

The Content of Collaboration between General Education Teachers and Co-Teachers in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

The necessity of collaboration between general education teachers and co-teachers is required in order to achieve inclusion. The purpose of this study is to investigate the content of collaboration between general education teachers and co-teachers in the same classroom in the Elementary School. Twenty-two general education teachers (N=22) and thirty-eight co-teachers (N=38) were asked through questionnaires with open-ended questions about the collaboration content. In addition, semi-structured interviews with four co-teachers and general education teachers were conducted and analyzed. The qualitative analysis has revealed three main categories about collaboration content: (a) Inclusive practices, such as co-teaching, common effort in planning, common goal determination. (b) Co-working into the classroom and (c) Co-existence into the classroom. The majority of the teachers collaborate, up to a certain extent. What is primarily needed is positive attitudes on behalf of teachers about collaborative practices and educational structural reforms with a view to removing any kind of obstacles.

Keywords: collaboration content, collaborative practices, inclusion, inclusive education, co-teaching.

1. Introduction

It is well known that inclusive education constitutes the foundation stone of all students' education in the mainstream schools. Among the European countries, inclusive education is based on the principles of equality, equity, democracy, humanity, supporting the indisputable and nonnegotiable right of everyone to be educated. In this direction, all schools should respond effectively to the rights and needs of all children regardless of gender, mental or physical ability, ethnicity, socio - economic status, or skin color. Teachers' contribution is of vital importance to the inclusive education, since teacher collaboration is a prerequisite for achieving inclusive education, so that all students can be equally trained in general classrooms (Rainforth & England, 1997).

The importance of collaboration between general and special education teachers registers with the literature, firstly because it promotes changes in the role of teachers in the school, as it contributes to their professional development and identity (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), and secondly because it promotes the inclusive education of all students in mainstream schools (Turnbull, Turnhull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). Hence, teachers' perceptions and practices are very important for the success of inclusive education. Goddard, Goddard, and Ts channen-Moran (2007), characteristically report: "*Benefits to students with disabilities, specifically related to gains in achievement or behavior, are presumed as a result of positive teacher perceptions.*"

In Greece, students with disabilities, such as students with autism, sensory and physical disabilities, health disorders and challenging behavior, who attend co-taught classrooms, must have an official diagnosis from the Public Center of Diagnosis and Support of Children with Special Needs (KE.D.D.Y).

However, co-teachers are hired for a few months until the end of the school year and it is doubtful whether they will work again in the same school the next school year, while the General Education teachers are more likely to do so.

1.1. The meaning of collaboration between co-teachers and general education teachers

The term “collaboration” has multiple meanings. The different meaning is attributed according to the context, the relationships, and practices in which it is developed. Collaboration requires communication and interaction, sincere attitudes and responsibility for joint actions, decisions, and choices. Collaboration refers to the interaction between two or more people and encompasses a variety of behaviors such as communication, information sharing, coordination, partnership, problem solving, and negotiation. Hence, the perception of collaboration between general education teachers and co-teachers gets differentiated. It is, therefore defined as a joint planning, decision making, and problem solving, in implementing a common goal.

Teachers interchange their professional knowledge and skills, maintain, and reinforce the positive interdependence feelings, at the same time. In this relationship, the problems which may arise in the classroom are faced as common issues affecting both teachers and are not regarded as affairs that the class teacher is expected to deal with personally, excluding the active involvement of the co-teacher. Friend and Cook (1992) mention the characteristics of effective collaboration as follows: (a) Collaboration is being voluntary; it requires parity among participants; and based on mutual goals, (b) depending on shared responsibility for participation and decision making, (c) consisting of individuals who share their resources; and accountability for outcomes. Consequently, collaboration works when both teachers work together as equals to help students succeed in the classroom. This may be related to the lesson planning for disabled children with co-teaching to a whole class.

