

Inclusion. A concept that, by definition, has the meaning of being «understood, integrated, included» (infopédia, 2016). Inclusion. An educational movement, as well as a social and political crusade, aiming at promoting the right of every person to participate, consciously and responsibly, within the society he or she belongs to, with respect and recognition of his or her full citizenship (Freire, 2008). Inclusion. Grounded in the structural values of Equality, Participation, Community, in the relationship-based ideals of Respect, Trust, and Compassion, and in spiritual standards of Joy, Love and Optimist, amongst others (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Inclusion. Reality, Imperative or Utopia?

In the field of Education, Inclusion – believing and building a School for All – has the goal of promoting educational inclusion and success for each and every student, independently of special and specific needs (Ministério da Educação, 2008). It also comprises the goal of preparing the students – all of them – to transition into adulthood and for a life of functionality, independence and participation (Decreto-Lei nº3/2008). Inclusive Education does not mean, however, that every student should access and benefit from the same products and/or services; emphasizing the difference between Equality and Equity, the inclusive approach focuses on the later – Equity – in terms of benefiting from:

- Equal opportunities to access and be present in the educational contexts;
- Possibilities of participation and engagement with the educational dynamics, overcoming barriers and obstacles;
- Recognition as being capable of achievements and maximization of potential (Decreto-Lei nº3/2008).

In the search for the way to Inclusion, what is the best pathway?

With the belief that Inclusive Education represents a sustainable project for the future of Education, how to incorporate inclusive values in the contemporary School?

Finding similarities, instead of looking for differences, by what means can we unleash all the richness and value of diversity?

The Portuguese Educational System has, for many years, embraced the ideal of Inclusive Education, having it explicitly stated in the national law in 2008 with *Decreto-Lei, nº3/2008*. Following principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Special Education services, within the model of Educational Inclusion, should aim at:

- (i) promoting educational and social inclusion, access and success;
- (ii) increasing autonomy and wellbeing;
- (iii) ensuring equality of opportunities and;
- (iv) preparing for the transition from school to employment (Ministério da Educação, 2008).

Following different procedures and implementing diverse strategies specified in the adopted legal documents (Decreto-Lei nº3/2008; Portaria nº 275-A/2012), the ultimate goal is to promote equal opportunities, value Education and encourage continuous improvements in the quality of the Educational System; gradually building a democratic and Inclusive School, oriented to the educational success of all children and young people (Ministério da Educação, 2008).

Starting from the times of Exclusion, when the disabled were considered as strange and outcasts, and moving to the Segregation Era, when people with disability were isolated and placed in assistive services and institutions located apart from the society of “normal” people, the Portuguese educational system moved to the Integration movement in the 1990’s, implementing practices that would place students with disability in the mainstream schools, expecting them – the different people – to adjust to the system

designed to answer the needs of the typical and average students. In 2008, however, this system changed with the publication of *Decreto-Lei n° 3/2008*, defining the principles of building a School for All, and an Educational System focusing on diversity – as an alternative to Difference versus Equal – and oriented to the access, participation and success of every student (Decreto-Lei n°3/2008).

Following principles and procedures specified in *Decreto-Lei n°3/2008*, everyone in the community may identify, signpost and refer children with specific and special educational needs, entitling them to a specialized and multi-professional evaluation with reference to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, by the World Health Organization; this procedure means that Health Services, Educational Services, Social Services, Early Intervention Services, individual professionals and families may request assistance from the Special Education Services from the Public Educational System, in order to design the most appropriate and effective response to the needs of every child. Having this multi-professional evaluation completed, the educational team will be able to decide whether the specific student is eligible to access Inclusive Education services. In case of eligibility, and Individual Educational Plan (IEP) will be created, implemented, monitored and managed by the team, with validation from the family and the school's Pedagogical Council and major responsibility by the mainstream teacher.

The IEP will specify different measures to consider, namely (1) adjustments to the teaching and learning processes and (2) specific educational modalities. Within the first, it is possible to consider:

- 1.1) Individual pedagogical support;
- 1.2) Individual curricular adaptations;
- 1.3) Adjustments in the registration process;
- 1.4) Adjustments in the evaluation process;
- 1.5) Individual specific curriculum;
- 1.6) Assistive technology services.

When referring to specific educational modalities, it is conceivable to refer the students to:

- 2.1) Specialist schools for the bilingual education of students with hearing disability;
- 2.2) Specialist schools for the education of students visual impairment;
- 2.3) Specialized structured teaching for students with autism spectrum disorder;
- 2.4) Specialized support units for students with multiple disability and congenital deafblindness.

By the time student is three years from leaving the mandatory Education System (12th grade or 18 years of age), an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) should be created by the same educational multi-professional team and managed by the responsible mainstream teacher, with the goal of promoting adjustments in the transition from school to adult life and define a step by step long course life project, in agreement with the student's and family's needs, expectations, aspirations ... (Decreto-Lei n°3/2008).

Within this time span and across the student's life in the Inclusive School, specialized support and resources may be activated via partnerships and networks of professionals and organizations. This is the special case of the Centres of Resources for Inclusion (CRI), a partnership driven by the Portuguese legislation and Educational Policy (Decreto-Lei n°3/2008; Direção-Geral da Educação, 2015), based on an integrated approach between Public Schools and not-for-profit organizations specialized in the fields of Disability and Rehabilitation. Within the CRI partnership, charities and foundations will provide specialized therapeutic services, working together with the Educational System and teams, in order to provide the necessary resources for all the students to be and to feel included, independently of the complexity of their educational needs (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2015).

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