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## **Self-Assessment of Teachers about Work in an Inclusive Classroom**

UNESCO (2015), in its efforts to ensure quality and equitable education for all, emphasises the importance of an inclusive approach. This approach promotes acceptance and inclusion of all children and highlights the need for a pedagogy that respects diversity and equity. In this sense, adaptive pedagogy is an essential part of inclusive education, as it allows teachers to adapt to students' different learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds. Skočić Mihić (2019) focuses on teachers' need to adapt methods that address student diversity, thereby improving the quality of learning and promoting equality.

Inclusion refers to allowing and considering student diversity when planning and conducting lessons (Ministry of Education and Training, Eurydice Slovenia, 2024). Inclusion concerns all involved, as it is realised at both the individual level and through cooperation, learning, and interpersonal interactions. The challenges and benefits of inclusive education are multifaceted. While children with special needs gain more confidence, motivation, and social skills through inclusive education, teachers face additional challenges, such as increased stress and the need for specialised knowledge. Teachers must create an inclusive environment and support children through adaptations (Kiswarday, 2018), making it crucial for teachers to be trained in individualised teaching tailored to the needs of different students (Drljić & Kiswarday, 2021). Self-reflection and self-assessment are equally or even more critical for developing inclusive pedagogy, benefiting teachers and students. A competent professional focuses on teaching methods, relationships, values, attitudes, and behaviours that are part of the institution's organisational culture. Organisational culture is the school climate, which includes core beliefs and values expressed in practice, leadership, interaction, and relationships within the organisation (Devjak et al., 2020). The school climate contributes to better learning outcomes (Kozina et al., 2012; Adlešič, 1998) and positively impacts teachers' self-assessment of their competencies, significantly influencing professional growth and satisfaction (Štemberger & Žakelj, 2021).

The educational process occurs in an educational institution, the school (Peklaj et al., 2009). Practical education balances theory and practice, freedom and rigidity, group and individual, and tradition and innovation (Robinson & Aronica, 2015). The school is a space where social, cognitive, and emotional aspects intertwine and where the teacher's role is not only to plan the learning process and impart knowledge but also to shape the student's individual development (Peklaj et al., 2009). Over the last 15 years, the number of students in inclusive education has increased, demonstrating the urgent need to enhance the quality of the learning environment and classroom climate, which should be addressed as a specific educational measure to achieve the goals of inclusive education. This measure is essential for establishing and maintaining good interaction processes, relationships, and classroom climate. However, the goals of inclusive education are often difficult to achieve (Allodi, 2010). It is still not entirely clear what inclusion means in education and what is necessary to develop a positive attitude towards diversity and increase the capabilities of educational systems to meet the demands of all involved (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2012). Not only is there a lack of clarity about what is expected from inclusion, but as S. M. Reindal (2016) points out, there is also a global phenomenon where a uniform definition of inclusion still does not exist, as everyone interprets and adapts it in their way. Nevertheless, Armstrong (2011) finds that diversity has become a fundamental concept for the quality of education. Promoting and maintaining inclusion in the educational environment is crucial for students' success and educational

excellence. Inclusion has become a core value (ibid). Similarly, several authors point out the idea of inclusion encompassing a broad population of students for whom it is intended.

Inclusive strategies to improve the situation of all students include:

- the teacher's personal touch, whose effect is shown by listening to students;
- participation in practical aspects with the involvement of social, health, and educational services to support and include all students, especially those in disadvantaged situations;
- inclusive care with control factors and systemic and school responsibilities as elements of teacher professionalism, as all students must ensure persistence and reinforce inclusive principles and approaches;
- professional development for inclusive education, as the teacher actively participates in all systemic and educational changes and advances within their competencies;
- support educational and systemic leaders in facilitating the advancement of inclusive practices and proper direction. Planning to meet the diverse needs of all students must become an integral part of the orientation process of all educational spheres. The project's findings focus on the need for joint implementation centred on collaborative problem-solving and teamwork (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011).

