

## СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ ФИЛОСОФИЯ И ФИЛОСОФСКАЯ АНТРОПОЛОГИЯ

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**V. Grincevičienė, J. Barevičiūtė, V. Asakavičiūtė, J. Grincevičius<sup>1</sup>**

### INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS A VALUE: PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES

*The authors of the article make attempts to present a trend of inclusive education, which has been visible in the national special education, as a value. The main normative documents that have presupposed the genesis and expression of the model of inclusive education in the context of a value-based aspect are introduced. The results of longitudinal studies, which prove that attempts to create a school that ensures equal access to education for everybody (school students with special educational needs as well as their healthy peers) have been only partially successful in Lithuania so far. A number of disabled children, adolescents and young people have still been learning in the settings that are isolated from their peers. Therefore, challenges in inclusive education are likely to arise.*

*Keywords: inclusive education, inclusion, value, special needs, disabled.*

### Introduction

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, as the main European Union organisation aimed to improve the education policy on special needs individuals and educational practice, recommends to collect data on systematic basis, to analyse them and to provide evidence-based studies to be followed while implementing the principles and objectives of developing inclusive education.

The main provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) as well as the strategic objectives 2020 relating to ensuring equity in education, which were established by European Council, all act as key drivers for implementing inclusive education policy in all the EU countries.

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<sup>1</sup> **Авторы:** Вилия Гринцявичене, Йовиле Барявичюте, Вайда Асакавичюте, Йонас Гринцявичюс  
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**Аннотация:** Предпринята попытка дать представление о складывающемся в Литве направлении в сфере специального образования – инклюзивном (включенном) образовании (обучении как ценности). Представлен обзор основных нормативных документов, раскрывающих генезис модели включенного образования / обучения (инклюзии) в контексте ценностного подхода. Приводятся результаты многолетних исследований, свидетельствующих о том, что в Литве до настоящего времени лишь частично удалось создать школу, в которой на равных правах имеют возможность обучаться ученики со специальными потребностями вместе со здоровыми сверстниками. В настоящее время в стране некоторая часть детей, подростков и молодежи с ограниченными возможностями здоровья все еще учится в изолированной от сверстников среде. Методы инклюзивного образования могут помочь решить эту проблему.

**Ключевые слова:** инклюзивное (включенное) образование, ценность, специальные потребности, ученик с ограниченными возможностями здоровья.

The essence of this policy is based on the compliance between disability and dignity, which is based on fundamental values in all the areas and trends of the currently changing society. The aim of the Convention is to promote and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. The principles of the Convention, which was ratified in the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on 27 May 2010, establish equal access to education and training for all members of society: inclusive education, previously just a mere aspiration, has become a reality, when the process of education is constructed in the context of supreme (fundamental) values [1].

### **Multidimensionality of the concept of value**

Having established the goal for themselves to strive for the good, the pre-Socratics representing different philosophical trends identified the good with different values. According to T. Kačerauskas, the conversation about virtues and ethics “has its roots in the Socratic and Platonic tradition” and are related to pre-Socratics such as Thales and Anaximander [2]. Taking one of the most important positions in this context, Stoicism encouraged to promote justice, to apply wisdom, to be brave. It also exalted temperance, modesty and moderation as key life values that pave the path for successful and happy existence of society and life of all its members [3–6]. The good as the supreme value (employing the analogy of the good to the Sun) was promoted by Plato [7], who claimed that the Sun shines to everybody who live in this world, i.e. under the Sun. Thus, the Sun’s care is accessible to both disabled and non-disabled people. Aristotle [8] also called for the virtue of moderation as the golden mean. In the context of this article, moderation is regarded as patience, restraint, tolerance, decency and assurance of equal opportunities to all. Aurelius Augustinus, a representative of Christian ethics, formulated the conception of freedom as a task: freedom is an aspiration to be sought [9–12] and, therefore, freedom to pursue own goals, including education, should be ensured to all the members of society. This is the only way for all members of society without exceptions to attain the goal of complete existence coping with the phenomenon of “errant conscience” elaborated on by Thomas Aquinas [13].

