Focusing on Inclusive Action:
Building Wellbeing Practices in the Classrooms and the Role of Professionals as Leaders with Positive Impact

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Abstract

This paper attempts to highlight the crusial challenges of professionals with positive impact in different educational contexts with emphasis on inclusion. The article, although theoretical, is based on research findings from previous empirical research in the international Greek-speaking area (Greece - Cyprus). It provides an initial theoretical map of the landscape of learning and working within the context of inclusive education: What they need to know and what they need to do as professionals – tutors and teachers as leaders with positive influence in inclusive classroom. This paper will highlight the dynamic and interactive relationship between teachers' skills and inclusive classroom practices. The article aims to contribute to building wellbeing practices within the context special and inclusive educational contexts.

Keywords: Inclusive Teachers, Inclusive Education, Inclusion, Inclusive Practice, Wellbeing Practices

Introduction

Today, we live in a transitional period that, like every phase of change, is characterized by uncertainty and simultaneous creativity. Any estimation of social evolution is largely challenging. New technology makes information accessible with immediacy and speed across the globe, thus enabling the continuous production of knowledge. This process includes both the replacement and renewal, as well as the enrichment of pre-existing knowledge, with all the implications this has for international educational systems, educational organizations worldwide, professional training in all fields, and learning for all (Goger et al., 2022a, 2022b; Goger & McDermott, 2021; Gaminian et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the sciences of education prepare professionals in all fields of

science to address contemporary problems in diverse educational environments and any discipline that focuses on education and workforce outcomes. On the one hand, learners acquire optimal ways to manage learning and tackle significant issues in educational practice; on the other hand, professional experiences, education, and training enhance learners' ability to understand and resolve complex academic and professional challenges (Kirschner & Hendrick, 2020).

The first to respond to new social conditions and educational needs is the teacher, as they play a decisive role in developing inclusive practices (Etherington, 2017; Boyle et al., 2020). In this formulation, educational work itself is a multi-level and multidimensional process. The new social and economic realities, as well as the composition of modern society—shaped by multiculturalism—necessitate a well-structured and redefined role for teachers. The quality of this role, among other factors, can ensure the quality of educational work, which is of critical importance for both the educational and broader community. Within this context, educational practice, including educational leadership, becomes the core of the educational entity, defining its characteristics, functionality, and development within the community (Tamisoglou, 2020).

The very practice of education, in particular, requires a positive pedagogical environment that supports learning in all directions and should include respect, enthusiasm for knowledge discovery, trust, pedagogical humor, good organization, active listening to all, etc. (Scrivener, 2010, p. 22). From this perspective, four fundamental values related to teaching and learning have been recognized as the foundation of the work of professionals (teachers, tutors, educators, trainers, instructors, etc.) in Inclusive Education. These four fundamental values are (www.european-agency.org): (a) Appreciation of student diversity (b) Support for all students (c) Working with others (d) Continuous personal and professional development. Overall, the role of professional competencies and attitudes is related to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). Given that the modern literature focuses on rethinking teachers' engagement with inclusive practices (Woodcock, 2022) and training on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (Boison & Burke, 2025), this paper attempts to highlight the role of professionals in inclusive action.

Basically, the paper provides an initial map of the landscape of learning and working within the context of inclusive education: What inclusive teachers as leaders need to know in the classroom and what they need to do as professionals with positive influence in the school community. Also, the inclusive role with positive impact is analyzed through skills that are necessary in inclusion. The purpose of this article is to determine the dynamic and interactive relationship between teachers' skills and in inclusive classroom practices. The article aims to contribute to building wellbeing practices in different inclusive educational contexts.

The article, although theoretical, is based on research findings from previous empirical research in the international Greek-speaking area (Greece - Cyprus). Here, first we discuss the background of the study and then, supporting professionals we discuss a brief review about ways of learning and working in the inclusive classroom. Without claiming to provide definitive answers, this contribution aims above all to enrich the debate, to advancing inclusive opportunities and to guide inclusive teaching choices in a constantly evolving field in the digital age of AI (see: Many, 2025).

The Research Framework of the Study

Generally, the researcher focuses her research on inclusive teaching practices and creating supportive didactical environments for all university students, including those with special educational needs or/and disabilities, in Higher Education, Greece and Cyprus. Her research leverages students' experience and examines the impact of skills of teachers on inclusion, aiming to equip them with applied knowledge and skills for inclusive learning and educational environments. Her research recommended a systematic provision for developing contemporary pedagogical practices and skills targeting the inclusive role of a classroom teacher with positive factor (Ioannidi, 2023; Ioannidi, 2022).

