

## Private Parallel Support to a Person With Severe Learning Difficulties in the General School

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**Abstract:** The present study investigates the institution of Private Parallel Support that exists in our country by the (Law 3699, 2008) (article 7.4.c.) regarding special education and training. The reasons why parents choose to support their child-student with autism and speech delay, with a private teacher in a public school are discussed. In addition, the person is investigated. The methodology utilized the bibliography, the implementation of the pedagogical tool that is defined as Targeted, Individual, Structured, Integrated Program for Students with Special Educational Needs (TISIPfSENS) an observation. The results show the lack of provision of special educational services to students with severe learning difficulties in the general school.

**Key words:** private parallel support, autism

### 1. Introduction

The attendance of a student with multiple disabilities, such as autism and speech delay, in the complex environment of a general school is made possible by the granting of parallel support in accordance with the Greek legislation 3699/2008 (Article 7.4.c). The law 4368/21.02.2016 (Article 82) favours the education of students with disabilities in general education classes together with their peers without disabilities. The increase in the number of pupils recognised with autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs) by schools is seen in an annual school census carried out in the UK (Mcconkey, 2020) over a nine-year period from 2010/11. The rates were higher in secondary schools than in primary ones. Increase in prevalence and variations within the country are associated with a higher assessment of ASDs that occurs along with other development difficulties. In the same survey, rates in the school population were higher in Northern Ireland and Scotland than in Wales and England. The findings were based on population data from almost nine and a half million pupils from across the UK for 2019, of which almost two hundred thousand were identified by schools as having ASDs. In addition, a common system, supervised, validated and analysed by statisticians in the educational institutions of the respective governments, was used for all countries and years to obtain information. Across the UK, around 58% of all pupils attend primary schools, 40% secondary schools and between 1% and 2% special schools. The training which is supposed to be provided to this

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student must be adapted to the characteristics of the student's autism. When parents, making use of their legal right, choose the general school for the child's attendance, and the parallel support is not approved, they are obliged to hire private parallel support. The recruitment criteria depend on the ability of parents to identify the right person. In addition, a study on the Special Educational Needs in Secondary Education in England, carried out at a time when schools are accepting the implementation of a wider set of policies and adjustments with funding constraints, foreshadows consequences that may affect the sustainability and quality of inclusive education. Teaching Assistants are allocated as part of the quality of the special educational services provided in general schools in England which corresponds to what we call "parallel support" in our country. The teacher of parallel support, in accordance to the pedagogical principles of the Framework of Analytical Curriculum' Special Education (FACSE) is invited to implement educational interventions along with the teacher. They can use the pedagogical tool identified as Targeted, Individual, Structured and Integrated Program for students with Special Education Needs (TISIPfSENs) (Drossinou-Korea, 2017). Parallel support for students with autism and speech delay represents the absolute respect and the protection from any form of violence and ensures an environment adapted to the particularities of the student, full of understanding and encouragement when there is no special school near the student's residence (1st European Conference on Autism in Greece, 2001). The parallel support is absolutely necessary for the students whose opinion defines its presence but, according to the results of the research, it becomes an important person for the students at the general school, despite the small interaction with them (Webster R. & Blatchford, 2017).

## **2. Purpose**

The paper intends to highlight Private Parallel Support to a person with severe learning difficulties (autism and speech delay) at the General School in search of the conditions created when there is no special school in the student's city. It should be noted that private parallel support is under review on a prerequisite that parents can afford the cost of the wage of the assistant teacher who will assist in their child's education. Work cases investigate whether parents can understand the functional behaviour of their child's autism. According to the Hellenic Society for the Protection of Autistic Persons and the literature from the 1st European Conference on Autism in Greece, it is also being investigated whether parents can intervene using their own pedagogical means and influence the special educational services of the small provincial town where they live (Powell & Jordan, 2001).

