Editors Nikoleta Gutvajn Milja Vujačić

CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



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OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Editors Nikoleta Gutvajn Milja Vujačić

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CONTENTS

7	Nikoleta	Gutvajn	and	Milja	Vujačić)

Foreword

Tinde Kovač-Cerović, Dragica Pavlović-Babić, Tijana Jokić, Olja Jovanović and Vitomir Jovanović

First comprehensive monitoring of inclusive education in Serbia: selected findings

31 Lidija Miškeljin

Inclusiveness of preschool education within the documents of education policies of the Republic of Serbia

49 Milja Vujačić, Rajka Djević and Nikoleta Gutvajn

An examination of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education

63 Janez Drobnič

How students with special needs should be educated

77 Vanja Riccarda Kiswarday and Tina Štemberger

Attitude towards inclusion: an important factor in implementing inclusive education

89 Isidora Korać

Preschool teachers' perception of professional training contribution to the development of competences in the field of inclusive education

Olivera Gajić, Milica Andevski, Spomenka Budić and Biljana Lungulov Inclusion of socially marginalized individuals in the light of human rights education

119 Nikola Baketa and Dragana Gundogan

Inclusion of the Roma in Croatia and Serbia: the institutional framework and its implementation

137 Branislava Popović-Ćitić and Lidija Bukvić

The symptoms of emotional and behavioral problems in older primary school students

153 Ignazia Bartholini

Bullying and strategies for confronting the phenomenon in Italian schools

173 Tatjana Novović

The concept of inclusive education in the master's degree curriculum in Montenegro

183 Vedrana Marković

Inclusive education of visually impaired students in music schools in Montenegro

195 Milica Marušić

The career cycle of teachers according to their motives of professional choice: a comparison of general and special schools

207 Authors' biographies

213 Authors' index

FOREWORD

nsuring conditions for a quality education for all children is a key goal that is supposed to be achieved within the process of reforming the education system. Efforts to ensure both equality and quality in education have become fully made through the idea of inclusive education. The importance of this concept has also been confirmed by the fact that inclusive education in many countries represents a key indicator of the quality, efficiency and humanity of their education systems. Experiences so far in the application of inclusive education have been very valuable, because they point out some important elements of this process and provide guidelines regarding the manner in which those necessary changes should take place. It is important to highlight that it is impossible to develop one unique inclusive model that could be applied in various countries with the same level of success, but that adequate solutions can be only achieved by analyzing specific contextual conditions, taking into consideration the specificities of each social and cultural environment and the existing conditions of education systems and schools. In order for this idea to be actually implemented, it is important that decisions regarding public policies be based on insights obtained through careful research of various problems in the field of inclusive education. Those insights can be very significant both for decision-makers and practitioners in considering the process and results of the implementation of inclusive education as well as in getting ideas for further development of inclusive practices in educational institutions. It is possible to single out two approaches to the research and perception of inclusive education based on the different interests of researchers. The first approach is about searching for practical solutions to certain problems of inclusive education (a partial reform of the education system and schools), while the other approach perceives inclusion as a cultural policy that requires complete reconstruction of society and a new way of thinking.

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.

Research indicates that, apart from the conditions of education systems, the achievement of inclusive education is hindered by numerous barriers, including social and local community factors, as well as the those relating to children who need additional support and their families. Therefore in considering key challenges and perspectives of inclusive education, barriers and problems should not only be tackled within the education system, but also in connection with other segments of society, such as the family, local community, as well as healthcare and social security.

A collection of papers "Challenges and Perspectives of Inclusive Education" contains thirteen papers by authors who are, by their thematic orientation, focused on elaborating on numerous issues significant for inclusive education. This book aims to examine current problems in inclusive education from the standpoint of their significance for the improvement of public policies and the practice of inclusive education. No theoretical and stylistic harmonization was required from authors of the articles. They were expected to show the results of their own theoretical and empirical research, thus making them accessible to both an academic audience and the wider public, in the hope that the results of such scientific research will be implemented to a greater extent in educational practice.

This collection of papers addresses certain questions of inclusive education, but it does not give a comprehensive account of all aspects of inclusive education. We thought that it was important to publish and present in a single collection papers by authors who are dedicated to examining inclusive education from various perspectives. Papers contain relevant information about the current conditions of inclusive education in Serbia; dominant discourses of inclusive education within legal frameworks of preschool education in Serbia; the connection between teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and their implicit pedagogies; attitudes of school counsellors towards the education of students with special needs; preschool teachers' competences for working in inclusive education; preschool teachers' opinions about the benefits of professional development in improving competences in the field of inclusive education; possibilities for inclusion of socially marginalized individuals and groups in an institutional environment and the local community in the context of education for human rights; institutional foundations for the inclusion of Roma people in the education system in Serbia and Croatia; frequency of symptoms of emotional and behavioural problems of older primary school students, with an analysis of gender differences, in the presence of symptoms and students' perception and assessment of the influence of difficulties on their own functioning; inclusive support in preventing bullying in the Italian education system; higher education programmes for teacher training in Montenegro and problems inhibiting improvements in inclusive education in music schools, with suggested solutions for their solution; characteristics of career development for various types of teacher in regular and special education systems.

The paper authored by Tinde Kovač-Cerović, Dragica Pavlović-Babić, Tijana Jokić, Olja Jovanović and Vitomir Jovanović *First comprehensive monitoring of inclusive education in Serbia: selected findings*, presents selected findings of the first comprehensive evaluation of inclusive education in Serbia, five years after its systemic introduction. This evaluation is based on indicators defined by the Framework for monitoring inclusive education in Serbia. The research was conducted

9

on a representative sample of 28 schools, and it encompassed 1537 students, 794 parents and 742 teachers. The structure of the framework, which implies predefined indicators and criteria, as well as the assessment of that same indicator by various informants, enabled the identification of the areas which are strong points in our education system, as well as areas that require immediate system development. The results of the monitoring constitute a reliable basis for improving the policy and practice of inclusive education in Serbia.

