THE CONCEPT OF DECLASSIFYING DISABILITIES IN LIFE AND THE PERSPECTIVE INVOLVING NEW TECHNOLOGIES: TRIBUTION TO THE TEACHER AND WRITER KOSTAS CHRISTAKIS

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Abstract:

In the context of a tribute to the author and pedagogist Kostas Christakis, this paper discusses issues of special education concerning the inclusive education of children with difficulties, with emphasis on de-categorization, de-ageing, and the perspective of New Technologies (NT). The following text is the product of an immersion in his publications, particularly his two-volume academic book (2011), 'The Education of Children with Special Difficulties - Introduction to Special Education,' which is used by students in Greek universities. De-categorization and de-ageing examine the difficulties of individuals in the context of inclusive education. The purpose of this paper is to highlight contemporary and timeless pedagogical issues of concern to the educational community, such as the understanding of diversity. The conclusions, according to the literature review, emphasize the necessity of de-categorization and de-ageing and their implications for New Technologies (NT).

Keywords: de-categorisation, inclusive education, special education and training, new technologies, Christakis

1. Introduction

This theoretical study presents Kostas Christakis's contribution to the concepts of de-categorization and de-aging. Kostas Christakis has served as a Special Patron of the Pedagogical Institute of Greece and holds an Honorary Doctorate from the Department

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of Philology at the University of Peloponnese. As he points out in his two-volume book (2011a, 2011b), the promotion of integrating students with special educational needs or disabilities is the purpose of the modern, inclusive school (Corbion, 2021). Therefore, the concepts of de-categorization and de-aging are emphasized, advocating a dynamic understanding of the diversity among children with difficulties and their acceptance. As Christakis mentions (2011a, p. 20), the concept of children with educational difficulties does not obscure diversity and is devoid of social and emotional bias:

> "*In Greece, various terms have been used over time, reflecting the prevailing social consciousness and the degree of acceptance or rejection of individuals with difficulties within society*" (Christakis, 2011a, p. 20).

Intersectional differences observed among people encompass both visible and non-visible characteristics related to their development and functioning. In the field of special education, these differences manifest in developmental skills, academic attendance, language development, psychomotor skills, and social development (Ministry of Education-Pedagogical Institute 2009a, 2009b), which are concepts articulated through de-categorization and de-aging. The categories of children with difficulties are diverse and vary based on their type and degree of functioning in their interactions with the environment. According to UNESCO's classification for statistical assessments, specific categories are included (Christakis, 2011a, pp. 33-36, 2011b, p. 16-32, 2023a, 2023b, 2006, 2013). Specifically, de-categorization includes individuals with visual and hearing disabilities, those who are exceptionally intelligent and gifted, individuals with mental disabilities, physical defects or disabilities, speech disorders, emotional and social maladjustments, learning difficulties, developmental disorders, autism spectrum disorder, and multiple disabilities. The increase in the number of people with disabilities, despite advancements in new technologies, is deemed illusory due to strict criteria or social biases that prevent their comprehensive recording.

The concept of "de-aging" also pertains to Special Education and Training, beginning from maternity hospitals and extending to nursing homes. Multidisciplinary data indicate that the genetics of disability are influenced by heredity and an individual's interactions with the environment. In continuation of this discussion, Christakis (2011a, pp. 49, 118) raises questions about the challenges posed by new technologies and the science of pedagogy:

> "*How can we define terms and definitions that facilitate rather than hinder the acceptance and rehabilitation of individuals with difficulties? How can criteria be established for assessing, monitoring, and evaluating the skills of people with special educational needs?*" (Christakis, 2011a, pp. 49, 118).