Specifically, the present article was based on a primary research in inclusive education to proceed with the present analysis. So, the research framework reports on a study conducted among Greek and Cypriot university students - teachers aiming to explore their perspective on the teachers' skills needed to practice inclusive education. The purpose of the research topic was an empirical investigation regarding teacher's skills in the inclusive classrooms of the 21st century. We adopt the hermeneutic paradigm, which is based on micro-scale research through a qualitative analysis wanting to explore in depth the meanings that teachers attribute to social and educational events, without generalizations, but strictly aiming at a detailed analysis of how teachers perceive educational situations and pedagogical facts. The teachers' skills in inclusive learning environments can contribute to a more inclusive educational landscape in Greece and Cyprus, fostering and ensuring the well-being of all students with and without specials educational needs. Finally, the research findings demonstrated the key role of teachers in creating and promoting inclusive schools. Overall, the research findings highlight the challenges faced in implementing inclusive practices and the impact of professionals in inclusive education (Ioannidi, 2024; Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2024).

According to contemporary literature review about "*Inclusive pedagogy in action*" (Florian, 2015; Foreman & Arthur-Kellym, 2017; Florian & Beaton, 2018) and "*preparing teachers for inclusive education*" (Florian & Linklater, 2010), another research reported what teachers do, know and believe about inclusive classroom practice

(Rouse, 2008, as cited: Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), with emphasis on inclusive approaches to teaching, as a way of developing understandings of what counts as evidence of inclusive pedagogy.

In addition, according to (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), "*distinguishing between inclusive pedagogy, inclusive education and inclusive practice is important but problematic because the term 'inclusive' is used broadly in education and has many meanings. It is an educational concept that has defied precise definition. Inclusive practice also varies widely: from the very specific, for example, including children with disabilities in mainstream schools by relocating specialist provision from special to mainstream schools; to a very broad notion of responding to diversity among learners without recourse to categorization*".

So, we focus on all special and educational contexts and this study was guided by the following special interest: What are the challenges teachers face today as leaders of inclusive classrooms and what skills do these challenges require?

Here, in the upcoming sections, highlighting the theoretical connections, we show what are the challenges of teachers as leaders in the classroom, the importance of learning and working within the context of Inclusive Education and how the skills of a inclusive classroom teacher with positive influence can affect the learners' participation, learning and academic achievement.

Exploring Challenges to the Role of Professionals within the Context of Inclusive Education, Including Inclusive Teachers as Leaders

It is commonly accepted that good leadership is the exercise of influence and "charisma" over others to achieve a specific goal. This definition is merely a foundation for effective leadership, as a good leader must support their influence with a solid set of skills on which those they lead can rely for the specific task they undertake (https://www.reference.com/business-finance/definition-good-leadership-bdd84b285c63cb4f?ueid=792288ab-59f8-4b29-97d0-a7ffb49de474).

The education professional in their field (coordinator, manager, consultant, trainer, etc.) serves as a source of information, inspiration, guidance, and organization of collaborative situations and communication interventions, as well as pedagogical programs that emerge as negotiated products with students, trainees, and others, including the broader community. They advocate for democratic decision-making processes with a strategic aim of shaping responsible young individuals with autonomous thinking based on critical reasoning, creativity, and problem-solving within the complexity of the modern psychosocial and multicultural environment (Ioannidi et al., 2011; Ioannidi & Kalokairinou, 2010).

Furthermore, the positive influence of an educator as a leader (Poekert, 2012)

aims to create conditions that foster the development of critical thinking in students and trainees in general. This influence is linked to qualitative learning criteria, such as:

- Distancing from prejudices and stereotypes
- Respect for others' opinions
- Curiosity and inquiry
- Questioning and re-evaluation
- Willingness and persistence
- Readiness and decisiveness
- Systematic approach

Effective leadership is crucial from multiple perspectives and across all educational systems (Koniari & Raftoulis, 2023; Urio, 2023; Mariono & Sabar, 2023; Tvaltchrelidze & Tvaltchrelidze, 2018; Charalambous, 2016), as it fosters trust among participants in an organization and encourages a professional and positive environment. In an educational, workplace, or business setting, leadership acts as a catalyst that enables all other aspects to function cohesively. In the absence of appropriate leadership, human and work resources remain stagnant (https://www.reference.com/world-view/leadership-important-f152d10910f5cc89?ueid=792288ab-59f8-4b29-97d0-a7ffb49de474).

According to Kehaiadou (2019), modern education, along with the contemporary school that is open to the local community, requires the presence of leaders who adapt their behavior based on purpose, circumstances, and people. Acting transformatively and shaping their vision, they should strive to adopt a democratic and participatory leadership style. The recognition of leadership's vital role in improving the quality of education has led to the exploration of ways to develop leadership skills among educational staff. In today's rapidly changing world, the need for effective leadership in education has become even more pressing.

An effective leader provides direction for implementing educational work, inspires trust, and motivates educators to invest their energy in achieving educational goals. Such a leader earns the confidence of their subordinates by making decisions based on thoughtful analysis of the existing situation. They assign active roles to team members, reward achievements, provide vision, communicate effectively, and take responsibility for any risks involved in executing tasks. Leaders in the education sector must demonstrate a high level of cognitive and technical skills related to educational objectives, complemented by strong emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

Moreover, the ability to make sound decisions quickly and confidently is a hallmark of leadership. Leadership is also reflected in the attitudes and behaviors of a leader's colleagues. Employees who openly share their opinions and comfortably express differing viewpoints exemplify leadership that encourages creative thinking and self-

reflection. Finally, providing timely, constructive feedback and setting clear expectations for both organizational and individual performance is also a characteristic of strong leadership (https://www.reference.com/business-finance/examples-effective-leadership-ac9d84162158f4fe?ueid=792288ab-59f8-4b29-97d0-a7ffb49de474).

