

## INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA

### Definition

The concept of inclusive education in Lithuania today: Inclusive education is the process that ensures qualitative education for all its participants, where attention is focused on the expectations of every pupil, pupils' parents, also peculiarities of each pupils' needs, necessities in special help and special services and stopping drop-out processes from the system of education (*Plan of actions of the development of inclusive education for the period of 2014–2016 year*, approved by the Minister of Education and Science, 2014-09-05).

### A. Policy

Inclusive Education in Lithuania is primarily based on international documents: *UN convention of children rights* (1989), *UN regulations for equal opportunities of persons with handicaps* (1993) and *Salamanka declaration and Recommendations for the improvement of special education* (1994), *UN convention of rights of handicapped* (2006), *UNESCO Recommendations for the development of inclusive education* (2008), *UNESCO Guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education* (2009) and the ideas, articulated in them.

The main legal documents that regulate education for children with SEN in Lithuania are as follows:

- *The Law on the Social Integration of the Disabled*, 1996: the disabled have the right to work, study and train, and regardless of the cause, character and degree of their disability they shall be entitled to the same rights as other residents of the Republic of Lithuania and is a law for the social integration of people with special needs;
- *The Republic of Lithuania Law on Education*, 2011: special needs education is provided by all compulsory and comprehensive education programmes. In order to meet the needs of a pupil, these programmes have to be changed, adapted or new special educational programmes created; an additional assistance has to be provided;
- Procedure of pupils' assessment of special educational needs (excluding those on the exceptional abilities) in pedagogical, psychological, medical and social aspects and appointment of special education, 2011,
- Procedure of determining the types and special educational needs into levels of pupils with special educational needs 2011,
- Procedure of psychological assistance, 2011
- Procedure of special assistance at schools, 2011

- Procedure of special educational assistance, 2011
- etc.

### **B. Implementation of the policy**

There are several groups of children with defined special needs: Children with handicaps include children with developmental, sensory processing, physical and other disorders, of which is biological in nature (there are no pedagogical means to improve the disorder). Children with disorders are those with learning, also behavioral, emotional and speech disorders. Children with learning difficulties are those who have limited possibilities to realize their skills, due to negative environmental aspects (cultural/language/pedagogical/socio-economic). According to the Law, special educational needs might be mild, moderate, extensive and very extensive.

An initial detection of a pupil's problem is made by his/her teacher. The teacher informs the parents about the pupil and only after that can an initial assessment of the pupil's special educational needs be conducted by specialists. (During 2013/2014 school year in kindergartens and pre-primary groups, there were 701 speech therapists, 75 special pedagogues, 75 social pedagogues and 68 psychologists within the I Level). These specialists present their findings and recommendations regarding further modification of the programme to the School Child's Welfare Committee, which makes decisions. After this period is over, if a pupil still cannot cope with teaching requirements and achieves low results, the School Child's Welfare Committee recommends to the parents to apply for further assessment through the local pedagogical psychological service (PPS). After further assessment and evaluation period, these specialists provide recommendations to the parents and the pupil's school to what kind of special assistance and education plan/programme that has to be implemented, including what kind of special provisions are required in order to support the pupil's learning and teaching process. Also, they recommend when it is necessary to repeat the assessment and evaluation of the pupils' special educational needs

Future steps in the process of effective development of inclusive education is very important to address a variety of children's needs, to help every child, to work in a team, to develop personal professional competences of teachers and specialists. (There is a catalogue, <http://www.sppc.lt/index.php?371803544>, of special learning/teaching materials for kindergarten and pre-primary age children, in which 296 items of materials are stored. This catalogue embraces didactic resources, learning, teaching materials, visual materials, posters, etc.).

Teacher Education

In Lithuania, higher educational institutions are of two types: universities and colleges (non-university higher educational institutions, sometimes also called universities of applied sciences). University studies provide universal academic education, theoretical training and the highest level of professional excellence, while studies in colleges are oriented towards training for professional activities - practical training covers at least one third of the study programme.

Teachers in Lithuania are trained by pedagogical-profile and some non-pedagogical-profile universities and colleges. Teachers are trained at colleges (providing non-university study programmes of higher education) and universities (providing basic professional study programmes; Bachelor's and Master's degree study programmes and also specialized professional study programmes).

Teachers for pre-school and primary education institutions and social pedagogues are trained under the concurrent model of teacher education. Under the concurrent model, the study programme in the field chosen is combined with the programme of professional teacher training in the corresponding field. On completion of the programmes, graduates are awarded a professional Bachelor's degree in the colleges) or Bachelor's degree (in the universities) and the qualification of a teacher (pedagogue).

Teacher training in Faculty of Pedagogy of Vilniaus kolegija / University of Applied Sciences

Faculty of Pedagogy of Vilniaus kolegija / University of Applied Sciences offers study programmes of Pedagogy of Pre-School Education, Primary Education, Social Pedagogy and Interpretation of Lithuanian Sign Language.

In accordance with the line of inclusive education, Faculty gives a lot of attention to developing intercultural competences of future pedagogues. Since 2008 the Faculty has been developing specialized training of human rights in educational field for teachers. In 2013 the Faculty of Pedagogy introduced a joint study model "Cultural Diversity" which is run together with the Faculty of Social Studies of Zuyd University (the Netherlands). Faculty also participates in different international projects, such as "Teachers Identity in Europe", "Improvement of social pedagogues professional qualification by mediation implementation" and others.