1.2. The content of collaboration between co-teachers and general education teachers

General education teachers tend to have knowledge of the curriculum, to plan for the group and have expectations for the whole class. Although most of them have adequate experience, they do not feel prepared to teach students with disabilities (Boyer & Mainzer, 2003; Hodgson, Lazarus, & Thurlow, 2011). On the other hand, most co-teachers are young without any teaching experience in the classroom, but they usually have expertise knowledge about special education and they plan for individuals (Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2005). One potential way in which general teachers could respond to the needs of more students with disabilities, is through gaining joined professional knowledge and the development of collaborative relationships with co-teachers (McDuffie, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2009; Winn & Blanton, 2005). Co-teaching is a mode of collaborative relationships, and it has been described as a special approach, combining the expertise of the shareholders in the educational process (Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Both teachers work together by sharing planning, presentation, evaluation, and classroom management in order to develop differentiated curriculum that meets the needs of a diverse student population (Gately & Gately, 2001).

According to Bawuens and Hourcade (1995), co-teaching is developed gradually, through five steps (presence-planning-presenting-processing-problem solving, knowing as the Five P's of co-teaching. Murwaski and Dieker (2004) suggest that it is a teaching method that may increase learning outcomes for all students in general education framework, providing disabled students with necessary amendments to the content and of teaching provided. Furthermore, Murwaski and Dieker describe the stages and all concerted approaches being implemented by the two teachers before co-teaching is applied. By extension, co-teaching cannot be applied without preparation and previous knowledge of the application. The proliferation of inclusion in public schools has prompted the development of several models of collaborative instruction (Austin, 2001).

National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (1995) identified four specific models of co-teaching, such as *one teaching/one assisting*, *parallel teaching*, *alternative teaching*, and *team teaching*. Furthermore, Zigmond and Magiera (2001) identified one more co-teaching model: station teaching (for co-teaching models see Friend & Cook, 2007; Friend et al., 2010). The experienced teachers tend to use different forms of co-teaching even within the same teaching period depending on the level of education, the requirements of the subject, the teaching objectives and the individual needs of students (Morocco & Aguilar, 2002; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2004; Walther-Thomas, 1997).

However, in Greece, the collaboration process between co-teachers and general education teachers encounters several obstacles (Venianaki & Doulia, 2015). The awareness of collaboration practices and co-teaching is not a part of the sessions' in the university program (Venianaki & Zervakis, 2015), as well as individual education programs, collaboration in the classroom. Given that collaboration content lacks in published research studies in Greece, the increase in the percentage of disabled students and the fact that collaboration practices and co-teaching are not a part of sessions' program, this study is trying to investigate the collaboration content by both teachers in co-taught classes.

2. Methods

The purpose of this study is to investigate the content of collaboration, which is developed in co-taught classes between teachers. Particularly, we want to investigate if co-teaching is implemented, if both teachers share common goals, jointly plan the lesson, make decisions or they are just confined to an earlier stage, such as discussion on problems between them.

2.1. Participants and Settings

Twenty two general education teachers (N=22) (82% females, 18% males) with an average of 15 years of professional experience (3-32) and thirty-eight teachers (N=38) (81.6% females, 18.4% males) with an average of two years of experience (three months-7 years) respectively, participated in this study. All of them are teaching in caught- classes in Primary education schools in both Crete and Northern Greece. The first group (G1) consists of twenty two general education teachers and the second group (G2) consists of co-teachers who teach in the same caught –classes.

2.2. Procedure and Instruments

A qualitative approach was used to investigate the context and content of collaboration between thirty-eight co-teachers and twenty-two general education teachers through questionnaires. In addition, semi-structured interviews with four co-teachers and general education teachers were conducted and analyzed. All teachers completed the questionnaires which included open-ended questions. The open-ended questions examined the collaboration practices between the two groups of teachers. All teachers' answers were coded into categories concerning collaboration practices. The frequency of answers was also examined and recorded. Each answer of the questionnaires was compared, in order to establish common categories. None of responses fell into two categories (criterion of mutual exclusion). All answers were exhausted within their classification into categories (exhaustiveness's criterion). The answers of the respondents were compatible with the objective of research and with the content that has been analyzed (eligibility's criterion). Furthermore, the probes of semi-structured interviews were used for further clarification on the answers given and for further analysis, penetrating and enlightening each theme (Creswell, 2008). We have, therefore, extracted sentence units from the answers in order to support the categories created. We have paid significant attention to teachers' answers and interviews in order to interpret data.

3. Results

Both groups shared similar collaboration practices and therefore, we present the results for both groups. Three main categories were extracted from the analysis.

