

Challenges for inclusive education in France : from expectations to practical modalities.

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Abstract

Since the French disability law in 2005, all disabled children have the right to follow education in a common school together with non-disabled children. This law is part of an international agreement that promotes inclusive education. The device is decided by the Maisons Départementales des Personnes Handicapées and admits several forms of inclusive education: in a regular classroom with or without additional help or special instruction; in a specialized classroom in a regular school, or school facilities in socio-medical establishments. These forms of education are not exclusive and combinations are possible. Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of children who benefited from these forms of education device increased from 50% to 72%.

This special education system needs cooperation between new actors from different social worlds (Strauss, 1978): educational, medical, social, psychological, sanitary, administrative, familiar, which, for some, were built historically in opposition. (Vial, 1990; Mazereau, 2001).

In our study we were interested how this cooperation is organized and operates.

We conducted an ethnographic study based on observations of different class situations: specialized classes in regular schools and regular classes with one or two disabled children. We also conducted interviews with schoolteachers, school directors, special needs assistants, and parents. Finally, we conducted observations of teachers' meetings at the Ministry of Education.

Our analysis doesn't confirm Dubet's theory of "the decline of the institution" (2002). On the contrary; it shows that the actors have a real vocation for their profession and a strong motivation to succeed inclusive education of disabled children. Yet, our research demonstrates a great gap between different social worlds of the inclusion system. On the one side, the world of administrative actors who, despite a huge workload, show a strong cohesion and consider inclusion to be of great value. On the other side, the world of teaching professionals who have to manage numerous constraints and difficulties in the classrooms, and deal daily with concrete adaptation problems, strategies and readjustments in order to respect as much as possible the inclusion objectives.

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