2. Inclusive education for children with difficulties

The inclusion of the diversity and specificities of children with difficulties in the context of inclusive education requires addressing a number of issues regarding the effects of environmental factors on the development, evolution, and rehabilitation of all children with difficulties, beyond the limitations imposed by age identity and the category of dysfunction. Christakis (2011a, pp. 77, 121-130) focuses on the child with difficulties, the family, the school, and the community, discussing ways to facilitate the accessibility and positioning of the child with difficulties. The emphasis is on the concept of the 'child' versus the difficulty faced. This statement of specificity encourages the design of individualized educational interventions. In the following passage, Christakis (2011a, p. 77) wonders, in the context of an approach to children's difficulties:

> *"1. How can an early information and awareness-raising program for families with a child with difficulties be developed? This program should be individualized according to each case, aiming to educate parents and siblings, when present, on how to address the problems and strategies they should employ to help the child with difficulties develop better and achieve satisfactory rehabilitation.*
> *2. How can a sensitization and awareness program for teachers and other educational staff about children with difficulties be designed? With proper information and awareness-raising, teachers and other stakeholders will be able to accept children with difficulties and seek strategic methods and means of teaching to successfully promote the concept of school integration and make their education effective.*
> *3. How can information and awareness-raising programs for the general public about people with difficulties be implemented? The aims of such programs are: a) to change or improve existing social awareness in order to transform rejection into acceptance and foster a positive attitude towards people with disabilities, and b) to take the necessary measures and provide support for people with disabilities to facilitate their participation in employment and their integration into society and everyday life".*

Christakis (2011a, 2011b, 2023a) also, highlighted the demand for de-aging in inclusive education, as these difficulties continue to affect students in their adult life and are not limited to childhood or adolescence. He also pointed out the dual role that new technologies can have if they are used appropriately in special education and training. The multicultural factor in the inclusive school causes difficulties in two main areas: communication between teachers and migrant children, and the design of education programs, as well as communication between teachers and parents of migrant children (Christakis, 2023a; Drossinou Korea, 2017a, 2017b, 2020a, 2020b; Millians, 2011). However, within the framework of the systemic interpretation and treatment of children's difficulties, the school can develop ecological approaches by intervening with all children, based on the understanding that a child's difficulty or problem results from a complex interaction of various environmental factors combined with the child's

individual characteristics, which can be decisively influenced by these factors (Christakis, 2011a, p. 55). The following passage mentions two factors in which the integration school intervenes:

"a) The child, whose behavior the school aims to influence and improve through direct interventions.
b) The environment, including the family and other significant individuals in the child's life, aiming to improve their interactions with the child. This approach is particularly recommended for addressing behavior problems."

3. Parents of children with difficulties in the context of inclusive education

Both parents and siblings are encouraged to understand the de-aged and de-categorized physical presence of the disabled child and to develop a positive attitude toward it (Christakis, K. 2023a, Drossinou Korea, 2024b). In the following passage, Christakis (2011a, p. 67) states that a family counseling program in the context of de-aging and de-categorization of difficulties follows certain basic stages (Christakis, 2011b, 2023a). In particular (Christakis, 2011a, p. 67, 2011b, pp. 45-71):

"1st Stage: Acceptance of the child.
2nd Stage: Adjustment to the idea of long-term living with the child and his or her problem.
3rd Stage: Stimulation of the parents' and siblings' self-awareness and autonomy, leading to independence from the child and his or her problem.
4th Stage: Detachment of the family from labels and social readjustment."

Parents of children with difficulties, according to the Special Education Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education-Pedagogical Institute, 1996; Law 2817, 2000; Law 3699, 2018), support the child with difficulties at school, recognizing that in addition to being a pupil, he/she is also a member of a social group, such as a group of classmates. The integration of the child with difficulties into the group often depends on the attitude of the other children in the group towards him/her and the interactions that take place between children with and without educational difficulties. As Christakis (2011a) points out, the effort for inclusion is a discussion that started in the 1970s and focuses on the integration of the child with difficulties into the general school, ensuring accessible spatial integration in peer groups.