In the paper *Inclusiveness of preschool education within education policies documents of the Republic of Serbia*, Lidija Miškeljin deals with an analysis of relevant legislative documents with the aim of showing that theoretical starting points interwoven with public policies discourse perceive a child differently, as well as inclusion itself thus bearing different implications for the practice of preschool education. A key question from which the author starts her analysis of the legislative framework is: What are the dominant discourses in legislative solutions for preschool education in Serbia and what kind of construction of inclusion do they offer? This paper uses one method of theoretical analysis implementing the technique of content analysis through the following dimensions: accessibility, employees, monitoring and evaluation, and management and financing. Based on the given criteria and categories we can observe that: children's rights remain at the level of political proclamation because they are not operationalized through the participation of children in education guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child; that reducing inclusion to a separate single consideration (such as the scope of children) becomes its own goal and displays particularity in understanding and recognition of inclusion; and that the concept of inclusion itself in documents of public policy is not based on a clear ideology because of existing terminological inconsistencies.

The results of the research aimed at examining teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education were presented and analyzed by Milja Vujačić, Rajka Djević and Nikoleta Gutvajn in their paper *An examination of teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education.* What distinguishes this research from similar studies in Serbia is its examination of the relationship between teachers' attitudes and their implicit pedagogies. The authors offer an account of key results of related research published both in our country and worldwide and recommend how to create further research on teachers' attitudes, which would lead to a more comprehensive and detailed consideration of this important variable, on which the quality of application of inclusive education depends to a great extent. A basic conclusion of this research is that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education are moderately positive. The research has shown that there is a connection between teachers' implicit pedagogies and their attitudes towards inclusion, that is, the closer teachers' implicit pedagogies are to the contemporary education paradigm the more positive their attitudes towards inclusion are.

In the paper *How students with special needs should be educated*, Janez Drobnič shows that special schools can be seen as an opportunity to ensure the right to education for students with special needs, while on the other hand, they imply inequality in education because of students' exclusion from conventional learning environments provided to other students. Considering the fact that school counsellors' task is to help the integration of students with special needs, the

author conducted research on school counsellors' attitudes towards the education of students with special needs, in particular as to where such education should take place. One hundred and one school counsellors from primary, secondary, and special schools in Slovenia were included in the quantitative study. The prevailing opinion of counsellors in schools shows that they prefer the partial model of inclusive education, as they support all students – including those with special needs – being offered education in ordinary schools and classrooms, with the exception of students with learning difficulties. This suggests that we should seek new solutions for modern schools, in particular the education of all teachers for inclusive teaching in a classroom where all students are allowed to be different and individual, rather than being dealt with in two categories: students with special needs and others. This also means that we should revise education curricula and training for all teachers.

In the paper Attitude towards inclusion: an important factor in implementing inclusive education, Vanja Riccarda Kiswarday and Tina Štemberger focused on preschool teachers' inclusive competences. The research, in which 124 preschool teachers were included, aims to establish how they value and assess their competences for inclusion, whereby competences are understood on three levels: attitude, knowledge, and skills. The authors also checked whether preschool teachers with longer work experience and those who had attended in-service training for inclusive settings assessed their inclusive competences higher than others with less experience did. The survey results indicate that preschool teachers see themselves quite competent for work in inclusive settings – they rated themselves high in all three dimensions of inclusive competences. It turned out that there are differences in the assessment of skills and knowledge: teachers with 10 - 20 years of service rated these dimensions higher, but no difference could be noticed between teachers in relation to inservice training for inclusive settings.

In the paper *Preschool teachers' perception of professional training contribution to the development of competences in the field of inclusive education*, Isidora Korać presented a segment of research whose goal was to examine teachers' opinions about the contribution of professional development in developing competencies in the field of inclusive education. The research was based on a questionnaire answered by a sample of 150 preschool teachers employed at preschool institutions in several towns in Serbia. The findings of the research show that the current concept of professional development accentuates the adoption of *ready-made decontextualized* knowledge, development of preschool teachers' competencies as individuals, without connecting individual and organizational changes that inclusion initiates. The author concludes that if we want for the system of professional development to contribute to obtaining preschool teachers' professional competencies for application of the current model of inclusive education, it is necessary to enable their greater participation and reflective practice via programmes for professional development. Inclusion is a change and a challenge for organizations in which various protagonists participate, who are supposed to interconnect from their various positions, roles and responsibilities, aiming for horizontal learning and organized action. Future programmes for professional development

in the field of inclusive education should be directed at the following areas: (a) working with gifted children (b) adapting work organization in preschool institutions in order to meet the needs of children who need additional support, (c) assessment and revision of individual education plans and (d) teamwork and cooperation in preschool institutions.

In the work *Inclusion of socially marginalized individuals in the light of human rights education*, Olivera Gajić, Milica Andevski, Spomenka Budić and Biljana Lungulov consider possibilities for inclusion of socially marginalized individuals and groups in an institutional framework and a local community in the context of human rights education. The authors consider the context of social inclusion and human rights education in order to collect qualitative indicators concerning the existing knowledge, interest, and recognition of social inclusion and human rights with the purpose of shedding light on this problem by protagonists of the education process, as well as the wider community, which forms the basis of strategic decisions and guidelines of education in a democratic society. Finally, the authors conclude that a well organized support network for workers in this area, who are required to ensure conditions for the fulfilment of human rights on the principles of accessibility, participation and equality.

Studying the Roma minority, which is one of the most economically and socially deprived minorities in Serbia and Croatia, is the focus of the paper *Inclusion of the Roma in Croatia and Serbia: the institutional framework and its implementation*, whose authors are Nikola Baketa and Dragana Gundogan. The goal of this paper is to show the institutional foundations for including the Roma people in the education system, as well as the way in which institutional foundations changed in the process of approximation to the European Union. On the basis of these insights it can be established that, despite the legal framework, there is a high level of exclusion in the education system so that this approach leads to the more difficult advancement of the Roma people within it dropping out, or deciding not to continue education, which in turn perpetuates the problem of education and the social position of the Roma people. The methodological approach of the authors included analysis of legislative documents and reports, as well as that of available statistical data about the education of the Roma minority.

