Chapter 5
Support in the Inclusive Classroom

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Abstract This chapter aims to discuss and delve into the knowledge and analysis of different models, organisations and possibilities of support that enable inclusive experiences in the classroom, and that break with the therapeutic and compensatory models that discriminate and segregate pupils. We understand the different kinds of support as strategies and resources, both human and material, that facilitate diversification of learning opportunities in the classroom so that any pupil can develop to the fullest and achieve success in school. Support is considered from a collaborative and institutional dimension, that is, collaboration is understood as a basic activity, taking into account an integrative vision of the school. The chapter presents research and proposals for action where the general support available in schools and the classroom promote participation and learning with equity and quality.

Keywords School organisation · Inclusion · Spain · Classroom resources · Classroom supports · Equity

Introduction

Introducing inclusive support in classrooms and at ordinary schools requires the involvement and collaboration of all teachers. In turn, the role of support teachers needs to be clearly defined to ensure student presence, participation and progress, without categorising or discriminating against anybody. Beyond access and presence (terms inherent to the integration-rehabilitation model), a qualitative leap is required, from the Global Inclusive Education perspective, to place each and every student in enriching learning experiences, sharing the communal spaces that promote participation and foster the students' construction of their own subjectivity.

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Moreover, these spaces are the ones that enable them to learn and practise inclusive, democratic values (solidarity, justice, equity, etc.).

From this perspective, all teachers are responsible for inclusive support based on a shared vision of the entire educational community, since support is an inherent part of education. Nonetheless, support in Spain continues to be rooted today in the deficit paradigm and is used as a therapeutic resource for students with the greatest learning difficulties in order to compensate for their deficits. This approach leads to isolated individual or small-group intervention in specialised classrooms, where support teachers are seen as specialists with restricted responsibilities at the school, thus upholding a restrictive and limited view of support.

This chapter aims to set out the bases to develop inclusive support in ordinary classrooms by aligning two elements: contributions from international bodies that see inclusive support as a right of all students, and scientific knowledge that endorses this support model to attain equitable and quality education for all. In this vein, the following objectives frame the chapter: (a) pinpointing the conceptual framework in international debates on educational support; (b) analysing the inclusion of natural support for learning that helps all students from a global and systematic perspective; and (c) posing questions and future challenges aimed at transforming practice through comprehensive inclusive support guidance.

The International Perspective

On an international level, the preamble to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN, 2006) sets out the need to promote and protect the human rights of all persons with disabilities, including those who require more intensive support. It also states the obligation of States Parties to undertake or promote research and development of, and to promote the availability and use of new technologies, including information and communications technologies, mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies, suitable for persons with disabilities (Art. 4.g), as well as to provide accessible information to persons with disabilities about mobility aids, devices and assistive technologies, including new technologies, as well as other forms of assistance, support services and facilities (Art. 4.h). The right to other types of support is also included in the Convention, e.g. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to provide people with disability access to the support they may require in exercising their legal capacity (Art. 12.3). Another fundamental right set out in the Convention is independent living and being included in the community, specifically, access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community, and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community (Art. 19.b).

The area of personal assistance and support remains unfinished business in many countries, especially in Spain. Indeed, in Spain it is a contentious topic given that on the one hand, it is included in the Act on the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent People (2006): 'personal care is human support that carries out

or helps to carry out those tasks that an individual, due to his/her disability and/or dependent status, cannot perform for him/herself or finds them really difficult.' And on the other hand, this support figure has been denied access to classrooms as s/he is not considered as teaching staff—a controversial situation that has even been condemned by families. This non-teaching professional category is common in different countries and often used as the 'primary mechanism to support students with disabilities in the general education environment' (Giangreco et al., 2011, p. 26). Many studies on the role of this support professional come from the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. This interest is due to international guidelines on inclusive education (UNESCO, 2005) that urge countries to relocate students who were traditionally taught in special education centres to ordinary schools.

Article 24 of the CRPD on the right to education states that 'States Parties shall ensure that people with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education' (2.d) and 'effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion' (2.e), as well as 'peer support' (3.a).