## **3. Clarification of Terms**

### **3.1 Autism**

Neuro developmental disorders known as Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are presented in the form of deficits in social interaction, communication and limited, repetitive behaviour that highlights a deficit in creative imagination and affects a person's life forever (World Health Organization, 2014). Synodinou, in her book "Childhood Autism - Therapeutic Approach", describing people with autism, refers to the denial of the outside and their isolation in the inside, as a defence reaction to the "intense outside" from which they try to protect themselves. During this process they set the boundaries between the two worlds creating an impenetrable shell, avoiding or even blocking communication, especially children who manifest delay or even absence of speech. Synodinou's therapeutic approach does not aim to break the shell but to transfer its limits by extending them to the

outside world through the observation of the preferences and identified abilities of the child. Her work highlights the unparalleled value of understanding autism for educational intervention (Synodinou, 1999).

### **3.2 Education in Autism With Absence of Speech**

The education of children of the autistic spectrum includes children who are late in speaking as part of severe learning difficulties (Christakis, 2011). The absence of speech in autism is defined as an additional source of anxiety for parents which can confuse them and create the illusion that this problem will be solved by speech therapy alone. In a survey which uses a scale to capture stress of 990 young people with autism spectrum disorder and their parents, the factors were measured by analyzing the item response theory (Lawrence et al., 2019). In the same survey they were identified with mild anxiety ( $n = 116$ , aged 5–17 years, 79.3% men) of the 25-item anxiety scale in each parent of a child with autism. Consequences of children's anxiety lead parents to aim at the verbleness of words and less at activating the interactional elements that are a prerequisite of communication. Objectives such as eye contact, sound response, imitation, simplification of speech in terms of type and structure, tone and intensity of voice are neglected due to the child's non-response and should be pursued even more intensely and adapted to the child's abilities and interests, just as in typical development.

### **3.3 Private Parallel Support**

“Parallel support” was established in 2008 (Law 3699, 2008), within the framework of integration policy in education, that is, in the context of ensuring the equal participation of people with special educational needs in education and their adaptation to the educational process of the General School. It is an institution that refers to two people, the special educator and the general education teacher who cooperate in targeted teaching interventions and issues of functional behaviour in the classroom. Together they have a duty to support the student with a disability to overcome the difficulties posed by the Curriculum of general education. The effective cooperation of the two teachers of general and special education, is a prerequisite of parallel support. Of course, Parallel support does not merely mean the coexistence of two adults within a classroom, but the ability of them, together, to implement good educational strategies and manage the classroom with a common teaching objective (Drosinou-Korea, 2020). Research on parallel support presents the institution, adapted to Greek culture, as a compromise between a very demanding collaborative approach and a pre-existing school culture of low cooperation. Most qualified teachers hold at least one degree in education and are fully certified teachers, but for many of them their training in special and inclusive education can be less than 400 hours. Many universities in the country have developed postgraduate courses and four hundred-hour programs that officially attribute the specialization to Special Education (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016). A similar picture is shown in other countries, where surveys show teachers' inability to teach pupils with SEN appropriately (Sucuoglu et al., 2019).

## **4. Methodology**

This research is empirical and bibliographic and focuses on a certain “case study” of a seven-year-old student with autism and speech delay who does not serve himself in the toilet and attends the 1st grade of Elementary school in a general school with private parallel support (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2006). In this paper, a number of research tools have been used in the methodology of participatory observation and educational intervention in accordance with the pedagogical tool TISIPfSENs, defined as Targeted, Individual, Structured and Integrated Program for students with Special Education Needs. The first tool recorded, using certain protocols, the individual,

family and school past history of the seven-year-old boy named Paul, for the needs of the study, with systematic empirical observation, with hetero-observations. The student, as far as his school past history is concerned, is recorded to have attended three years in the general Nursery school of the same school complex and had been granted Special Auxiliary Personnel (SAP). As researchers have shown in the case of developmental disorders, parents first identify delays in the progression of motor skills and speech and later the ones of cognitive function or behaviour. As a result, they turn to experts too late for early intervention (DeCandia et al., 2020). In our study, the first diagnoses by specialists were unsuccessful and the diagnosis of autism was set at six years of age. From the age of three he did physical therapy, from the age of four, occupational therapy and only at the age of 4.5 years speech therapy.

