

Models of Educational Support Provided for Students with Special Educational Needs in the European Union

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Abstract: The article presents the models of educational support, based on Human Ecology Theory, provided for students with special educational needs in the European Union inclusive schools. It has been pointed out that the presented models are based mainly on cooperation of different partners; and different countries present varied experiences in their implementation. It is, therefore, recommended to prepare the partners from the support networks to cooperate at the levels of different systems by using the international exchange of expertise.

Key words: educational support, special educational needs, European Union

1. Introduction

In recent years, educational policy has undergone significant changes in terms of models of support. In the traditional model, responsibility for meeting the special educational needs of students or individuals has been borne either by individual persons (special educator, teacher, assistant), or “external” experts. Although the assistance of external experts still remains available; in a newer approach, before asking for help from outside, schools are expected to benefit first from their own resources and programs, while building on mutual cooperation between staff employed at the school. Local schools are encouraged to create networks of mutual support in order to share resources, joint problem solving and the development of competences, which is made available to all teachers and students. “Cooperation” has become the key term for the delivery of support (Lunt et al., 1994). It can take place at different levels, both inter-institutional and school or class levels, and involves various models. As they usually overlap, it is sometimes difficult to clearly separate one from another. In order to present the most popular models in a logical way the systems described in Human Ecology Theory were taken into consideration.

The aim of the paper is to describe different models of special educational support offered within the macrosystem, egzsystem, mezosystem and microsystem. Models of support offered under each system are illustrated with examples taken from the latest Eurypedia Report on Special Education Needs Provision within Mainstream Education.

2. Models of Educational Support Provided for Students with Special Educational Needs

Various models of special educational support have been introduced as the means to allow students with

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special educational needs to be included into mainstream settings. Westwood (2002) describing the changing nature of special educational support, suggests the following models: clusters and networks, collaboration consultation model, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCO), helping strategies within a classroom and the resource room model. Helping strategies within a classroom include various ways of assisting a student either by computer-assisted instruction or an extra person. The additional person is usually another teacher (support teacher, team teaching), paraprofessional (teachers aids and paraprofessionals, parents, volunteer helpers, college and university students) or peer (peer tutoring, cross-age tutoring).

Most of the models proposed by Westwood are based on mutual cooperation. The resource room model involves usually individual work with students outside the classroom, but resource room expert can also provide a student or a class teacher with advice concerning their work in a class. Moreover, it is highly recommended that a teacher and special educator cooperate closely with each other sharing information about the children, their progress and teaching materials.

More recently, lists of Specific Support Measures has been developed as a tool to describe models of support offered to students with special educational needs in different EU countries; these are available at the EURYDICE database. The following categories of support models are taken into account: additional support with specialist teachers, special teaching methods/materials, special adaptation of the curriculum, liaison with non-educational social welfare institutions, special arrangement for evaluation, reduced class sizes and alterations to school building facilities (Eurypedia, 2015).

The aim of this paper is to describe the models of educational support (Zamkowska, 2009), which take into consideration categories enlisted by P. Westwood and mentioned in the EURYDICE database. Its structure is based on Bronfenbrenner's (Berger, 2012) Human Ecology Theory. The model describes the educational support offered to a child by various institutions, therefore, the family is considered only in terms of parents playing an advisory and assistive role to a school support team and a teacher, in contrast to the ecological model described by Kirk (2011).

While developing the model, the deductive approach, beginning with a description of educational environments from the widest macrosystem to narrow microsystem, was introduced. The suggested order does not indicate the relative importance of various models. It describes the models of support offered to pupils at different levels, either directly (e.g., by the general teacher in the classroom) or indirectly (e.g., through collaboration with professionals) (Zamkowska, 2009).

It should be noted that both the systems as well as their elements do not exist independently; they are interdependent. Furthermore, it is not possible to precisely attribute each element to one system only. For example, cooperation between the school and the support center can take place both at the level of the ecosystem, if school as an institution is taken into account, and at the microsystem, if this involves consultation provided by a class teacher or by a professional from the center (Zamkowska, 2009).