In the paper *The symptoms of emotional and behavioral problems in older primary school students*, Branislava Popović-Ćitić and Lidija Bukvić have shown the results of the research on the frequency of emotional and behavioural symptoms in primary school students, with analysis of gender differences in the presence of symptoms and assessment of students' perception about the influence of difficulties on their own functioning. The data was obtained by means of a Strengths and difficulties questionnaire, a version for self-assessment of adolescents aged 11 to 16 with an addition about the influence of symptoms, on a sample of 630 students from 5 secondary schools in Belgrade. The obtained results were discussed in the context of considering the need for additional support, which, within an inclusive education system, would be provided for students with difficulties in their emotional and social development.

In the paper Bullying and strategies for confronting the phenomenon in Italian schools, Ignazia Bartholini starts with a review of literature about bullying, published since the 1970s to date. On the bases of the outcomes of some studies previously conducted, she aims to explain how the phenomenon of bullying has accompanied the raising of the period of mandatory school. Through the research of eminent scholars, she argues that the crisis of values and the loss of perspective for the future of teenagers increase the possibility of violent relationships among peers in school, where they spend much of their time. An interpretative model on bullying is therefore highlighted, using the "dramaturgic metaphor" of Goffman and focusing the role of viewer/witness (often the same classmates) in breaking the violent triangle where the perpetrator and victim are similarly victims of the same cruel play. Finally she describes the strategies devised by the Ministry of Education which are currently applied in schools in the Italian peninsula from the perspective of preventive and rehabilitative education, on potential protagonists - victim and bully - on spectators viewers - on all those adolescents who just look at the "violent drama" for fun or for weakness, without interrupting it and preventing a recurrence. In the light of empirical evidences, it is suggested that such programs accompanied by informal practices should be encouraged. The author suggests that after Italy another of the European nations that has invested very much in terms of support for inclusion and prevention for confronting the problem of bullying at school can be considered.

On the basis of recent structural and functional changes in the Montenegrin education system, with a special focus on the concept of inclusion, in her paper *The concept of inclusive education in the master's degree curriculum in Montenegro*, Tatjana Novović analyzes high school programmes for teacher training in Montenegro. Almost twenty years since the inclusive concept was implemented in the Montenegrin education system, with substantial changes in teaching practice and education legislation, the problem of vertical discontinuity in the system is still significant, i.e. there is a lack of coherence and compatibility between primary, secondary and tertiary education. The lack of a continual exchange of practical experiences and obtained knowledge about the benefits and marked challenges among all systemic institutional participants, creating a fluid field of inclusive context in Montenegro, induces discontinuity and actualises "old" questions about the purpose and functionality of previous courses of development of this concept in all education segments.

In her paper *Inclusive education of visually impaired students in music schools in Montenegro*, Vedrana Marković presents problems that complicate the improvement of inclusive education at music schools and offers some solutions. Musically talented children with visual impairment should be identified in time and have their music potential developed, i.e. they should be educated in music schools. It is often the case that blind and partially sighted children with musical talent acquire their musical education outside institutions, by private means, whereby they only dedicate themselves to learning how to play a selected instrument, but not to other courses which are envisaged in the elementary music school (solfeggio, music theory, choral singing, orchestra). This way of learning makes their music education incomplete. In addition to the primary goal – achieving a complete music education - there are numerous positive influences that happen through education in a music school.

The text written by Milica Marušić *The career cycle of teachers according to their motives of professional choice: a comparison of general and special schools*, is focused on the consideration of three groups of teachers, based on the dominant motives of their professional choice: realists, idealists and opportunists, with the aim of comparing characteristics of career development of those groups of teachers in regular and special education system. Results obtained by the use of a questionnaire (N=209) show that teacher *idealists* displayed the lowest level of career frustration, out of a total sample. It was concluded that the career development of *idealists*, *opportunists* and *realists* differ depending on the context in which they work: as regular school teachers, *opportunists* are more prone to withdrawal, while at special schools there is a stronger career frustration.

At the end of this foreword we would like to stress that our task was facilitated to a great extent by the readiness of all the authors to fulfill the requirements of the editor both in terms of the scope and structure of the papers. We hope that our gratitude will be a sufficient reward for the efforts they invested. We would like to thank the consulting editors, our distinguished colleagues Professor Nikolay M. Borytko, Professor Susana Padeliadu and Professor Marija Kavkler, whose suggestions significantly influenced the improved quality of the book. We owe a debt of gratitude to Milan Stančić, PhD, who patiently and dedicatedly helped us during all stages of preparation of this collection of papers. We are equally grateful to Rajka Djević, PhD, for her help and constructive suggestions, which significantly contributed to the quality of this collection of papers. We are also grateful to Mladen Radulović, MA, Branko Cvetić and Vlada Polić for their patience, professionalism and friendly understanding during the preparation of this manuscript.

Nikoleta Gutvajn and Milja Vujačić

ATTITUDE TOWARDS INCLUSION: AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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During the last decades, inclusion as an educational approach has become fairly recognised and adopted all over the world. Inclusion and inclusive education are understood and interpreted in various ways. Ainscow (2005) emphasizes the right for the uniqueness of each country's definition of inclusion but strongly recommends compliance with four key elements that meaningfully delineate inclusion. Educationalists and educational systems need to perceive inclusion as a process of constant searching and learning one from another and from different situations, and to sensitively identify and remove different kinds of barriers that prevent equal opportunities for presence, participation and achievement of all students, especially those who may be at risk of marginalisation, exclusion or underachievement (Ainscow, 2005). Unesco (2009) underlines that real inclusion implies active participation, learning at the highest level and developing the potential of each individual (ibid: 13) and it suggests a universal design for learning, whereby the diversity of needs of all students is considered from the very beginning of the teaching-learning process and the curriculum. Being involved in an educational process in inclusive settings that stimulate the proactive mode and encourage everyone's participation should be like "being involved in the common enterprise of learning" as Forbes illustrated (Forbes, 2007: 68). This perspective leads towards understanding inclusion as a challenge and an opportunity to shift the quality of education for all.

