INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SPECIAL TOPICS: REDUCING LABELING WITH GUIDES TO DESIGN AND REALIZE INCLUSIVE TEACHING. A LITERATURE FOCUS

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Abstract:
The purpose of the article is to contribute to the debate on inclusive education from the point of view of labeling - reducing stigma and labeling in the school. The materials of the article can be useful for classroom teachers and school educators in working with children with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN). The article discusses the implications of this brief literature review's data for future research on inclusive education and inclusive teaching. The emphasis is on the profile of the inclusive teacher and on the concept of universal design for learning in the classroom (UDL). The implementation of inclusive education creates challenges for classroom teachers who have to meet the learning styles of students with and without special educational needs (SEN). Further, the aim of this review is to present a focused analysis of consideration of the inclusive education about UDL and to contribute to teacher training.

Keywords: inclusive education, labeling, inclusive teaching, inclusive teacher, universal design for learning, inclusion, special needs, disability, socio-educational model, human rights

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1. Introduction

Generally, the human rights model of disability improves the social model of disability. Three different models of disability can be attributed to different concepts of equality. The medical model corresponds with formal equality, while the social model with substantive equality and the human rights model can be linked with transformative equality (Degener, 2016). According to Oliver (2013), "*the idea behind the social model of disability stemmed from the Fundamental Principles of Disability document first published in the mid-1970s (UPIAS 1976), which argued that we were not disabled by our impairments but by the disabling barriers we faced in society*". In addition, today the challenge of the modern philosophy of inclusion and the specificity of the pluralism of Special Education as a branch related to theoretical searches, practical interventions, techniques and research data that come from or have ramifications in other scientific areas (pedagogy/didactic, sociology, neuropsychology, evolutionary psychology, social psychology, clinical psychology, psychopathology, counseling psychology, speech therapy, etc.) can be translated into a psychopedagogy of inclusion based on the basic principles of inclusive and humanistic pedagogy and adopts a holistic positive approach to the difficulties of childhood and adolescence, regardless of the causes and nature of these problems.

The purpose of the article is to contribute to the debate on inclusive education from the point of view of labeling - reducing stigma and labeling in the school. The materials of the article can be useful for classroom teachers and school educators in working with children with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN). The article discusses the implications of this brief literature review's findings for future research on inclusive education and inclusive teaching. The emphasis is on the profile of the inclusive teacher and on the concept of universal design for learning in the classroom (UDL). The implementation of inclusive education creates challenges for classroom teachers who have to meet the learning styles of students with and without special educational needs (SEN). Further, the aim of this review is to present a focused analysis of consideration of the inclusive education about UDL and to contribute to teacher training.

2. Inclusion in schools

Basically, the policy of inclusion in schools is implemented in countries around the world (Soulis 2008/ Soulis, 2002). This development challenges teachers to seek pedagogies and practices that will enhance their professionalism in addressing diversity in their classrooms. Inclusion is emphasized as an ongoing process. It is based on its ideologies of social justice, democracy, human rights and access to education for all. Accession is discussed in three terms:
- as inclusive education which represents the process of increasing participation and reducing exclusion,
- as an inclusive pedagogy that focuses on how to teach in inclusive schools and

- as a practice of inclusion that represents how the concept of inclusion makes sense in practice (Gudjonsdottir & Óskarsdóttir, 2016) and in teaching.

Inclusion requires teachers to accept the responsibility for creating schools in which all children can learn and feel they belong. In this task, teachers are crucial because of the central role they play in promoting participation and reducing underachievement, particularly with children who might be perceived as having difficulties in learning (Rouse, n.d.).

Below, the literature on these topics is examined for teacher training for inclusive classrooms, because the development of inclusion in schools depends in part on the way teachers are prepared for their work (Booth et al., 2003).

3. Special and Inclusive education as teaching

Overall, Special and Inclusive Education is teaching (Heward, 2011) for all and lifelong (Malafantis & Ioannidi, 2021). This is the area of focus in this paper. Especially, key characteristics of teaching in Special and Inclusive education are (Heward, 2011, p. 24):

- Individually designed teaching e.g. learning objectives are selected based on assessment and the cooperation of parents, teachers and students.
- Specialized teaching e.g. adapted teaching processes, assistive technology, teaching materials, etc.
- Intensive teaching e.g. teaching with precision, clarity, repeated practice, etc.
- Deliberate teaching aimed at the maximum possible proficiency of the student.
- Research based methods e.g. research-based curricula and procedures.
- Guided teaching by the student's performance e.g. systematic control with consistency and continuity aimed at modifying teaching.

We must also mention the issue of labeling in the school classroom and community, a fact that can be combined with the consequences of a stigmatizing practice. In reality, the perspective of the inclusive teacher and the social-educational environment is very significant for inclusive education (Ioannidi, 2001). Thus, a commitment to inclusion and equality requires an acknowledgement of various categorization problems, and a realization that various contexts may contribute to people's different learning patterns. It is more productive to design flexible curricula that can accommodate learning diversity (Ho, 2004).

