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CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES  
OF INCLUSIVE  
EDUCATION





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# CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Research in this field shows that, in spite of great efforts and endeavours to improve this idea, the inclusive education implementation process in most countries develops slowly and with difficulties. There are still many unresolved issues and dilemmas related to this process: (a) In what way is inclusive education related to key challenges in education such as quality, failing classes, lack of resources, rigidity of school programmes? (b) Is inclusive education the right solution for all children with developmental disabilities? (c) Is there is a best solution for the successful application of an inclusive programme and is there a clear plan to be followed? (d) Is the introduction of inclusive education possible in all countries?

The results show that official education policies in this field haven been completely implemented in practice and that existing differences can be explained by the existence of numerous barriers and challenges relating to the practical application of planned changes. Overcoming existing problems has not yet been fully solved, even in countries that have a long tradition of inclusive education and good economic conditions for its implementation, and it is clear that challenges and problems which developing countries encounter, having less experience in this field and unfavourable economic conditions, are bigger and more complicated.

Education policies in the field of inclusive education can be successfully implemented in practice if the key actors in this process (principals, teachers, students, and parents), strongly support planned changes and express a positive attitude towards them. Research shows that the resistance and negative attitudes of teachers and other stakeholders towards the inclusion of children from marginalized groups in regular schools lead to numerous problems in the implementation of inclusive education. It is therefore highlighted that changing attitudes is one of the challenges and key conditions for the success of this process. Changing and overcoming negative attitudes towards inclusive education is progressing very slowly and with difficulty, and that is why many other planned activities in this field encounter difficulties in the process of realization.

The problems in the application of inclusive education to a great extent relate to teachers, as key actors in this process. Research shows that the successful development of inclusive practice is particularly obstructed by teachers' negative self-assessment of their professional competency for the realization of inclusive education, as well as a lack of adequate professional training and expert support in working with students who need additional support. These problems cause teachers who work in inclusive contexts to become overwhelmed and stressed, which additionally affects their work negatively. Modern educational approaches show the importance of the new role of teachers in establishing the required conditions for encouraging the individual development of children and recognizing their individual abilities, affinities, family and cultural heritage. Therefore, adequate professional training of teachers for working in inclusive education, the implementation of innovative approaches in work, and cooperation with parents has been highlighted as one of the most important goals in the process of adapting education to meet the abilities and needs of all children.





























counsellors in primary and secondary schools favour "normalization" of students with special needs, but not for all categories.

In order to find possible differences in the positions of advisers to the education of students with special needs in relation to the type of disorder, we have separated particular groups of students with mental disabilities.

**Table 3. Attitudes of counsellors on three statements: inclusion of students with special needs in common schools, employment of these students, and whether students with special needs are inhibiting other students**

		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	95% Conf. I. for Mean		Min	Max
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
If students with mental disabilities attend regular schools, they will achieve better results in terms of knowledge and personal growth than in special schools	PS	42	2.19	.969	.149	1.89	2.49	1	4
	SPS	30	1.67	.802	.146	1.37	1.97	1	4
	SS	29	2.66	.857	.159	2.33	2.98	1	4
	<i>Total</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>2.17</i>	<i>.960</i>	<i>.096</i>	<i>1.98</i>	<i>2.36</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>
Students with special needs in regular schools are inhibiting learning results of other students	PS	42	1.93	.921	.142	1.64	2.22	1	4
	SPS	30	2.50	1.225	.224	2.04	2.96	1	5
	SS	29	2.14	.743	.138	1.86	2.42	1	4
	<i>Total</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>2.16</i>	<i>.997</i>	<i>.099</i>	<i>1.96</i>	<i>2.36</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>

As regards the placement of students with mental disabilities in education, there is a dominant view that it is better for them to attend special schools. This is approved by the findings concerning the claim "If students with mental disabilities attend regular schools, they will achieve better learning outcomes, such as in special education programs", where the majority position is against this statement (M=2.17): The counsellors in secondary schools show moderate disagreement to education of these students in regular schools (M=2,66), but advisers in special schools are seriously against the statement to include this category of students into common schools (M=1.67).

The differences between the positions of counsellors depending on the type of school are statistically significant at a confidence level  $\alpha \leq 0.05$ . Counsellors from primary and secondary schools are implicitly more inclined towards the integration of students with mental disabilities in ordinary schools than advisors in schools with special programs that explicitly support the placement of these students in special schools. In accordance with their view, these students will gain more knowledge in special schools and such schools provide better personal growth for them.



**Table 4. Statistical significance of differences in counsellor's attitudes regarding the education of students with special needs**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
If students with mental disabilities attend regular schools, they will achieve better results in terms of knowledge and personal growth than in special schools	Between Groups	14.444	2	7.222	9.109	.000
	Within Groups	77.695	98	.793		
	Total	92.139	100			
Students with special needs in regular schools inhibit learning results of other students	Between Groups	5.731	2	2.866	2.996	.055
	Within Groups	93.734	98	.956		
	Total	99.465	100			

We have also set a provocative statement: "Students with special needs in regular schools inhibit learning results of other students." This statement was rejected by all groups, but not completely (M=2.16). Closer to that position are counsellors from special schools (M=2.96) who presumably (at least most of them) do not have experience of work in usual schools. The sum of the advisers' answers: "agree" and "very much agree" is relatively high in special schools – as many as 23.4% agree that students with special needs inhibit the learning achievements of other (normal) students.

