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#### Chapter

# Perspective Chapter: Individual Support Services in Inclusive Education – *Pros et Contras* (Polemic)

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#### **Abstract**

Inclusive education needs constant support for its development and improvement. It is a long and demanding process that requires many changes, both in society and its attitude toward the rights and needs of all children to education, as well as in the management of the education system, which certainly implies the provision of various forms of support for inclusive education. From the position of an approach based on human rights, requirements move in the direction of the complete derogation of all segregated environments for children with disabilities; such attitudes are not emphasized on positive experiences in segregation (separate and stimulating education of the gifted, for example). We cannot ignore the need for children with different abilities for additional educational support. But is it reasonable to expect that teachers can respond to all the challenges that inclusive education sets before them in the context of the requirement to adapt the approach to the needs of each child? In polemic, we discuss the power and weakness of mainstream schools to respond to the requirements of the modern concept of inclusive education for all children and the need to keep professional individual educational support services for children who need them.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, polemic, human-rights approach, disabilities, giftedness, mainstream settings, individual support services

#### 1. Introduction

Inclusive education is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn, and develop the skills they need to thrive. Inclusive education means all children are in the same classrooms and schools. It means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded—not only children with disabilities but also speakers of minority languages and others.

Inclusive systems value the unique contributions students of all backgrounds bring to the classroom and allow diverse groups to grow side by side to the benefit of all [1].

For example, UNESCO underlines that every learner matters equally. Yet millions worldwide continue to be excluded from education for reasons that might include sex, gender orientation, ethnic or social origin, language, religion, nationality,

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economic condition, or ability. Inclusive education works to identify all barriers to education and remove them and covers everything from curricula to pedagogy and teaching. UNESCO's work in this area is firstly guided by the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), Sustainable Development Goal 4, and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, emphasizing inclusion and equity as the foundation for quality education [2, 3].

Sustainable Development Goal number 4 contains objective 4.a build and improve educational institutions that are sensitive to children, disabilities, and gender and provide a safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environment for all; and the indicator of achievement of the goal is: percentage of schools that offer basic services, according to the type of services [4]; so, we can understand that the existence and offering of basic support services in schools proves that educational institutions have become more inclusive and provide more adequate education for all children.

But what type of inclusive educational support is needed for students, and which support services are present in schools? And, are these services directly (individually) support to students, or is it support provided to students in a department or group? Are there so-called therapeutic services available as a form of support in school, such as occupational therapy or speech therapy? Who provides expert support to mainstream school students to overcome obstacles in education?

In this article, we argue about these issues (and broader) to justify the need to preserve individual professional support to students in different areas of expertise as solid support in inclusive education in mainstream schools, which has existed for a long time worldwide.

#### 2. Methodology

In our research article, we use the polemic as a methodological approach to achieve an understanding of the proposed solutions and procedures and to reject the solutions that oppose them. We use polemic to argue with the opinions, experiences, acts, and arguments of other researchers. The methodological approach using polemics successfully returns in scientific practice (mainly in humanistic and social sciences) because Stoicism, Epicureanism, or some other ancient systems have become increasingly present in today's theories [5] as the basis of moral systems. Also, today's philosophical discussions are based on the ancient polemic from which they receive the most diverse ideas for consideration, such as Bogdanovski and Nišavić [6], the authors who transferred the polemic to the original theoretical discussion.

Although the term *polemic* is often related to theological considerations, its use in ancient philosophical schools had the greatest significance. In Brill's Dictionary of Religion, polemic is represented as "Here is a rhetorical 'attack strategy' for quarreling: polemics (Gk., polemiké téchne), and identified by irrelevantly aggressive, but overpoweringly argumentational, discourse." [7]. "Such argumentation is called polemics and it commonly contains an aggressive attack on or refutation of the opinions or principles of another and involves the art or practice of disputation or controversy" [8]. Roskam also claims that "the obvious starting point of philosophical polemics is the position of the opponent" [9], while ter Borg concerns that "polemics might be defined as a discursive conflict" [10].

