TRAINING TEACHER CANDIDATES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SOCIO-CULTURAL CHALLENGE

A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Training Teacher Candidates in Inclusive Education: a Socio-cultural Challenge

Introduction

Taking into consideration the significance globally attached to inclusive education, and the critical role teachers have in fostering inclusive environments, my research work has focused on the training of teacher candidates in inclusive education. Cardona (2009), cited in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010), notes that concentration on initial teacher education “… would seem to provide the best means to create a new generation of teachers who will ensure the successful implementation of inclusive policies and practices” (p. 35).

This literature review will explore how pre-service teacher education prepares teachers-to-be to teach effectively in socio-culturally diverse settings. The review also considers the policy framework necessary to facilitate the changes required in teacher education to support the move towards a more inclusive education system.

As it is such a vast field, the development of this work will attempt to give an answer to the following research questions, which guided the reading of the bibliographical sources:

What is inclusive education?
Is pre-serving teacher training in inclusive education a priority in the global education policy makers’ agenda?
Does the pre-service teacher education curriculum provide teachers-to-be guidelines on how to implement inclusive practices?
How can pre-service teacher training suitably qualify teacher candidates for inclusive education?
What is the impact of pre-service teaching training programs on the development of positive attitudes and feelings towards children with special educational needs?

The present literary review will also provide relevant data collected from both current research on the field and on a series of official documents issued by UNESCO, the European Agency of Education, UNICEF and Mercosur Educativo, between 2005 and 2015.
**Inclusive Education Conceptual Framework**

Throughout the last twenty years, the inclusive education issue has become one of the most relevant challenges the educational system has had to deal with not only because of the considerable significance attached to the individual integration as the norm for all learners but also because of the new paradigm of inclusion resulting from current research (Booth, 2003; Peters, 2004; Peters and Reid, 2009; Forlin, 2010). Inclusive education now encompasses a much broader definition than the traditional one, which considered the integration of students with special educational needs in regular schools without introducing significant institutional and curricular changes in either the school culture or the teaching practices employed (Operetti *et al.*, 2009). Nowadays, as stated by Terigi *et al.* (2009), inclusion is understood as the process of responding to a wide diversity of learners either with special educational needs or coming from varied multicultural backgrounds by offering them a kind of school which is open not only in terms of space but also in its educational plans and in the organization of its curricula. Kosnik and Beck (2009) note that such a broad approach to inclusive education is in line with much current writing in the field (Ainscow, Dyson and Booth 2006; Melnick and Zeichner, 1997; Verma, Bagley and Jha, 2007). All things considered, inclusion represents a progress compared with the integration movement as it does not merely seek to ensure the right of the disabled to study in mainstream schools, but is intended to realize the right of all people to a high quality education, focusing on those who, due to differing reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalized (Blanco Guijarro, 2008).

Diversity is a crucial aspect when addressing inclusive education at present. UNESCO (2008), cited by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs (2010), states that inclusive education is

"an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination" (p. 3).

Further to this, UNESCO (2009) supports that a broadened concept of inclusive education can be viewed as a general guiding principle to strengthen education for sustainable development, lifelong learning for all and equal access of all levels of society to learning opportunities so as to implement the principles of inclusive education. Given that inclusion is today about the prevention of barriers to learning and participation for all children, young people and adults, there are grounds for the belief that diversity is then viewed as a rich resource rather than a problem.
Diverse needs entail a comprehensive approach towards inclusive education. An inclusive school, as emphasized by Blanco Guijarro (2008), has no selection mechanisms or discrimination of any kind. Instead, it transforms its pedagogical proposal into ways of integrating the diversity of students, thus fostering social cohesion. In this respect, the UNESCO International Conference on Education (ICE) report ‘Inclusive Education: The way of the future’ (2009) conceives inclusion as a way of integrating cultural, political, racial, ethnic, gender and linguistic diversity so as to address and respond to the diversity of needs of all children, youth, and adults by both increasing their participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and eliminating exclusion within and from education. The students with special educational needs, ethnic minorities, women with greater obligations and fewer rights, immigrants, all of them are present in most schools and all of them require that their history, culture, tongue and aspirations be taken into account (OEI, 2008). Taking everything into consideration, teacher education needs to prepare student teachers to observe learners in non-categorical ways that describe learning processes and outcomes which will not be adequately reflected by tests or checklists but which more accurately reflect learners’ capacities and inform further learning.

