



Specific Learning Models And Approaches For Persons With Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 stipulates that “(1) Everyone has the right to education. (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Persons with intellectual disability are at high risk of marginalisation and supporting, by all means, their educational effort should be a common goal of the community, in the aim of contributing to their social integration and insertion on the labour market. In relation to this target group - persons with intellectual disability – difficulties have been identified in:

- *implementing activities aimed at developing key and specialist competencies (according to recommendations proposed by the European Council as in Barcelona Conference 12/05/2009 ET2020);*
- *providing European methods in order to foster the concrete development of essential competencies or becoming active citizens and finding better jobs.*

The paper presents the achievements of the D-ACTIVE project (a LLP/Grundtvig – Multilateral project with ref. no. 510773-LLP-1-2010-1-ITGRUNDTVIG-GMP) in creating and experimenting multidimensional and integrated tools and applicative models in education, for educationalists and trainers working with persons with intellectual disability, in the view of developing and fostering the active citizenship of the latter and for supporting them to become socially integrated. A tool used in clinical and social fields - the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, the so-called ICF (recommended by World Health Organization) is equally described in the paper and as well as its applicability in the afferent outcomes for acquiring active citizenship skills in people with intellectual disability.

1. Disability, intellectual disability and the right to learn and work

The right to learn is a universal and fundamental right of all human beings. It is so stated in art. 26(1),(2) of The Universal Declaration of the Human Rights [1]. The right to learn should be seen as a comprehensive concept by which learning is accessible and open to all categories of people, at all ages, throughout the entire life. It thus includes lifelong learning and continuing learning – or in other words learning from cradle to grave – learning beyond any barrier: age, gender, disability, religion, race, etc. “Learning throughout life implies a rethinking of content to reflect such factors as age, gender equality, disability, language, culture and economic disparities”, as also stated in the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning, issued during the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education on 14-18 July, 1997 [2].

The Millennium Development Goals Two is “to achieve universal primary education by 2015” [3]. But this noble mission can be fulfilled only if it reaches all children, including the children with disabilities. Up to 90% of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school. They then miss out on education's lifelong benefits – better employment opportunities, greater participation in society, improved health and a clearer understanding of their rights. This enormous gap has many causes: lack of access, inadequate facilities, the mistaken belief that disabled children cannot go to school and discrimination are all factors. While learning can take place in many settings, often the most effective way for children with disabilities to get an education is to attend their local, mainstream schools. This approach, known as inclusive education, sees changing school cultures as a positive process.



Disability is not viewed as the problem; rather it presents an evolving opportunity for change and growth that enables schools to take account of the needs of all children in their area. Without such efforts, meeting MDG 2 will be impossible.

In 2006 a second worldwide initiative was added to the Millennium Development Goals – the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) [4]. The adoption of this UN Convention increased momentum for the adoption of legally binding instruments that consolidate the rights of persons with disability. This human rights treaty takes a rights-based approach to disability and development and states that “States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels [...]”. With the world now committed to every child's right to full participation in every country's educational system, it is vital to assess which methods of inclusive education are most effective. Besides the concept of inclusive education, the approach of inclusive development in relation to the persons with disabilities became more spread and got more and more supporters. The World Bank for example is committed to improve the well-being of persons with disabilities living in developing countries and seeks to promote inclusive development through knowledge generation and documentation of good practice, through the integration of disability issues into its analytical and operational work, and by fostering external partnerships for disability and development [5].

Showing that its provisions shall apply to all categories of disabled persons, the Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) has entered into force on 20/6/1985 [6]. It stipulates in art. 1(2) that “Each Member shall consider the purpose of vocational rehabilitation as being to enable a disabled person to secure, retain and advance in suitable employment and thereby to further such person's integration or reintegration into society”.

2. Approaching teaching and learning for persons with intellectual disabilities

Disabled people make up approximately 10% of the world population or roughly 650 million people [7] and 20% of the world's poorest [8]. Disability is both a cause and effect of poverty, and 82% of disabled people live below the poverty line in developing countries (UN). 98 % of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend schools (UNESCO). These figures can be higher in countries devastated by civil war or natural disaster. Disabled people, in all parts of the world, experience discrimination and are widely excluded from the social, economic and political life of the community. This exclusion is the basic cause of high rates of poverty among disabled people in the poorest countries. Being amongst the most excluded has severe life or death implications for disabled people in developing countries [9].

In 1980, the World Health Organization [7] adopted an international classification of impairments, disabilities and handicaps, which suggested a more precise and at the same time relativistic approach. The “International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps” makes a clear distinction between impairment, disability and handicap. It has been extensively used in areas such as rehabilitation, education, statistics, policy, legislation, demography, sociology, economics and anthropology. Some users have expressed concern that the Classification, in its definition of the term “handicap”, may still be considered too medical and too centred on the individual, and may not adequately clarify the interaction between societal conditions or expectations and the abilities of the individual.

D-ACTIVE project – a LLP/Grundtvig multilateral project developed by a partnership of 9 EU institutions from 7 countries (IT, FR, DE, RO, ES, AT, GR) under the coordination of Consorzio CO&SO Firenze [11], aims at fostering active citizenship and learning among a particular target group at high risk of marginalization: persons with intellectual disabilities.

