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## The DISTINCT Project as an Example of Building New Europe, or New World by Inclusion in Education and Upbringing

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Pedagogika Rodziny 2/2, 281-288

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2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



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# The DISTINC Project as an Example of Building New Europe, or New World by Inclusion in Education and Upbringing

## 1. Introduction

The world is constantly changing. This is the truth that cannot be discussed. However contemporary world is changing faster than ever in many areas of development. So in order to make these changes positive for human existence and every day living, we must consider solidarity and learning people how to live together. But trials of joining people by force them to be equal brought nothing but pain and lots of misery. As history has shown we are not equal and every tries to make people equal requires killing part of their personality, aspirations, styles of living. So it is obvious that the idea of joining must have been changed from thinking about equality into thinking about advantages of diversity. The main example, or rather result of such thinking is European Union. The nations of Europe, having in their history much more time of hatred and wars than of cooperation, however did join together and still building the area of harmony (Kolodko, 2008).

The problems that occurred here was of social, cultural, historical and economical nature. The first two aspects, namely society and culture was, and still are especially difficult as they cannot be solved without changes in thinking of members of all social environment. Here lies the necessity of start at the stage of upbringing and educating. If we want to have Europe full of harmony and in the further perspective world full of harmony, we must first teach people, or even rather make people to learn how to live with other people. Thus the idea of inclusion was born in Europe, the continent of different cultures, historical background, styles of living, social structures.

Idea of inclusion is based on the principles of human rights, established in 20th Century as a result of development of culture throughout many centuries (UN Common Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). It consists of many ingredients of European culture – ancient Greek ideas, Christianity and reasonable Enlightenment of 18th Century. Among others, the right to have the access to knowledge and all achievements of culture and civilization, and the right to education that derives from the previous one are crucial. They laid on the basis of idea of inclusion.

## **2. What is Inclusion?**

“Inclusion represents the confluence of several streams of thought, social and political as well as educational. Those moves to inclusion in fact come not from one direction – not, for example, solely from research about the effectiveness of special education and special pedagogy – but from several directions: from research, certainly, but more importantly from the imperative to greater social justice; from calls for civil rights; from legislation that prohibits discrimination; from the stimulus provided by original, distinctive projects started by imaginative educators” (Thomas & Vaughan, 2005).

The idea is to make schools the places or areas of equal chances for developing in the diversity of human natures and abilities. It derives from the deficiencies of the idea of integration, what can be easily seen after years of its implementation. It is also strongly opposite the division of education into regular and special as it creates two separate worlds: world of disability and world of “normality”, however the last term is even hard to be defined and every efforts of establishing criteria of it are doomed to failure. Yet the idea of integration still divide society into two worlds, assuming that the world of disabled must be “integrated” with the rest of society, with the world of “normal” people. While inclusive way of thinking assumes that we are all equal in chances for living in society, and our differences coming from many aspects: from culture, throughout material status, up to biological conditions. These can be regarded as the source of diversity but cannot determine our status or place in the educational system. This is the idea that is very hard to be implemented as it requires not only changes in education systems, but most of all changes in thinking of all stakeholders of education in the first perspective, and all members of our society in further one.

## **3. The idea of DISTINC Project**

The DISTINC Project (Developing In-Service Training for Inclusive Classroom Teachers) was founded in 2010 in the Comenius Multilateral Framework. The partners are from all Europe, even outside the EU, as the main partner is Turkey (Boğaziçi University Lifelong Learning Center (BULLC), and Istanbul Provincial Directorate for National Education (ILMEM). Other partners are: University of

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Antwerp (Belgium), Academy of Management in Lodz (Poland), University of Evora (Portugal) and Noel Park Primary School (UK).

The team reflects the area of interests of the project as well as the main beneficiaries: educationists, teachers, education governments and all stakeholders of education.

The project is set in the mainframe of idea of inclusion as all research has shown (as well as common sense dictates) that segregation has big and negative influence for all society and brings bad and expensive results. Both in social and financial sense. The fundamental thing to avoid segregation is to establish conditions for developing different potentials of all children. Thus we can receive not only a great tool for prophylactic activities but also make the ability for children to learn from themselves which is one of most powerful didactic “weapons”.

One of the main barriers in developing inclusive education is that it's about shifts in thinking not only in teachers' minds, but also governments, local authorities, even parents, that it's about looking at the same reality but in a different way so we can see other opportunities in dealing with this reality. But to create shift in thinking is not enough here. It is necessary also to show what lies behind the scenes – what are the benefits of new way of thinking: to diminish fears of change, and, what is of great importance, to create the environment for developing tools for this new way of thinking, new way of teaching.

The project is constructed in such way as to give to the teachers basic tools but most of all to show them how to create their own ideas, as each and every teacher works in specific conditions, that requires sometimes specific tools and attitudes. So the project is a kind of self developing tool, conceived as a “snow ball”, becoming bigger and bigger as it is spread all over educational world.

The project is mainly related to the teachers, but doesn't limit to them. It can be useful for educational authorities, school staff, school heads, even parents, whose expectations according to school are often based of the lack of knowledge and thus are far from reality.

#### **4. The construction of DISTINC**

The Project started from preparing research on knowledge and needs of teachers according to the idea of inclusion. The research was made in all countries of partners of the Project in 2011. The results will be published in the separate paper as it can be also a contribution to another useful social or educational projects.

The next stage was developing modules for training teachers. The modules consists of toolboxes with all necessary material for developing the idea of inclusive education, but most of all to put them into practice.

After the toolbox are produced, the trainings of the trainers are planned. The idea of spreading the Project is to train 5 teachers making them trainers, than they

train 5 teachers each, making thus the amount of 25 teachers trained. And so on. The operation is independently made in all countries participating in the project.

Then the assessment will be made. To see all possible aspects of impact of this Project, the evaluation process will be held in two different ways. First is to gather the opinion of the trained teacher of what changes they can see after training and what is their contribution (or the teachers that were trained) to the developing or evaluating of the Project. On the other hand the external evaluation will be made. Experts on inclusive education will have their eye on the implementation process and will be able to value the impact of educational process.

The idea is here to make the process to be born and leave it still working and developing after the Project will be finished.

## **5. The content of DISTINC**

The toolbox for the Project consists of five modules.

Each of them has clearly stated goals. They begin from the introduction explaining these goals, and put them in a wider perspective of inclusive education. Then the scenario of the training is set with themes, explanations and activities. But the main content of each module is a set of scenarios, presentations, reading materials, that can be used not only during training, but most of all in the every day work of the teachers. We can distinguish three main groups of materials: Reading materials for teacher trained, presentations to use during the trainings, and scenarios of activities that can be used by teachers in their work. What is very important, every toolbox encourages also to search for new, particular tools and materials. It is made in two ways: by showing how to prepare it on one's own, and by showing where to seek additional tools (links, libraries, persons). So all the modules are open to develop – if they are to create the shift in thinking into the inclusive mode, they have to be inclusive by itself.

The five modules are:

1. Education in an Inclusive Paradigm
2. Inclusive Classroom Practice
3. Challenging Behaviours
4. Initial Reading and Writing
5. Difficulties in Fluency and Reading Comprehension

### **1. Education in an Inclusive Paradigm**

This module consists of general information on inclusion and inclusive education. Its goal is to introduce some key concepts that can be helpful in understanding the concept of inclusion as a framework and to realize its significance for educational practice and challenges today. It gathers basic information about the background of inclusion and inclusive education, and introduces some kind of

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inclusive language which is a sign of inclusive way of thinking, that will be used throughout the other modules.

It begins with introduction that puts the inclusion on the wide background of human rights. That the idea of inclusion is presented, especially in regard to the approaches to disability. However it must be remembered that inclusion doesn't limit to disability, but it is a wide idea of living in diversity in general.

Shifts in thinking that are crucial to put the idea of inclusion into practice are here a start point, because it is necessary to raise the problem of changes in school organization. Sometimes it is impossible to wait for authorities to make some changes as we could wait for it for eternity. The initiative must go from bottom to the top. That requires full conscious of teacher and all educational stakeholders. But sometimes teachers don't even realizes the conditions of their functioning, as things that are around for always are regarded as natural and not even noticed. The answer for the question of school organization is here the starting point to change it in minds of people who using it, as this is the best way to persuade the people who create it.

The module also gives awareness of the most common problem that can arise in teacher's work. It presents popular kinds of problems described in educational practice as Special Educational Needs.

## **2. Inclusive educational practice.**

This module is of a practical nature. Its goal is to give as much tools for teachers as it is possible. But it doesn't mean that it is only the toolbox, the repository of things ready to use. It has to lead to making the teacher feel more competent in dealing with a wide diversity of educational needs and abilities in an inclusive context. The tools here always refers to some concepts that can be used in preparing more adequate material, as the teachers are dealing with specific challenges in their everyday work. For example the reference to the Gardner's multiple intelligences is made here with possible way of using it in practical work in the classroom used as an example.

The module that is starting from scenarios of welcoming all children in the class, refers to three basic dimensions of classroom working.

First is the adaptation to children with wide diversity of different abilities. Teachers in really inclusive school must deal with children of different nature, abilities, behaviours, cultural and ethnical background. It requires not only the inclusive approach or even the patience, but also a wide knowledge about different kinds of human nature in every aspect of living.