### Practices

Hearing is one of our five senses. Hearing gives us access to sounds in the world around us — people's voices, their words, a car horn blown in warning or a simple "hello". When a child has hearing loss, it is cause for immediate attention, since language and communication skills develop most rapidly in childhood, especially before the age of 3. The period from birth to 3-5 years of age is often considered as the "critical period" for the

development of normal speech and language. With early detection, modern assistive devices such as, cochlear implants and special educational support, enables hearing impaired children to integrate into school and society and live a complete life.

The idea of inclusive education brings new demands and challenges to all teachers. Supporting hearing impaired pupils/children means supporting with a teacher for the deaf, which is uncommon in schools in Lithuania. How to deal with this problem? How is it possible to implement the idea of inclusive education for hearing impaired children in practice? How to help children with cochlear implants (CI) who need a language environment and special educational support?

As it is well known for successful habilitation/rehabilitation of children with CI, they need a good spoken language environment, i.e. they have to be together with others like themselves. On the other hand, they need constant support from professionals – teachers for the deaf - who are accessible only in from special educational institutions. Two thousand and eleven was a new starting point in educational practice of CI children. As a result of cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Science and municipality of Vilnius, a group for hearing children and children with CI was opened. The group was founded in a general kindergarten of Vilnius city but located in the premises of Educational Centre of Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Lithuania. The group had three kids with CI and twenty children with normal hearing. The children's age was 3-4 years.

Children with CI in the group received individual trainings four times a week which were provided by a trained teacher for the deaf from the Educational Centre of Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Lithuania; also, one training was given by a speech therapist from the kindergarten. Of the three children, all received their implants under the age of 2, two had congenital deafness and one lost his hearing as a result of meningitis. All of them received speech, language and hearing trainings in the first year after implantation.

In the beginning CI children differed greatly from their hearing peers. They didn't speak or play and were less independent. Their teacher had to organize their communication, play activities and provide more care for them. By the end of the school year, we observed that the children had some independence and their communication had improved, all of which we stimulated and encouraged.

In this group, close cooperation was required between the teachers and specialists (teachers for the deaf, speech therapists). All planning of the educational process, as well as of topics of individual trainings, was carried together. It helped to prepare CI children for the common activities in the group.

Organizing correctional work with CI children was important and had to take into account peculiarities of perception of sounds and speech, which are defined by: distortion of speech sounds transmitted by CI into the hearing system; partially damaged auditory nerve

fibers and auditory centers of the brain; underdevelopment of the hearing centers of the brain; monaural perception (in some cases).

Teachers for the deaf try to involve parents by continuing the educational work at home; it was agreed with parents to participate once a week in individual training sessions with the teachers, with special notebooks for homework.

During the games with adults the children heard a lot of new words. They started to understand more complex phrases, expressions and game situations.

In conclusion, if a hearing impaired child acquire a modern and high quality hearing aid or cochlear implant(s) and is included into a general education environment, he/she is able to master his/her language and successfully engage into society. An example of our CI kids in inclusive setting allows us to make a prognosis on their future successful rehabilitation. Parents, teachers and audiologists strongly believe in this method of education organization. Children with CI staying together with their hearing peers and receiving appropriate special educational support can access general and higher education easier and may experience successful inclusion into society.

### **C. Needs and Challenges**

Inclusive education in Lithuania is understood primarily as an inclusion of children with non-standard mental and/or physical capabilities into “normal” school and classroom structures. Recently, the concept of “special needs” was broadened and has become an umbrella term for children facing learning difficulties by whatever reasons they are caused, including the consideration of a pupil’s ethnic or social background. However, something very essential is lacking within the understanding of “special needs.” Regarding homogeneity within the educational culture, it is also characterized by a lack of intercultural orientation, by not taking into account social, ethnic and gender factors, and by personnel who are not skilled to work in socio cultural diverse groups. The curriculum is extensive and demanding, and centrally designed and rigid. The curriculum can facilitate the development of more inclusive settings if it leaves for the school or teacher to make adaptations so that it makes sense in the local context and for the individual learner.

It must be stressed that teacher education has not consistently kept up with the policy of inclusiveness in Lithuania. Moreover, intercultural education has rarely been a subject in the teacher training curriculums.

In summary, common educational problems in Lithuania are: lack of specialists to provide early childhood education support; insufficient teacher training and education, especially the lack of implementing European policies on intercultural education; curricula is centrally designed and rigid; educational policies fail to recognize the social inequality as a

central issue based on cultural and economic differences within the educational system and as equally important to the inclusion of children with mental and/or physical disabilities.

Recognition and respect of cultural diversity is necessary in order to avoid social marginalization. Therefore, inclusive education is not sufficient without being merged with intercultural education.

In order to better address problems related to social and ethnic inequality and discrimination, it is suggested: to increase the availability of the early childhood education; to provide individualised support for pupils according to their needs; to develop curriculum in such a way that learning content relates to, and builds on the learner's background and the resources they have access to; to establish monitoring and evaluation of quality of Preschool Education and Pre-primary education programs; to promote inclusive, cooperative and individualised teaching methods; to develop an inclusive heterogenic school culture; to explicitly address dimensions such as intercultural education, inclusiveness of diversity, and citizenship education in teacher training and teacher in-service education; to promote the development of teachers intercultural competence.