In the school environment, the classroom community is a particular type of social group dependent on the dynamics and processes of individual and group development (Kiš-Glavaš & Fulgosi-Masnjak, 2002), an educational environment where everyone feels safe, valued, and respected (Rus et al., 2008), which students need to achieve and demonstrate their potential. A hostile climate is usually an obstacle to learning, so it is necessary to create and maintain a favourable climate for the learning of all students (Garibay, 2015). Hansen et al. (2017) also state that it is the teacher's moral duty to establish a positive classroom climate to support students' learning achievements and intellectual, behavioural, social, and emotional growth. A positive classroom climate includes quality interpersonal relationships, support for teaching and learning, and safety in all contexts. Students who feel a strong connection to the school environment are more likely to engage in extracurricular activities, achieve higher grades, graduate, and experience better overall well-being than students who perceive their school environment as poor.

Classroom climate is a broad concept and a fundamental component of how the class and everyone in it respond to each other (Peklaj & Pečjak, 2020), consisting of students' feelings towards the teacher and peers (Peklaj et al., 2009) and is the state or atmosphere shaped by relationships and felt by all those connected to the school (Wulan & Sanjaya, 2022). At the same time, classroom climate is related to good planning, practical teaching and the teacher's concern for children's well-being (Barth et al., 2004).

When shaping the classroom climate, it is necessary to consider the diversity of students with their multifaceted social identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, immigration status, disability, age, socioeconomic status, and religion. The teacher shapes students' experiences in the classroom, so it is crucial to understand these different social identities to actively develop an inclusive classroom climate for all (Garibay, 2015). Teaching strategies that promote a good classroom climate include constructing, responding, and reinforcing in an environment where students listen to and trust each other, rejoice, and are compassionate (McGrath & Francey, 1996). Meanwhile, Hook and Vass (2000) list the following factors that create classroom climate: recognising and appreciating students' efforts, establishing a relationship with students where connection is at the forefront, and being prepared for an emotional relationship that requires dedication, effort, and skill.

The teacher must establish conditions that support the inclusion of all children and enhance children's learning. It is essential to consider the overall well-being, which affects the quality of relationships (ibid). According to Schilling (2000), creating conditions such as successful conflict resolution, light and relaxed communication, and consideration of emotions impacts classroom climate. The influence of students' social competence is also essential, as it is the foundation for developing classroom climate. Social skills are approaches to children's behaviour that help them form friendships and alliances (McGrath & Francey, 1996). As explained by Peklaj and Pečjak (2020), social competence manifests as responsible and prosocial behaviour that includes maintaining social affiliation and following rules, participating, helping, and caring for others. At the same time, Ryan and Ladd (2012) define criteria for social competence, stating that all students must strive to develop a sense of trust and social identity. They need to learn valuable standards of behaviour by observing the behaviour of others to achieve goals positively evaluated by peers and teachers. An essential criterion of social skills is establishing and maintaining relationships with affection for their social group. According to Peklaj and Pečjak (2020), achieving these goals leads to a healthy self-image, academic success, and an overall positive climate.

Classroom climate is fundamentally interpersonal, expressed through students' perceptions, and is the ability to develop an interpersonal relationship based on harmony, connectedness, mutual trust, and improving relationships, contributing to a positive classroom climate (Frisby & Martin, 2010). Every teacher can use all the strategies for relationship building, regardless of whom or what they teach, making relationship building a crucial component of teaching (Barr, 2016). Education of all students is better and more effective in a pleasant and encouraging environment that considers and supports all students, including those who are vulnerable, marginalised, or excluded in some way (Šmalc, 2018).

Based on research findings and theoretical definitions, we conclude that inclusive pedagogy ensures all students receive quality and equitable education that respects their diversity and equality. An inclusive school culture requires a systemic structure, as perspectives and guidelines are mutually influential. Indicators of inclusivity show that inclusive education is becoming more established, but a plan, a recognisable commitment to inclusive principles, and community responsibility are necessary for its strengthening. Increasing inclusivity reduces exclusion and promotes the holistic progress of all children (Buljubošić - Kuzmanović and Španja, 2019). However, this is also a complex and "challenging" process that demands a high level of professional competence and personal motivation from teachers, which they develop through self-reflection and self-assessment. Additionally, teachers are responsible for achieving the goals and principles of inclusion. Teachers must also continually educate and train themselves for work in an inclusive classroom. A teacher who teaches in an inclusive classroom needs more support, independence, critical thinking, reflection, creativity, collaboration, and involvement in research and development (Kavkler et al., 2015).