In turn, the recent Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020 (UNESCO, 2020) points to different aspects under discussion with regard to support. Chapter six looks at the issue of support staff in education (assistants, psychologists, drivers, etc.), to what extend they are available and their relationship with teachers, with a view to achieving inclusive practice. These educational support staff members may favour or hinder inclusion in certain settings. Nevertheless, the report states that on a global level, provision is mostly lacking since 15% of the countries largely lack support staff or they simply do not exist. The report's conclusions state that support staff need training and defined duties and responsibilities. Scant training or a lack of clear responsibilities may hinder the effectiveness of support staff. Although professional training has enabled support staff to obtain formal qualifications in recent years, most join schools without any specific training (Rose, 2020). Therefore, training support personnel is necessary, but not sufficient, to ensure an inclusive learning environment and effective cooperation with teachers. A review of studies on 11 high-income nations, including Canada, Italy and Norway, revealed that the responsibilities assigned to teaching assistants were often unclear. Moreover, their collaboration with teachers was limited, as well as the teachers' supervision of their work. The review concluded that their effectiveness in improving learning results and inclusion was uneven. For example, teaching assistants taught students with disabilities, in many instances, in small, separate groups, excluding them from the general classroom (Sharma & Salend, 2016).

Furthermore, the report deems that support technology, with regard to universal design for learning, should align with a focus on inclusive media to represent information, express knowledge and participate in learning. For instance, assistive devices help overcome obstacles that hinder vulnerable students from getting the most out of the syllabus. In order to realise their full potential, technology should be used with suitable pedagogy. However, differentiated instruction provided by technology is rarely used, due largely to teachers not having received appropriate training.

The Theoretical Perspective

In the inclusive education model, Booth and Ainscow (2015) define pedagogical support from an inclusive approach as 'all activities which increase the capacity of a school to respond to student diversity' (p. 18). That said, the way and level at which support is provided is hugely important and should be continuously reviewed and analysed; depending on the prevailing support model, teachers with a specialist profile and support duties may facilitate and drive changes in a school's culture and practices or, on the other hand, represent a barrier to progress in inclusion. Retrospectively, and from an inclusive perspective, the duties of a support teacher change and go from individual rehabilitative care to a responsibility towards all students in the group alongside the tutor, in order to share and improve the global response to student diversity.

Based on the research carried out by Takala et al. (2009) and Ainscow (2012) defines three different support situations corresponding to three alternative approaches:

– The individual learning model
– The small-group learning model
– The collaborative learning model with two teachers

Several research papers (Sabando et al., 2017; Sandoval Mena et al., 2019a, b; Soldevila Pérez et al., 2017; Rappoport & Echeita, 2018; Rappoport et al., 2019) have demonstrated that a classroom support model is the best choice, as it enables more students to benefit from support and reduces the pressure and stigmatisation of those who have to leave the classroom at specific times. As Huguet (2006) outlines, developing this support model requires a series of agreements between teachers: the type of activities to be undertaken; the type of participation each will perform in the activity; planning broad and flexible activities; providing the necessary attention to the most vulnerable students, whether by the tutor or support teacher and, finally, assessing how it works to plan for future activities.

In short, involving inclusion support professionals in internal classroom dynamics is a necessary, albeit not the only, step to attain educational inclusion for all students. Where support is provided in the classroom, nobody is left out or sidelined from participating in learning experiences which, alongside peers, boosts the comprehensive development of all students and contributes to constructing satisfactory personal pathways. In this sense, it is essential for support to be negotiated and reorganised in inclusive classrooms with a view to contributing to collective benefit rather than exclusively focusing on students deemed to have 'difficulties'. The following section will look further at inclusive support, as well as certain structures that provide optimum responses to student diversity within the framework of inclusive education.

Contributions to Inclusive Support in Classrooms

Goal four in Agenda 2030 aims at 'ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all'. This takes us back to support as one of the pillars underpinning inclusive education: support being understood in a broad systemic sense (for all), in opposition to a restrictive vision (for some) that largely or almost exclusively refers to students with special needs. This controversial tension between normal and special, good and bad, able and unable remains rooted in our education system, creating powerful inequalities and exclusion processes at schools.