A. Inclusive practices. This particular category includes all participants' answers, which are considered ideal practices to promote inclusive education. It contains two subcategories:

First subcategory: Co-teaching.

37% of both groups report that they have adopted co-teaching as a collaborative practice. This means that the co-teacher is not only there for the disabled student, leaving the general education teacher to deal with the remaining class that is the other students. The qualitative analysis also reveals that both teachers tend to discuss the objectives for disabled student on a daily basis and formulate the daily program together.

A Co-teacher (G2) reports: "*we use structured program jointly.... The objectives are set by the general education teacher, but we are discussing, too. For example, we discuss if it is necessary for there to be any diversification or whether modification practices are used*".

Both teachers often act jointly on issues of social skills. Furthermore, they both underline the necessity of developing collaboration with student's family to ensure the success and the continuity of any intervention at home.

"We also try to set social objectives for the student with disabilities, for example, to teach him to say "Thanks" and "You are welcome" and not only to ask things for him, but to offer to others... Furthermore, during the lesson if this student reacts badly, we use special educational material, using PC diversified in level and quantity in order to reduce the level of stress. And we always inform his parents, so as to ensure that they are in the same line" (G2).

This kind of collaboration allows the use of strategies. Furthermore, both teachers agree to the use of certain techniques in order to modify students' behavior.

"We use some strategies, such as the assistant classmate, or relabeling courses just to reduce any stress or avoid any bad reaction. We observe his behavior and use behavioral techniques, such as rewards, token economy..." (G2).

After the collaboration relationship, both groups report that they have put into practice various teaching models such as separation of class in groups and the use different approaches depending on the interests and needs of the whole class. They also interact, using diversification of teaching, clarifications or local support in order to encourage all students. In addition, they exchange roles and co-teach.

"We often plan the lesson jointly ... we divide the class in two heterogeneous target groups and teach the same lesson using different approaches" (G1).

"I teach... while the special education teacher usually observes and supports students who encounter difficulties in order to prevent the development of behavioral problems" (G1).

The qualitative analysis from the semi-instructed interviews reveals that co-teaching does not emerge "on its own" and mostly does not develop in a vacuum. Co-teaching is formed on the route and goes through various modifications at each stage until both teachers reach the point of jointly deciding and co-teaching. It presupposes that the two teachers have discussed a lot and have resolved other everyday problems. It is proved that co-teaching is a laborious process that requires time, exchange of professional knowledge of two educators within an established frame of confidence. They characteristically indicate:

" we discuss how we will do the lesson, so that everybody can achieve maximum benefit", " ...we are drafting the plan of everyday lesson, discuss on the difficulties and we are looking for modes in which we can help the student with disability " " ...we implement teaching jointly and exchange roles".

"...We analyze behaviors and exchange ideas". "We understand each other and reach a common decision concerning the content of the lesson, the method, the exercises..." ; "...we are working together on the teaching of the various courses by interchanging roles". "The co-teacher participates actively in teaching and has an active - auxiliary role to the other students. Several times we perform co-teaching" (G1).

The development of collaboration relationships presupposes its sincere availability, -since it is voluntary - by both teachers. The desire for collaboration encounters obstacles mostly because co-teachers are recruited usually later, most at the beginning of school year (three or four months later), while the disabled students attend the class from the beginning of the year with the general education teacher being left alone to his/her own devices. This means that the process of creating partnerships does not start from the beginning of the school year. The co- teacher characteristically says in an interview:

"I found a very intimate atmosphere in the classroom developed by the general education teacher, who really gave me space to intervene in the process without thinking that I interfered in her work. Later, together we created conditions for cooperation and team spiritedness. We did activities together. We even shared some lessons. We exchanged roles. This helped me to see how my student worked away from me without having my support. However, this also helped the general education teacher to be in my shoes and better understand my position, the demands, and the difficulties of my job.

Second subcategory: A joint effort in planning, common goal determination.

20% reports that collaboration means the joint responsibility so as to effectively deal with the students' behavior. This category contains -as the above category- discussion and exchange of information and knowledge, adoption of common objectives for all pupils in order to ensure the proper functioning of the class during the lesson, without implementation of co-teaching at all.

