

The Universe of Supervision: An Inclusive Approach within the Teacher Training Domain

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Abstract: Social and cultural transformations pose daily challenges to the educational field, particularly with regard to its objectives, functions, roles and the performance of those involved. This naturally leads to a need for (re)thinking the training of its professionals. The present study is integrated within this framework, developed with the aim of both assessing the quality of the inclusive approach in the supervision of teacher education, as well as creating proposals for future implementation based on the results, in order to eliminate or reduce gaps and weaknesses which may be detected. Based on these objectives, the research process was developed using a quantitative approach with the higher education public institutions of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (Portugal), which include the Supervised Teaching Practice course (Teacher Training) in their curricula. The study included a total of 340 participants, divided into Student Interns (n = 245), Teaching Supervisors of Higher Education Institutions (n = 38) and Cooperating Teachers of the Home Institutions (n = 57). Questionnaires were used as the data collection instrument for each group in the sample. The literature review and data analysis demonstrate the need for rethinking the form and content used in inclusive practices in the supervision of teaching education.

Key words: higher education in Portugal, pedagogical supervision, training, inclusion

1. Introduction

In a society which refers to itself as *inclusive*, the education of learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is carried out partially in regular classes, under the slogan “a school for all” (Sassaki, 2010; Rodrigues, 2013; Morgado, 2014). This is an attempt to guarantee a type of education capable of going beyond the limits of a democratic society, making an effort to accommodate the differences of all its members (Vilela-Ribeiro, Benite & Vilela, 2013). Our focus on this issue stems from our awareness of the depth and complexity of the long road that is still ahead of us, combined with the (still) blatant absence of training and sometimes lack of sensitivity towards SEN within the classroom by the various people involved in the school (Morgado, 2014). The focus of this study is on the thoughts of intern students (IS), supervisors from higher education institutions (SHEI) and cooperating teachers from the higher education institutions (CTHEI) concerning their inclusive approach within the teacher training field. This study refers to the initial training phase of teachers and was developed with two public higher education institutions (HEI) in the North of Portugal (University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro and

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Polytechnic Institute of Bragança). As such, the study included the fields of pedagogic supervision, special education and curriculum development, with an integrative and multidimensional perspective of both teacher training and teaching.

2. Literature Review

During the initial phase of training teachers, pedagogical practices play a key role in the problematization, planning, experimentation and coordination between theoretical and practical knowledge (Caires & Almeida, 2003; Alarcão & Tavares, 2013; Albuquerque, Silva, Resend E, Gonçalves & Gomes, 2015; Iza & Souza Neto, 2015). Pedagogical practices can be said to be at the center of training (VONK, 1985; Morgado, 2014; Benites, Sarti & Souza Neto, 2015), as they are essential components of the curriculum and the profession (Formosinho, 2009). They provide contact with the reality and the multidimensionality of the teaching profession, as well as the applicability of the acquired/consolidated knowledge and practices of their initial training (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987; Caires & Almeida, 2003; Cyrino & Sousa Neto, 2015). With regards to integration and inclusion, this training process plays a key role in helping teachers with the needs and challenges of a learner with SEN (Sassaki, 2010; Correia, 2013; Correia; Serrano, 2013; Morgado, 2014). However, despite the global perspective found in relation to respecting and protecting students, in reality it is difficult to “think in an innovative manner with the conceptual frameworks and the words which are currently available to us” (Rodrigues, 2013, p. 79). All educational activity and the entire teaching-learning process will only be effective when we understand that “we are not only training professionals; we are creating a profession” (Nóvoa, 2014, p. 24).

3. Research Method

This study uses a quantitative approach (*ex post facto*), by means of a survey administered via a closed-question questionnaire (via *Google Drive*). The data were later analysed using SPSS 22.0. The questionnaire was administered to 340 participants (SHEI [n = 38]; CTHI [n = 57]; SI [n = 245]) of 26 courses in the 2013-2014 academic year.

4. Results

The analysis of the data (see Tables 1 and 2) shows that the teaching staff surveyed (SHEI, 52.6% [n = 20]; CTHI, 47.4% [n = 27]) have relevant experience as supervisors; however, they show a clear lack of specific training in Special Education (SHEI, 81.6% [n = 31]; CTHEI, 68.4% [n = 39]).

On the other hand, the IS (Table 3) are practically unanimous concerning this topic, not due to their training, but to their interest in the specific field instead (IS, 95.5% [n = 234]).