In the same vein, the integration-inclusion duality remains in place—treating both as if they were the same thing—although the vision of schools (their project) clearly points to a commitment to inclusion for all students. This duality is reflected in the prevailing support model at schools that focuses on direct attention for students with special or specific needs from specialised professionals, whose duties are grouped into two profiles: Therapeutic Pedagogy (TP) and Speech and Language (SL) teachers. The research undertaken by Sandoval Mena et al. (2019a, b) highlights this, questioning the role of support teachers and how they could contribute to transforming schools into more inclusive settings. The conclusions underscore the following points:

(a) Support teachers continue to perform their duties largely from a rehabilitative approach, either individual or directed to a small group of students, especially in fundamental areas
(b) There is a lack of collaboration between classroom and support teachers, which focuses more on discussing certain students and the content to work on in teaching periods
(c) There is a lack of cooperation and prior joint planning, with no time being set aside for this purpose
(d) There is a lack of a shared support vision at the school as a whole (management team, teachers, etc.), in addition to no coherent guidelines containing the principles and values of inclusive education.

Moreover, the Spanish legal framework (LOMLOE, 2020) adopts inclusive education as a human right for all and aims at ensuring quality learning for all students. Despite this, students are still categorised based on clinical labels (Echeita et al., 2016), and the idea that certain students require learning support from specialists remains in place (including TP and SL). The duties of these specialists include making individual syllabus adaptations for special students or those with specific needs in terms of educational support: non-significant (access) and significant changes that are framed by a student's lag with regard to the syllabus (equal to or above 2 years). Again, far from disappearing, the deficit model is fuelled by legislative authority to justify school practices that segregate and exclude.

Strengthening mutual support relationships would be the main tool for achieving inclusive classrooms. By inclusive classroom, we mean one that offers a response to

all diversities within their natural learning contexts, through developing participatory practices and heterogeneous interactive organisational support systems. In this sense, progress in inclusive practice inevitably means rethinking which support model is in tune with this practice, as well as widening perspectives to look in-depth at issues with the potential to transform learning environments for all from an inclusive standpoint.

Along these lines, certain benchmark approaches will be looked at below that focus on processes to facilitate and promote significant inclusive and accessible learning experiences for all students, recognising the value of everyone's strengths on a basis of what Florian (2013) would term 'inclusive pedagogy'. The presented guidelines are a type of support that question 'the architecture of exclusion' (Slee, 2012, p. 161) by spotlighting the school's ability (ecological perspective) to respond to the needs of each and every student in all their diversity.

Universal Design for Learning

Inclusive pedagogy requires teachers to broaden what they do in the classroom in an accessible way for everybody, offering a range of options open to all (Florian, 2010). This approach connects to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) since both approaches set out the need to provide multiple learning options as a response to individual differences. This approach aims at avoiding student exclusion and marginalisation in the classroom, whilst also connecting to the concept of an interactive, accessible, enriched syllabus to offer opportunities of participation and learning to all students (Sapon-Shevin, 2013). With regard to UDL, one of its main features is that it promotes flexibility to enable all students to achieve their learning goals (Wehmeyer, 2009).

In line with Sánchez-Gómez and López's contribution (2020), UDL is designed as a support system for learning. The authors propose linking UDL to the support paradigm, the premise of which is that individualised support reduces discrepancies between individuals and their environment (Schalock et al., 2010). Thus, in line with the comprehensive multidimensional framework of human performance, support is deemed a way of improving personal performance. The conceptual basis for this paradigm goes further into the role of support at three levels, namely: (i) support understood as a construct referring to the template and intensity of necessary support for a person to participate in communal or important activities; (ii) support understood as all resources and strategies to promote the development, education, interests and personal wellbeing of individuals and improve their performance; and (iii) the support system corresponding to planned integrated use of individualised support strategies and resources (to attain the aforementioned goals) that include different aspects of human performance in multiple contexts.