In Slovenia, the implementation of inclusion was a rather slow process dominated by parents who were anxious for their children to enter regular schools. The parents' right to choose the school for their children resulted in a notable decrease of children attending specialised schools (Krek, 1995). Such an inclusive trend has also been reported elsewhere (Cook 2002; McLeskey et al., 1998). Even though special educators were well-acknowledged professionals, as a result of traditionally separated regular and special education system, the characteristics of this first period reflect an integration paradigm – a process that opened the doors to children with SEN in regular education, but in which schools and teachers were not yet ready to respond appropriately to the demanding

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challenges. There were noticeable differences in levels of quality and supportiveness toward students with SEN, due to a lack of school policy and system guidelines. Consequently, students had to adapt to regular school environments and expectations with only minimal alterations.

Regular schools started progressively to adapt and meet the needs of an individual child after the first conceptualisation of inclusion within the Slovenian educational system, designed within the White Paper on Education (Krek, 1995) and enacted in 2000 with the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (ZUOPP, 2000). Children with SEN who were included under this Act were entitled to an individualised educational plan, whereby all the adaptations and different forms of additional professional support for learning were detailed.

Underpinned by this Act (ZUOPP 2000) the Slovenian educational legislation, at all levels – from preschool to university - had to change and include provisions that refered to students with SEN. Due to a comprehensive educational system, it was assumed that during their careers teachers would be, faced with the challenge of working with students with diverse SEN. Based on this understanding, teacher and preschool teacher preservice programmes were reformed and enhanced with special education courses; at the same time teachers and preschool teachers were provided with in-service training with special education contents via continuous professional development courses (Opara, 2003).

COMPETENCES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive education embodies a wide variety of situations in which a teacher should act effectively with all children (Moran, 2009) and requires a cluster of teachers' abilities, commitments, knowledge, and skills. Inclusion in its developmental and processional aspect is the responsibility of all teachers and teacher educators (Cook 2002; Watkins 2012). The broadness of competence definitions encompasses three important areas of capabilities (attitudes, knowledge and skills) and gives a comprehensive framework for the competence-based approach to inclusive teacher education. Within such understanding "certain attitudes and beliefs demand knowledge or a level of understanding and then skills in order to implement this knowledge in a practical situation" (Watkins, 2012: 11). Baráth (2013) defined these three broad headings as descriptors, giving to attitudes the motivational value, knowledge the informational value and skills the operational value. However, as Korthagen (2004) states, competences only represent a potential for behaviour, not the behaviour itself and it depends on various circumstances whether they are realised in practice or not. The question of how to implement efficiently inclusive

education is still a vast challenge among teachers and teacher educators. However, the continuous search to improve and to foster pro-inclusive attitudes, skills and knowledge of teachers and student teachers seems to be common all over the world (Cook 2002; Kim 2011; Lepičnik Vodopivec & Vujičić, 2010; Marinšek & Hmelak, 2015; Rakap et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2012; Winter, 2006).

The need for concrete information on the necessary inclusive competences required of all teachers working in inclusive settings stimulated the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education to specify and develop a Profile of inclusive teachers' competences (Watkins, 2012). The areas of competence in the Profile are placed within a framework of four core values that are closely related to teaching and learning in inclusive education: (a) embracing and valuing diversity of all learners, considering differences as a resource and an asset to education; (b) supporting all learners and having high expectations for all learners' achievements; (c) collaborating and team-working; and (d) taking engaged responsibility for continuing personal and professional development (Watkins, 2012).

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON INCLUSIVE COMPETENCES

In the context of competences and implementing inclusion, it has been determined that successful implementation of inclusion mainly depends on teachers' positive attitudes towards children with special needs (Bender et al., 1995) or, to put it another way, that unfavourable attitudes may be a major barrier to inclusive education (Malinen et al., 2012: 531). In general, the results of research studies (Avramidis et al., 2000; Rutar, 2012; Štemberger, 2013) indicate teachers mostly have a positive attitude towards inclusion. This attitude is believed to be influenced by many factors, e.g. knowledge, skills, experience, training, self-confidence, self- efficacy etc. (see also Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005).

Positive attitudes are believed to be connected with the acquisition of knowledge and skills about the characteristics of children with special needs (Avramidis et al., 2000; Brownell & Pajares, 1996; Emam & Mohamed, 2011; Kukanja Gabrijelčič & Čotar Konrad, 2015; MacFarlane & Woolfoson Clarks, 2013; Schmidt & Čagran, 2011). Such knowledge about children with SEN can be gained through formal studies during pre- and in-service training.

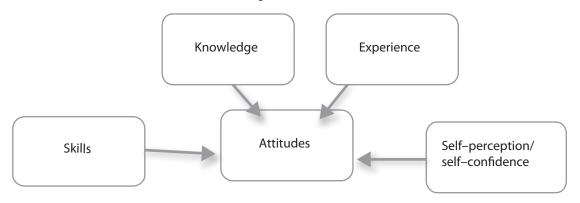
Teachers need to feel confident and competent for proactive implementation of inclusive teaching methods. The most effective way to prepare teachers to be ready for work in inclusive settings and work with children with special needs seems to be a competence based approach (Cook, 2002; Movkebaieva et al., 2013; Sharma et al., 2012). Since the number of students with special needs in general education has been

increasing very rapidly in last decades, Cook (2002) highlighted the need to place great importance on the well-preparedness of general education pre-service teachers and on the development of their inclusive competences within teachers' initial preparation programs.

Many researchers (Cook, 2002; Forlin et al., 2009; Weisel & Dror 2006) determined that attitudes importantly correlate with teachers' self-efficacy and self-confidence, or, as established by Lee et al. (2011), "empowering teachers' efficacy in inclusive settings showed up as the strongest factor and predictor of inclusion advocacy.