Table 1 Academic Qualification

Academic qualification	SHEI		CTHI	
	N	%	N	%
With university training in special education	7	18.4	18	31.6
Without university training in special education	31	<u>81.6</u>	39	<u>68.4</u>
Total	38	100	57	100

Table 2 Professional Experience

Professional Experience	SHEI		CTHI	
	N	%	N	%
Up to 5 years	10	26.3	18	31.6
Between 6 and 10 years	8	21.1	12	21.1
>10 years	20	<u>52.6</u>	27	<u>47.4</u>
Total	38	100	57	100

Table 3 Interest in Topic

Intern student (higher education institution)	SI	
	N	%
Shows interest and knowledge of the topic	234	<u>95.5</u>
Shows no interest or knowledge of the topic	11	4.5
Total	245	100.0

Nevertheless, additional and extracurricular training were rarely taken into consideration in the HEI (Question 2: 35. 0% [n = 119]) and these questions are only valued when confronted with real situations in the classroom (Question 4: 45.6% [n = 155]). They deny that this happens (Question 5: 67.9% [n = 231], unless it concerns integration of learners with SEN in regular classes. In addition, a significant number of participants (Question 3: 35.6% [n = 121]) claim the HEI *never* provided any training related to writing dissertations. The participants consider the course units (CU) of introduction to teaching practice — ITP (Table 4) as preparatory or propaedeutic (Question 1: 82.9% [n = 282]), so that they can be exposed to and use some of these strategies and techniques in inclusive classrooms (Question 9: 55. 9% [n = 190]).

Table 4 SEN and STP (Part 1)

Q1	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know	No Answer
	<u>82.9%</u>	6.2%	8.2%	1.8%	0.9%
Q2	Never	Rarely	Enough Times	Several Times	Whenever Necessary
	19.1%	35.0%	21.2%	17.9%	6.8%
Q3	Never	Rarely	Enough Times	Several Times	Whenever Necessary
	35.6%	26.8%	21.8%	5.9%	10.0%
Q4	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know	No Answer
	45.6%	27.2%	21.5%	1.8%	3.8%
Q5	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know	No Answer
	23.5%	67.9%	5.9%	1.8%	0.9%
Q6	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know	No Answer
	<u>91.5%</u>	1.8%	5.9%	-	0.9%
Q7	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know	No Answer
	<u>87.9%</u>	1.8%	9.4%	-	0.9%
Q8	Never	Rarely	Enough Times	Several Times	Whenever Necessary
	14.1%	<u>40.0%</u>	22.9%	14.1%	8.8%
Q9	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know	No Answer
	<u>55.9%</u>	22.9%	14.1%	3.5%	3.5%
Q10	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know	No Answer
	21.8%	<u>59.7%</u>	15.0%	1.8%	1.8%
Q11	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know	No Answer
	72.9%	2.4%	22.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Q12	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know	No Answer
	20.0%	<u>45.9%</u>	21.8%	10.6%	1.8%
Q13	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't Know	No Answer
	23.5%	<u>45.6%</u>	23.8%	6.2%	0.9%

Nonetheless, the participants consider that the theme of inclusion (Question 8: 40.0% [n = 136]) is rarely taken into account in the preparation, planning and monitoring of supervised lessons, perhaps due to what they answer in questions 6 (91.5% [n = 311]) and 7 (87.9% [n = 299]), where they indicate certain gaps in the specialized training of their supervising professors, which could be partially resolved with additional CUs in this area for training teachers and supervisors (Question 10: 59.7% [n = 203]). The overwhelming majority of participants think it is important to have a basic course book (Question 11: 72.9% [n = 248]), implying that currently there is not enough support on the topic (Question 12: 45.9% [n = 156]). Finally, nearly half of the participants do not consider themselves to be personally or professionally prepared to work with learners who have SEN (Question 13: 45.6% [n = 155]). In general (Table 5), the participants state they have had direct contact with learners with *moderate learning difficulties* (Question 16: 18.2% [n = 62]) and that an action based on inclusive strategies can have a significantly broader, more decisive and satisfactory role (Question 17: 61.5% [n = 209]). However, they believe that learners with SEN should follow *their own/adapted curriculum* (Question 14: 57.9% [n = 197]) with a *learner-centred perspective* (Question 15: 91.5% [n = 311]).