As scientists found, polemics—from πολεμική/polemikḗ (sc. τέχνη/téchnē), "art of war," i.e., hurtful dispute through words—is directed toward topics and is thus objective in its orientation [11]. Peterson notices the basic but also the positive side of the polemics,

describing them as "work on ideas of verbal warfare and destructive debate," while he says that in his study, however, polemical discussions were actually productive forms [12]. Other authors also recognize complex but with positive intent formed debates within polemics, which aim to produce new ideas and improve the future [13–16].

#### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Inclusive education support services

Inclusive education support services include all forms of educational work that assist students with needs for some form of education support, encourage their development and advancement, and their maximum inclusion and social interactions in school groups. Children and students may need additional support in education for various reasons and circumstances: children with disabilities, children with learning problems, migrant children, children of different religions and languages, children from different cultural backgrounds, victims of violence, children victims of child trafficking, children victims of abuse and exploitation, but also children with giftedness, children with double or multiple exceptionality (one or more disability and one or more giftedness) and in different areas talented and exceptional children, children without parents, street children, bilingual children, children from socially deprived environments, and the others.

Education support services are essential for inclusive education provided in the school, the environment, and/or the family of the child or student. Education support services include several procedures, which can be considered a process of supporting the child, the institution, and the family during education.

Schools support pupils with a wide range of special educational needs (SEN). They should regularly review and evaluate the breadth and impact of the support they offer or can access, and must co-operate with the local authority in reviewing the provision that is available locally and in developing the Local Offer [17].

Some possible forms of support applied in inclusive education in school are:

- Detection and recognition of children/students in need of educational support;
- Identification and assessment of abilities and educational needs of children/ students;
- Determining the necessary support measures for the child, school, and family;
- Personal companion in education;
- Teaching assistant;
- Adjusting the content, methods, and techniques of working with the child/student;
- Aids and products of assistive technology;
- Peer support;
- Individual support from professionals in various specialties;

- Advisory work;
- Instructive work;
- Monitoring the implementation of child/student, school, and family support measures;
- Support for the professional development of teachers and associates for work in inclusive education;
- Adjusting the school environment (physical environment);
- Support for improving school inclusiveness.

As shown above, *individual support from professionals in various specialties* is only one form of support for inclusive education. Then why is this service the main topic of our polemic? We believe its significance is far above other listed services because of its benefits for children and students. In the following text, we discuss and analyze its importance and possibilities.

Accurate identification through a thorough evaluative process, is the first step to ensure that individuals with learning disabilities receive the services, support, and accommodations that are required for academic and life success. The same source [18] also emphasizes that functional academic demands vary across the lifespan as well as across educational settings, so when an individual does not need support in one setting or at one time of life, it does not necessarily mean that support is not warranted at another time or in another context.

Other sources also speak about the importance of the ability assessment and referral toward the necessary support services in the school. As the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education [19, 20] states, countries in Europe may have different types of official decisions, but for all official decisions:

- There has been some form of educational assessment procedure involving different people. This procedure may involve the child/learner, parents, school-based team members, as well as professionals from multi-disciplinary teams from outside the child's/learner's (pre-)school,
- There is some form of a legal document (plan/program, etc.) that describes the support the child/learner is eligible to receive, which is used as the basis for decision-making,
- There is some form of regular review process of the child/learner's needs, progress, and support.

We see that after the educational needs assessment process, in addition to providing support, documentation is kept on the support of the child/student, and the entire process is monitored and evaluated in some way. When the competent authority assesses the ability and needs of the child or student for educational support, the support process in inclusive education of the child/students begins.

#### 4. Individual support services

Individual support services (personal, individual support) are the individual support of professionals in various specialties provided to children/students in the school and extracurricular educational environment.