In addition to knowledge, self-efficacy and self-confidence, Malinen et al. (2012: 531) pointed out the importance of experience in teaching students with disabilities. The research results considering this question are quite inconsistent. Some researches (Cook, 2001; Emam & Mohamed 2011; Unianu 2012) reported that teachers with more experience had more positive attitudes than those with less experience, but on the other hand, some researchers (Ernst, 2006; Taylor et al., 2003) came to a conclusion that less experienced teachers had a more positive attitude towards inclusion than the ones with more experience.

As Avaramidis et al. (2000) stated, we might conclude that understanding that attitudes develop out of the interaction between knowledge, skills and experience, highlights the importance for newly qualified teachers to possess appropriate levels of experience, knowledge and skills for work in inclusive settings (Kiswarday & Drljić, 2015) (Picture 1). In addition, it is important to continuously empower teachers with good inclusive teaching strategies to effectively teach all students in regular settings (Lee et al., 2011).



Picture 1. Factors influencing attitudes towards inclusive education

Based on research evidence we believe that the success of inclusion depends on teachers and their readiness to work in inclusive settings. The majority of research studies on inclusive competence were performed among teachers (e.g. Avramidis et al., 2000; Cook, 2001; Emam & Mohamed, 2011; MacFarlane & Woolfoson Clarks, 2013;

Schmidt & Čagran, 2011; Unianu 2012) whereas studies on preschool teachers' inclusive competence are not so common. Since inclusion is a process, it should start in early childhood and this is why we focused on the preschool period and preschool teachers.

The aim of this study was to explore how Slovenian preschool teachers perceive their inclusive competences by considering separately the levels of their self-perception of all three dimensions of competences: (a) attitudes, (b) knowledge and (c) skills. We also wanted to examine the correlation among the three dimensions and determine if there were any differences in perceived inclusive competences according to (a) work experience and (b) in-service training in the special education or inclusion field. In addition, we wanted to determine which of the factors (knowledge, skills, work experience, in-service training) could predict attitudes. The final goal of the study is to implement research findings in initial (pre-service) preschool teachers' education and raise the readiness of students (future preschool teachers) to work in inclusive settings.

METHODOLOGY

In the study, the descriptive and causal non-experimental method of educational research was employed. The data were gathered in May 2015 via the questionnaire "Profile of Inclusive Pre-school Teachers" that we developed for the purposes of the present research. The questionnaire consisted of one open-ended question (work experience), one close-ended question (in-service training for inclusive settings) and a five-point Likert scale. The latter was based on the "Profile of Inclusive Teachers", the document that was developed as the main output of the "Teacher Education for Inclusion project" conducted by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (Watkins, 2012)². In its final version, the part of the questionnaire encompassing the Likert scale consisted of 48 items, 16 for each of three competence dimensions. Cronbach alpha showed high internal consistency, for the whole scale (α =.946), and when the three dimensions of inclusive competences scales were measured separately: attitudes (α =.824), knowledge (α =.869) and skills (α =.870).

The research *sample* consisted of 124 preschool teachers from all over Slovenia, all of them female. The majority (33.9%) of the participants had 0—10 years of working experience, followed by those (27.4%) with 31—40 years of working experience and those with 21—30 years (21.0%) of work experience with preschool children. The smallest group within the sample was the group of preschool teachers (17.7%) with 11—20 years of working experience. Furthermore, 36.9% of participants had not yet taken any in-service

In the process of formulating the statements for the Likert scale, we followed Agency's guidance that a Profile in its non-copyright section is allowed to be modified and developed in order to meet a range of possible purposes (Watkins, 2012: 9).

training for working in inclusive settings in the last three years, 45.1% of them had taken up to 16 lessons, and 13.9% had taken just some lessons a few times a year. Only the minority (4.1%) had been continuously involved in in-service training for inclusive settings.

The *data* were processed with the statistical package SPSS. The initial 48 items were first combined (based on the Profile of Inclusive Teachers structure) into three dimensions: (a) attitude, (b) knowledge and (c) skills, with each of the dimension consisting of 16 items. Later, basic descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, normality of distribution (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test) and homogeneity of variances (Levene test) for all three dimensions were performed. The tests were statistically significant, which meant that the non-parametric tests were the right choice for further analysis. We used Kruskal-Wallis H test to establish the possible differences in competences according to work experience and according to in-service training. Since we wanted to examine the possible predictors of attitude toward inclusive education, we also applied the multiple regressions (stepwise method).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptives and correlations for attitude, knowledge and skills. The results of descriptive statistics on average show that preschool teachers have predominately positive attitudes towards inclusion (M=4.23; SD=.38), they also perceive they have the necessary knowledge (M=4.36, SD=.39) to work in inclusive settings and they believe they are very skilful (M=4.41, SD=.38) (Table 1). As far as attitude is concerned, the results confirm previous findings that preschool teachers mainly have positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Odom, 2000) and that preschool teachers are an enthusiastic group in favour of inclusion (Avramidis et al., 2000: 279). When considering knowledge, the results are in a way inconsistent with some other research (Avramidis et al., 2000; Gašić-Pavišič & Gutvajn, 2011; Odom 2000; Rutar, 2012; Štemberger & Pogorevc Merčnik, 2014) which showed that preschool teachers perceived themselves as insufficiently competent for working in inclusive education. We may explain the high knowledge assessment results with the quite high level of in-service training for working with children with SEN - almost 2/3 of preschool teachers from our sample had been involved in up to 16 lessons during last three years, while 4.1% stated that they were continuously involved in education on inclusion topics.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation for the three dimensions

Dimension	M(SD)	Мо	Me	1.	2.	3.
1. Attitudes	4.23(.38)	4.06	4.18	-		
2. Knowledge	4.36(.39)	4.56	4.37	0.883*	-	
3. Skills	4.41(.38)	4.38	4.38	0.721*	0.712*	-

Legend: M—mean, SD—standard deviation, Mo—mode, Me—median, **P is statistically significant at 0.01

The results of correlation analysis indicate very high and positive statistically significant correlation among all three dimensions, which was expected since it is clear (Watkins, 2012) that a certain attitude or belief demands certain knowledge or a level of understanding together with skills to implement this knowledge in a practical situation. The highest correlation emerged between knowledge and attitudes (r=0.883), which confirms that knowledge about children with SEN is a very important building block in the formation of positive attitudes towards inclusion. The highest correlation emerged between knowledge and attitudes (r=0.883), which confirms that the knowledge about children with SEN and the formation of positive attitudes towards inclusion strongly influence each other.