Discussing New Skills in the Role of Inclusive Teacher

More specifically, the modern role of the inclusive teacher is clearly outlined through the quality of their theoretical training, the level of their technical expertise, and their overall adequacy in terms of their psycho-emotional and social identity in relation to their students (Caires & Almeida, 2007).

Furthermore, in the 21st century, where science and technology are among the key factors of economic and social development, the uniqueness of the teacher is shaped within a broader spectrum of scientific, research, teaching, and learning parameters. What distinguishes an effective Inclusive Teacher is the clarity and quality of educational goals, the selection and effectiveness of teaching strategies, co-educational assessment, as well as lifelong skills that connect education, learning, and life (Ioannidi et al., 2024). Also, more student-centered approaches are the consequence of positive teacher emotions, while a teacher-centered approach is the consequence of negative teacher emotions, although there are two surprising links (Chen, 2019).

The newly emerging role of the teacher should be based on key pillars such as staying informed about contemporary developments in their field, developing a holistic perception, introducing critical and creative thinking, as well as acquiring knowledge intertwined with human values. It is important to emphasize that education itself should be oriented toward shaping the role of an active, emancipated citizen with democratic ideas, whose self-sufficiency and professional competence can ensure the creation of a peaceful and productive classroom as a foundation for a later creative journey in society. Ideas, attitudes, and principles such as peace, environmental awareness, concern for health, familiarity with new technologies, adaptation to the new spirit of globalization, and the awakening of new characteristics regarding the identity of the active citizen are some of the key elements that will promote the modern individual (Ioannidi & Kalokairinou, 2010).

Moreover, it is a fact that an effective teacher knows they must utilize all theories—behavioral, cognitive, and socio-cognitive (Elliot et al., 2008)—during their teaching, while also forming their own personal theory. This theory may consist of their own experiences, values, and knowledge, which influence their teaching choices. They observe the student's capabilities, learning style, classroom environment, and interpersonal relationships with peers. To enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning, teachers use various methods such as presentations, brainstorming,

classifications, experiments, concept maps, storytelling, puzzles, symbols, motor skills, and more (Plomaritou, 2019).

The combination of different teaching strategies and methods is recommended in education. An effective teacher understands that the lifelong skills students need to acquire include the ability to act independently, learn autonomously, assess, evaluate, and make informed decisions, observe, distinguish, compare, classify (based on criteria), organize and prioritize, formulate hypotheses and verify their accuracy, draw evidence-based conclusions, design, organize, and conduct research, experiment and "discover," explain/interpret, analyze, combine and synthesize, communicate, participate, and collaborate, ask questions, listen, express themselves correctly, engage in dialogue, articulate and justify their opinions, apply what they learn, solve problems, and even unlearn what is no longer useful (Mavropoulos, 2020).

Finally, teachers must emphasize the role of emotions in education (Zembylas, 2002; Zembylas, 2004; Zembylas, 2007; Zembylas & Schutz, 2009), for example, in emotional awareness, emotion management, utilizing emotions productively, empathy, relationship management, intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, stress management, adaptability, and a generally positive disposition (Plomaritou, 2019). This educational practice is founded on a healthy social and physical environment and is further strengthened by the support of 21st-century technologies.

Conclusion

According to Baglieri & Knopf (2004), "*Although inclusion is a moral imperative in promoting social justice, some inclusive practices continue to marginalize students with disabilities. A truly inclusive school reflects a democratic philosophy whereby all students are valued, educators normalize difference through differentiated instruction, and the school culture reflects an ethic of caring and community*".

In conclusion, to have excellent schools, we need to have excellent educational teachers as leaders and to contribute to the preparation of professionals who understand the framework within which education operates and who can act creatively and productively from responsible positions in the education system, such as teachers who want to obtain an administrative/leadership position in the education system, e.g. school principal, deputy school principal, mentor, advisor, senior education officer, etc. (Pasiardis, 2014).

It is fact that "teachers can and should play a powerful active role in promoting societal inclusion and equity for all learners" (Li & Ruppar, 2021). Finally, we should mention that this discussion is also important for online learning, because "*as schools work on determining what remote learning looks like, professional development needs to move away from defining the work of teachers in stereotypical and own bubble terms and*

towards the skills and knowledge to develop trust, build community, and support diverse learners" (Boison & Burke, 2025).

Practical implications

The study emphasizes the need for professional development and continuous support to help teachers effectively integrate didactical ways and skills into their daily inclusive practices.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no conflicts of interest

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