2.1 Macrosystem

The macrosystem is based on social and cultural conventions, which have changed in the process of historical development (Müller, 1997). It concerns the wider context of social support and consists of a system of beliefs and social attitudes regarding individuals with disabilities, traditional and contemporary views on the education of persons with disabilities, special education tradition and the current political and legal system of education and services available for persons with disabilities. The macrosystem influences the place of each

country in the process towards inclusion. This process has been recommended in international conventions and declarations promoting inclusion of students with SEN into the general education system: Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UN, 1993), the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2008).

The critical issue determining the way of introducing these recommendations was the interpretation of crucial concepts of “inclusion” and “least restrictive environment”. The concept of inclusion can be, however, understood and implemented in different ways (Powers, 1996). For the proponents of full inclusion, inclusive education is the unquestionable moral imperative, the only acceptable model. The “least restrictive environment” can be provided only in the neighborhood school. However, only a few countries (e.g., Italy, Spain) are focused mainly on educating children within the mainstream, not rejecting totally the separate education sector. In Spain most of the students are included into the general education system, only the ones whose educational needs cannot be met within the framework of educational support provided in mainstream schools, because of their serious disability or behavioral disorders, may be educated in specific Special Needs Education centers (Organic Law of Education, 2006). Similarly, in Italy students with disabilities and with specific learning disabilities (DSA) attend mainstream schools. There is not a separate provision, except for a few special institutes for the blind and deaf, which existed prior to the rules concerning integration, and schools for disabled minors or minors with profound disabilities (Eurydice, 2015).

However, most of the EU countries (e.g., Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Poland) have been developing a continuum of services between special schools and mainstream, usually including different forms of educational support within integrated and inclusive education systems. Inclusion is understood not as an imperative, but rather as the right of the child to have access to mainstream education balanced with the right to effective education, appropriate to their specific needs. Therefore the continuum of provision is being developed in order to meet the individual child’s needs in the best possible way.

The whole continuum of special pedagogical support is offered, for example, in the Danish folkeskole; however, it is always the pupils’ needs which decide which option is preferred:

- **Extra teacher or team teaching during some or all class hours.** Choosing this option, the pupils keep their relation with the class and follow the common curriculum, not missing the teaching going on in the class. This model can involve an extra teacher working in a class during some or all teaching hours, further teaching differentiation or team teaching. The planning of the special pedagogical support is made by the team.
- **Extra teaching hours after classes.** The pupils follow the ordinary teaching and can maintain a relationship with the class, but also benefit from special support in one or more subjects organised before or after the lessons. The planning of the special pedagogical support is done within the teachers’ team.
- **Special pedagogical support takes place parallel with the ordinary teaching time.** The pupil attends his/her class, but receives extra teaching in some subjects parallel with the ordinary teaching. The decision about this model is made by the head-teacher upon pedagogical-psychological assessment and consultation with the parents, and if the pupil does not get the full outcome of the two previous models.
- **Education in both an ordinary class and a special class.** The pupil attends either an ordinary class or special class.
- **A special class or a special school.** The pupil has no relation with mainstream class peers and all

teaching is provided in a special class located in an ordinary folkeskole or a special school.

- **Day treatment center.** The child is placed in a center following the decision of social services (Eurydice, 2015).

2.2 Egzosystem

The egzosystem of educational support includes the level of cooperation between the school and other schools, supporting institutions and local authorities. Inter-institutional cooperation enables the development of a support network. Cooperation between schools is usually informal, but may also be formal, based on mutual, especially in the countries, where it is recommended by the educational law (i.e., England, Ireland and the Netherlands) (Westwood, 2002).

In the Netherlands the institutional cooperation is obligatory. Since the first of August 2014, when the Act on Appropriate Education came into force, mainstream and special schools have formed regional **consortia** to ensure that all children can be placed at the school that best meets their needs. A group of cooperative school boards decides on the sort of guidance that will be available. Resources are allocated to the regional consortia responsible for deploying the funds to support special needs children in mainstream education.