Since attitudes are believed to be most important in the implementation of inclusion (e. g. Bender at al., 1995; Malinen et al., 2012: 531) we wanted to determine which factors they are influenced by. Multiple regression (stepwise model) was employed and 4 possible factors (knowledge, skills, work experience, and in-service training) were checked. The results show only knowledge and skills³ can predict attitudes. The regression coefficients show that knowledge is an important predictor of attitudes (β =0.496) and that attitudes can also be predicted by skills (β =0.306). These results are consistent with previous findings (Avramidis et al., 2000; Brownell & Pajares, 1996; Emam & Mohamed, 2011; Kukanja Gabrijelčič & Čotar Konrad, 2015; MacFarlane & Woolfoson Clarks, 2013; Schmidt & Čagran, 2011) in which researchers established that knowledge and skills are important determinants of attitudes.

Table 2. The Kruskal—Wallis test for examining differences in perceived competences according to work experience

	0–10	11–20	21–30	31–40		
Dimension					H(3)	Р
Attitudes	56.19	74.95	61.73	62.82	3.965	.265
Knowledge	57.13	80.50	53.98	64.00	8.000	.046
Skills	54.05	80.68	56.87	65.49	8.865	.031

Legend: —average rank, H—Kruskal Wallis test, P—statistical significance

³ The factors »work experience« and »in-service training« were excluded from the model by using the stepwise method.

Table 2 presents the results of the Kruskal-Wallis tests used to determine whether there were differences in the three dimensions of inclusive competences according to preschool teachers' work experience. The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the case of knowledge (H=8.000, P=.046) and in the case of skills (H=8.865, P=.031). When knowledge is in question, the results show that preschool teachers with 11-20 years of work experience consider themselves to possess the most knowledge. The results are not surprising, since after the "Placement of Children with Special Needs Act" in 2000 Slovenian teachers and preschool teachers, were systematically involved in a variety of in-service training on inclusive education. The preschool teachers with 11-20 years of work experience were at the beginning of their career and were more open-minded towards "new" than their more experienced colleagues.

Similar conclusions can also be drawn for the skills. Preschool teachers with 11-20 years of work experience consider themselves to be the most skilful in inclusive education (\bar{R} =80.68) They are followed by the most experienced preschool teachers (\bar{R} =65.49), whereas the results for the two other groups are similar (\bar{R} =54.05 for the 0–10 group and \bar{R} =56.87 for the 31-40 group).

Even though the analysis showed there were no statistically significant differences in attitudes on the basis of mean rank, we can claim that there is the same trend in perceived attitudes according to work experience. The result was expected, since it has been previously established that attitudes depend on knowledge and skills (e.g. Avramidis et al., 2000; Brownell & Pajares 1996; Emam & Mohamed, 2011; Kukanja Gabrijelčič & Čotar Konrad, 2015; MacFarlane 6 Woolfoson Clarks, 2013; Schmidt 6 Čagran, 2011).

Table 3. The Kruskal-Wallis test for examining differences in perceived competences according to inservice training (in the last 3 years)

	No in-service training	Up to 16 lessons	Few times a year	Continuously		
Dimension					H(3)	Р
Attitudes	58.64	64.06	56.79	74.40	1.532	.675
Knowledge	53.88	66.57	57.41	88.20	6.320	.097
Skills	53.38	65.98	62.15	83.10	5.151	.161

 $Legend: {\color{blue}\textbf{---average rank}}, \textbf{H--Kruskal-Wallis test}, \textbf{P---statistical significance}$

Using the Kruskal-Wallis test we wanted to determine whether there were differences in the three dimensions of inclusive competences according to in-service training. As it is shown in Table 3, the results of all performed Kruskal-Wallis tests indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in perceived inclusive competences between the preschool teachers who attended some form of in-service training and those who did not. The results are surprising since there is much evidence showing the importance

of pre- and in-service training in improving teachers' attitudes towards inclusion (e.g. Avramidis et al., 2000; Brownell & Pajares 1996; Emam & Mohamed, 2011; Kukanja Gabrijelčič & Čotar Konrad, 2015; MacFarlane & Woolfoson Clarks, 2013; Schmidt & Čagran, 2011). However, for all three competences the mean ranks are the highest in the case of preschool teachers who have continuously attended in-service trainings. As was expected, preschool teachers who have not attended any form of in-service trainings perceive their knowledge and attitude to be the lowest. Surprisingly, the self-perception of attitude is lower with preschool teachers who attended in-service training a few times per year than with those who had not attended any form of in-service training for inclusive education.

CONCLUSIONS

The results show that preschool teachers have predominately positive attitudes towards inclusion, that they believe they are very skilful, and that they perceive that they also have the necessary knowledge to work in inclusive settings. All three dimensions were rated as very good (Mattitudes=4.23, Mknowledge=4.36, Mskills=4.41). Such results match well with previous findings that found preschool teachers the most positive oriented towards inclusive education, especially regarding their attitudes (Avramidis et al., 2000: 279; Odom, 2000), but surprisingly our research also a showed higher self-confidence of preschool teachers regarding their quoting of knowledge and skills. We assume that this may be explained by the fact, that the questionnaire was completed by preschool teachers that mentored our university 3rd year students in their field work practice. The majority of them (63.1%) were also involved in at least 16 in-service training lessons on inclusion duringthe last three years. The results also show very strong statistic correlation among all three competence dimensions. This was expected, since we found it very clear that a certain attitude or belief demands certain knowledge or level of understanding and then skills in order to implement this knowledge in a practical situation, as Watkins (2012) quoted.