The reviews [19, 20] show different forms of support in various countries individually provided by experts of different profiles. In nearly all countries, specialist provision professionals have to address special education issues to promote quality inclusive education at the school level. Specialists may be SEN teachers who are qualified in special education and/or in a specific type of special need. Their role is to support learners with SEN to follow the curriculum, taking into account their abilities and needs. Professionals can also guide teachers as they adapt their practices to learners' specific needs. According to the country reports, these specialists may include special pedagogues from pedagogical-psychological services who provide consultancy to learners receiving support, parents or guardians, and teachers. They may also be teaching or learning assistants who help the teacher deliver lessons or provide in-class support to specific learners. Some countries also emphasize the role of sign language interpreters.

What do individual support services include? In order to better understand the described services and their different activities carried out in various contexts, we propose the following overview of the individual support services (**Table 1**).

In the example of regulations in the education system of the Republic of Serbia, as corrective and stimulating exercise programs (as individual types of support are called), the following are listed:

- Speech therapy exercises.
- Listening and speaking exercises.
- Psychomotor re-education exercises.
- Visual training/tactile training/orientation and movement/Braille.
- Orthooptic pleoptic exercises.
- Corrective gymnastics (instead of earlier: corrective preventive exercises and games).
- Phonetic rhythms/musical stimulations/movement stimulations.
- Serbian sign language.
- Social skills, and
- Sensory integration [21].

Bearing in mind the diversity of the educational needs of children/students, it is clear that most of the above-mentioned individual support services require special implementation conditions in their application, primarily specialized rooms, and in

1	Mastering special skills in the domain of academic advancement
	a. Literacy or learning to read and/or write in a particular way (braille, cursive, etc.)
2	Using educational aids
	a. Assistive technologies to support writing, reading, calculation, and acquisition of other skills and knowledge
3.	Developing specific communication as the only possible or accepted way by the child
4	Developing special personal skills necessary for participation in the community
	a. Mobility
	b. Communication
	c. Social skills
	d. Social competency
	e. Others
5	Improving interpersonal communication with the school and family environment
	a. Acquiring and developing mutual trust and belief;
	b. Understanding messages and non-verbal communication;
	c. Gaining the trust of the family and trust in the family;
	d. Developing cooperation with everyone who participates in education – peers, teachers, school, parents and others
6	Skills of importance for children/students with SEN, which include the development and improvement
	a. skills for coping with everyday life and taking care of yourself
	b. skills for participation in the community and cooperation with the environment
	c. skills that increase the quality of personal independence
	d. skills relevant to occupation and work
	e. skills that increase the quality of cooperation, interaction, and communication with others
	f. skills of perceiving and experiencing the environment
	g. quality of life for every child/student through training for maximum participation in the community, independence, and individuality
7	Specialized services
	a. Encouraging the development and improvement of speech and language
	b. Occupational therapy
	c. Encouraging the development and improvement of motor functions
	d. Encouraging development and improving sensory functions

Table 1.
Individual support services overview.

addition, specific instruments for work—documentation, tools for work, literature, instruments, and technologies. Most importantly, highly qualified specialists provide these services with competencies in highly specialized areas of expertise.

Providing individual support services to children/students in inclusive education is forwarded to improve the child's capacities for successful and independent education. Therefore, this service is most important for children and students, and for the

same reason, parents and teachers often require this kind of support to be provided for children and students in inclusive education.

#### 5. Discussion

#### 5.1 Individual support services—pros

The professional service of individual work with a child supports the child's capacities in inclusive education. It can be seen as imminent and strong support for inclusive education or as a strong obstacle to setting up inclusiveness in schools. We discuss arguments and counter-arguments for this thesis.

Professional individual work with children with disabilities is not a newspaper; experts deal with decades, even longer, in this business and are educated to be in it. In the current professional and laic dictionary, different terms can be found that all indicate the same individual professional work with children who have faced obstacles in education:

- Inclusive education teachers;
- Leaning support teachers;
- Special educational teachers;
- SEN teacher;
- Inclusion teachers;
- Visiting teachers;
- Individual teachers;
- Individual support teachers;
- Support therapists;
- Individual special corrective teachers;
- Corrective-preventive special teachers;
- Therapists of different specialities, such as speech pathologists/therapists, or occupational therapist, etc.

We present arguments that justify the application of individual support services as support for inclusive education in mainstream schools for children and students who need educational support. All such services are provided mainly by educated special teachers or therapists.