The above-mentioned interpretations dedicated to values and many others that originated in the 19th–20th centuries have also reached various problems addressed in social sciences. Thus, these problems are obviously of an interdisciplinary and multidimensional character. The issue of values can be associated not only with cultural but even with ecological problems, too [14]. The participants in scientific discussions, which break out while elaborating on the typological aspects of values, mainly agree upon the interpretation of transcendental (supreme, eternal, spiritual) values. These include the fundamental and eternal values that comprise the main parts of the individual’s life and existence plan. They are *resistant* to the passage of *time*, passed down from generation to generation and remain in the human consciousness as the main ambitions and goals of life. The values of this type function at cognitive, emotional and behavioural levels. According to V. Pruskus, while choosing certain values people indirectly reveal their ambitions and ideals that are close and relevant to them [15]. These ideals are of a universal nature. On the other hand, according to S. Kanišauskas [16], while addressing the value-related problems, it is necessary to look not only into the width but also to transcend into the

ontological depth, which allows trespassing the intentions of only material character, also realising own fundamental and inherent humanity and avoiding devaluation of values that we are currently facing. So values should not be ignored in the education process, it is necessary to emphasize “that higher education also covers general education, including education of students’ values” [17].

Values of other types exist next to fundamental values. They are of relevance to separate social strata in different phases of society’s development. Here reference is made to temporal (partial, artificial) values nurtured by separate social or professional groups [18]. Values of these types are not timeproof, and their significance and weight among value-based orientations in society have a tendency to shift. Having received strong support from society, partial (artificial, temporal) values can become fundamental ones in the course of time. Therefore, it can be assumed that inclusive education under conditions of globalisation and information society will become an underlying value. The analysis (monitoring) of change trends in the attitude towards the disabled reveals obvious turning points: negativism – positivism. It is important to emphasise that the problems of values were approached from various perspectives by the above-mentioned Antiquity thinkers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others. V. Gudonis states that the attitude towards disabled people in the period of Antiquity also depended on the value system in separate poleis [19].

From the philosophical approach, values are regarded as rules that are necessary for individual living and social communication, as orientation models and behaviour norms, which are objectively valid and have to be obeyed by people while subjectively evaluating respective phenomena, as thinking over and controlling their own actions [20]. It is appropriate to turn to currently relevant values such as human rights and dignity that have become one of the keystones of Kant’s ethics from the philosophical perspective. Following Kantian deontological principles, the humankind with separate societies or individuals that comprise it have to be approached as a goal in itself. The latter is inseparable from a good will, which is also a goal in itself. This Kantian position provides a solid theoretical foundation for solutions to moral problems related to human rights and dignity that emerge in modern society and moral actions that derive from those decisions [21]. Therefore, an individual, society and the humankind are three main reference points that allow building up the so-called “respect for autonomy” and ensuring it as an essential idea of Kantian ethics [22].

Clarifying / determining the concept of value in the context of sociological perspective, the manifestations of pluralism are also numerous. According to T. Parsons, values are approached as normative components of culture. However, not every component of culture can be considered a value: T. Parsons applies this term only for normative examples of the highest level of universality that are linked to action orientation in the social reality [23]. According to A. Giddens, values are abstract ideas that provide a meaning and guidelines to people. They are obeyed by individuals and/or their groups and determine what is desirable, appropriate, good or bad. Different values express the main aspects of human culture variety. Values of individuals are influenced by the specific culture they live in [24].

From the educational perspective, the object that significantly satisfies the needs of an individual or society is regarded as a value [25]. The True, the Good, the Beautiful and Love could serve as an object of this kind. These are transcen-

dental (supreme, eternal, spiritual) values. Internalised values tend to programme activities of an individual, accordingly, to draw trajectories of his/her actions and behaviour in the relation with the self and other people and particularly with the disabled. The place of a value and a value-based attitude in the value system of an individual and society discloses the maturity, culture, ideology of the society a person belongs to, the national educational system, areas and tendencies in its change under conditions of globalisation and information society.