The results showed that we can expect better inclusive competences from preschool teachers that have more working experiences and have been included in in-service inclusive education, especially when the legalisation of inclusion occurred (in 2000). Otherwise, it seems that in-service training does not significantly influence preschool teachers'opinion on whether they feel more or less competent for inclusion.

Limitations and future directions. One of the possible limitations of the presentstudy is the sample structure, since the questionnaire was mainly completed by preschool teachers who mentored our third year students. In this context, it is possible that mentors are, because of their mentoring role, more self-confident than other preschool teachers.

Another limitation seems to be the small sample size, which was, due to a low response rate (40%) smaller than what we had expected.

On the other hand, preschool teachers'inclusive competences have not frequently been the subject of research studies, so the reasonable direction seems to be to enlarge the size and heterogeneity of the sample, and to include some additional questions (e.g. the possibility of collaboration with special educators). In addition, it would be very interesting to spread the research internationally, especially to countries with a similar process of implementing inclusion in the educational system.

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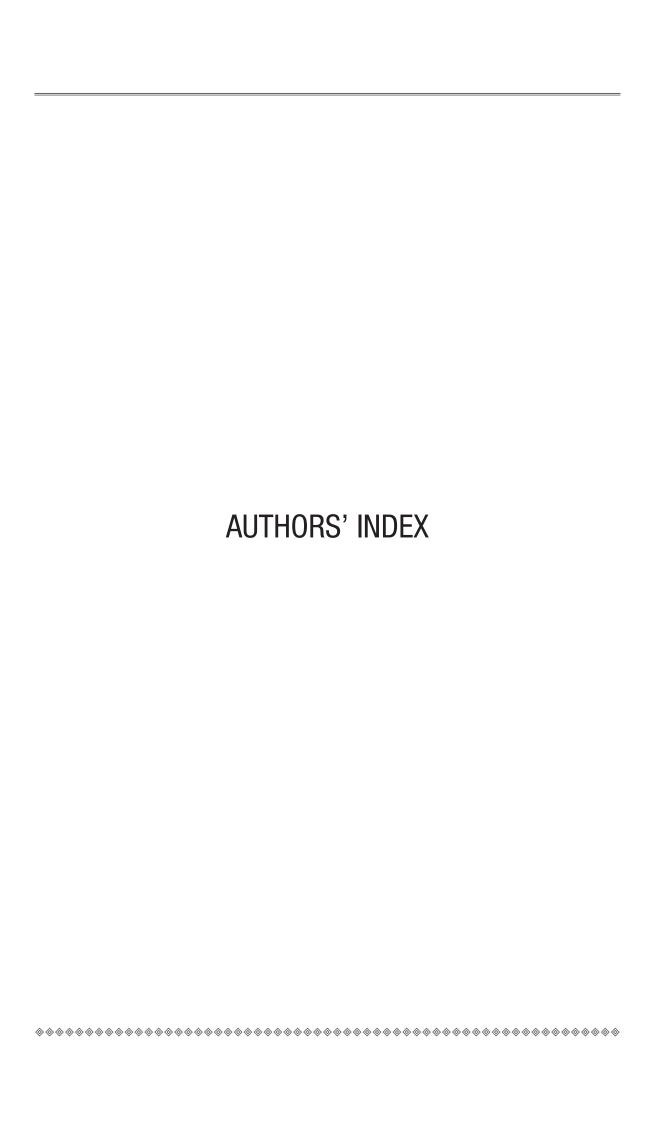
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Α

Abdelbasit, A. 119
Abu-Rayya, H. M. 137, 149
Achenbach, T. M. 137
Adeniyi, S. O. 56
Agran, M. 50, 59
Ahmed, E. 159, 169
Ainscow, M. 20, 21, 25, 77, 86, 104
Algahazo, E. M. 50, 59
Alper, S. 50, 59
Ang, R. P. 196
Arsenović-Pavlović, M. 16
Astor, A. R. 159
Avramidis, E. 22, 49, 50, 55, 56, 57, 58, 79, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85
Avtqis, T. A. 155.

В

Bandini, T. 153 Banjac, S. 100 Baráth, T. 78 Baričić, T. 133 Bartholini, I. 157, 159, 161, 162 Bartolome, L. I. 23 Batini, F. 156 Baucal, A. 22, 23, 100, 108, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 129, 132 Baucal, I. 16, 17 Bauman, Z. 154, 168 Bayliss, P. 49 Beck, U. 154, 168 Begen, F. M. 109 Benbenishty, R. 159 Bender, W. N. 79, 83 Benner, S.M. 114 Bennett, J. 119, 124 Bešić, M. 175 Bhatnagar, N. 55 Billinglsey, B. 204 Biro, M. 124 Bodroža, B. 196, 197, 198, 203 Bones, R. 50, 57 Booth, T. 185, 193 Borić, S. 54 Bossaert, G. 105

Bourdieu, P. 107, 109, 113
Bourdon, K. H. 139
Braithwaite V. 159
Braunholtz, T. 106
Brophy, J.E. 155, 157
Broughan, Ch. 113
Brown, J. S. 22
Brown, S. D. 196
Brownell, M. T. 79, 83, 84, 85
Bruinsma, M. 195, 202
Bunch, G. 49, 54
Burden, R. 49
Burnett, A. 119
Buzzi, C. 153, 154

C, Č

Calabrò, A.R. 153 Cameron, D. L. 50 Campbell, J. 57 Carney, A.G. 159 Cavalli, A. 153, 154, 156 Chambers, D. 57, 58 Chong, W. H. 196 Civita, A. 161, 162 Coakley, J. 105 Cook, B. G. 77, 78, 79, 80 Crighton, J. 123, 124 Crockett, J. B. 20 Cuskelly, M. 57 Cabarkapa, M. 196 Čagran, B. 79, 81, 83, 84, 85 Čekić-Marković, J. 16 Cotar Konrad, S. 79, 83, 84, 85