Second is the adapting the methods for such a variety of children's natures. The teacher should keep balance between being flexible in approach to particular children and firm in the approach to curriculum in general. Teaching becomes an art of choosing between flexibility and being strict.

Third is adapting environment of teaching. Flexibility in teaching cannot mean leaving curriculum in its general mainframe. But to create the good environment for inclusive teaching, and for the children the environment for inclusive learning, the teacher must change the organization of the class, as setting the right environment is crucial for further working. The conception as well as tools are proposed here.

### **3. Challenging behaviours. Things we know, things we can learn**

This module contains information, especially given from psychological point of view, about behaviours that the teachers can deal with at school. It is obvious that every teacher meets challenging behaviours in his or her work, but it is necessary to understand their complexity and all possible factors that are the cause of it. In the third module teachers are given presentations of psychological background of most common challenging behaviours. They are able to understand the roots of behaviours as a reaction to stimulus. It is also pointed that not every special educational needs are of organic nature, some of them are connected with behaviours of reactive nature. So they can be easily eliminated if the cause of them will be eliminated.

The module gives tools to manage inclusion of children with challenging behaviour into the community of the class or school, eliminating fears of spreading them to the rest of the children. It focuses also on the fact that teacher cannot forget about interactions between him or her and the child. Dealing with children with such behaviours in an inclusive way cannot divide teacher and the child into “both sides” as it can create conflict and is far away from the idea of inclusion.

The important feature of the module is that it doesn't pretend to be the new prescription for acting but encourages teachers to join their own experiences with the new approach.

### **4 and 5. Initial reading, writing and fluency**

These modules are also mainly of practical nature. Module 4 is devoted to early reading and writing, while 5 deals with difficulties in fluency and comprehension in reading. These activities are chosen as the basic one for the next stages or levels of education. Neglecting beginnings of structured educations, i.e. ability of communicate by reading and writing, makes irreversible harm in children's minds and have undoubtful affection on the future life of individual in the society. The tools that are presented in this module can allow teachers to take a look at the process of teaching of reading and writing from the inclusive perspective, not from the perspective of estimations and achievements only.

Module 4 helps teachers to understand needs of children on the stage of initial reading and writing, especially those who have problems with it. It is sometimes necessary to link behaviours or other organic or social problems with difficulties in reading or writing. With the tools delivered, the module helps teachers to

determine and/or describe basic skills in the area of communication from the educative perspective.

Module 5 focuses on fluency in reading and comprehension, dealing with some myths about difficulties in fluent reading. It also presents a lot of methods and techniques improving comprehension from the inclusive perspective: without dividing children into any groups, without challenging expectations or achievements. It also gives a clue on how to encourage children in their aspirations without giving a fear of failure.

## 6. Conclusions

The Project is the expression of the idea claiming that changes must be made on the level of particular minds. Inclusive education as well as inclusion itself is of such nature that implementation by establishing top – down rules is impossible. It must be internalized by all the people responsible for education first, but all over the society then. Wide range of partners in the DISTINCT Project guarantees taking into considerations many aspects of complex problem that lies on the basis of theory of inclusion, as each partner has its own experiences on this ground: from dealing with diversity that arises from the emigration and diversity of cultures, throughout different levels of economical status, to the different levels of civilization development within one country. However there are things that are common: question of disability or special educational needs. That is why DISTINCT Project has big chance to succeed and can be continued in practice even after its end, what is one of the main goal of it.

### **Projekt DISTINCT jako przykład budowania nowej Europy lub nowy świat przez włączenie w edukacji i wychowaniu**

#### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł przedstawia jeden z międzynarodowych projektów europejskich z programu Comenius, mianowicie DISTINCT (Szkolenie zawodowe dla nauczycieli w zakresie edukacji włączającej), poświęcony problematyce edukacji włączającej. Osadza projekt w obszarze włączania, podkreślając, że idea włączania leży u podłoża idei Unii Europejskiej. Idei, która może być rozprzestrzeniona na cały świat. Autor przedstawi cele, konstrukcję i zawartość projektu i podkreśla jego znaczącą rolę w budowaniu nowoczesnego, otwartego, wielokulturowego społeczeństwa.

#### **Summary**

The paper presents one of the European international projects from the Comenius Framework, namely DISTINCT (Developing In-Service Training for Inclusive Classroom Teachers), devoted to the problems of inclusive education. It sets the project in the area of inclusion, pointing out



that the idea of inclusion lies at the ground of the idea of European Union. Idea that can be spread all over the world. Author presents goals, construction and contents of the Project and emphasizes its significant role in the building of modern, open, intercultural society.

### **Bibliography**

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