The coexistence of capable and less capable students within school contributes to an enriching experience and fosters understanding and solidarity. The philosophy of educating all students regardless of special education necessities (SEN) within the mainstream environment is now firmly established as the education of choice (Winter, 2006). However, as stated in Goals 2021 (2015), the mere presence of students with special educational needs does not ensure the success of the inclusive task. Rather, the coexistence of students with so different living conditions may put empathy and solidarity with each other at risk. As argued by Forlin (2010), much of the discrimination and prejudice people with disabilities encounter comes from the broader community’s fear of the unknown, which arises from limited contact and a general lack of knowledge and understanding. Therefore, as far as challenging stereotypes is concerned, it is necessary for students to understand the phenomenon of prejudice and discrimination as well as acquiring inclusive outlooks, attitudes, and behavior patterns, both for the school setting and for their life in general (Kosnik and Beck, 2009).

Inclusive education does not only focus on removing the barriers that students face but also on the development of cultures, policies and practices governing educational systems as well as educational institutions (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). Acknowledging the importance that the cultural baggage takes on the education process, Kosnik and Beck (2009) point out that a key factor in ensuring student success is teachers’ understanding and appreciation of how
culture shapes academic and social development. Similarly, Ainscow (2007) observes that teaching and education are deeply rooted in the culture of particular places and thus thought needs to be given as to how ideas can be made relevant to each individual context. Bearing cultural relevance in mind, Forlin (2008) notes that inclusive education is based on the principle that local schools should provide for all children, regardless of any perceived difference, disability, or other social, emotional, cultural or linguistic difference. On account of the importance attached to identity and culture, Alexander (2008a) refers to culture as so pervasive a shaper of education and educational realities that it cannot possibly be ignored.

The inclusive perspective currently provided to education (Booth and Ainscow, 2005) marks a shift from seeing inclusion as about individual special educational planning and special pleading for individual students, to the development of pedagogy of inclusion and a commitment to the rights of all to belong. In this regard, Booth et al (2003) make reference to a paradigm shift in inclusive education bringing about a transformative view of inclusion that rejects the “melting pot” view in which learners, irrespective of their backgrounds, interests, identities, gender, attainments or disabilities were meant to fit into a mono-cultural education system, with fixed curricula and approaches to teaching and learning (p. 2). Within such a paradigm, disability is viewed as a form of illness or physical condition which is intrinsic to the individual and believed to cause significant disadvantage (Finkelstein, 2001). This is what Peters (2004) refers to as the placement paradigm since inclusive education is conceptualized as a place and not as a service delivered. UNESCO (2009) states that the integration of “different” learners into the mainstream making the child to adapt to school can too often lead to assimilation, uniformity, and the loss of “difference” (p. 53). The problem with defining integration solely in terms of placement is that it tells us little about the quality of the education received in that context (Farrell and Ainscow, 2002). All things considered, the change of perspective as far as education is concerned seems to indicate that instruction is no longer considered a collective enterprise administered for groups of children. Rather, the ideological paradigm for school development is changing into an individual direction being adjusted to the disposition of each individual child (Haug 1998).

Focusing on student difficulties in an attempt to create homogeneous groups for special treatment conceives of diversity as a problem to be overcome. Instead, as recognized by Booth and Ainscow (2005), it should be acknowledged and welcomed as a resource for learning as the recognition of the particular support some disabled students need is an essential part of a response to diversity that accepts and celebrates difference. OECD (2010), cited in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review, define diversity as “characteristics that
can affect the specific ways in which developmental potential and learning are realized, including cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and socio-economic differences” (p. 21). According to Saloviita (2005), learners’ diversity should never be considered as a pathology or medical-based knowledge that is separate from a teacher’s daily work, but as central to the focus of quality teaching (Alton-Lee 2003). Added to that, Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow (2005) make a distinction between the “medical model” considering students' deficits or impairments to be the main cause of their difficulties, and the “social model” of disability blaming the lack of suitable adaptations for disabled students’ failure to gain access to a school or a curriculum (p. 239). As stated by Kosnik and Beck (2009), the inclusive education paradigm is based on the premise that if the educational needs of a student are not met then the problem is with the system rather than with the student. Finkelstein (2001) points out that the key principles of such a paradigm are based on the sociological model of disability. On top of that, Booth and Ainscow (2005) point out that the insights we gain in understanding the learning of those students traditionally designated as the ones with learning difficulties can be applied to the learning of other students not so designated. In this respect, Peters and Reid (2009) highlight the urgent need for societal reform and argue that moving from the prevalent technical-rational discourses based on (special) education towards a socio-political discourse will take time because they are “so enmeshed in the national psyche, legislation, school procedures and daily classroom practices” (p. 557) (quoted in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review, 2010). Needless to say, the intentions and values involved are an integral part of a vision of the whole society of which education is a part (Barton, 1997).

The next section will consider the policy framework which is necessary to support the development of inclusive practice more widely.