### Regulation of inclusive education

The following international documents and national legal acts, ratified and adopted by the Seimas, regulate the social policy and educational system in Lithuania: the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [1], the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child [26], the *Salamanca Statement* [27], the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania [28], the Law on Research and Studies of the Republic of Lithuania [29], the Law on Special Education of the Republic of Lithuania [30], the *Lithuanian General Education Curriculum* [31], the *State Education Strategy 2013–2022* [32], the *Lithuanian Progress Strategy “Lithuania 2030”* [33] as well as scientific studies published by scholars [19, 34–40 et al.]. These all contribute to a focused and consistent formulation of a positive attitude towards inclusive education, laying emphasis on the necessity to ensure access to education and equal opportunities at all levels of education, enhancing educational inclusion among members of younger generation, providing school learners, students and young people with favourable conditions to unfold their own individual abilities and to satisfy special educational (learning, training, study) needs. The aforesaid texts emphasise the necessity to provide efficient pedagogical and psychological support on systematic bases to children who encounter learning difficulties: the trajectory of a targeted and consistent activity, which can presuppose the transition of partial values (of inclusive education, equal opportunities) into underlying values, is drawn. Thus, considering the situation from the theoretical approaches, the result is obvious: our society recognises the right of people with disabilities to exercise equal opportunities and to have a dignified access to education and training. The direction towards inclusive education (inclusion), which opened up in the space of special education, can be seen as a safeguard that a disabled individual will not be discriminated against, i.e. he or she will feel dignified and attain own objectives through collaboration and communication with peers. On the other hand, parents, adoptive parents or caregivers are in charge of a disabled minor, and their main duty is to proactively initiate solutions to discrimination-based conflicts [38].

The changing educational system in the country has resulted in a targeted transformation in the model of education of disabled children and young people: the newly open space for change in special education direct educational institutions towards inclusion in education and training of disabled youth for a professional career. A multi-track educational system has formed in the country, in which various methods and forms of education are offered, and people with different educational needs are provided with a choice of educational institutions. One of the directions in the area embraces inclusive education. This is an approach within which families as well as all educational institutions are invited to act on a joint, harmonious and creative basis because our society has already reached the phase of development

when accessibility of education has become a reality to every individual. A substantial role in these activities has been played by the United Nations.

Under conditions of inclusion, a high quality pedagogical interaction and a respect-based educational setting acquire utmost importance. According to A. Galkienė [35], a respect-based environment at school or in the classroom can be created only by school learners and teachers, whose behaviour model becomes highly significant. A positive emotional climate prevails in such an environment, which also creates conditions for participants in education to seek constructive interaction of teachers, disabled learners and those of regular development in cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects. Therefore, it is quite natural that while analysing (evaluating) the problem of the person's individuality, socialisation and identity, the environment, epoch, society's tradition and attitude towards disabled people, values and value-based attitudes that prevail (are supported) in society are evaluated first.

### **Equal opportunities in education?**

According to Giedrienė, inclusive education is an ongoing process that aims to offer high quality education for all members of society, an access to education while respecting rights, equality and diversity of all individuals as well as the different needs and abilities, eliminating all forms of discrimination and ensuring unconditional acceptance of every community member [37]. The increasing number of countries that acknowledge the provisions of Article 24 [1] outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which state that inclusive education ensures best educational opportunities for disabled persons, has resulted in targeted transformations in educational models as well.

The evaluation and comparison of the longitudinal research data [38, 39] showed that the previously positive attitudes of society (school learners' parents) towards the disabled tend to turn into negative, when the latter interfere into their personal space. Therefore, seeking social solidarity and social integration in education, it is necessary to perform targeted, consistent and simultaneous actions both in the theoretical and practical areas of society's expression. Corrections in study programmes of teacher education institutions are of particular significance as all prospective teachers should study special pedagogy, get familiar with individual educational programmes and communicate with school learners with special needs during their teaching practices. The teachers participating in the surveys particularly emphasised the importance of practical skills because a disabled child in the classroom frequently makes them feel at a loss. They are not always aware where to find help or get consultations in specific situations.