#### 5.1.1 Support in the local environment

The support of experts for the individual development and progress of children/ students in inclusive education, which is provided in their environment and settings, without the need for displacement in any form and duration, is particularly significant. Thus, it is stated in [22] that legislation and policy should focus on prevention and intervention approaches to enable all learners to overcome barriers to learning and participate fully, in line with the ultimate vision that all learners of any age are educated in their local community, alongside their friends and peers.

The stay of children/students in education under the auspices of the family is undoubtedly the best because it is the most stimulating social and emotional environment a child needs for development and progress. The family environment provides opportunities and chances for emotional stability and the child's development of positive values and skills.

When children and students have such support from professionals in their school, there is no need to leave their natural environment for such support and to learn and live far away from their homes and families.

#### 5.1.2 Personalized support

The gains and benefits of individual professional work in inclusive education are, according to Šćepanović [21], the possibility of more precise planning and monitoring of the effects of work, constant focus on the user/student, which enhances motivation, helps to overcome difficulties in understanding, encourages perseverance and provides more data in observation, the possibility of focusing on micro-changes during the implementation of orders and tasks, increased student/user activity, more vigorous encouragement and encouragement to complete tasks, richer communication between process participants, as well as a better possibility of developing some social skills than is possible in a group. Overall, the focus on one student/user, as given by the very nature of this type of work, is not only a simple spatial orientation of a higher degree, but it is also a new type of relationship, communication, and interaction that creates a unique quality and a shift in the development, discovery, and experience of the world around these children/students.

#### 5.1.3 Support within the specific context of the child's/student's education

Regarding the valuable aspects of individual work, we found opinions, i.e., studies of several authors [23, 24] that speak of corrective work. Thus, some authors [24] claim that "person-centered individual planning (or person-centered planning) is a set of advanced principles and strategies that emerged ... as a way to better understand the experiences of people with developmental disabilities and to improve those experiences with the help of associates." Other authors [23] investigate the relationship between individual work planning and quality of life; the results of their research speak of the connection, i.e., conditionality of the observed variables.

Individual (and mandatory) support, which is provided to individual students with developmental disabilities or for other reasons, is realized within the framework of extracurricular mandatory individual activities and represents a model of direct, personal support aimed at the very specific needs, difficulties, and abilities of each individual student who individual support is provided.

In the educational context, it is important to point out that currently, the educational systems of European countries, in general, are faced with numerous challenges that can make education not fair and highlight inequalities related to: ... gender, distance, wealth, developmental disabilities, ethnicity, language, migration, relocation, incarceration, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion, and other beliefs and attitudes [2].

#### 5.1.4 Support from highly qualified experts

The need to develop better quality work with children and students in an inclusive environment with different educational needs, including the need for additional educational individual support, has been discussed since the beginning of the development of inclusive education since not all participants are competent to support it.

This increasing recognition of learner diversity and complexity calls for greater collaboration. It will also require a changed role for education professionals, who must be prepared to provide more personalized pedagogies, increased use of digital technologies, and more varied learning pathways. School communities will increasingly be required to engage in the process of re-conceptualizing the notion of a school as an institution that offers more than curriculum content delivery [22].

That is why the support of existing highly qualified experts for the inclusive education of all children is welcome and should be used as an available resource in all circumstances for the benefit of children/students rather than forcing teachers to continue their education and seek new knowledge about working with children of different abilities and educational needs.

In the example of the Republic of Serbia, additional individual educational support services provided by specialists in special education and rehabilitation, are financed by the relevant ministries as a service that is a direct aid to inclusive education in Serbia. The service was introduced a few years after the introduction of inclusive education because it was shown that teachers are not sufficiently prepared to work with students with developmental disabilities and other students with a need for educational support and that without the help of special educators, there cannot be established inclusive education [21].