**Inclusive Education Policy Framework**

Inclusive education has increasingly become a focus of debate in discussions about the development of educational policy and practice around the world (Farrell and Ainscow, 2002). As stated by UNESCO (2009), it involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision that covers all children and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular educational system to educate them all. In moving to support education for all and remove barriers to participation and learning for every disadvantaged group, essential links must be made between the reform of the education system and other
policies designated to support a move towards more inclusive practice. Indeed, both achieving inclusion and dealing with differences and diversity continues to be one of the biggest problems faced by schools worldwide. However, it seems that both the regulatory standards and the educational processes are aimed at populations and students sharing a common economic, social, cultural and linguistic substrate (Goals 2021, 2015). Such a situation then brings up to the question of whether pre-serving teacher training in inclusive education is in fact a priority in the global education policy makers’ agenda. Despite the fact that UNESCO (2009) heavily emphasizes that inclusive education should guide all education policies and practices, Rosenberg et al (2007) argue that when policy makers and those involved in general education teacher preparation consider both the design and the implementation of programs, special education is rarely on their radar screens. Taking account the fact that inclusive education is concerned with issues of social justice, it seems fairly difficult to envisage inclusive schools within a society that pursues policies and practices that exclude some of its citizens from social rights and participation (Forlin, 2010).

When considering policy and practice for inclusive education across countries, as pointed out in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010), it is important to keep in mind the fact that policy makers and practitioners are not always talking about the same thing. In this regard, Mitchell (2005) states

“Since there is no one model of inclusive education that suits every country’s circumstances, caution must be exercised in exporting and importing a particular model. While countries can learn from others’ experiences, it is important that they give due consideration to their own social-economic-political-cultural-historical singularities” (p. 19).

The ideology of inclusive education is implemented in different ways across different contexts, and varies with national policies and priorities influenced by a whole range of social, cultural, historical and political issues (Watkins and D’Alessio, 2009). Schools without exclusion, where both the most able students and those who have some sort of disability learn in spite of their differences in terms of social background, culture and different capacities and interests, are an ideal model (Goals 2021, 2015). In this regard, the 48th International Conference on Education, Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future (UNESCO, 2008), calls upon the international community ‘to adopt an inclusive education approach in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of educational policies as a way to further accelerate the attainment of EFA (Education For All) goals as well as to contribute to building more inclusive societies’ (p. 18). As stated in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010), national education policy needs to consider legislation, funding, curriculum, assessment and
accountability holistically if it is to improve inclusive practice and ensure that the next teacher generation is brought up in inclusive settings which develop appropriate attitudes and values. For the above mentioned aspects, it is time to move into a new era based on effective dialogue and acceptance of diversity for the principle of inclusion to become an integral part of the thinking of policy makers and other stakeholder (Dyson, 2005).

Regarding teacher education to meet more diverse needs, the European Commission Communication Improving the Quality of Teacher Education (3/08/2007) calls for different policy measures on the level of member states in order to adapt the profession to meet the new challenges of the knowledge-based economy. It further states “Changes in education and in society place new demands on the teaching profession. [...] classrooms now contain a more heterogeneous mix of young people from different backgrounds and with different levels of ability and disability. [...] These changes require that teachers do not only acquire new knowledge and skills but also that they develop them continuously” (p. 4).

While there is general acceptance that the wide diversity of student’s needs have put forward major demands on teachers, Forlin (2008) claims that there has been relatively little by way of radical changes in teacher preparation and professional development that make the inclusion process easier. In this respect, Pinnock and Nicholls (2012) suggest that effective strategies to overcome the barriers which disabled people face to education are not apparently widespread within teacher training. Undoubtedly, education needs to focus on preparing teachers for potential challenges as the complexity of the classroom situation demands ‘unique and authentic’ action by the teacher (Lauriala, 2011).

On the whole, policies and documents regulating teacher education appear to embrace the concept of inclusion. However, as argued by Booth et al (2003), deconstruction of such documents, while confirming that they generally provide positive attempts to ensure quality of training, usually results in rhetoric of practice that enables ethical but not genuine inclusive preparation. After several decades of educational reforms (Goals 2021, 2015), they had had little effect in improving knowledge and competencies among students, in reducing disparities, in strengthening public schools and achieving training for the teaching staff in accordance to the new social and cultural demands. McLeskey and Ross (2004) suggest that although educational researchers have frequently considered the definition of a highly qualified teacher and the characteristics of quality teacher education, the debate today takes place in a highly charged political context which calls for active engagement of all those involved (Cochran-Smith, 2002; Fenstermacher, 2002; Feuer, Towne and Shavelson, 2002). The Communication from the Commission on improving competences for the 21st Century: An agenda for European
cooperation in schools (03/07/2008) also highlights the need for initial teacher training to improve the balance between theory and practice and present teaching as a problem-solving or a research-in-action activity linked more to pupils' and students' learning and progress. All in all, there is a need to be explicit about the values underpinning education systems and ensure that political and educational measures focus on what is really valued.