The term integration reflects the attempt—with certain rules and conditions according to the Aristotelian conception—to integrate the child into school and, subsequently, into society. Integration can be distinguished as school, social, and economic (Drossinou Korea, 2024a, 2022, 2024b). In particular, school integration is further divided into spatial, social, and curricular integration. From early on, and in particular, from 1978, Christakis makes it clear that in order for the child to be integrated into adult society as he or she grows up, a culture of acceptance of de-categorization and

de-aging needs to be developed. In other words, the child must have been 'exposed' to the meaning of community and community interactions.

Christakis acknowledges that parents of children with difficulties, according to the Special Education Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education-Pedagogical Institute, 1996; Christakis, 2011a, pp. 52-78), often pressure teachers to support their integration into mainstream school because children's interaction is crucial and fosters a climate of cooperation, understanding, and acceptance. The other children become aware of the difficulties of their classmates by interacting with them and are gradually led to accept them, an attitude that will follow them into adulthood.

Based on decategorization (Christakis, 2011a, pp. 118-135; Christakis 2011b, p. 16-72) and the de-aging of difficulties, he prefers the conceptual approaches of 'inclusion' and 'inclusive schooling'. However, amidst a dispute over the correct term, he supports the essential pedagogical organization of structured, didactically differentiated inclusive education programs that consider the specificities of students with specific learning difficulties and focuses on inclusive interventions with adapted teaching methods (Drossinou Korea, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2024a, 2024b).

Furthermore, in his two-volume book (2011a, 2011b), he seems to follow a realistic pedagogical approach without idealized inclusionary rhetoric, considering that unconditional inclusion could lead to further stigmatization and marginalization from the group, contradicting the philosophy and principles underlying the Special Education Curriculum Framework for decategorization and de-aging (Millians 2011). Integration must, therefore, solve problems rather than create additional ones, according to the pedagogical approach advocated by Christakis. The presence of very severe disabilities, combined with the lack of individualized inclusive education programs, necessitates the continued existence of Special Schools (Corbion, 2021). This underscores the importance of intensifying efforts toward providing equal, inclusive, decategorized compulsory and lifelong education. Measures, rules, and limits are crucial factors in successfully including children with difficulties, taking into account the individuality of each student. Consequently, interdisciplinary team-collaborative approaches are essential when designing pedagogical intervention programs and promoting inclusive education. The following passage addresses the removal of the educational marginalization of people with difficulties, without guilt or remorse (Christakis, 2011a, pp. 119-120):

"*Today, therefore, we accept that there may be learning difficulties attributed to children's inherent disabilities, but we have, or should have, strategies available to compensate for these weaknesses so that all children can be educated equally and according to their capabilities and needs. This perception led to a shift in focus. From the pathology of the child, we moved to the pathology of education.*"

Christakis specifically recognizes the difficulties and obstacles that parents of children with difficulties may encounter. Their involvement and collaboration with teachers, principals, psychologists, special educators, and social workers can prevent the

exclusion of children with difficulties. Additionally, the bureaucratic processes within the educational system can create obstacles and exclude individuals with difficulties from the learning process by categorizing and stigmatizing disability at certain ages. Simultaneously, the training of all educational and school staff, social awareness, appropriate equipment, and the allocation of financial resources form a network of challenges that need to be addressed.

4. De-categorisation, de-aging and the new technologies perspective

New Technologies in Special Education support the principles of equal rights, equality, and diversity, helping to prevent the exclusion of people with learning difficulties. They also promote acceptance and peer support among all members of society, whether they have special needs or not. De-categorization and de-ageing are crucial factors in inclusive education as they underscore the democratic nature of education systems and their potential to foster a better society (Drossinou Korea & Alexopoulos, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2024; Drossinou Korea, 1997). As Christakis (2011a, pp. 118-142) asserts:"*Phenomena which, considered from sociological, anthropological, and economic perspectives, cannot satisfy any health-minded person."*

He proposes a series of carefully planned stages for inclusive education. Initially, he advocates for the gradual integration of a small number of children with minor difficulties from special to mainstream schools, with the support of special education assistant teachers and the establishment of clear rules and records. In the second stage, he suggests increasing the number of children with more severe difficulties, followed by a third stage of universal integration into general classrooms. These stages aim to shape conditions that facilitate the reception and integration of these children, requiring adjustments in rules, programs, school environments, teachers, students, and the entire educational community.