" We discuss on how we will do the lesson, the appropriate attitude in matters of behavior", "... discussing the objectives, the behavior of the student and interpreting his reactions in order to see how we handle them."

Both teachers take into account both cognitive and social goals and observe the disabled student's satisfaction each time, on a daily basis. Their main concern is to strengthen the student towards the difficulties and teach him how to deal with these difficulties, immediately, with readiness and patience as well.

" We discuss the objectives we have set for the student and the problems arising in everyday life" ... "We also discuss on handling situations and problems arising about issues relevant to teachingwe are working together for his behavior."

However, this kind of collaboration does not evolve the use of co-teaching models for a variety of reasons. It seems that teachers are affected by the existence of co-teaching, because in some cases a few teachers use a unique co-teaching model, namely "one teach- one observe" (Friend et al., 2010), but they do not feel sure about implementing it. Most times, they hesitate to implement certain models. They have tried but they do not know how to continue, adjust, modify or up to which point they should extend it.

We have tried this once: I was teaching, the co-teacher was supporting teaching... But we need training on how to achieve this at all levels and subjects (G1).

In other cases, the co-teacher tries to support more students while the general education teacher interferes only when in case it is necessary. The implementation of co-teaching encounters some obstacles such as ignorance of co-teaching or the seriousness of the condition of the student who is faced with a particular form of disability.

"I usually observe and support some students - when I can- and the general education teacher helps me if there is some trouble" (G2-25).

Two teachers from G1 group report:

"It was not only the lack of knowledge which set obstacles to the implementation of co-teaching but also the student's seriousness of disability as well as the pressure to attend all the lessons".

... "Measures should be taken to deal with these obstacles, such as teachers' training ... high importance and absolutely necessary at the beginning of the school year"...

Although both teachers have developed collaboration practices, severe obstacles exist. In addition, they suggest teachers' training from the beginning of the year.

B. Co-working into the classroom

25% focus on common effort for the students (informing, agreement for the handling of knowledge, classroom organization). This means that they focus on a jointly agreement by maintaining the limits of each other in the classroom. However, there is good communication and sharing of a few activities. In this sense, the cooperation may evolve, in an attempt to achieve students' socialization and involvement in organized activities, which contribute to the student's integration into the group (Strobilus, Nikolarazi, & Tragoulia, 2012). However, it is not a joint effort in planning, common goal determination or in a teaching approach. In some cases, both teachers perceive the collaboration as a procedure without a common plan or goal determination for the student. This certainly relates to the student's disability seriousness and therefore affects the teachers' attitudes as regards the objectives and teaching material:

"We work together for the disabled student... be in the group. We choose exercises of concentration and understanding".

" we even work for the development of the student' consciousness and for his integration into the various groups, that's why we organize participatory activities".

It is obvious that those teachers are mainly geared toward the integration of students. Teachers' perceptions, training, and student's disability seriousness differentiate to these practices.

In addition, the co-teacher supports two students in two different schools a week and as a result, this does not allow the growth and development of collaboration practices. Taking into account the lack of knowledge about co-teaching, it is obvious that the obstacles in collaboration between the two teachers are quite a lot implying that collaboration remains at an early stage and cannot be easily developed.

... "my own lack of knowledge as to my role in the classroom is a factor which makes the implementation of collaborative practices impossible ... It is of high importance to the co-teacher not to have to be divided into two schools... training seminars at the beginning of the school year are needed" (G2).

C. Co-existence into the classroom.

16.6% do not collaborate into the classroom. They just coexist into the same classroom. Their relationships restricted to give some information about the lesson by the general education teacher to the co-teacher without deepening in objectives or without any effort for further cooperation develop. The discussion and the update information focus on the syllabus. Consequently, a general education teacher teaches all students except the disabled one, whom only the co-teacher is responsible to teach separately in the classroom, away from the others. This marks the solitude which surrounds both the co-teacher and the general education teacher. The probes from the co-teacher were revealing:

"I worked on my own. I tried to investigate student's needs, interests, and capabilities in order to adapt the material to his needs. I use PC, various strategies and techniques to establish a good relation with him. I feel that I got through from various stages".

"The objectives are set by me for the child, while the general education teacher is responsible only for the other students. There is no information about the activities of the day. I just hear what she teaches at that moment and try to respond simultaneously. What I should do next, is unknown".