In considering how education policy can support teacher education for inclusion, Kyriazopoulou and Weber (2009) recognize the need for legislation on education to address the quality of training for teachers, with special regard to dealing with diversity. Likewise, the Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010) highlights the importance of both pursuing education in the public interest and strengthening the government’s capacity to orientate, promote and follow up on the development of equitable education of high quality in close partnership with civil society and the private sector. Furthermore, the Council Conclusions on preparing young people for the 21st Century (21/11/ 2008) invited member states to ensure a high standard of initial teacher education, coherent and coordinated early career support and continuing professional development to attract and retain the most able people into the teaching profession. Forlin (2008) notes that the development of an inclusive pedagogy within teacher training organizations requires not only a curriculum addressing the needs of teacher candidates to prepare them to cater for multi-diverse school populations but an inclusive stance that enables equitable systems of teacher education by enrolling pre-service teachers from minority groups as well. According to Ballard (2003), the latter would require much more than local changes as to challenge cultural ideology that created poverty and sustains institutional racism requires political action. It is not possible to make progress towards a more just society without equitable education, where minimum quality requirements are guaranteed for all students (Goals 2021, 2015). Taking everything into consideration, there appears to be a consensus on the need for developing policies that, while adopting a flexible approach in order to accommodate to local needs and situations, provide educational support for different categories of learners in order to facilitate their development in regular schools.

Having analyzed the main policies designed to embrace diversity, the next section will focus on the most relevant aspects the pre-service teacher training curriculum should cover in order to foster an inclusive education approach.
Pre-service Teacher Training Curriculum for Inclusive Education

In order to ensure that inclusion becomes an acceptable philosophy for teacher preparation institutions, teacher education needs to be reframed. A major challenge today is to analyze the role that teacher education curricula should play in responding to the diversity of learners. Therefore, teacher training institutions (Rose, 2007) need to review the courses they offer to ensure that teachers are prepared to work with students from increasingly diverse backgrounds. As Stobart (2008) states, at a time when teachers are more and more estranged from decisions about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, teacher education needs to enter the debate about curriculum rather than training teachers to install it. Therefore, the challenge of inclusive education for teachers’ professional learning is to develop programs of teacher education that respect and respond to human differences in ways that include rather than exclude learners in what is ordinarily available in mainstream schools and classrooms (Forlin, 2010).

Preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive education implies the modification of the teacher preparation curriculum and pedagogy to address this reality. Sharma et al (2008) have suggested that perhaps rather than the mode of delivery being the most significant issue, it is more likely the content and pedagogy of a program that seems to have a greater impact on student attitudes, sentiments, and concerns about inclusive education. As stated by Folin (2008), teacher preparation for inclusion requires a more open and collaborative approach by faculty engaging amongst themselves in dialogue about the new knowledge required by teachers and how an inclusive curriculum can be offered within each discipline. Larrivee (2000) highlights the importance of reflection, believing that when teachers become reflective practitioners, they move beyond a knowledge base of discrete skills to a stage where they integrate and modify skills to fit specific contexts, and, eventually, to a point where the skills are internalized, enabling them to invent new strategies. Acknowledging the new demands for knowledge to be articulated, Forlin (2008) further posits a “whole-faculty approach” to facilitate the way in which an inclusive curriculum can be embedded across all discipline areas, fostering more equitable educational opportunities for traditionally disadvantaged groups (p. 23). In this respect, Wang and Fitch (2010) note that every inclusive teaching education (ITE) program should embrace the key elements of successful co-teaching in order to train better collaborative teachers for 21st century inclusive education. Similarly, Teacher Education for Inclusion Across Europe – Challenges and Opportunities (2011) indicates that it is possible to include common core content in teacher education courses which raise awareness among student teachers of the diverse needs of both
learners with special educational needs and disabilities and many others who may be vulnerable to under-achievement and exclusion. Therefore, there are enough grounds to believe that there needs to be a considerable change in the focus of pre-service teacher training curriculum that results in a close link between theory and practice for them to be appropriately prepared for working in diverse classrooms.

Concerning the methodological approaches to pre-service teachers’ preparation for inclusion, Stayton and McCollun (2002) quoted in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010), identify The Infusion model, The Collaborative Training model and The Unification model as those ones existing in programs that train for inclusion (p. 21). According to their description, in the Infusion model students take one or two courses that cover inclusive education; in the Collaborative Training model both mainstream and special education teaching students take a higher number of courses dealing with teaching inclusive classes and share the whole or part of their practical experiences, and in the Unification model, all students study the same curriculum that trains them for teaching mainstream education with a focus on pupils with special needs. Similarly, Pugach and Blanton (2009) refer to the above mentioned approaches as discrete, integrated and merged models and point out that these form a continuum from least to most collaborative. In addition to this, Golder et al (2005) and Pearson (2007), quoted in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010), make reference to the “permeation” or “embedded” approach, which incorporates specific activities for inclusive education training in a general education subject (p. 21). Nonetheless, while supporting the need for an integrated approach, Gultig (1999) suggests that teacher education tends to ‘get caught in the trap’ of focusing on detail, for example, teaching about human rights, rather than taking a human rights approach (p. 21). Given that, there is a sound reason to believe that this difference in preparing teachers will impact significantly on the amount of time that can be dedicated to strategies for supporting students with diverse learning needs (Winter, 2006).