In family past history, parents are recorded to be conscious about having their only child. The question of understanding autism is approached based on the hetero and self-observations of the parents themselves and especially of the mother who is involved in this study. Thus, the parents' request for the continuation of the granting of SAP was rejected by the diagnostic services. In the printed protocols of cooperation with the parents it was recorded in the hetero observations that Paul's parents consider the rejection of the application for special auxiliary personnel for their child's attendance at the General School as their own and their child's stigmatization. Also in the mother's self-observations, concerns about the pedagogical and cognitive subject on autism and the one provided through special educational services by special education teachers and other scientists in co-education in general school were recorded. Private parallel support arises as a necessity for the special education and education of the student who is unable to be transferred, due to a long kilometric distance and the pandemic, to the special primary school according to the ecological model and also, because the parents are willing to cover the cost of the wage for the teacher who accompanies the student at school.

The school past history recorded that the nearest special school is located in a less accessible city, twenty kilometres away from the student's hometown, making it impossible for parents to consent, in the midst of a pandemic, for daily taxi transportation to it. According to the protocols of systematic empirical observation, the hetero-observations and self-observations of the teacher of private parallel support were recorded. One of the first obstacles the teacher encountered in the integration of seven-year-old Paul into the classroom was his repetitive playing. Every time he started hitting an object on the desk, the lesson would stop; the teacher would take the student out to the yard so as not to obstruct the educational process for the other students. However, in this way, parallel support was losing its role. In a research concerning the obstacles in the integration of students with autism in a General school, through the review of the bibliography and with emphasis on human differences and not deficits, it is pointed out that the intense focus on fields of general interests that are associated with autism can become a source of motivation and dedication for the students with autism (Bailey & Baker, 2020). Besides, this particular behaviour is connected to the student's language development disorders which, in autism, are related to the pragmatic field, that is, the choice of communication that is in accordance with the rules of the community, as the student does not have the ability to convey the right message, in the right place and time, something which is addressed by choosing strategies that enhance sociability (Vogindroukas & Sherratt, 2020). Therefore, with the removal of Paul from the classroom, the obstacles were not removed respectively for the student for whom the parallel support teacher was recruited. Much more so at the beginning of the school year, when the classroom teacher, as well as teachers of other fields such as Music or Physical Education, did not cooperate, and considering autism as inability, they had Paul's expulsion from the room or his marginalization as their first choice.

With respect to the serious problem of stigmatisation, the student with autism and speech delay has already

been rejected and stigmatised by the non-administration of special auxiliary personnel (SAP). Now, the risk of stigmatisation within the structure chosen by parents for attendance is remarkably high. Paul, often expelled from his class as obstructing the educational process, was stigmatized by his teachers. The teacher of private parallel support responded to the negative feelings of members of the school community, consciously and not, with pedagogical honesty about the student with autism. The reaction towards the student, admittedly or not, depends mainly on emotion and not on logic.

The student's mother often had to intervene with instructions to the parallel support teacher and help her with models in completing observation protocols. The second tool of the observation methodology was the informal pedagogical evaluation in accordance with the second phase of TISIPfSEnS and protocols were used with EXCELL tables in which performance (Table 1) was recorded, with Basic Skills Checklists (Table 1). The greatest deviation was detected in oral communication. Therefore, alternative methods of communication (MAKATON, TEACCH, PECs) were proposed to all those involved with the extracurricular education of the student and with the parents. Due to the fact that the private parallel support teacher was unaware of all the above alternative methods and of their implementation, enough time was required initially for the studying and then for the familiarisation with and implementation of these methods. The mother gradually introduced the teacher to the multisensory communication and learning with the creation of educational material and means with stable and mobile cards, personalised with cognitive machines such as the binder and the shoebox.

## 5. Research Restrictions

The research restrictions on this project stem from the fact it was the first year that the institution of private parallel support was applied in this school, which indicates the lack of culture of the school concerning this institution. Another limitation derives from the general aggravating situation created by the pandemic and affects both parents and teachers and, of course, the student himself.