However, this kind of collaboration is related to some additional obstacles, except the unawareness of collaboration content from both teachers. Inefficient family and school support affects collaboration with the involved members. The inefficient support from the two systems "school" and "family" set obstacles to teachers' collaboration, and to the student adjustment. Moreover, the disabled student is not an equal and accepted member by his classmates.

"The general education teacher has difficulty in collaboration. This difficulty emerged from the very beginning. There was a lack of willingness to deal with the student, who was not efficiently supported neither by the family nor by the school, as result no one accepts him".

Consequently, it seems that collaboration does not exist and both teachers work alone in the classroom. Obviously, a set of obstacles originating from factors out of teachers' control hamper the development of collaboration.

4. Discussion

The results indicate some certain aspects about collaboration between co-teachers and general education teachers in the Primary education. Both questionnaires as well as the semi-structured interviews, brightened further various aspects of the content of collaboration. Given the fact that teachers' collaboration does not start from the beginning of the school year, general education teachers' attitudes and reactions are very important, at the presence of special education teachers into the classroom.

Co-teaching

37% of the teachers have introduced co-teaching. Both teachers have achieved this inclusive practice which promotes teachers' professional development, but also enhance the likelihood of students' success regardless of their having disabilities or not (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Turnbull et al., 2007). Qualitative analysis revealed that teachers' attitudes and knowledge about collaboration practices are important and also that co-teaching is the result of an entire course. This course is gradually formed and includes several stages until the two teachers are able to co-teach. Initially, both teachers, after meeting and knowing each other, have to develop interactional skills in order to participate effectively in the sharing knowledge, planning, and problem solving. This status creates a certain relationship with feelings of trust between them. Next, they define goals for the student with a disability, but also for all the other or draw a daily lesson plan. They look for appropriate teaching methods for all students.

Teachers use various pedagogical strategies, techniques (behavioral mainly for the delimitation of the student, at least at an early stage), alternative approaches, and teaching methods (e.g. differentiated instruction, establishment of cooperative relationship among the group members, etc.). These inclusive practices, including co-teaching, develop dynamics such as highlighting collaboration desire, sharing knowledge, developing competence, preparing for this through the continuous interchange information and knowledge. The discussion and search for effective solutions, strategies, teaching methods, and goals (cognitive, emotional, and social) for the whole class can ensure team spirit, fairness and respect without discrimination, targeting or separations. The interests and needs of the students are a compass for both teachers in formulating their education policies (Condemn & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Sharpe & Hawes, 2003), which complement one another employing one's professional knowledge and skills (Dettmer et al., 2005; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). Furthermore, they often jointly intervene to behavior problems' into the classroom. They decide to have a closer contact and collaborate with the family for the continuity of intervention at home. Besides that, both teachers discuss and collaborate with the family. This coordination helps parents experience a feeling of safety and trustworthiness. It is obvious that they often tend to avoid many conciliation or manipulation problems.

A joint effort in planning, common goal determination

20% of respondents indicate that they use practices that promote inclusive education, without co-teaching implementation. Both teachers discuss the design of the course, the method, and objectives, while they focus on students' behavior and enable them to face any difficulties with readiness. For this purpose, they closely monitor how students respond to each activity every single time. This category of collaboration includes discussion, exchangeable information, knowledge and common cognitive and social goals for students in the order to ensure the proper classroom functioning during the day. It seems that this relationship may have significant benefits to all students even without co-teaching. It is likely to become the preliminary stage of co-teaching. To some extent, teachers seem to know about co-teaching, but they hesitate to introduce a co-teaching model, because the implementation requires supervision and continuous feedback for any modification. Seeing that general education teachers have not been trained on co-teaching, either in theory or in practice, it is difficult for co-teaching to be applied. In addition, lack of experience, little or no previous experience of special education or lack of adequate knowledge about the content along with a sense of fear and hesitation which unavoidably stem from lack of training, can become obstacles to effective teacher collaboration (Venianaki & Doulia, 2015). Hence, it is important the fact that there is collaboration in this category, which may contribute to the understanding of the needs, skills and students' progress by both teachers and contributes to their professional development (Strogilos et al., 2012).