Regarding new trends towards inclusive education teaching training, Forlin (2003) argues that both the approaches that provide innovative programs encouraging pre-service teachers to work with students with disabilities as well as those ones presenting opportunities for them to engage with self-advocates within the community are being successfully adopted. In this respect, available research (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Jobling & Moni, 2004) also demonstrates that when teachers are asked about their most preferred methods of preparation for teaching diverse learners, they suggest that direct teaching experiences with students with special needs is favored. Ainscow (2007) stresses that teachers need to see what inclusive
teaching actually looks like and explore ideas with someone who can help them understand the difference between what they are doing and what they aspire to do. Acknowledging this, Rose and Garner (2010) stress the importance of practical, school-based experiences as an addition to the theoretical base of university inclusion courses, as they both provide an opportunity to learn the profession and reduce the anxiety of beginning teachers (Rice, 2003). On top of that, Loreman (2010) argues that field experience opportunities and direct contact with students with special needs may be the only meaningful solution to improve inclusion training. There is good evidence thus that teacher education programs need to consider practical placements in schools and classrooms where inclusion has been embraced as a philosophy and where there is enough appropriate support to ensure a successful practical experience for pre-service teachers. All things considered, there is extensive evidence that when teachers are asked about their most preferred methods for preparing them for inclusion they suggest that direct teaching experiences with children with special needs, in-service training and attending university courses are mainly favored (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

However, as far as the practicum setting is concerned, Atay (2007) observes that some careful consideration should be put forth given that field experiences do not always offer the optimum environment for practicing inclusive skills. Peebles and Mendaglio (2014) argue that their experiences as teacher educators confirm that when field experiences do not include specific guidelines for working with students with exceptional needs, pre-service teachers often have limited exposure to—and practice with—these students. In this regard, Jobling and Moni’s (2004) study reveals that teachers-to-be education programs lacked focus on this field preventing teacher candidates from having a meaningful inclusive experience. Furthermore, it concludes that a high number of pre-service teacher participants had neither enough understanding nor comprehensive knowledge about teaching students with special needs. Jordan et al (2009) stress the need for practicum experiences providing opportunities to learn about how to address the needs of diversity in the classroom which, according to their point of view, is a dimension neither typical nor rigorously addressed in teacher education programs. Yet, research on cognition (Talvite et al, 2000) suggests that practical or situated knowledge must be acquired before one can competently apply what has been learned. Therefore, as stated by Forlin (2008), while teacher preparation courses must have an appropriate curriculum, it is also critical to ensure that they utilize appropriate pedagogy that wherever possible reflects the type of pedagogies to be employed in an inclusive practicum environment.
As regards the topics most often reported as missing in pre-service training, Pinnock and Nicholls (2012) point out that getting disabled people into teaching itself, and learning assessment appropriate to the needs of people with disabilities are said to be the most recurrently mentioned. They further state that theoretical knowledge contained in training schemes does not translate to classroom practice to support teachers when dealing with real challenges day to day. As stated by Hagger and McIntyre (2006), this is the result of the tension between what is learned at university and what is learned in school. On top of that, Pinnock and Nicholls (2012) note that the trainers’ lack of experience in inclusive practice is another factor depriving student candidates of getting fully prepared for inclusive education. They further argue that trainers do not usually use their knowledge of inclusive strategies in teaching teacher candidates and that their understanding of inclusion is limited to physical access. Lastly, Forlin (2010) blames the narrow and discrete teacher training curricula for endorsing and promoting autonomy that does not allow for the development of a common inclusive agenda. Furthermore, he argues that to expect to prepare teachers for inclusive practices while training institutions persist in offering a segregated curriculum-based course that sees inclusion or special education as being outside of the core syllabus is fraught with erroneous arguments and likely to maintain the exclusion of disadvantaged groups. For the above mentioned, as suggested by Ware (2003)

“… if we refuse to examine the workings of privilege, entitlement, elitism and exclusion embedded in teacher education programs then it is doubtful that teacher educators can meaningfully inform the curricula and pedagogies necessary to support inclusion … as more inclusion proponents attempt the challenge of institutional reform in their own departments and programs the cluster of attributes that contribute to the locus of exclusion embedded in society will become more readily transparent and with any luck more swiftly extinguished” (p. 161)

Undoubtedly, the challenge of preparing teachers in inclusive education places considerable emphasis on providing teachers-to-be with both sound knowledge and inclusive environments for them to get a meaningful experience in diversity. Nonetheless, such a challenge does not only lie in modifying teacher preparation curriculum and pedagogy to address this reality but also in helping teacher candidates to build confidence and broaden their repertoire of skills and strategies by focusing on learning opportunities that reflect a socio-cultural perspective.