This approach deems that the concept of support has traditionally been applied more as individualised support in personal plans and adaptations. Nonetheless, the proposal underscores the possibility of designing universal support (for everybody),

without decoupling it from the individual needs of each student (Sánchez-Gómez & López, 2020). These authors distinguish between learning support needs linked to motivation, which should be understood as the template and intensity of support required by students to engage in learning in line with their preferences; learning support needs linked to representation, which should be understood as the template and intensity of support required by students to be able to perceive and understand the information presented to them by teachers; and, finally, 'learning support needs linked to action and expression which should be understood as the template and intensity of support required to be able to perform learning tasks and express the knowledge that has been attained' (Sánchez-Gómez & López, 2020, p. 150).

In turn, there are different classroom support resources within UDL. Technology is one of the most common, being used as an essential help and support mechanism for students with disabilities and enabling them to overcome physical or time barriers. Using technology not only serves as a support for specific student groups but also as a way to ensure accessibility to learning and attention to diversity (Alba et al., 2015). Its role in the development of UDL has been fundamental since it facilitates flexible content and forms of expression for students.

In short, UDL fosters the elimination of barriers to learning and student participation, considering that the focal point in inclusive practice is not the disability of certain students or their specific difficulties, but rather the syllabus being designed, from the very start, to be accessible (flexible) for all students in terms of material and methods, activities and educational strategies, and assessment. The main aim is to offer different alternatives so that each and every student has successful learning experiences and acquires the life skills defined as meaningful and valuable for all. In turn, UDL is an approach and model 'that aims at reformulating education by providing a conceptual framework—alongside other tools—that facilitates analysis and assessment of syllabus designs and educational practice so as to identify barriers to learning and promote inclusive teaching proposals (Alba, 2019, p.58).

Teaching Support: Shared or Co-teaching

Co-teaching is an effective approach to provide suitable responses to student diversity, 'with the aim of exploring and implementing new teaching strategies based on mutual collaboration' (Duk & Murillo, 2014, p. 11). Co-teaching involves synergies, cooperation, joint responsibility, trust, etc. in order to move towards more inclusive practice (policies and cultures). It is a way of amplifying support in the classroom or, in other words, 'it involves assistance being available for all, both for those that constantly need it and for those who only need it from time to time' (Duran-Gisbert et al., 2019, p.3).

In addition to being seen as a support for students, this type of collaboration should be appreciated as a 'learning resource for teachers' (Sandoval Mena et al., 2019a, b, p. 94), through joint reflection and analysis of practice for informed and contextualised improvements.

As active professionals, teachers need to constantly seek out new ways of learning support for all students. A key foundation for this principle is finding ways to work together or with others in order to foster participation and improve the educational experience of all students in the classroom community. This represents a challenge to the traditional division between 'conventional' teachers, who are responsible for most students' learning, and 'specialist' teachers who work with students identified as 'having special needs'. Instead, 'adults need to work together to find better ways to support all students' (Spratt & Florian, 2013, p. 144). The benefits of this approach are important since it leads to re-thinking the professional roles (Florian, 2003) of both teachers and support staff who, by working in co-teaching situations, contribute to developing sustainable inclusive practice over time.

Peer Support

Peer support is part of the extraordinary teacher-student-family triangle, alongside other external agents from the education community involved in inclusion. Inclusive classrooms foster cooperation and the creation of natural support networks through strategies such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring or circles of friends. According to Bunch (2015), teachers have several simple and informal strategies to boost peer support in the classroom, e.g. quick chats between students to ask brief questions to clarify points or share advice on how to approach a lesson; homework friends where two or three students compare their homework and discuss any problems; Know, Want, Learn groups where students review together what they already know about a topic and what they need to learn now; and pairing for book reviews where they interview each other about books they have read, noting down the main characters, plot significant events and other aspects.

One of the most commonly used and empirically studied cooperative learning methods is peer tutoring (Topping et al., 2015). The concept may be defined as a learning strategy where students mutually support each other in pairs whilst they learn. It is a cooperative learning method based on an asymmetrical relationship of a pair of students with the same aim (Flores & Duran, 2016). Zapata (2020) points out that students with different education levels have a highly positive opinion on this learning methodology. The benefits of peer tutoring have been documented in different subjects and at different learning levels. These benefits are not limited to the most competent students, as those who have learning difficulties or who need the most support have also benefitted from it (Huber & Carter, 2019; Mahoney, 2019; Sarid et al., 2020).