Co-working into the classroom

25% of teachers perceive collaboration as a joint effort for students' adjustment. It is obvious that both teachers' priority is students' social adjustment. There is communication, sharing information, and agreement through commonly organized activities. This effort for adjustment is probably the result of teachers' perceptions and lack of awareness of collaboration practices, but students' behavior problems may affect unfavorably the learning process. However, both teachers report some administrative obstacles, such as mobility (the special education teacher teaches two students in different schools). As a result, the few lesson hours per week may prevent the collaboration development between teachers. Taking into account all the above, we can easily conclude that collaboration may be established at an early stage although not yet fully developed. However, collaboration can be further developed through communication and certain activities.

Co-existence into the classroom

16.6% of teachers focus on the syllabus, although there is lack of both willingness and effort for further development of collaboration. It is obvious that collaboration does not exist and the collaboration content is limited to an informal discussion or information, which may not exist (Strogilos et al., 2012; Venianaki & Zervakis, 2015). Both teachers work in isolation that is separately alone. The special education teacher's report is indicative of the feeling of loneliness in the classroom. The student with disability also experiences the same feelings, since there is no support either from the school or from the family. Thus, the sense of isolation may affect students' adjustment (D'Alonzo, Giordano, & Vanleeuwen, 1997; Klinger & Vaughn, 2002). In these schools, the general education teacher shoulders the responsibility of the whole class, while the special education teacher has the responsibility of the disabled student. Nevertheless, this status does not create a common ground for collaborative practices in school.

Finally, neither of the teachers shares these difficulties with other colleagues and the director and/or with the school consultant. Collaboration with other colleagues, the director and the school consultant should bear fruits both for school staff and students. In addition it would lead to the solution to the problem of insufficient family support.

5. Conclusions

The complexity of the situation that general education teachers are faced with in the classrooms as well as the large number of students with disabilities have led to an strong demand for the necessity for collaboration development (Noell, 1999). Collaboration practices have been developed, since a huge number of students with disabilities attend the classroom with two teachers. Collaboration practices, such as a joint effort in planning, common goal determination and co-teaching are used by some co-teachers and general education teachers in caught classes. Yet, many teachers are trying by themselves without any supervision or support on collaborative practices. They have not gained knowledge on collaborative content, strategies, or co-teaching. Needless to say, educational training on collaboration content (practices, strategies) must be the main focus. Moreover, there is strong demand for supervision and feedback to teachers who are in caught-classes. In this direction, the role of school consultants and support services can be crucial in helping to shape positive attitudes to inclusion and collaborative practices development. Positive attitudes promote and improve the inclusive education. Moreover, it is well known that inclusion will not succeed, if teachers adopt a negative attitude towards it (D' Alonzo et al., 1997).

The development of collaboration has benefits for both students and teachers and promotes disabled students' adjustment and learning. Teachers are strengthened professionally and improve their skills through the sharing of experiences, by taking initiative and taking up responsibility. Devoting time, effort, knowledge, administrative support, and also positive attitudes, about inclusive education are necessary for the development of collaborative practices. Time allocation for collaboration development has to be part of the daily program for the high priority area in inclusion and collaboration as part of inclusive education. Time allocation in conjunction to the common responsibility in caught classes by two teachers, for all students, will eliminate the strong assumption that the co-teacher holds full responsibility for disabled students. Thus, our schools should develop collaborative culture towards inclusive education. Yet, collaborative culture does not develop by itself. Initially, it is necessary to implement awareness programs on disability and diversity issues, which aim at eliminating stereotypes, prejudices and shaping positive attitudes to inclusive education. These programs should address teachers, parents, students, stakeholders, local and wider society, as the inclusive education is not achieved regardless of the socio-political context in which we try to apply it.

Consequently, Greek educational system has to be prepared based on inclusive education. The reconstruction of our education system should be set as a first priority so that it can respond to all students' needs. Special education needs to be planned towards inclusive education, so that all schools can develop democratic ethos. In this direction, the state should focus and work on a common ground where education of equal opportunities is considered to be a right, not a privilege. Moreover, the upgrading of special education based on the accession perspective, is directly linked to the improvement of the general school, which must be prepared and reconstructed so that it can respond to the diverse needs and come up to the expectations of the student population, including disabled students.

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