In some EU countries (e.g., in Austria, Portugal, Sweden, Bulgaria, Greece, Malta), the coordination of support has been ascribed to former special schools transformed into resource centers for inclusion. In Greece the Centers of Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support of Special Educational Needs (KEDDY) are responsible for assisting the process of educational support, namely:

- “Making assessment of pupils’ special educational needs and suggesting the most appropriate educational provision;
- Developing the Individualized Education Programs in cooperation with the classroom teachers and the Special Teaching Personnel, as well as the implementation of other scientific and social support measures;
- Designing the corresponding group programs of psycho-pedagogical and teaching support and creative activities;
- Making individualized reports and suggesting proposals of modern educational approaches, innovative aids and assistive technology, supporting inclusive education;
- Providing counseling, information and training to all stakeholders involved in the educational process and to the parents;
- Suggesting alternative ways of testing and evaluation where appropriate;
- Monitoring and assessing the educational progress of pupils, in cooperation with the Special Education school advisors, the mainstream education school advisors, the Special Teaching Staff advisors, the school heads and the teaching staff being responsible to implement the program”.

In Austria, to ensure inclusive education, regional coordination of special educational measures has been introduced. Both regional school boards and special educational centres, usually located at special schools, share relevant responsibility. They provide identification of special educational needs; transfer of special educational competences; special educational support quality; advice and support for teachers and parents; as well as teaching materials and staff resources.

In Portugal the network of 74 Resources Centres for Inclusion (CRI), certified by the Ministry of Education and Science, has been developed. The CRI, in cooperation with mainstream schools, provide specialized support for the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs. Moreover, the clusters of schools are supported by a

national network of 25 ICT Resources Centres for Special Education, which assess pupils' needs for assistive technology.

In Luxemburg the multi-professional teams of the Service for Special Education offer individual support for pupils with special educational needs integrated into mainstream education and help teachers and parents of children facing psychological, pedagogical or educational problems. Composed of experts with different specializations (e.g., psychomotors, psychologists, educators), they provide mobile ("ambulant") support at a district level.

2.3 Mezosystem

Inclusive education assumes that a school model and all of its elements should be incorporated to create an environment ready to accept students with different needs and abilities. This "whole school" approach considers it necessary to make changes involving the whole school, both its policy and structure, organization and allocation of resources, ethos, program and teaching methods, as well as mutual relationships, etc. (Leicester, 2000). When students with physical disabilities are included, alterations to school building facilities are necessary as well.

As these complex actions require the cooperation of many different partners, it seems highly recommended to use in the planning and implementation of activities applied at school and classroom level the model of collaborative consultation. This model is based on the assumption that in addressing challenging situations, a teacher can achieve more in co-operation with other specialists than trying to simply implement ready-made solutions provided by external experts. Often, in fact, taking into account the complexity of the situation in the classroom, these ready-made solutions are not effective and the teachers are not involved in the process of their creation. The co-operation in terms of special education implies that two or more persons who have enough expertise will work together on developing appropriate intervention strategies implemented at the level of class or school. The consultant in this model can be a supportive teacher or school coordinator, a specialist from a support center (e.g., speech therapist, psychologist, psychotherapist). Their role is rather joint development of an action plan, than implementation of ready-made solutions.

The cooperation consultation model emphasizes mutual cooperation of equal team members. All participants are responsible for problem solving, as well as the success or failure of the implemented solutions. This model assumes joint planning, sharing responsibility and resources, as well as willingness to invest their time and effort in getting to know the opinion, values and terminology used by other team members.

The model of cooperation and consultation uses both the direct and indirect approach. The choice of a suitable approach depends on the class, the student's needs and teacher's preferences. For instance, conducting lessons by a teacher and a special education teacher working together, involves a direct approach. The indirect approach takes place when the professional (speech therapist, special educator, etc.) provide, on an occasional basis, a class teacher with guidance or materials to work with the student with special educational needs (McCormick et al., 1997).

