

Facing the challenge of educating pupils with pupils with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) in the mainstream primary schools of Cyprus.

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Within the last 25 years the Government of Cyprus has encouraged and supported the education of pupils with special educational needs into the mainstream educational system. A specific project that I had recently undertaken aimed to study the concept of special education in Cyprus and more specifically the concept of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) encountered by pupils by analysing teachers local practice, experiences, levels of confidence, levels of communication and support offered within the school as well as different strategies that they use in action.

In order to be able to fulfil the main purpose of the study primary research was undertaken by me from five local mainstream primary schools (age group 6-12 years old) with the use of questionnaires and interviews. Reflecting on the study I was able to highlight different challenges and obstacles teachers appear to come across with while trying to educate those pupils in the mainstream sector as well as a number of areas that need to be improved within the education system in order to be able to provide a more inclusive education for pupils with EBD.

The different challenges teachers appear to come across with are:

- Failure in clarifying the aims and the objectives of the Law
- Teachers lack of knowledge and training

- Special educators seek for more support
- Strategies that exist vary between teachers
- Limited support offered from the school and the Ministry of Education
- Lack of co-operation and communication between teachers and special educators
- Limited communication and co-operation with parents of children with EBD

Improvements in the provision of support

There should be more frequent visits from special educators and each school should be entitled to a number of them being present at the school throughout the year, so that that are available to teachers when even they seek for additional support. The number of children in each classroom should be reduced so that each teacher will be given the chance to spend more time with each one of his/her students giving him/her additional time to support those children as well. A number of teachers and special educators argued that children who are considered to have EBD, before they join the elementary school, should receive some special provision that would help make their transition in the education system easier.

The government should try to provide parents with more information about the concept of special needs including EBD, in order for them to become more sensitive towards those issues, if they are to accept additional support offered from the school, as well as co-operate with teachers and special educators in supporting their work at home. Teachers as well as special educators should have access to more material which is relevant to supporting the teaching of EBD children.

I would argue that there is an urgent need for a radical deconstruction of the existing education system. There is also a need for the Ministry of Education to suggest a more adaptable and beneficial education system to be implemented for children with EBD, as well as to provide a better organised and structured education for them with more general structures within the education of SEN, offering useful guidelines that could

easily be adapted to each classroom. Teachers' and special educators' views should be taken into account as they are the ones who are called to face those problems and provide suitable solutions if they want to provide equal participation in teaching and learning to all the children (Hoplarou 2004; Phtiaka 2005; Hadjiyiannakou, 2005; Angelides, 2005).

More training and in service education on how to teach children with EBD should also be available to both teachers and special educators in order to be more effective in the classroom. Very few teachers feel ready to teach those children and their lack of knowledge as well as lack of appropriate support, resources and materials in a mainstream school is a fact that concerns almost all of them (Phtiaka, 2005; Angelides, 2005).

Good communication and co-operation should be reinforced within the schools in order for support to be chosen and be implemented more carefully. Teachers need to build a bridge between themselves and the special educational needs (SEN) staff, in order to be able to develop a relationship that will acknowledge each other's work and knowledge (Rogers, 2004).

Children with EBD, require support and respect and for those working with them to show them that we have faith in them in order for them to become motivated and try to achieve more things throughout their education. The legislation and practical implications of SEN in combination with the supplementary provision of appropriate support for children with EBD increasingly gains a greater investigative interest and it is considered to be a promising future research domain (Riddell and Brown, 1994a). Our aim should be to support the system and embrace the people who work towards the effectiveness of the illustration of the law, trying to offer the best that they can towards the children, especially children with special needs.

An organised school environment is essential even for children with special needs, as in it they find a place where support exists. There should be provision for that extra something that the child needs e.g. additional time, available resources, special teaching that is been organised and presented in a specific way in order to be able to fulfil his/her needs (Phtiaka, 2005). Therefore, we should aim to transform all schools into effective schools for all children, which will accept and meet the need of all children regardless of their needs. We need schools which are prepared to re-examine and review not only their curriculum and framework, but each and every aspect of their policy and organisation (Mittler, 1993).

Teachers are the voice of change and they most crucial factor for integration to succeed (Panteliadou et al, 1996), but we need to support them. It is our duty and responsibility.