#### 5.1.5 Continuous support during schooling, with monitoring of development and progress

Adequate individual additional educational support can be provided to a child/student as much as there is a need for it, and it can be continuous during schooling and at different levels of education, from preschool to high school. Continuity of work with the child/student ensures monitoring of their progress and development while recording all crucial moments and facts related to the child/student's education in their portfolio. Other known forms of support are mostly one-time or repeated in a shorter period, so they cannot be a source of monitoring the progress and development of the child/student in the true sense of the word.

#### 5.1.6 Teachers' opinions

The research that we are citing [25] had the character of action research because it was supposed to be carried out in parallel with the observed process of inclusive education, following the changes that occurred in the process. This type of research has a participatory character because the researcher actively participates in the process being investigated and gives his subjective view of the situation, and finally, it requires a change in the educational situation.

The archival method, individual interviews, and focus group interviews with the immediate participants of the process being investigated were used to conduct the research. The research was conducted in 2020 with the participation of 200 teachers from Southeast European countries online. The results of the study speak in favor of teachers' need for diverse support, and especially the need for professional support

from experts who can give them instructions on how to work more successfully in an inclusive environment, since they do not have enough such knowledge and competencies acquired during their studies. In terms of support for children and students, teachers most often, in a considerable percentage (96%), point out that, among other things, children/students need professional, individual support in the school environment. These findings are significant primarily because they come from teachers who work with children and also because of the high percentage of responses, that is, the significance of the answers.

#### 5.2 Individual support services—contras

#### 5.2.1 Segregation in providing additional individual educational support

The most frequently mentioned argument for not including experts who provide additional individual educational support services to children/students in an inclusive environment (and these are usually special educators) is the reference to the fact that individual work with a child/student is actually a form of segregation of children and that as such must be considered discriminatory and unacceptable. The term "separation of a child from a group" has become a synonym for segregation and, thus, for discrimination, as stated in some sources. Interestingly, separating a child from a group is not considered segregation when a school pedagogue or psychologist works with him, and even less when a music or ballet expert works with him in a specialized environment. What's more, in working with gifted children and students, segregation is considered one of the very successful measures to support the education of the gifted since their segregation and grouping give excellent results on the progress and achievements of children and students with giftedness. In this situation, too, no one talks about segregation or discrimination. To be completely clear, we will ask you, the readers, a question: if your child had difficulties speaking difficulties, would you take him to a speech therapist for individual treatment or a throat and voice specialist? Is that also singling out a child based on some of his personal characteristics, or segregation? Of course not, since it is applied to the benefit and progress of the child.

Legal segregation is present in schools all over Europe thanks to the inconsistency and imperfection of legal regulations in education, while real segregation does not, in our opinion, have that much foothold in practice and is increasingly being overcome through the enrichment of diversity among the population, and its needs in general, including in the field of education.

Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize the apparent differences between real and legal segregation and discrimination on the one hand and the procedures of singling out children for their well-being and progress within the process of education and schooling on the other hand.

#### 5.2.2 Absence of unique work standards

So far, a general framework with contents that should fully define this form of work has not been built: plan and program, goals, tasks, documentation, methods, means, techniques, conditions for performing work, implementers, users, etc. That is why it is now necessary to create protocols for handling and implementing corrective individual work that will describe the procedures for assessing abilities, applying, and evaluating the effects of support on children and students with developmental and learning disabilities and other children who need educational support. Some

countries define such services. For example, according to the same source, in the Republic of Serbia, it is prescribed that the implementation of educational work, as well as the provision of additional support in education and upbringing, through programs of corrective and stimulating exercises for students who, due to developmental disabilities and disabilities, specific difficulties in learning, social deprivation and other reasons for needing support in education and upbringing, the school can implement individual teaching through support programs for children and students with disabilities and others [21].

#### 5.2.3 Individual and direct support as therapeutic treatment, not an educational support

Individual or direct work with children who need support, which professionals of various specialties carry out, is recognized as therapeutic work, that is, work that is not in the domain of education. Like most medical services provided by individuals—professionals, work that takes place in person with one recipient of services does not necessarily have to be in the field of medicine; such work can and is carried out in the field of education, in the form of specific skills (such as learning to play an instrument) or as the work of professional associates in schools—pedagogues, psychologists, and others. So why not work on providing professional individual support services for inclusive child education in such a way?