## 6. Results

Research has shown that young children from poor backgrounds face high levels of family and environmental stress, which affects their developmental function negatively. Early recognition provides a path to solutions, but many children are never evaluated. Moreover, the workforce who have children do not have the resources and expertise to use traditional measures. Moreover, existing measures do not take into account the substantial influence of a child's ecology. This study explored whether parents can understand the functional behaviour of their child's autism and whether parents can intervene using their own pedagogical means and influence the special educational services of the small provincial town they live in.

The first research question seems to be answered through the socio-economic status of parents, who work, love their child and make sure that he grows up in a family environment with sufficient resources using an ecological perspective in order to support the work of autonomy but also to identify and address the risks in life. The ecological awareness of the parents helped them to turn to special education and methods proposed for the educational approach of autism, with the common goal of achieving the sociability of the person with autism through his own way of communication. Thus, it was recorded that imitating the repetition of the game, for example, stimulates the interest of the student and at the same time transmits to the adult part of the sense of pleasure caused by this repetition. This response to the peculiar game can become a channel of communication

and interaction. Repetitiveness or even obsessive playing can be integrated into the intervention with the pedagogical tool TISIPfSENs. It is noted in the hetero-observations that any imitation which does not “comment” and does not inhibit the child’s behaviour but reinforces the desire for what marks the “you” with the eye contact, the answer sounds, any transaction and interaction is sufficient. This is a teaching strategy which is primarily aimed at integrating the pupil into school.

In bibliographic research we studied the Neurodevelopmental Ecological Control Tool which reinforces the fact that parents understand the cognitive subject of autism if they are supported (DeCandia C. J. et al., 2020). This research refers to a pilot study (n = 60) with caregivers of children aged 3-5 years, corresponding to the special auxiliary staff in children with autism who come from family environments with low resource settings. A data group was studied with three areas, the ones of the child, of the special educational personnel (SEP) and of the learning environment and interviews were conducted on the subject of autism by parents (n = 15) and case managers (n = 10). An online, user-friendly delivery platform used the model of an object parameter and an evaluation scale model. The results of this research have shown that they support the ecological perspective in the learning work of those who ensure that children develop higher levels of autonomy. Even more so, if it is those who are familiar with the individual and his disability such as parents, special scientific staff, special auxiliary staff and teachers.

In our case, the ecological perspective did not work and the gap created between the parties who must cooperate to support the work of autonomy could hardly be bridged by what was happening at school. This is apparent from the hetero-observation protocols of the mother, who states, *inter alia*:

...the first teacher for private parallel support who met with parents was a special educator. The second had a master's degree in Special Education.

...the teacher who was permanently hired had attended only a short-term special education seminar. The communicative, social, emotional and other challenges caused by Paul’s attempt to adapt to the new environment of the structure were burdened by the change of the people who accompanied him each time...

In the mother’s hetero-observations, the tension in the student’s behaviour is recorded, which sometimes became aggressive. These developments undermined Paul’s smooth integration into the General School. The bridge to the ecological perspective requires everything that constitutes a friendly school for the student with autism and delay in speech, in order to achieve his possible autonomy without discrimination and categorisations (Drosinou-Korea, 2020).

In this study it was shown that parents can intervene using their own pedagogical means and influence the special educational services of the small provincial town they live in. The pedagogical tool TISIPfSENs was partially used by the teacher of private parallel support because she was unaware of it and the teachers of the primary school were not educated in it. Thus, the education of a student with autism and speech delay follows the educational steps as stated in the pedagogical tool TISIPfSENs to the extent in which parents study and discover the pedagogical materials and means that they can use by applying it at home. The mother, through her self-observations, seems to have adequately understood that with this program she can essentially serve seven-year-old Paul’s learning in his school life and participate autonomously in it. The systematic empirical observations organised interventions with Learning Readiness Activities in Oral Speech, in Psycho mobility, in Mental Abilities, and in Emotional Organization according to the Special Education and Training teacher’s book (SET) that take into account the student’s experiences in individual, family and school past history (Ministry of