Some authors, given the above criteria, distinguish two different support models: the model of consultations given to the teacher (consulting teacher model) as an indirect approach and a model of cooperation of teachers (cooperative teacher model, co-teaching) as a direct approach (Idol, 2006).

The ideas of cooperation in a larger group are incorporated in the models of a special educational coordinator and support team. Both of them are implemented in the mesosystem of special educational support. The mesosystem can be described as a school system including the following elements: school support network, a

model of support, school work program for students with SEN and school climate focused on their social integration. The school support network is usually coordinated by support teams and/or Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). In Malta the coordination of the service provision for pupils with special needs attending the mainstream primary schools and/or the resource centres is ensured by Inclusion Co-ordinators (INCO).

In the UK all mainstream schools and academies must designate a qualified teacher working at the school to be the SENCO (the Special Educational Needs Coordinator), sometimes known as the Inclusion Coordinator. A new code of practice states that if “the teacher has not been the SENCO at that school or any other school for a total period of more than twelve months they must achieve a National Award in Special Educational Needs Co-ordination (a postgraduate course accredited by a recognized higher education provider) within three years of appointment” (DfE, 2015).

The role of the SENCO is both strategic in terms of developing SEN policy and provision, as well being operational in terms of day to day coordination within the school. The SENCOs are responsible for a whole set of different activities concerning mainly operation of the school’s SEN policy, liaising with different partners, advising fellow teachers and coordinating provision for students with SEN. Their responsibilities may include:

- “overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school’s SEN policy;
- Co-ordinating provision for children with SEN;
- Liaising with the relevant Designated Teacher where a looked after pupil has SEN;
- Advising on the graduated approach to providing SEN support;
- Advising on the deployment of the school’s delegated budget and other resources to meet pupils’ needs effectively;
- Liaising with parents of pupils with SEN;
- Liaising with early years providers, other schools, educational psychologists, health and social care professionals, and independent or voluntary bodies;
- Being a key point of contact with external agencies, especially the local authority and its support services;
- Liaising with potential next providers of education to ensure a pupil and their parents are informed about options and a smooth transition is planned;
- Working with the head teacher and school governors to ensure that the school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010) with regard to reasonable adjustments and access arrangements;
- Ensuring that the school keeps the records of all pupils with SEN up to date” (DfE, 2015).

A brief analysis of the above listed tasks leads to the conclusion that being a coordinator requires performing many different roles: a leader, adviser, assessor, program planner, consultant, liaison officer, record-keeper, decision-maker, in-service-trainer, etc. To meet the requirements of all these roles it is necessary for the coordinator to acquire a whole range of appropriate knowledge and skills (Winter & Kilpatrick, 1998), and at the same time, not being overloaded by additional administrative duties that can be taken over by any other persons. The new code of practice, issued in the UK in 2015, recommends that “the school should ensure that the SENCO has sufficient time and resources to carry out these functions. This should include providing the SENCO with sufficient administrative support and time away from teaching to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities in a similar way to other important strategic roles within a school” (DfE, 2015).

The second model available in the mesosystem is the support team. Support teams play a crucial role in a school support network. They are developed to provide a suitable organizational structure to enhance cooperation

between mainstream teachers and other professionals mainly for making a multidisciplinary assessment of SEN students' needs and abilities, and developing and monitoring the Individual Educational Plans. A comprehensive list of their tasks would include several or all of the following:

- Discussing students' needs with co-educators and planning ways of addressing those needs.
- Listening to colleagues' concerns about a particular teaching situation.
- Assisting families with their students who are in a transition period from early childhood education programs to kindergarten, from elementary to middle school, from middle school to high school, or from high school to work or postsecondary education.
- Recommending classroom alternatives as first-to-be-tried interventions for students with special learning and behavioral needs.
- Providing direct assistance to colleagues, as in co-teaching or demonstration teaching for special needs.
- Leading or participating in professional development activities that focus on special needs.
- Locating and sharing resources, instructional materials, and teaching strategies.
- Using technology for efficient, productive interactions among colleagues, students, and their families.
- Engaging in classroom observations, assessment of students, and evaluation of services.
- Serving on curriculum committees, textbook committees, extracurricular activities committees, and school advisory councils.
- Following through and following up on educational issues and concerns with co-educators, students and their families, and community members.
- Networking with other educational professionals and agencies that can be resources for students' needs and school improvements in general (Dettmer, Knackendoffel & Thurston, 2005).