The following section will be devoted to the skills and competences teachers-to-be need to acquire in order to embrace inclusive education.

**Pre-service Teacher’s Skills and Competences for Inclusive Education**

The integration of students with special needs into mainstream school environments has placed new demands on the teaching profession ever since global policies and strategies
concerning the inclusion of children with disabilities in the education system were first outlined in the international consensus Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). Teachers, who are meant to play a key role in providing education that is inclusive for all, need not only to possess sound knowledge but also to pursue suitable teaching strategies to respond to inclusive schooling posing both the recognition for individual attainment levels and the respect for socio-cultural diversity. Such strategies and skills, necessary to face the challenges of inclusive education, must be taught at the level of pre-service teacher education, as opposed to more special education training (Vaillant, 2011).

Concerning the competence teachers need to develop in order to meet more diverse needs, the European Commission (2007) states that

“to equip the teaching body with skills and competences for its new roles, it is necessary to have both high-quality initial teacher education and a coherent process of continuous professional development keeping teachers up to date with the skills required in the knowledge based society” (p. 4). Although there is good evidence proving that teachers need to know how and when to use a range of practices to accomplish their goals with different students in different contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2006), the Council Conclusions on preparing young people for the 21st Century (21/11/2008) state that no course of initial teacher education can equip teachers with all the competences they will require during their careers. As a result, as Jones and Fuller (2003) observe, a considerable number of candidates are still leaving initial teacher education without the skills, knowledge, or attitudes needed to work with all of their future students. In addition, the Council Conclusions on preparing young people for the 21st Century (21/11/2008) reinforce the sound argument assuming that the demands on the teaching profession are evolving so rapidly that they require teachers to reflect on their own learning requirements in the context of their particular school environment. All in all, there appears to be a consensus about the need for pre-service teachers to start, primarily, seeing themselves as life-long learners and developing interpersonal skills that contribute to a full understanding of every integrated learner’s needs.

Taking into consideration the significance having been globally attached to inclusive education, and the critical role teachers have in fostering inclusive environments, Cochran-Smith (2003) stresses the need to produce teachers who, in addition to knowing what to teach and how to teach, also know how to learn and make decisions informed by theory and research and by feedback from school and classroom evidence in particular contexts. Similarly, Forlin (2008), recognizes that it is critical for teacher preparation courses to ensure that they utilize appropriate pedagogy that wherever possible reflects the type of pedagogies to be employed in an inclusive school. Shulman (1986), quoted in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature
Review (2010), notes that “in the face of student diversity, the teacher must have a flexible and multi-faceted comprehension [of subject matter], adequate to impart alternative explanations of the same concepts or principles” (p. 9). Unlike Moran (2009), who states that good inclusive teaching requires the values dimension to be made explicit and permeate all aspects of teacher preparation, Lancaster and Bain (2010) fully concur that a sense of preparation is not contingent on attitudes alone, but that pre-service teachers must also feel they have the strategies and the capability to execute the necessary practices. Additionally, Edwards and Kuhlman (2007), quoted in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010), note that some teachers-to-be have “a heart for diversity instruction” but lack the knowledge and skills to go beyond scratching the surface with students (p. 20). Even more, Silverman (2007) found that some pre-service teachers believe that teaching is merely a set of discrete skills learned in a straightforward way and that they will be adequately prepared to teach once told what to do. On consideration, Boling (2007) highlights both the need for teacher educators to ensure not to give the impression that there is one proper way to think about inclusion, and the need for teacher candidates to understand that no single model of education can ever truly make a classroom inclusive.

There is obviously a compelling need for better qualified teachers with a deep understanding and appreciation of learners’ diversities, who act respectfully towards their students, supporting them individually and emphasizing goals like “learning to learn”, problem-solving, and analytical skills, as well as developing a sense of responsibility and ability to cooperate (Opertti et al, 2009, p. 7). Teacher education, as Booth et al (2003) argue, must give all the teacher students a competence that makes them able to meet and teach the range of variation in or the heterogeneity of the pupil population. Similarly, Cardona (2009) suggests that student teachers in new ITE programs must be prompted to begin to see learners with disabilities as resources providing opportunities to learn and understand student characteristics more deeply in order to develop skills and empathy with the learners’ abilities. The way teachers have been educated to deal with vulnerable groups (Booth et al, 2003) may give students a clue to how they are prepared to meet and teach the complete heterogeneity of pupils and therefore the inclusive school. Yet, as stated by Winter (2006), while most teacher education has changed in recent years to incorporate some content knowledge about diversity and inclusion, a large number of newly qualified teachers still suggest that they are unprepared for working in inclusive schools, and many teachers enter the profession with little understanding of inclusion.
(Booth et al, 2003). All things considered, there is actually a clear disparity between molding an inclusive teacher and a teacher who knows about inclusive education (Ronald Bustos, 2015).