Education & Pedagogical Institute, 2009). The importance of this process is even greater in Paul's case, as systematic hetero/self-observation enables access to non-verbal forms of communication, interaction and interpretation of the individual's behaviour (Drosinou-Korea, 2020). Of course, both observation and their recordings require specific knowledge in order to be as effective as possible in creating a personalised structured intervention programme. Among other things, it was recorded that speech deficits cause behavioural problems, especially the student's bellicosity. The objectives of the intervention programme sought to gradually improve communication, reduce provocative behaviours and highlight "hidden" learning abilities. On the other side of the curriculum, was the individualized program draft which, on the basis of the curriculum of the first class in which the student attends, and with a focus on the development of autonomy, social skills and communication possibilities, applies the ecological model focusing on private parallel support. This included the drafting of the personalised treatment plan in the extracurricular program.

In the recording of the mother's self and hetero-observations, in the parents' cooperation form with the teacher and in the teaching interaction forms of the parallel support teacher with the student, the delay in the implementation of the teaching interventions was noted. In addition, what was also recorded was the lack of effective cooperation with the classroom teacher in the first three months of the school year, the teacher's inability to control the student's anxiety, which manifested itself in the destruction of the educational material, and the aggression towards her. The major disadvantage in the interventions and the method of application of the teacher was the absence of structure in the teaching with a corresponding structure of the educational material. Thus, the student, not knowing what was next in the teaching process, was distracted and refused to cooperate with the teacher. The situation was exacerbated by the unstructured space and the frequent change of his position in the classroom. Structured teaching TISIPfSENs having predictability as its main characteristic, creates the appropriate conditions for less stress, confidence assurance and stimulation of self-feeling with the ultimate goal of generalisation of achievements (Christakis, 2011). It is noted that at the end of the third month with the private parallel support, the violent behaviour of the student was alleviated, thanks to the emotional bond he developed with his teacher and the well-developed cooperation with the teacher of the class. This progress at school, with the interventions of special education and TISI(PfSENs) education in the midst of a pandemic allows for an optimistic message.

## **6. Conclusions - Proposals**

Learning for children of typical development lasts 24 hours a day, but for students with autism and delay in speech this happens only during the hours of targeted and differentiated SET intervention. Interventions should therefore be carried out, if possible, on a 24-hour basis. This means a heavy financial burden for parents who need to ensure that their child stays in school. Thus, apart from the assistance of the allowances from the State, in a free public education system, they are required to "pay" for the right of their child to attend the school in his area. Parents' choices are limited to non-existent in areas far from major cities and are often accompanied by "words about the respect for diversity", thus covering the complex inherent weaknesses of the public school.

The fact that historical, economic and other conditions affect school education just as much as the educational needs, such as those of children with disabilities that have not yet attracted the direct interest of society still remain an "open educational problem" nowadays. For this reason, the institutional organisation needs to be sufficient in order to respect and implement the acquired rights of children with SEN and the demands of

their parents. Through the existence of institutionalised special educational services for the achievement of effective interventions, all people are sought to be equal and have access to the good of education. These institutions must take into account the possibility of stigmatisation and the terrible consequences it may have on people with disabilities, as history has shown (as was the case during the period of national socialism in Germany). Finally, the important problem of the economic dependence of the institutions of Special Education on the funding institutions and the political priorities of these institutions is highlighted, especially in difficult economic times.

The specificity and heterogeneity of each case of a person on the autistic spectrum makes the pedagogical tool TISIPfSENs an important method of reaching out and educating students (minors and adults) considering that it is necessary for those involved in education with public as well as private parallel support to possess it. It also requires the specialisation in autism of individuals involved in education and continuous research to include as many cases as possible in scientific knowledge for fairer integration of people with autism into our community and our world. Bearing this in mind, we propose a further study of private parallel support in order to highlight the factors that make it a mandatory one-way street in special education and training in more cases of students with autism.

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