In the beginning of the research period (2002), half of the respondents (school learners' parents) expressed the opinion that children with disabilities could learn in classes of general education, that is, together with peers. This is a model of natural integration that naturally reflects the values of Kantian deontological ethics and people's parity emphasised by those values, obligation to establish a dialogue with the Other and approaching him or her not as an object worth pity or even contempt but rather as You, who is equivalent to me. Let us get back to the above-mentioned research. The representative quantitative research, which was repeated ten years later, revealed obvious considerable changes in the attitudes of school learners' parents: every second father, mother or caregiver of school-age children pointed

out that disabled children could attend general education schools but learn only in separate classes. The results of the longitudinal research show that so far no school has been created in the country where all students can learn together on an equal basis. Attempts to change the attitude of society and education community members and to convince them that all children can and have to learn together without any discrimination have failed. Statistical data show that about 4 thousand children in Lithuania have been learning in isolation from their peers.

From the philosophical-axiological perspective, such a situation a priori pre-determines an insufficient respect for the alterity of the Other, denial of another person's disability, pity or contempt for him or her.

The current situation can be commented on from different perspectives: it is obvious that inclusive education as a value is supported in our society, but not all its members (particularly participants in education) have internalised it equally deeply. Thus, the learning of disabled children and young people together with their peers but not in separate educational situations or classes is still an aspiration to be achieved. All that remains is hope and belief that our society will make crucial decisions about inclusive education as an exceptional value and will properly support this direction in future. Does inclusive education (inclusion in education) as a value have a possibility of rising and reaching the rank of fundamental values? An insight is possible that an ability of each society member to retain their decisions is particularly significant: strong *intrinsic* motivation to internalise European values – respect for human rights, tolerance, equal opportunities – can guarantee that inclusive education (inclusion in education), as an exceptional value in today's society, will naturally ascend and reach the rank of basic values.

## Conclusions

The role of values and value-based attitudes in the system of value development of an individual and society reveals the maturity, culture, ideology of the society a person belongs to, as well as areas and directions of change in the social sphere (particularly in education). The overview and analysis of the aspects in special education transformation in the country disclose that consistent and targeted activities (acknowledging European values) have led to the establishment of a solid legislative basis that ensures equal education opportunities to every individual at a theoretical level. Theoretical approaches in change of special education and an open direction of inclusive education offer a choice of the most suitable path and a dignified access to education for disabled people.

The data of the long-term (representative) quantitative research reveal that the created legal regulation framework does not actually ensure equal opportunities to special needs individuals while pursuing education and training: striving for a real implementation of the model of inclusive education, it is necessary to improve an institutional mechanism. It is obvious that values declared in the normative documents that regulate the educational system have not reached the rank of fundamental values. Challenges are anticipated in inclusive education within the area of special education.

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**Vilija Grincevičienė**, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (Vilnius, Lithuania).

E-mail: vilija.grinceviciene@vgtu.lt

**Jovilė Barevičiūtė**, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (Vilnius, Lithuania).

E-mail: jovile.bareviciute@vgtu.lt

**Vaida Asakavičiūtė**, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (Vilnius, Lithuania).

E-mail: vaida.asakaviciute@vgtu.lt

**Jonas Grincevičius**, Vilnius University (Vilnius, Lithuania).

E-mail: jonas.grincevicius@mf.vu.lt

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**Keywords:** inclusive education; inclusion; value; special needs; disabled.

The article introduces the curriculum of inclusive education as a value in the area of special education of the Lithuanian education system. By reviewing and analysing the aspects of change in special education, it is revealed that in the country, by acting in a consistent and purposeful way (recognizing European values), a proper legal regulation basis is already in place, theoretically guaranteeing equal opportunities for every person to pursue education and scholarship with dignity. However, data from long-term (representative) quantitative studies indicate that the established legal framework exists only theoretically. In reality, people with special educational needs who are seeking the desired education and scholarship face difficulties: in order to actually realise an inclusive education model, it is necessary to improve the institutional mechanism for its implementation. It is obvious that values declared in the normative documents regulating the country's education system have not yet reached the level of basic values in the education reality.