Table 5 SEN and STP (Part 2)

		SHEI/CTHEI/SI	
		N	%
Q14	Normal Curriculum	112	32.9%
	Own/adapted curriculum	197	<u>57.9%</u>
	Alternative curriculum	31	9.1%
Q15	Learner-centred perspective	311	<u>91.5%</u>
	Curriculum-centred perspective	29	8.5%
Q16	Hearing impairment	13	3.8
	Motor impairment	28	8.2
	Visual impairment	18	5.3
	Slight learning disability	41	12.1
	Moderate learning disability	62	<u>18.2</u>
	Severe learning disability	32	9.4
	Multiple disabilities	32	9.4
	Serious behavioral issues	24	7.1
	Never had contact with any learner with SEN in the classroom	58	17.1
	Others	32	9.4
Q17	Among learners of gypsy ethnicity	34	10.0
	Among learners of different religions	3	0.9
	Among learners with drug or alcohol-related problems	27	7.9
	Among foreign learners with difficulties adapting to the culture and language	27	7.9
	Among learners with clear socio-economic difficulties	23	6.8
	In all the situations listed above	209	<u>61.5</u>
	Others	17	5.0

Based on our observations, there seems to be a need for significant changes (on a personal, professional, and institutional level) which should be implemented as soon as possible by those with the power to do so. At the level of curriculum and academic training (institutional level), the current curriculum must be adjusted/alterd in order

to include required CUs related to SEN, as well as Multicultural Education, in which the issues of inclusion and exclusion are addressed in depth. The HEI should organize more events to promote awareness of issues related to SEN among the entire educational community (including SHEI, CTHEI and SI). Also at the institutional level, the HEI should develop specific rules so that the teaching staff which promotes, prepares, monitors and evaluates the Internship (and related seminars) can also become specialized in the field of Special Education. At the personal level, the staff involved in internships with SEN (the interns and their students), who do not have special training in this field (as seen in this study), should actively search for training on their own initiative (or institutional requirement). A voluntary and well-intentioned practice should not ignore training and monitoring specially directed towards those with SEN.

5. Conclusions

The results of the present study cause us to reflect on ways to provide improvement in the quality of activities and training related to special education, of which the following are highlighted: (1) developing a broad outline for professional competencies which might enable each teacher to act within a multidimensional educational context; (2) constructing a facilitating professional culture, with an integrative and inclusive curricular approach; (3) promoting formative and didactic perspectives which may (re)configure the connection and exchange between subjects, creating new opportunities for discussion and new training perspectives. To sum up, in order to better deal with the complexity of our times, it is crucial that the school be capable of refreshing its outlook on reality, by promoting a more inclusive approach towards pedagogy, demanding certain values and not foregoing anyone.

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Appendices

Questionnaire

Question	Description
1	Do you consider the course units (of the Bachelor's) of IPP (Context Observations, Institutions and Educational Activities; Observation Methods and Techniques; Planning and Evaluation, etc.) to be extremely important in preparing the interns for their Internship (STP) in their current course (Post-graduate – Master's)?
2	Did your higher education institution provide accredited or non-accredited extracurricular training (seminars, lectures, training sessions, etc.) about STP (Internships) and/or about inclusion/Exclusion in education in general?
3	Did your higher education institution provide accredited or non-accredited extracurricular training (seminars, lectures, training sessions, etc.) about how to write a dissertation to be defended in public, which is a required component of the (Internship)?
4	Do you believe supervising professors, cooperating staff and interns only value the issue of inclusion when confronted with a real situation in the classroom?
5	In your opinion, is the issue of Inclusion in the classroom only related to integrating learners with SEN into regular classes?
6	Do you think the supervising professor, cooperating teacher and intern can benefit from a broader type of training in the field of special education, so that they may better address situations in the classroom which require this type of training?
7	Do you think it is advantageous to have a supervisor or cooperating teacher with training in the field of Special education when training intern students, especially for promoting awareness to inclusion?
8	How often is the issue of Inclusion/Exclusion discussed (CTHEI and SHEI) during preparation, planning and teaching of the interns' lessons?
9	Do you know and use any strategy and technique which might be applied in an inclusive classroom?
10	Do you think that the curriculum (higher education) for teacher training (Teaching Qualification) includes sufficient curricular units to prepare a future teacher to observe, evaluate and intervene (as part of the internship) in an inclusive manner?
11	Do you think a manual for simple diagnostics, planning and monitoring would help prepare teaching staff to fulfil their duties more effectively when it terms of inclusion?
12	Do you believe there is enough material that is up-to-date to assist with lesson planning with a more integrative and inclusive approach?
13	Do you feel personally and professionally prepared to help learners with SEN?
14	In your opinion, how should learners with SEN be integrated.
15	In your opinion, which of the following options should a school take when there are learners with SEN?
16	In the classroom, have you ever had contact with any learners with the following SEN (choose only the most significant situation).
17	If you consider Inclusion to go beyond learners with SEN, in which of the following situations (choose only the most significant one) do you think an Inclusive strategy might have a decisive and positive outcome.