

EFPA Position Paper

Educational Psychology and Inclusive Education

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The implementation of inclusive education in Europe is still at the beginning of a long term process, which can be positively influenced by psychological work. The implementation bears tensions and challenges, especially concerning the achievement and management of including children and adolescents with the most challenging behavior and with multiple challenges. Inclusion is not just a matter of technical, organisational, educational issues, it is also and maybe primarily a matter of attitude. Psychologists should thereby model an acceptance of difference and diversity, in terms of abilities, values and aspirations held in a plural society.

The service of psychologists in school communities is

- indispensable to ensure a child rights based professional approach to individual needs in inclusive and other learning environments.
- essential to support and to contribute to processes allowing to provide an education for all children and their families, who decide to participate in an inclusive setting.

In order to benefit from psychological expertise the educational system needs to provide services of psychologists equally and freely accessible by all members of the school communities. The lack of the provision of psychological support to teaching staff and to school leadership in many European Member States multiplies the challenges to implement inclusive education.

In the past psychologists in education have often contributed to segregation in the educational system. Psychologists need to apply the paradigm shift towards inclusion. In an effective including approach:

- The psychologist needs to become a partner in a problem solving process.
- The focus of change is not primarily anymore on the child but on the context the child lives in.
- The focus is not exclusively on problems and challenges, but on positive aspects of function.
- Psychological assessments need to include a broad range of information, such as protective factors, risk factors, strengths and weakness at the same time.

European Psychologists in Education

- have competences (i.e. in the area of educational psychology, developmental psychology, social psychology, organizational psychology, psycho-diagnostics, psychopathology, neuropsychology.), which draw on their profession and education and which can be successfully used to support inclusive education as many examples illustrate.

- take a rights based approach to inclusive education and support the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in European educational systems.
- look at inclusive education as the promise
 - to recognize difference as a matter of fact
 - to prevent difference from becoming disadvantaged and excluded in education
 - to enable all students to develop their full potential by promoting and providing adequate conditions in education and by removing barriers.
 - to enable all students to participate and to find a decent place in the educational community.
- share the vision that successful inclusion in schools will facilitate the development of an inclusive society.

Challenges in the work of psychologists in inclusive education are seen in

- Helping to create an optimal learning environment adapted to individual needs
- Helping to develop a rights based information and data system in education
- Developing adequate support for teachers (at individual level, in form of training courses for groups of teachers etc.)
- Promoting research on inclusive education
- Developing proposals for improvement of inclusive education on the basis of collected data in practice and on the basis of evidence for decision-makers in administration and politics

In order to improve professional work of psychologists in inclusive education, it is necessary

- To develop evidence based practice of prevention and intervention in inclusive education and a database of best practice models through cooperation of research and practice across Europe
- To include in psychologist's education and training new competences and the transfer of knowledge on inclusion, i.e. methods and evidence, how to organize change towards inclusion in schools, how to achieve inclusive classrooms, inclusive assessment methods and strategies, application of technology for inclusive education, knowledge of inclusion centred regulations and ethical codes.
- That psychological expertise in the educational system is a legally guaranteed integrated part of educational systems
- That psychological expertise is equally and freely accessible for all members of the school communities.