The typical support team involves several professionals, including special education teachers, classroom teachers, school administrators, related services and support personnel and families and community agencies. Creating an efficiently cooperating good team is not, according to Ebersold (2003), achieved spontaneously, but requires consideration of many differences between its members. Members of effective support groups should therefore acquire knowledge and skills useful for working in a team (Dettmer, Knackendoffel & Thurston, 2005).

In France a multi-disciplinary team is composed of physicians, occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers, etc., who assess disabled persons needs based on their life plan and suggest a personalized schooling project (PPS). The assessment concerns also the pupils' needs for adapted educational tools (a Braille keyboard, adapted peripherals, specific software, etc.) as part of PPS. The PPS ensures the consistency of all aspects of the disabled pupils' education path. The children/pupils' families are actively involved in working it out. It is revised regularly (at least once a year) by an educational monitoring team composed of all persons directly responsible for implementing the PPS, first of all the children' parents and their teachers. A special education teacher is responsible for organizing and coordinating this team. If it is necessary, the monitoring team makes suggestions to the multi-disciplinary team concerning supporting the child's development or modifying the PPS.

2.4 Microsystem

The microsystem concerns the class level with particular emphasis on teacher-student and student-student relationships. The main source of support at this level is a competent teacher, but having in a class several students with special educational needs is very demanding. One of the main difficulties the teacher faces is paying enough time to an individual student while working with the whole class. It is necessary to involve other persons in the

network of special educational support provision. It's usually done by co-teaching, peer tutoring, or cross-age tutoring, offering assistance (aids, paraprofessionals), parents' or volunteers' support (Westwood, 2002). Their assistance enables a reduction in the amount of time spent by a teacher on interaction with the whole class, allowing him or her to spend more time on direct work with pupils with SEN or enables a teacher to work with the rest of the class while students with SEN are assisted by another teacher or assistant.

Support may be provided in different ways: in or outside the classroom, during a lesson in class or during class taking place outside of the classroom (resource room model), directly by the professional or indirectly by a teacher consulting a specialist. It may be provided by one person at a time working with the student individually or in co-operation with another professional or paraprofessional.

The model involving cooperation of two or more teachers is called co-teaching. Its key element is the shared responsibility both in planning and delivering instruction. Co-teaching is not necessary for every inclusionary situation, but should be used when special needs of a significant number of students or smaller number of students with more serious or/and complex needs should be met. Co-teaching usually occurs for a certain period of time, e.g., one class period each day, certain lessons, certain days of the week (Dettmer, Knackendoffel & Thurston 2005).

Professionals should often vary approaches to co-teaching in order to present their lesson to heterogeneous groups in the most efficient way. Some examples of the most popular approaches are the following: One Teach, One observe; One Teach One Assist, Station teaching, Parallel Teaching, Alternative Teaching, Team Teaching (Potts & Howard, 2011). Struggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie (2007) conducted a meta-synthesis on 32 qualitative researches on co-teaching and found out that the special education teacher provided more assistance than teaching and the most often used model is One Teach, One Assist. Therefore, it is crucial to organize the co-teaching in the most efficient way and train both teachers to co-teach effectively (Fattig & Taylor, 2007; Beninghof, 2012; Fitzell, 2010).

Support teachers are employed in many EU countries (e.g., Greece, Italy, Ireland, Poland, Romania). They have received specific initial training and are part of the team of regular teachers. Support teachers participate in all the activities concerning planning and assessment, especially in developing, introducing and assessment of the Individual Educational Plan (IEP).