3.1 Labeling
According to Dimou (2003, pp. 197-198), "*any opportunistic characterization can, under certain conditions, be the starting point for the establishment of a permanent negatively defined communication relationship between teacher and student, with decisively burdensome effects on the school, and possibly for the latter's professional career*".

Labeling is the process by which the diagnosis of a disability becomes the primary characteristic that defines a person, essentially limiting the person to that diagnosis. Labeling is associated with the medical model of disability and its emphasis on accurate

diagnosis and continued specialization of diagnostic categories, but also on providing services only when an official diagnostic 'label' has been assigned to an individual. Labeling contributes to negative treatment and exclusion and should not be confused with a person's positive and conscious decision to identify as disabled (Hodapp, 2003, p. 235).

According to Heward (2011, pp. 10-12), although research has not led to a final decision on the total acceptance or rejection of labeling practices, potential benefits of labeling and classification are:

- A disability label can allow access to facilities and services that are not available to people without it.
- Labeling can lead to a protective reaction.
- Taxonomy helps practitioners to communicate with each other and to classify and evaluate research findings.
- Funding and resources for research and other programs are often based on the specific categories of special needs.
- Labels facilitate advocacy groups for people with specific disabilities.
- Labeling makes children's special needs more visible to policy makers and society at large.

However, potential disadvantages of labeling and sorting are:

- Labels may stigmatize the child and teachers may have low expectations for labeled students.
- Labels can negatively affect a child's self-esteem.
- Disability labels prevent appreciation of the uniqueness of each child.
- Labels limit the systematic examination and accountability of instructional parameters as causes of achievement deficits.
- A disproportionate number of children from minority or culturally diverse groups are included in special education programs, resulting in them being labeled disabled.

Here, some recognized special education teachers have suggested that children with special needs be classified according to the areas of the curriculum and skills they need to learn (Heward, 2011). In any case, the didactic-corrective intervention based on the socio-educational model is important in the main classroom (Paraskevopoulos, n.d.). The psychodynamic understanding of disorders in reference always to the socio-cultural context of the child and his family, the emphasis on the psychosocial skills of the child and the collaboration of teachers and specialists, are characteristic of the most sophisticated educational systems, recommending a dominant stake of modern psycho-pedagogy of integration and bringing about huge changes in school systems and in the perspective of inclusion of similar logics and practices (Kourkoutas, 2008). Therefore, right to Education act promotes the compulsory education of such children, and limiting disability by knowing the current profile of impairments could help in improving physical and functional status in all children (Pahwa & Mani, 2022).

3.2 The inclusive teacher

Of course, the profile of Inclusive Teachers is one of the main goals of inclusive education. The Teacher Education for Inclusion project has explored how all teachers are prepared via their initial education to be inclusive. The three-year project set out to identify the essential skills, knowledge and understanding, attitudes and values needed by everyone entering the teaching profession, regardless of the subject, specialism or age range they will teach or the type of school they will work in. The Profile has been developed around this framework of core values and areas of competence (https://www.european-agency.org/activities/te4i/profile-inclusive-teachers):

- Valuing Learner Diversity - learner difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education.
- Supporting All Learners - teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements.
- Working With Others - collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers.
- Personal Professional Development - teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their lifelong learning.

Teachers need to be able to implement inclusion into their daily practice (Booth et al., 2003) and teaching. An inclusive teacher is likewise a teacher who is equipped with general as well as special techniques of teaching and who can ensure quality education for all students (Atta et al., n.d.).

3.3 Guides to design inclusive teaching and to build inclusive environments. Data collection

Universal Design for Learning can be implemented in School for all (Soulis, n.d.). Inclusive education is where all children and young people are engaged and achieve through being present, participating, learning and belonging. Inclusive education means that all learners are welcomed by their local early learning service and school, and are supported to play, learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of life at the school or service. Inclusive education is also about how we develop and design our learning spaces and activities so that all learners are affirmed in their identity and can learn and participate together. It means deliberately identifying and removing barriers to learning and wellbeing (https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/about-inclusive-education-2/#what-guides-inclusive-education).

The UDL Guidelines are a tool used in the implementation of Universal Design for Learning, a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn. The UDL Guidelines can be used by educators, curriculum developers, researchers, parents, and anyone else who wants to implement the UDL framework in a learning environment**.** Universal Design for Learning Guidelines provides multiple means of engagement, representation, action and expression. Universal Design for Learning Guidelines provide options for recruiting interest, perception, physical sustaining effort and persistence, language and symbols,

expression and communication, self-regulation, comprehension and executive function (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/). Specifically:

- There is not one means of engagement that will be optimal for all learners in all contexts; providing multiple options for engagement is essential (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement).
- Learners differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them. There is not one means of representation that will be optimal for all learners; providing options for representation is essential (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation).
- Learners differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know. There is not one means of action and expression that will be optimal for all learners; providing options for action and expression is essential (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression).
- It is important to have alternative ways to recruit learner interest, ways that reflect the important inter- and intra-individual differences amongst learners (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/recruiting-interest).
- To reduce barriers to learning, it is important to ensure that key information is equally perceptible to all learners by: 1) providing the same information through different modalities. 2) providing information in a format that will allow for adjustability by the user (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/perception).
- It is important to provide materials with which all learners can interact. Properly designed curricular materials provide a seamless interface with common assistive technologies through which individuals with movement impairments can navigate and express what they know (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/physical-action).
- The external environment must provide options that can equalize accessibility by supporting learners who differ in initial motivation, self-regulation skills, etc. (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/effort-persistence).
- An important instructional strategy is to ensure that alternative representations are provided not only for accessibility, but for clarity and comprehensibility across all learners (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/language-symbols).
- It is important to provide alternative modalities for expression, both to the level the playing field among learners and to allow the learner to appropriately express knowledge, ideas and concepts in the learning environment (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/expression-communication).
- A successful approach requires providing sufficient alternatives to support learners with very different aptitudes and prior experience to effectively manage their own engagement and affect (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/self-regulation).

- Proper design and presentation of information can provide the scaffolds necessary to ensure that all learners have access to knowledge (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/comprehension).
- The UDL framework typically involves efforts to expand executive capacity in two ways: 1) by scaffolding lower level skills so that they require less executive processing and 2) by scaffolding higher level executive skills and strategies so that they are more effective and developed (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/executive-functions/executive-functions).

In total, UDL is not in conflict with other methods and practices. It actually incorporates and supports many current research-based approaches to teaching and learning, as (https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2_TEAL_UDL.pdf). For example, UDL is an overarching approach focused on the inclusive design of the whole learning environment at the outset. UDL aims to ensure all students have full access to everything in the classroom, regardless of their needs and abilities. Differentiation is a strategy aimed at addressing each student's individual levels of readiness, interest, and learning profiles. The teacher modifies content and processes to address the needs of each student. The teacher directs students to specific activities to further their learning (https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/udl-and-differentiation-and-how-they-are-connected/).

Highlighting the value of UDL to learning community: (a) The UDL provide Options for Perception: for example, using PowerPoint as a visual supplement to your lecture. (b) Provide Options for Expression: for example, providing students an option of writing a final exam or submitting a final assignment. (c) The UDL provide Options for Comprehension: for example, engaging students in both group work activities and individual work, as opposed to engaging students only in individual work (https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/assessment-evaluation/inclusion-accessibility-accommodation/building-inclusive-5).

In conclusion, it is very important to:
- Use tools and strategies to create flexible classroom environments that minimise barriers to learning (https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/).
- Plan and develop innovative learning environments that are inclusive of all learners (https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/planning-innovative-learning-environments-iles/).
- Inclusive learning environments are ones in which students feel that their contributions and perspectives are equally valued and respected (https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/assessment-evaluation/inclusion-accessibility-accommodation/building-inclusive).

Also, the educational material and software that is posted and available for free on this Greek website (http://www.prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/el/), aims to strengthen and support general and special education teachers in their difficult work. It is a key tool for differentiating teaching and educating students with disabilities and/or special

educational needs, with the possibility of application and use by all students. The classification of the material based on the type of disability is done mainly for practical reasons, without this meaning that each distinct educational software or material is addressed only to a target group of students and without being a criterion for one-dimensional use of the material. On the contrary, it is recommended that it be used flexibly for all students based on the special characteristics of each student, the pedagogical evaluation and the short-term and long-term teaching goals that each teacher sets for his students (http://www.prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/en/ekpaideutiko-uliko). In further analysis, UDL aims to improve the educational experience of all students by introducing more flexible methods of teaching, assessment and service provision to cater for the diversity of learners in our classrooms. This approach is underpinned by research in the field of neuroscience and is designed to improve the learning experience and outcomes for all students (https://www.ahead.ie/udl).

Thus, the improved multiplicity of options in lesson planning demonstrates a better understanding of UDL principles; however, teachers need more experience in actually implementing the UDL principles in their classrooms (Courey et al., 2013).

4. Epilogue

Every year the number of children with disabilities and special educational needs increases in the world. The relevance of this topic is determined by the issue of inclusive education, which has become increasingly important in recent years (Elmira & Negmatzhan, 2022). A challenge will be to reduce both stigma and labeling in school and in the community. By reducing the stigma and labeling in inclusive education and inclusive teaching, we include all students and all learners without excluding them (Ioannidi, 2001/ Ioannidi, 2010). Finally, the concept of universal design for learning (UDL) and the role of a classroom teacher are significant innovations in inclusive education.

Further to this, an inclusive education system cannot be enacted successfully with-out a similar process to develop an inclusive society. Although education can take a leading role, it needs to be supported by the development of a more inclusive society if it is to be maintained and defensible in the long term (Forlin, 2012).

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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