New Technologies contribute significantly to enhancing accessibility for people with difficulties in the learning process. Christakis (2011a, pp. 126-127) advocates for respecting children's rights to life and education, emphasizing that inclusive education lays the groundwork for de-categorizing and de-aging education. This approach ensures that individuals with disabilities receive support through special education services across their lifespan, promoting awareness of inclusive education's importance across all ages and categories. He considers innovative methods and practices throughout his writing, including in his two-volume book (2011b, pp. 259-300). He explores how these approaches can enhance the complex systems of Special Education and Education, acknowledging potential risks.

Christakis recognizes that new technologies (NT) can enhance children's skills and stimulate their interest and involvement in learning. Following the Warnock Report and the ensuing debates, new trends have emerged in Special Education, including personalized tools with interactive content for children with difficulties. Christakis (2011a, pp. 150-151) identifies the most important trends in inclusive education:

"a) The decategorization of individuals with difficulties.
b) The shift in perception regarding their education, moving from the pathology of the child
to the pathology of education.
c) The promotion of this perception in school practice."

According to these trends, school integration is not a cure-all. However, NT can enhance communication and social integration by facilitating connections and collaboration, even in distance education settings. This is particularly important for children who face geographical limitations or mobility disabilities.

Moreover, Christakis recognizes that NTs can enhance children's skills and motivate their interest and engagement in learning. As he states, school integration is not a cure-all, and NTs can improve communication and social integration, helping students connect and collaborate even in distance education settings, which is crucial for children facing geographical limitations or mobility impairments (Drossinou Korea, & Manikioti, 2019; Drossinou Korea, 1999).

He also recognizes that efforts in inclusive education need to be targeted, following specific rules with didactically differentiated and structured pedagogical intervention programs. These programs promote the irreplaceable pedagogical relationship between students with difficulties and teachers. Christakis emphatically underscores the central and core importance of pedagogical interaction and a person-centered approach in schools that provide individualized services, as opposed to a standardized mechanistic approach to NT in Special Education and Training.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

In conclusion, Christakis prioritizes respecting the rights of children with disabilities to education and life. He envisions inclusive education aiming for the de-categorization and de-ageing of educational practices, providing targeted, individualized, and didactically differentiated pedagogical intervention programs. Consequently, inclusion is not merely a theoretical construct for him, but a practical solution grounded in realism, experience, and awareness of the challenges in Special and Training.

The first concluding point pertains to inclusive education for children with difficulties, highlighting Kostas Christakis' pivotal contribution to Special Education. His work decisively promotes inclusive education and outlines the integration of New Technologies. Through his efforts, he advocates an educational philosophy based on equity, individualized support, and innovation, thereby fostering a more equitable and inclusive education system for all students with special educational needs.

The second concluding point concerns parents of children with difficulties within the context of the Special Education Curriculum. Christakis recognizes the parents' need for counseling and support services in the context of New Technologies (NT), emphasizing that education should be accessible to all, regardless of their learning

difficulties or disabilities. He advocates for a carefully targeted selection of pedagogical tools in Special Education to achieve this goal.

Finally, the third concluding point addresses de-categorization, de-ageing, and the perspective on New Technologies, acknowledging their immense potential in improving lives. While Christakis considers their use in pedagogical intervention programs crucial, he maintains a cautious and critical stance towards them, particularly regarding the risk of undermining the interpersonal pedagogical relationship between student and teacher.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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