While a support teacher has received initial training in special education, and participates in all the educational activities concerning planning and assessment, the personal assistant (the term used in Czech Republic) or Learning Support Assistant (LSA) is not a professional. He or she rather provides pupils with social services, e.g., with caring for themselves, with travelling to school, etc.. The LSA, employed in the UK and Malta, plays a more educational role, assisting students with SEN in the classroom on a one-to-one basis or on a shared basis depending on the students' needs. They provide additional support to enhance SEN students' learning experience and maintain their motivation. In the UK, a higher level teaching assistant, who has to meet national standards, may cover planned absences and allow teachers time to plan and mark.

Moreover, a student with learning difficulties can also get efficient help from a fellow student (peer-tutoring) or from a higher grade (cross-age tutoring) student. According to Westwood (2002) peer-tutors often use simple, direct language and sometimes demonstrates things faster and more efficiently than a teacher. Nevertheless, it's worth mentioning, that in order to make tutees gain confidence from learning with an older pupil, it is recommended to introduce a peer tutoring programme and teach peer tutors coaching skills (Topping, 2001; Tolhurst & Harris, 2015).

Another way of organizing support at microsystem level is to reduce the number of pupils in classes where children with special educational needs are educated. In some EU countries (Greece, Italy, Poland, Malta, Slovenia) the number of students in an inclusive class is reduced. In Greece the presence of each pupil with disability and special educational needs allows for the reduction of the number of pupils in the classroom by three, and pupils are equally distributed to the classes of the same grade. The Integration Classes in mainstream schools consist of 3 to 12 pupils.

In Italy, the maximum size of a class where SEN pupils are educated is 20. The number of students is reduced under certain conditions: if it is necessary to assure an appropriate education process and if the integration process is supported by a project defining strategies and methods adopted by class teachers in cooperation with the support teacher and other members of the school staff. In Malta, the number of students in a class is reduced from a maximum of thirty to twenty-six if any one student has special educational needs. In Poland the size of an integrated class is reduced to 15-20 pupils, with 3-5 students with special educational needs.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Analysis of the models of educational support offered in the European Union countries for pupils with special educational needs leads to general conclusions on each system. At the level of the macrosystem, it is observed that the EU countries, despite the explicit pursuit of inclusive education, do not leave it as the only possible option. Even in countries with a clear predominance of inclusive education, students with specific, serious and complex disorders are offered education in special classes and schools. This is due to the specificity of disorders, existing facilities as well as the country's traditions and experience.

At the level of egzosystem, most countries are expanding the continuum of educational support offered to pupils in inclusive education, mainly using models based on cooperation. Some countries, like the Netherlands, apply compulsory cooperation at regional level; creating clusters of schools. Others establish separate institutions — support centers for providing expertise, advice and teaching materials for teachers, parents, and students. In many countries schools are obliged or encouraged to cooperate or form a support network at inter-institutional level.

At the level of mesosystem, school policy concerning special educational needs is, in more and more countries, developed and monitored by a supportive team and special education needs coordinators. This model allows the implementation of a “whole school approach”, of working systematically and collectively, taking advantage of school resources and if necessary of using external assistance. These actions should contribute to changing the school culture, and its organization, and creating a friendly climate for inclusion of pupils with special educational needs.

At the level of microsystem, cooperation takes place mainly in the form of co-teaching, and assistance. There is an increasing tendency to offer special educational support in the class rather than outside the class (resource room model), although the latter there is also an option if it is more beneficial for the student.

In order to include the suggested models efficiently, it is recommended to prepare the school staff and future teachers to collaborate with each other at institutional, school and classroom level. Forming collaborative teams or networks should not be implemented as another administrative procedure, as such it might not be beneficial. It rather demands gaining collaborative, communication and organizational skills. As various EU countries are at different levels when it comes to implementation of support models, there is therefore a need to exchange experiences and to increase their expertise in this area.

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