



# Inclusive Education and Mental Health Preservation for Students

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## Dear Editor-in-Chief

Children with disabilities present a significant social challenge, requiring special attention in the education system. Professional experience with these children does not have a significant influence on forming or changing of the regular school teacher's attitudes toward inclusive education (1). The attitude in which inclusive education creates the basis for mutual positive impact on them and their peers, is the firm argument spoken by the authors who advocate inclusion. No frequent contacts and lack of communication experience with children without disabilities and grown-up have an impact on decreasing the social competence of children with disabilities (2). This resistance would be weakened if the inclusion process were organized in a way that experts got a more important role in the process itself. Those are children who have learning difficulties, problems in behavior, children with borderline intellectual capabilities, children with ADHD syndrome and etc. and a great number of them attend regular school.

The aim of this cross-sectional study conducted during Nov and Dec 2012 is to evaluate teachers working with pupils with special needs, in the context of preserving and improving the mental health of the groups involved.

The survey instrument was a questionnaire. The teaching cadre sample consisted of 26 class teachers in an urban elementary school, as well as 21 class teachers teaching grade 1 to 4 in the rural elementary school in Serbia. The teachers with

less than 18 yr of service consider that the special schools are a better place for children with disabilities ( $P=0.013$ ), while teachers with more than 18 yr of service consider that it is beneficial for these children's further development to introduce them to regular schools. According to the responses of 59.6%, teachers agree that there are sufficient resources in their schools for implementing the inclusion of the children with special needs. To the question whether the child with special needs could have a negative influence on the entire class success, teachers (51.1%) replied that they partially agree with that statement. We found a statistically relevant correlation between replies from teachers of both schools and the negative influence of inclusion of children with special needs on the children in regular schools ( $\chi^2=8.228$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $P=0.042$ ).

Although there are teachers thinking that children with disabilities would be better in regular school, still there are a 44.7% thinking that special school is a better solution for education for children with disabilities. About 70.2% teachers suggested that, for better achievements of children with disabilities in regular schools it is necessary to start from creating different pedagogical aims, and 80.9% teachers suggested that lessons must be organized in a different way which implies that besides teacher and children should be a continuous presence of assistant, suitable books in every classroom. About 60% of teachers suggested that, we need a suitable adaptation of

school premises and school equipment, and 66% teachers suggested attending seminars for professional development to know better characteristics and different needs. Also, these teachers think that these seminars should be complex, and that they should attend continuous education (not only one or two seminars) taking into account the real schools' needs and the categorization of children with disabilities in those two schools. About 66% teachers suggested that classes should be smaller, while 70.2% teachers suggested a reduction of educational curriculum and plan as far as children with disabilities are concerned. The survey represents the teachers' attitudes factors that make the inclusive process difficult, and it shows that, the financial problems that affect the inclusive process in our country, followed by the attitude that teachers are not prepared enough to work with these children. The weakest attitude is the resistance of other children to children with disabilities, mockery, ignorance. Schools are not enough ready for a complete inclusion process in regular. The research conducted by the experts in The Center for Evaluation, Research And Testing, frequently stated that in regular schools there are no proper conditions for education of children with disabilities, while in special schools there are better conditions like smaller number of pupils, skilled teachers and more educators capable of working with this kind of pupils, plus adjusted school curriculum and plans as well (2). Enrollment of children with disabilities in a regular school; changes school in general, affects the atmosphere in class, changes methodological approaches in teaching, and alters the evaluation process. According to Guilford the essential relationship between a teacher and a child with disabilities is acceptance, which means that the relationship is positive but not too emotional, and tolerant and understanding even when a teacher cannot successfully stop some unwanted behavior using correctional measurements. The children taught by the teachers with a positive attitude toward integration, were the most successful and made a great improvement (3). This improve-

ment represented the better understanding of the school curriculum, greater attention and interest in lessons, and better motivation for work. Therefore, their teachers were more motivated and successful in cooperation with parents. Pupils taught by the teachers with a negative attitude, do not know about the problems of the children with disabilities, were extremely bad (4). The next essential assumption of the successful relation of parents and teachers understands of children's goals (5). The teachers who implemented different approaches in teaching and respected the pupil's capability, finally created a motivating atmosphere in class and lessons contents.

It is necessary to provide additional education and organize individual work for teachers, suitable equipment and better technical solutions in schools as well as the better involvement of parents with their children to qualify them for life.

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