A further peer support strategy was defined by Thomas et al. (1998) as the 'circle of friends'. Here, a support network is established around a student with severe and profound educational needs when s/he joins the school.

Interactive groups—a teaching strategy within the framework of the Learning Communities project—is another type of peer support that promotes learning for all

students through dialogue and cooperative work amongst heterogeneous student groups. The aim is to boost learning (Peirats & López, 2014) and participation for all, maintaining high expectations of students' potentials and capacities. It also contributes to improving co-existence and encourages mutual assistance.

Family Support

It is essential to build participation partnerships with families to improve inclusive practice, since they can contribute to their children's learning success if, and only if, there is a participation space based on trust, communication and dialogue (Simón et al., 2016).

Beyond professional relationship models with families (Turnbull et al., 2006), inclusive classrooms need to be open not only to collaborative work, but also to developing a clear will to empower families as a better way to extend required support and make it more effective. All inclusive schools recognise and value the competence of families in the responsibility to provide the necessary optimum conditions for students' learning success and wellbeing. Family support is therefore part of a vision of mutual trust and shared convictions.

Community Support

Inclusive schools grant the education community an essential role since it is what truly provides identity and contextualises the purpose of education and how it is managed. Community support, such as social support, takes on huge importance by linking different areas: health, education, families, society, etc. Therefore, it represents a way of obtaining a different perspective on support by establishing and fostering support networks for professionals, non-professionals and education stakeholders, shifting the spotlight of intervention from the individual or group who needs help to the individual or group that can provide help. This perspective starts with an ecological, systemic and emancipatory approach that sparks a revolution by introducing concepts such as 'informal support networks', 'environment resources' or 'community support systems' (Gallego, 2011). All these networks are established in nearby natural environments that serve as sources of emotional, instrumental and material support, etc. Thus, teachers, students, families, neighbourhoods, local institutions and other social stakeholders become support agents for schools and inclusion projects.

Families, the students themselves and the environment resources (professional and public services, local associations, etc.) are support resources for transformation processes undertaken at schools with an inclusive approach. In reality, community support has a dual meaning: (a) support that can be offered by the school to the community, working in collaboration with other social and health service

networks, neighbourhood associations, NGOs, etc. on, for example, solidarity, volunteering or service-learning initiatives; and (b) support that the community and society can provide to the school. This second meaning is linked to managing community resources located in a nearby setting, with an approach not just of being an inclusive school but also as an institution immersed in the local area (Sales & Moliner, 2020).

In short, community support networks play a fundamental role in promoting this model of total inclusion. According to Porter and Towell (2020), one of the key ingredients for transformation is the systemic and collaborative approach to improvement actions at schools. Developing partnerships, collaborations and cooperation amongst the stakeholders involved is an essential factor.

Conclusions, Challenges and Proposals

Support processes from the Global Inclusive Education perspective, benefit all stakeholders involved in schooling contexts. In contrast, a fragmented support culture persistently focuses the specialised attention of one or several professionals on specific student groups, at the expense of a community vision that activates natural support networks and generates strategies, collaborations and partnerships in the specific context of each school.

A systemic inclusive approach requires a different method for developing support to make it inclusive. Support is not an action aimed exclusively at students, nor is it the exclusive responsibility of specialists; rather, it entails developing an institutional and organisational approach that involves the entire educational community. One example of this would be the Mutual Support Groups (MSG) described by Gallego et al. (2018). These groups comprise a collaborative support structure which, thanks to their structural and methodological features and the benefits they provide, are able to adapt to different contexts and be developed by different groups involved in inclusive education: students, families and teachers.

This systemic inclusive approach should continue to seek out evidence that reaffirms the essential (albeit complex) interaction between classroom activities, the school, families and the community as an opportunity for learning success, given that comprehensive educational support flows from this interaction.

Nevertheless, a review of the literature points to ongoing challenges that need to be resolved by schools.