The next question "Where should students with special needs get education" (Table 5) shows that 2/3 of all respondents (66.7%) support the decision: "Students with mental disabilities<sup>4</sup> enjoy better education in special schools than in regular schools".

**Table 5. School counsellors and the question concerning education of students with special needs**

Pupils with special needs should be educated		Counsellors in			Total
		Primary schools	Special schools	Secondary schools	
In special schools only	N	1	3	0	4
	%	2,5%	10,0%	0,0%	4,0%
Students with mental disabilities in special training programmes, others in regular ones	N	28	18	20	66
	%	70,0%	60,0%	69,0%	66,7%
All, without exception, in regular schools	N	1	2	4	7
	%	2,5%	6,7%	13,8%	7,1%
Other proposals	N	10	7	5	22
	%	25,0%	23,3%	17,2%	22,2%
Total	N	40	30	29	99
	%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

4 In European countries there is no common term for this category of persons with special needs. In Spain, they used the term intellectual disabled, the Netherlands and Swiss mentally handicapped, in Germany intellectual disabled. (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012).





opportunities for the transition, the formation of structure functions, providing examples to learn the concepts, ensuring practices for achieving excellence, ensuring tasks related to the support and assessment of readiness for the next stage of learning. These tasks range from those that are independently run by peers (low intensity), only teacher-led (high intensity), or by highlighting the broad steps, long-term objectives (low intensity) to stress small passages, short-term goals (high intensity). In essence, this is a multi-methodical and multi-level approach, which is a combination of strategies associated with various learning models such as direct instruction, cognitive behavioural, or constructivist.

This concept of continuous learning strategies has some similarities with the American version of "continuum of this instruction" (Mercer et al., 1996). This is a kind of individual continuum of the presence of other assistants who may be teachers or other staff, including peers. In this constellation, individual students and other staff entering the learning process have some function of managing the learning processes and the employees. However, this can be understood only as a theoretical basis for various positions in the continuum associated with different learning theories (behavioural, constructivist and individual constructivism). Therefore, flexibility in the teaching approach is extremely important, and not belonging to any particular theoretical model.

It is therefore important that we acknowledge the continuum of teaching approaches. It is therefore necessary to reject teaching as a dichotomy among groups of general education and special schools, and accept the continuously varying concept of inclusive teaching practices. This also includes the incompatible concept of specialised education – special pedagogic.

The key question is whether inclusive teaching needs special pedagogy. If we understand inclusive education in the universal inclusive sense, then the answer is no, because every separation or distinctive treatment threatens the overall good, even if it is for a variety of curricular objectives, different teaching strategies and identifying individuals with a disorder. If, however, our approach is partially integrative (assuming a special school for some), then yes, because inclusive pedagogy needs specialized teaching<sup>5</sup> for certain persons identified as functioning unusually and atypically, who are referred to as persons with a disability / invalidity and it is necessary to take account of their needs (Norwich, 2013). In the case of that inclusive pedagogy we may need some kind of specialization, but this does not mean that a separate special teacher is necessary for students in common schools; specialized teaching should therefore be implemented by general teachers themselves. Maybe special teachers or teaching assistants will help a general teacher. For some cases it will be necessary to take some pupils from common classroom and place them in separate classes or groups (also because of individual

5 Specialized (inclusive) teaching is teaching of different strategies, methods and customized content in a well arranged inclusive environment. Special teaching typically refers to a separate group of students with specific needs (Author's remark).





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# AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES















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# AUTHORS' INDEX



















**Nikoleta Gutvajn**



**Milja Vujačić**

Nowadays inclusive education is seen as a priority field in development of the system of education for children with disabilities. The authors use relevant research materials and apply modern methodology. Each article shows long-term research interest of its author, reflecting their scientific interests and priorities. The edited book can be recommended not only to researches and educators, but also to students, undergraduates, graduate students, who only begin their path in science and in need of expanding research horizons.

*Professor Nikolay M. Borytko (from review)*

This book as a whole provides information on several countries in the wider Balkan area, for which there is limited relevant information available and communicates both commonalities and diversity. The mission of inclusive education is propelled throughout the entire book and many of the challenges discussed, are of interest of wider readership. It is certainly a useful book for anyone who is interested in inclusive education.

*Professor Susana Padeliadu (from review)*

The chapters follow the framework of the scientific papers with clear objectives, adequately described methodology of the studies, consist of clear descriptions of results with discussion and conclusions and also include information how results may affect the practice. Reader of the book will also find the review of relevant literature in the field of inclusive education.

*Professor Marija Kavkler (from review)*

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