Starting from a tool used in clinical and social fields - the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, the so-called ICF (recommended by World Health Organization) and in order to address the needs explained above, D-ACTIVE project aims at creating and experimenting multidimensional and integrated tools and applicative models in education.

There is an absence of multidimensional and integrated applicative intervention models and of specific guidelines for working with disabled people, connected to the theoretical framework set up by the European Council, allowing the fulfillment of its objectives and the realization of a true inclusion.

D-ACTIVE has a very innovative character aiming at producing and experimenting tools, methodologies and models for effectively fulfilling the objectives set up by the Lisbon and Barcelona



Conferences for disabled people and having a recognized and transversal value in the different countries involved in the project.

ICF is still an innovative tool since it suggests a classification aimed at:

- describing the health of people, their daily life, in relation to where they live, in order to identify the difficulties aroused in their context by disabilities
- stressing unicity and resources of the person with disabilities
- pointing out not only the way in which people deal with their disabilities, but also what can be done in order to improve the quality of their lives.

The D-ACTIVE project provides applicative models, educational instruments for training educators and disabled people in order to implement these principles in practice.

The project partnership performed a survey based on questionnaires to evaluate the disabled persons' quality of life. The questionnaires were divided into ICF macro-areas:

- physical, psychological and social well-being;
- the disable person in the habitat;
- the interaction of the disabled persons with family, society, cultural setting, services;
- availability of services;
- individual resources.

The innovativeness of the D-ACTIVE project consist in considering and evaluating contextual aspects concerning the environment, the family, the emotional burden associated with caring for a certain subject. The tools (questionnaires) were applied both of people with disabilities (care-receivers) and on proxies (care-givers).

In order to be able to attend the course aimed at active citizenship and social integration, the disabled persons on whom the ICF tools were applied should observe the following criteria:

- - Mild Mental Retardation (WAISr QI from 50-55 to 70);
- - Under 40 years old;
- - Able to learn (more details in ICF Checklist Range);
- - Able to Participate.

A set of 5 different ICF-based tools were used:

- (1) ICF CHECKLIST (the complete instrument developed by WHO as a common classification about Disability and environmental barriers/facilitators);
- (2) WHODAS II (the Disability Assessment Schedule II (WHO, 2000), asking about difficulties of the care-receiver due to health conditions);
- (3) WHOQOL-Bref (the Quality of Life-Bref (World Health Organization, 2004), that asks about how the care-giver feels about his/her quality of life, health or other areas;
- (4) CAREGIVER BURDEN INVENTORY - CBI (the instrument assessing the stress level of the caregiver due to care-giving (Novak, Guest; 1989));
- (5) CAREGIVER ROLE RELATION INTERVIEW – C.a.R.R.I. (Caregiver Role Relation Interview, developed by psychologists of CSE "Totem" (2010) that detect how the relationship between caregivers and care-receivers and their deep emotional aspects play a relevant role in improving or worsening the Quality of life of people with disabilities).

The results of the survey will be used in identifying the educational and training needs of disabled persons (correlated with the level of their disability) and further it will support the designing of a pilot course targeting at creating specific skills for active citizenship and social integration of disabled persons.

The next steps in this specific D-ACTIVE approach are:

1. To elaborate a Catalogue of criteria and key factors for ICF as a practical guide which will incorporate: (a) guidelines for implementing multi-system actions aimed to realize the objective of improving the quality of life of disabled people and to develop keys and competences in disabled people in order to promote their Active citizenship; (b) guidelines for a balanced development of the different phases in which the competences of disabled people and of educationalists are developed.



2. To design the D-ACTIVE-EDU Handbook to be used for planning a training course for educationalists, a course aimed at explaining how to use ICF in practical initiatives targeted at disabled people. The course will provide educationalists with competences for dealing with disabled people, their families, their environments and for helping them to develop specific and key competences in order to: foster their Active Citizenship improve the quality of their life foster their social inclusion.
3. To implement the experimentation phase: (a) selecting the educationalists, (b) implementing the course (adopting integrated and multidisciplinary teaching methodologies; alternating frontal teaching with interactive teaching, performing working sessions on case-studies, on specific tools, planning the course and the evaluation, implementing the empirical testing in order to obtain suitable performances), (c) evaluating the results through an analysis of the training agreement cards given to educationalists and of the activities organized in order to evaluate the achievements.

3. Conclusions

Joint efforts are nowadays done worldwide for building and achieving a society in which every disabled person can enjoy their rights and has the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Persons with disabilities are at high risk of marginalisation and supporting, by all means, their educational effort should be a common goal of the community, in the aim of contributing to their social integration and insertion on the labour market.

Persons with disabilities are members of society and have the right to remain within their local communities. They should receive the support they need within the ordinary structures of education, health, employment and social services. States should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system. They should recognize the principle that persons with disabilities must be empowered to exercise their human rights, particularly in the field of employment. In both rural and urban areas they must have equal opportunities for productive and gainful employment in the labour market [10].

References

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