The first challenge would be problematising the 'support needs for learning' construct. The premise of this new construct within the support paradigm is that individualised support reduces discrepancies between individuals and their environment. However, if this is true, are we not facing a new form of student categorisation that splits those who need support from those who do not? UDL enables us to move forward by considering support needs from the beginning, and thus planning a response to student needs. Nonetheless, it is not yet clear how we link assessment of student support needs to the support provided within the UDL framework.

The second challenge is related to defining the duties of new general support professionals and of those who offer specific direct support (technical assistants, educators, volunteers, etc.). In this sense, one element refers to the role of human support figures for students with major support needs. At an international level, no difference is made between support figures, although different countries use different terminology including: *Teacher Assistants*, *Teacher Aides, Paraprofessionals or Paraeducators, Learning Support Assistants, Classroom Assistants or Higher-level Teaching Assistants*. Currently, according to Jardí et al. (2019), education systems are at a crossroads when it comes to providing inclusive support and everything this involves, in addition to the ethical and social justice issues related to the requirements, demands and contracting of teaching staff. Therefore, one aim would be to achieve a broader and more complex joint intervention through multi-professionalism, contributing to a more global understanding of students and opening a research area on the possibilities of educational support staff to facilitate interactions amongst students and provide support in a wider sense.

With regard to the above, it would seem that the main challenge is how to provide the necessary support for students with the greatest support needs within a framework of inclusion. There is concern regarding participation in academic and non-academic activities of students with major support needs in inclusive classrooms. Zagona et al. (2021) conclude that ongoing research is required on how to implement special resources (e.g. assistive technology, visual aids and manipulatives), modifications, communication support and behavioural support in inclusive classrooms. Along these lines, Hartmann (2015) proposes the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework as a way to understand how to support students with severe disabilities and how to support their access to the curriculum, underscoring two key factors: a) understanding student diversity and b) expert support. In this instance, our suggestion would be to find a formula to combine different types of support, e.g. cooperative work (peer support) with shared teaching (with direct specialised support). One proposal endorsed by research on this area comes from Soldevila Pérez et al. (2017), who conclude that cooperative learning is essential to ensure the participation of all students and, specifically, of those with major support requirements. In turn, the authors highlight that transforming the methodology and the nature of tasks is a pressing issue so that everybody, without exception, is able to learn from their peers within the classroom. It is in this very framework that the role of support professionals may change, making a significant contribution to the 'implementation of activities and the experience of the children' (p. 53). We refer here to shared teaching, taking into account that collaboration and complementarity affect teaching by strengthening professional teacher development, and learning through the availability of two teachers in the classroom for all (Duran & Miquel, 2004; Huguet, 2011).

These issues lead us to raise a new challenge linked to teacher training and professional development: self-efficacy as core content in initial teacher training. The work of Spratt and Florian (2013) includes the concept of transformability as a way for teachers to guide and inform their own decision-making in inclusive pedagogy. This transformability is articulated on the basis of three core principles governing

teaching practice: 'co-agency', 'trust' and 'everybody'. The first principle recognises the educational process as a shared activity with students and requires a creative, empathetic teacher to generate learning situations that make active participation for all students possible. Moreover, teachers need to trust in both their own teaching possibilities and in the learning ability of students, and transmit this trust to the entire class. Lastly, inclusive teachers should take responsibility for absolutely all students, without exception or nuance (Echeita et al., 2016).

We need to continue to explore the impact of effective practice in order to move towards inclusion of all students. In other words, strengthening inclusion with evidence from improved teaching and learning processes (Porter, 2020). We face challenges, obstacles and barriers that could also be viewed as a chance to learn from and with everybody (co-agency), transforming school culture into a collaborative learning culture between teachers (*Teacher Agency*). According to Moliner and Doménech (2020), 'collaborative work is a fundamental element to build inclusive schooling' (p. 30) and, therefore, a support model viewed from the perspective of joint responsibility.

A critical analysis is necessary. 'Before constructing answers […] a new analysis is required that invites us to move beyond contests between special and regular' (Slee, p. 31) so that the 'irregular school' (as per the title of Slee's book) is for everybody.

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