For a clear idea of the responsibilities and tasks of a special educator in inclusive education, we list only some mentioned by other authors [26], which clearly speak about the educational role of special educators in school.

As an SEN teacher, you'll need to:

- teach either individuals or small groups of pupils within, or outside, the class,
- prepare lessons and resources,
- develop and adapt conventional teaching methods to meet the individual needs of pupils,
- use special equipment and facilities, such as audiovisual materials and computers to stimulate interest in learning and aid concentration and understanding,
- use specialist skills, such as teaching Braille to pupils with visual impairments or sign language and lip reading to students who have hearing impairments,
- collaborate with the classroom teacher to define appropriate activities for the pupils in relation to the curriculum,
- assess children who have long- or short-term learning difficulties and work with colleagues to identify individual pupils' special needs,
- organize learning outside the classroom in activities such as community visits, school outings, or sporting events,
- carry out administrative tasks, including updating and maintaining records of pupils' progress,
- manage behavior, etc.

### 5.2.4 Individual therapeutic providers (or special educators) are opponents of inclusive education

In some countries, special educators are sometimes blamed for the slow progress of the development of inclusive education, due to their alleged fear that the need for their work will cease with the progress of inclusive education. The truth is quite the opposite. The support of special educators is increasingly needed as children with different educational needs are included in general education, where they need additional educational support. Special educators are the only experts whose entire university education is dedicated to acquiring skills and knowledge about working with children of different abilities and educational needs. Their services are, therefore, of the highest quality, unique, and specific. It is an unjustified aspiration that it is necessary to "abolish" an entire profession because of unargued accusations of obstructing the development of inclusive education. At the same time, teachers and other professionals who do not have the competence to work with children of different abilities are forced to acquire additional knowledge and skills in order to work with children successfully. Is it difficult to imagine that all experts work for the welfare of children in collaboration and cooperation? As authors [27] say: "Productive professional collaboration between different parties is required to realize both visions of inclusive education." Also, the results of the study [28] show the need for enhancing collaboration between special and mainstream teachers in knowledge, readiness, and attitude for effective implementation of inclusive education in schools.

Fortunately, there are positive examples all over the world, and we can only hope that such a trend will continue. The best examples of collaboration are the transformation of special schools into resource centers, which serve as strong support for the inclusive education of all children in the local environment, deal with assistive technologies, and support both schools and families, as well as young people and adults with different abilities in their development and life. The backbone of the work of resource centers is special educators with their specific knowledge, experiences, and skills.

#### 6. Conclusion

As a fundamental principle of the present civilization, the ethical universal position on human equality, freedom, and fraternity deduces a general relationship based on everyone's equally respected personality and its needs, abilities, and affinities. And so in education [21]. Not only the rights of all children to the same conditions and quality of education but also to the support they need in education determine us to choose and provide the highest quality support services, following personalized plans that we build on each child's personal needs. In the context of inclusive education, personal educational needs determine personally needed support and fully justify the application of individual professional support services to every child/student who needs it. Professionals who provide this kind of support cannot be seen as opponents of inclusion. Still, on the contrary, they are the most vital support because they enable children/students to attend classes with their peers in their natural environment, parents to understand their children's needs, and teachers to adapt their work to the needs and abilities of each particular child and student. The potentials of individual professional support in an inclusive school are: constancy and continuity in work, quality of work, knowledge of opportunities, daily possibility of cooperation with all

participants in the process, and better monitoring of the effects of work. The benefits of individual educational professional support services are proven and significant, and the service providers are highly qualified experts. Strict emphasis on segregation as a negative environment for the education of children/students, in the case of providing services of individual educational support, is not justified. From the example of work with the gifted, where the separated (segregated) environment proved very supportive for children/students, we learn that we are not right in insisting that segregation is wrong at all levels of education. All the stated reasons are arguments for the preservation and development of individual educational support services in the future and for the cooperation of all providers of education support services for children/students who need support.

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