Regarding the kind of skills teacher candidates need to acquire in order to embrace inclusion, the UNESCO International Conference on Education (ICE) report ‘Inclusive Education: The way of the future’ (2009) calls for training teacher candidates by equipping them with the appropriate skills and materials to teach diverse student populations and meet the diverse learning needs of different categories of learners through an instruction attentive to the development and strengths of the individual learner. Acknowledging the importance service-learning has in helping teacher candidates to explore education in various teaching-learning contexts, Rowls and Swick (2000) note that it also helps them practice, via direct involvement, the instructional strategies learned through university instruction. Forlin (2008) makes a similar observation about the critical role pre-service teachers exposition to a variety of learners with diverse learning needs serves in ensuring they have a full grasp of the scope of teaching requirements in the classroom. According to Edwards and Kuhlman (2007), service-learning gives teacher candidates the chance to acquire new skills from a typical classroom. Further to this, they note that sharing of educational practice is one of the strategies placing a teacher candidate in an educational setting that can be beneficial for increasing their social opportunities. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) note that when teachers are asked about their most preferred methods for preparing them for inclusion they suggest that direct teaching experiences with children with special needs is mainly favored. However, Loreman (2010) states that teacher preparation institutions might consider building elements of what constitutes an inclusive environment into their criteria for selecting a practicum school, since the fact of simply accepting practicum schools because a quota must be filled, regardless of the standard of practice in the school, does pre-service teaching a disservice.

Having dealt with the skills and competence pre-service teachers training in inclusive education is supposed to provide teacher candidates with for them to meet diversity, the last section will focus on the teachers-to-be concerns and attitudes to diverse students’ learning needs.

Pre-service Teacher’s Attitude towards Inclusion

Teachers’ attitude towards including students with disabilities in their mainstream classes is a key element in furthering inclusive practices (Sharma et al., 2008). According to Johnson and Howell (2009), quoted in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature
Review (2010), attitudes ‘may be seen to have three related components: cognitive (i.e., the idea or assumptions upon which the attitude is based), affective (i.e., feelings about the issue), and behavioral (i.e., a predisposition toward an action that corresponds with the assumption or belief)’ (p. 28). In support of the affective and the cognitive components mentioned above, international research (Andrews, 2002; Reinke and Moseley, 2002) suggests that the training of teachers in preparation for inclusion is recognized as a critical factor in addressing attitudes and promoting a greater commitment to inclusion. Regarding the behavioral component, Cook (2002) and Silverman (2007) add that teachers’ attitudes and beliefs towards students with special educational needs do not only directly affect teachers’ behavior towards them but also the classroom environment and interaction.

However, according to Lambe and Bones (2006a) positive attitudes towards inclusion were only one factor in ensuring its successful implementation. Even more, while positive attitudes may be able to transcend philosophical barriers to inclusion, they may not always translate into feeling prepared for the reality of inclusive teaching. A review conducted by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) concluded that teachers did not feel prepared for teaching students with exceptional needs, especially in the case of students with severe learning difficulties and behavioral/emotional disorders. Rather, the participants felt their mandatory inclusion course, while adding to their knowledge base, only provided a very narrow understanding of practical skills. Likewise, Moore-Hayes’ (2008) study reports that pre-service teachers cited the need for more preparation and experience in order to feel prepared for working with students with exceptional needs. Acknowledging that the majority of initial teacher education (ITE) students come from a non-inclusive educational background, Naukkarinen (2008), cited in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010), additionally states that it is crucial to remove this ‘experience-based barrier’ to adopting the ideas of inclusive education (p. 25). In this regard, research by Day et al. (2009) highlights both the important role of school leaders on learners with special educational needs outcomes and the impact they have on trainee teachers, who will be heavily influenced by their school practice. Therefore, for pre-service training to address prospective educators’ concerns and negative feelings about inclusive education, it must involve the promotion of both teacher attitudes and instructional competences (Andrews, 2002; Reinke and Moseley, 2002).

