PECULIARITIES OF INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING WITHIN SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION IN FRANCE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

Class teachers play a key role in relation to the work to be done with pupils with special educational needs who have been included in mainstream schools. The main forms of support provided to teachers consist of the following:

- information;
- selection of teaching materials;
- elaboration of individual educational plans;
- organisation of training sessions [3, p. 48].

All countries refer to the fact that class teachers receive some form of compulsory training concerning pupils with special needs during the initial training. This must be seen as a positive impact on teachers’ responsibilities regarding pupils’ individual needs. It provides future teachers with a broader base of information and at least some kind of basic knowledge about the diversity of pupils’ needs which they may encounter later [1]. Nevertheless, data gives the impression that such training is often too general, vague or insufficient, with limited practical experience and may not satisfy teachers’ later professional needs.

Compulsory training on special needs varies greatly in duration, content and organisation. It is obvious that initial teacher training cannot attempt to cover the vast range of teachers’ needs. But it is also obvious that differences regarding content on initial teacher training reflect, to some extent, differences regarding inclusion policies in different countries.

For example, in France initial training corresponds to training modules of 42 hours. They include information on teaching pupils presenting disabilities, illnesses or other problems. Teachers are recruited via two competitive examinations: the examination for primary school teachers and the examination for secondary and high school teachers.

These examinations are open to candidates who have passed a diploma after three years of studies following high school graduation (A-levels). Candidates can prepare during a one-year training course for their career of choice: school teacher or secondary and high school teacher. Those who pass the examination successfully will then enter one year of professional training [2, p. 19]. Teacher training is organised by the university institutes for teacher training.

Training of specialised teaching personnel

The certification for adapted teaching methods and schooling of disabled pupils are now open to all fully appointed teachers at all levels, for all disciplines and ranks. These certifications are only for teachers, they are not accessible to other personnel categories.
The certification for primary school teachers is the CAPA-SH: a certificate of professional competence in specialised assistance, adapted teaching and schooling of disabled students (decree no. 2004-13 of 5/1/2004). The CAPA-SH entitles to full appointment to the position of specialised teacher for the selected specialisation.

The certification for secondary and high-school teachers is the 2CA-SH: a complementary certificate for adapted teaching and schooling of disabled students (decree no. 2004-13 of 5/1/2004, circular 2004-026 of 10/02/2004 and circular 2004-103 of 24/6/2004). The 2CA-SH does not correspond to any specific position. Its purpose is to certify the special capacities of a secondary level teacher, appointed to an ordinary position, whose class is attended by disabled students and who assists in the schooling of these students with the support, in some cases, of an institutional facility known as an integrated learning unit (UPI).

While our research we are interested only in training secondary school teachers.

2CA-SH specialties are the following:
- schooling and learning assistance for deaf or hearing impaired students;
- schooling and learning assistance for blind or visually impaired students;
- schooling and learning assistance for students with serious motor deficiency or a developing/invalidating health disorder;
- schooling and learning assistance for students with serious cognitive function disorders;
- schooling and learning assistance for students in regional adapted schooling centres and adapted general and professional schooling departments [2, p. 24].

These training courses are organised on an alternating basis: the secondary level teachers taking the courses perform their function (in the classes and special arrangements which correspond to the specialty they are preparing at the primary level) and are convened to the training centre for the various training sessions. The training course is split into several sessions during the first two quarters of the school year. During their in-class training with students, the teachers are monitored and assisted by the qualified inspectors and the training centres (order of January 5, 2004).

The training is organised by the National higher institute for training and research on the education of young disabled persons and adapted schooling (INS HEA) or by the regional ASH (School adaptation and disabled pupils schooling) centres integrated in certain IUFMs, as well as by certain universities.

National initiative training modules (MFIN)

The national initiative training modules are complementary training courses enabled by the second paragraphs of articles 4 and 9 of decree no. 2004-13 of January 5 on the creation of CAPA-SH and 2CA-SH [1].

Thanks to a national initiative, these modules with a duration of 25 to 50 hours are organised within the framework of continuous training for teachers and target teachers who have obtained the CAPA-SH or 2CA-SH. Their objective is to more thoroughly develop and reinforce their knowledge and professional capacities and/or assist their capacity to adapt to given professional circumstances.

The contents of the training courses respond to emerging problems and support the implementation of national policy orientations in the area of adapted learning,
alternatively focussing on different aspects. Consequently, the themes vary from year to year, depending on the needs and priorities [3, p. 50]. Some of these modules are also available to non-specialised teachers who encounter particular types of integration problems, as well as to psychologists who work in orientation counselling or educational counsellors.

Concluding, it must be said that class teachers are perceived by all countries as the main professionals responsible for the education of all pupils. This means that they need to receive the appropriate knowledge and skills in order to meet different needs of the pupils. It is important to consider the type of training offered to all future class teachers during their initial special educational needs training.

References: