

## **In the shadow of the integrational legislation: Expectations and realities**

Helen Phtiaka

In the summer of 1999, the eve of Cyprus's entrance in the European Union, the new legislation regarding the education of children with special needs in Cyprus passed through Parliament. At that time, everyone who had struggled for the replacement of the old separatist legislation and the destruction of an educational philosophy and practice which stigmatised without offering support believed they had reason to celebrate.

Today, 10 years after the implementation of that legislation which was considered by many as progressive for the island, we are in the unhappy position to note that very little has been done for the enforcement of an integrational philosophy and practice. Instead we discover that the same legislation heralded as the eve of a new era for the disabled Cypriot children, an era of improved educational opportunities, has instead marked the start of a more extensive separation procedure. This now takes place within the realms of the general school and affects an even larger spectrum of children than that excluded via the old legislation.

Interestingly, while the new integrational legislation is in fact failing in the essence of its mission, to integrate successfully the disabled children, the new integrational rhetoric is prominent and bright new careers are on offer, not for the general classroom teacher with integrational sensitivity, but –once more- for the specialists.

In the shadow of the integrational legislation which may have unwillingly established separatist practices of a new form, what is our own role as researchers and teacher educators for an inclusive education?