognition of Students' rights

Embraces the following criteria:

- The student is aware of both their rights and duties.

- The student can read the available information at school.

- The student feels safe at school.

Each individual criterion relates to some indicators that are intended to be objectively observed and are therefore described in the form of student behaviour.

The Checklist

The Check List (Table 1, Table 2, Table 3) is presented below. It takes into account the three sections discussed above. We must emphasize that this Checklist is intended to guide the evolution of any and all interventions. It allows us to analyse what is being done to determine priorities for change and to put these priorities into practice.

Inclusion happens when…

Criterion A. - A student with SEN engages in class activity and in class as a whole.
Indicators:
The student with SEN attends the same classes as his/her classmates'.
The student behaves appropriately with both colleagues and teachers.
The student asks questions and makes relevant comments.
The student with SEN is involved in the dynamics of the classes, such as asking and answering questions.
The student is able to answer the questions when requested.
The student with SEN is invited by his/her colleagues to participate in group assignments.
The student with SEN participates in class visits or in other activities for the class as a whole.

Criterion B. Students try to keep up with their class learning achievements.
Indicators:
The student when in class does not disturb the learning of his/her colleagues.
The student shows an interest in his/her colleagues' learning achievements.
The student accepts the help of his peers.
The student asks his/her colleagues and teachers for help.
The student tries to fulfil the tasks he/she is asked to do.
The student manages to learn specific input when he/she is previously prepared for it.
In spite of many blanks, the student keeps abreast of the subjects covered.
The student keeps up with his/her colleagues at medium level.
The student in some subjects shows a high successful rate.

Criterion C. The student works autonomously at school.
Indicators:
The student with SEN has lunch with his/her other classmates.
The student with SEN is actively involved in school parties.
When having a break, the student with SEN socialises with his/her peers without SEN.
The student with SEN moves around all areas of his/her school.
The student moves to new school areas when asked to do so.
The student manages to independently use his/her card.
The student is able to take his/her medication at school (if necessary).
The student manages to inform other people when he/she feels unwell.
The student takes part in activities carried out in clubs, churches, scouts, other gathering associations, etc..
The student participates in associations inside the school.

Criterion D. The student jnteracts with-non-teaching personnel
Indicator:
The student looks spontaneously for some non-teaching people he/she knows.

Criterion E. The student is motivated to receive support.

Indicators:

The student shows enthusiasm for the activities of his/her support teams.

The student acknowledges that the support he/she is given helps him/her to participate more and better in class.

The student is compliant during the hours of support.

The student feels that the support he/she is given helps him/her to feel more secure in his/her relationships with his/her colleagues.

Criterion F. The student has both personal autonomy and a social life outside the school and these are adapted to their age.

Indicators:

The student holds a purse and is able to manage small amounts of money.

The student uses a mobile phone with discretion.

The student is able to access information from the Internet.

The student travels on the school bus.

The student has friends outside the school.

The student is invited to his/her colleagues' parties.

The student knows how to behave in a restaurant.

The student knows how to behave in public places like coffee shops.

The student maintains age-adjusted behaviour in churches, museums, shops, shows and places alike.

Table 1. Inclusion happens when...

INCLUSION REQUIRES... STUDENT-CENTRED PLANNING ...
IT HAPPENS WHEN:

Criterion A. The student participates in the preparation of his/her Individual Educational Programme (IEP) and the school accepts his/her contributions.

Indicators:

The student shows interest in the teaching materials.

The student shows to have talents and special abilities beyond the academic competences.

The student is able to self-evaluate his/her performance.

The student has expectations that fit the expectations of his/her family.

The student knows what he/she wants to become in the future.

The student speaks proudly about the activities he/she does at school.

The student contributes with positive suggestions for his/her Individual Educational Program (IEP).

Criterion B. The student in Transition to Adult Life (TAL) participates in the elaboration of his Transition Individual Programme (TIP)**.**

Indicators:

The student shows a clear preference for some activities.

The student and his/her family contribute to the preparation of his/her TIP, choosing areas of interest for internship.

The student joins visits to various places in his/her community aiming to find vocational tendencies.

The student shows interest in a professional occupation.

The student complies with the rules of the place where he/she carries out his/her internship.

The student has a healthy relationship with those responsible for the internship sites.

The student is assiduous and always arrives on time.

Table 2. Inclusion requires… Student-Centred Planning.

Table 3. Inclusion happens when…

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS FROM THE RECOGNITION OF STUDENTS' RIGHTS?
WHAT HAPPENS IF...?

Criterion A. The student is aware of both his/her rights and duties.

Indicators

The student is aware of both his/her rights and duties.
The student is able to proclaim his/her rights.
The student knows his/her school rules of behaviour.
The student complies with school rules.
The student shows sufficient knowledge about the way his/her school works.

Criterion B. The student is able to read the information available at school.
Indicators
The student is able to read some information from his/her school newspaper.
The student is able to read and understand school signs.

Criterion C. The student feels safe at school.
Indicators
The student feels safe at school and shows no fears inside the school.
The student sees the CRI and Special Education technicians as a protecting body.

Table 3. Inclusion happens when…

Using the Checklist

This Checklist does not intend to be an objective measuring instrument and, for this reason, we suggest that teachers and other professionals who know the students well conclude it by the end of the school year.

The marking system operates on a nominal Likert scale, being scaled in four points: 1 represents "never" and 4 represents "always".

The results are not an objective value, and in each year the evaluation is independent of the one made in a previous year because there are interferences caused by changes in the environment, changes in the nature of people's interactions and changes in the actual development of the child/adolescent.

There is a recognized risk here because we do not have a reference standard.

We assume, however, that the term for comparison, when necessary, should be from students of the same chronological age, the same school and the same social cultural environment, according to the People's Rights Convention.

One of the possibilities available is to use this list as an aid to plan the Individual Educational Programmes (IEP). This way, teachers and other members of staff will not rely only on regular programs, adapted curricula or development scales as a basis to plan the IEP.

Furthermore, if learning objectives are established in order to consolidate some of the behaviours set out in the Checklist, it will be clearer for everyone to understand what is intended when a student is in class with his/her colleagues. It will also shed some light on how parents can effectively contribute for the development of their children.

This document is not intended to solve all the problems related to school inclusion, but with the indicators previously described, it could be used as a bridge for dialogue with teachers of special education, teachers of regular education, non-teaching members of staff and also with the students' families on a more tangible basis.

3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

educational support model. This model is still predominant for the special education support teams within the regular school contexts.

One of the changes we felt necessary to be taken on board is the shift from a support model aimed at the rehabilitation or recovery from a deficiency or a disability to another model that focuses on supporting the SEN student's participation in class and in school activities. This latter model will focus on supporting the growth of feelings of belonging, feelings of safety and valorisation through the implementation of student-centred planning, and the promotion of equal rights in order for us to achieve the ultimate goal: inclusion.

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