The fact of developing empathy towards those with diverse needs by providing pertinent opportunities to engage with them encourages the progress of a positive belief system and affirmative attitudes towards inclusion (Kosnik and Beck, 2009). Similarly, Elhoweris and
Alsheikh (2006) suggest that attitudes can be improved by increasing both students’ knowledge about learners with disabilities and ways to meet their learning needs. Sze (2009) further notes that teacher education for inclusion brings an awareness of exceptionalities, which form positive attitudes in pre-service teachers toward inclusion. On top of that, Meijer et al (2006), quoted in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010), state the need for positive teacher attitudes and for teachers to create a ‘sense of belonging’ to support effective inclusive practice (p. 28). In this respect, initial teacher preparation, as stated by Forlin (2008), is considered a decisive factor in developing efficacious teachers who are confident in their own ability to teach all students. Atkinson (2004) and Forlin et al (2009) note that if pre-service teachers’ negative attitudes towards inclusion are not addressed during initial teacher education, they may continue to hamper the progress of inclusive education efforts in schools. Highlighting the need for positive attitudes, Murphy (1996) similarly states that if teachers leave from university with negative attitudes then those attitudes are difficult to change. Likewise, Tait & Purdie (2000) suggest that if student teachers complete their pre-service education without having developed positive attitudes towards inclusion this will adversely affect the successful accommodation of learners with special educational needs into mainstream settings. Positive attitudes (Hobbs & Westling, 1998) can be and need to be fostered through both training and positive experiences with students with disabilities. All in all, pre-service teacher training in inclusive education should not only provide teachers-to-be with suitable knowledge and skills but also help them to reassess their attitudes towards diversity in order to develop genuine empathy for students with special educational needs.

Concerning the acquisition of knowledge and theories about inclusive education, an extensive review of literature on inclusion undertaken by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) supports that resistance to inclusion is noticeably less when teachers have obtained special education qualifications. Some authors (Andrews, 2002; Reinke and Moseley, 2002; Forlin, 2008) state that teachers’ feeling of not being suitably trained to deal with diversity is one of the greatest barriers between teachers and inclusion. According to Lancaster and Bain (2007), there is in general a positive change in attitudes after undertaking an inclusive / special education unit of study since such a formal input helps to increase the awareness of general education pre-service teachers (Ching et al, 2007; Kyriakou et al, 2007). However, Molina (2006) in agreement with many other researchers (Campbell et al, 2003; Forlin et al, 1999; Tait and Purdie, 2000) argues that theoretical classes and reading are not sufficient to modify teachers’ and students’ negative attitudes towards pupils with special educational needs. Rather, pre-service teachers
Loreman et al., 2007b) need both opportunities for direct interaction with people with disabilities and opportunities to gain confidence in practical teaching situations with disabled students as well, if they are going to develop positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Nevertheless, although teaching practice provides an opportunity for future teachers to use their knowledge and develop their abilities and confidence, Forlin and Chambers (2011) argue that it may also increase teacher candidate’s levels of stress.

It is essential for teachers (Forlin, 2010) to shift their gaze from some learners to all learners in order to think about the concept of inclusive education. Forlin further states that rather than defending the need to accommodate learner differences, teachers holding positive attitudes toward inclusion focus on what is being taught as much as on who is being taught. Reynolds (2001) similarly points out the need to look beyond that which can easily be observed. In this regard, Pearson (2007), quoted in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010), notes that the complexity of inclusive education should be accommodated by the inclusion of work on attitudes and beliefs in teacher education rather than ‘relying solely on a technicist, competency-oriented approach (Edwards et al, 2002) which is better suited to the transmission of bureaucratic and procedural knowledge’ (p. 28). Forlin (2010) concludes that extending what is ordinarily available as opposed to doing something additional to or different from is a complex endeavor that requires sensitivity to differences between learners without perpetuating the stigmatizing effects of marking some students as different.

**Concluding Remarks**

Inclusive education is definitely a human right issue. Nevertheless, for school to provide a high quality education ensuring that every student regardless of special education needs is equally equipped, within a regular class, with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed, pre-service teachers need to be suitably qualified for inclusion. There are enough grounds for believing that pre-service teachers’ training in inclusive education is actually not only a matter of academic preparation but also of values and respect for every student’s unique needs. However, there is good evidence that the lack of appropriate information in the typical pre-service teacher training curriculum, limited resources, inappropriate teaching-learning approaches and insufficient practicum experiences continue being the major challenges for teacher candidates to confront. There is much work to be done in this field yet. Therefore, further research is important in supporting the development of more inclusive pre-service teacher education institutions and
schools. As pointed out by Cochran-Smith (2008), quoted in Teacher Education for Inclusion – International Literature Review (2010),

“teaching and teacher education for social justice are fundamental to the learning and life chances of all teachers and pupils who are current and future participants in a diverse democratic nation and who are able both to imagine and work towards a more just society” (p. 5).
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