D

D'Ambrosio, M. 156
Dadds, M. R. 141
De Giacomo, A. 139
De Heus, P. 195
De Lillo, A. 153, 154
De Sanctis, O. 156
Diekstra, R. F. 195
Djerić, I. 91
Djević, R. 16, 49, 50, 54, 56, 98
Dogliani, P. 153
Donnelly, P. 105

Drljić, K. 80 Glazzard, J. 49 Dror. 0.80 Goffman, E. 155, 160, 161, 169 Due, P. 78, 120, 122, 159 Golubović, Š. 187, 188 Duguid, P. 22 Goodman, A. 147 Goodman, R. 137, 138, 139, 141 Dyson, A. 63, 75 Džinović, V. 91 Gordon-Burns, D. 32 Govoni, R. S. 119 E Griffin, C. C. 203 Grim, J.C. 114 Elkins, J. 24 Grubačić, J. 196 Emam, M. M. 79, 80, 83, 84, 85 Guskey, T. R. 91 Emery, D. W. 196 Gutvain, N. 82, 93 Engstrom, C. 109 Guy, W. 119 Ernst, C. 80 Eškirović, B. 184, 189 Н Espelage, D.L. 153 Habermas, J. 154, 168 F Hammond, L. 56 Hanak, N. 185 Farkas, L. 126 Harel, Y. 153, 159 Fisher, S. 155 Hargeaves, A. 91 Florian, L. 58 Harvey, H. 154 Fokolade, O. A. 56 Hawes, D. J. 141 Forbes, F. 77 Hawkins, K. 113 Forlin, C. 22, 56, 57, 58, 80 Heath, A.F. 155 Fornella, Z. 159 Heung, V. 50 Fraser, J. B. 21 Hill, H. 91 Friedman, E. 16 Hmelak, M. 79 Fullan, M. 91, 177 Hodge, S. 114 Furlonger, B. 56 Holborn, M. 103 Hossain, S. 137 G Hrnjica, S. 22, 50, 56 Gaad, E. 50, 56, 58 Huan, V. S. 196 Gajić, 0. 103, 108, 112 Hunt, L. 113 Gale, T. 114 Hussein, S. A. 137 Galland, O. 153, 154 Gallino, L. 154 Gašić-Pavišić, S. 22, 93 Inglehart, R. 153 Gasperoni, G. 154, 155 Issawi, R. 50 Gatti, U. 153 Ivić, I. 39 Giannakopoulos, G. 141, 146 Giannetti, E. 162 J Giddens, A. 154, 168 Gidley, J.M. 105 Jablan, B. 185 Gilmore, L. 57 Jansen, E. 195, 202 Giroux, H.A. 154 Jeremić, J. 16 Glaubman, R. 50 Jimerson, S.R. 159

Jokić, T. 15 Joksimović A. 51, 52 Jovanović, 0. 16, 17, 50, 54, 56 Jovanović, V. 16, 17, 108, 109

K

Kalyva, E. 50 Karsten, F. 63 Katsiyannis, A. 196 Kermauner, A. 73 Kieling, C. 137 Kilgore, K. L. 203 Kim, J. R. 79 Kiswarday, V. 80 Klaić, B. 103 Klasen, H. 138 Knežević, A. 121, 122 Kolić, M. 16, 54 Korać, I. 89, 90, 91, 95, 97 Korthagen, F. A. 78 Koskelainen, M. 138, 141, 145, 146 Kostović, S. 16 Koutrouba, K. 57 Kovač-Cerović, T. 15, 16, 17, 23, 24, 35, 39 Kowalski, R.M. 157 Kowar, G. 123, 124 Krnjaja, Ž. 36, 37, 44, 91, 99 Krolick, B. 188 Kukanja Gabrijelčič, M. 79, 83, 84, 85 Kumar, C. P. 146

L

Lambe, J. 50, 57 Lash, S. 154 Laufer, A. 159 Leatherman, J. M. 79 Leccardi, C. 153 Lee, Y. 80 Lent, R. W. 195, 196 Lepičnik Vodopivec, J. 79 Lesar, I. 67 Levkov, Lj. 16 Lewis, A. 73

Leyser, Y. 56

Lalić-Vučetić, N. 93

Liebich, A. 119 Lifshitz, H. 50 Limber, S.P. 157 Loeb, R. C. 203 Loreman, T. 24, 56 Loureiro, S. R. 146 Lungulov, B. 112

Lyotard, J. 154, 169 M MacFarlane, K. 79, 80, 83, 84, 85 Macura-Milovanović, S. 16, 178 Main, S. 56 Maksimović, J. 187, 188 Malinen, 0. 50, 79, 80, 83 Marinšek, M. 79 Marković, V. 16, 188, 190, 191, 192 Marushiakova, E. 119 Marušić, M. 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 202, Marzocchi, G. M. 145, 146 McLeskey, J. 77 McVilly, K. 57 Melucci, A. 154 Menesini, E. 161, 162, 164 Mercer, C. D. 74 Merrell, K. W. 159 Meseldžija, B. 16 Meyer, A. 18, 157 Milin, V. 91 Mirković Radoš, K. 186 Mišković, M. 107, 108, 113 Mohamed, A. H. 79, 80, 83, 84, 85 Moll, L. 108 Montgomery, C. 195 Moran, A. 78 Morse, J. I. 184 Morvant, M. 203 Moss, P. 43 Movkebaieva, Z. 79

Mullis, I. V. S. 22

Murphy, D. M. 22, 57

Muzammil, K 137

Muris, P. 139

Rix, J. 65 Ν Romi, S. 56 Niemeyer, J. A. 79 Rothenberger, A. 137 Norwich, B. 50, 55, 57, 63, 64, 66, 73, 74 Rupp, A. A. 195 Ruspini, E. 153 0 Rutar, S. 79, 82 Obel, C. 145 Rutter, M. 157 Odom, S. L. 82, 85 S Olweus, D. 156, 157 Opara, B. 63, 78 Saur, A. M. 146 Ortuño-Sierra, J. 145, 146 Savolainen, H. 50 Oswald, M. 57 Sayed, Y. 65 Schmidt, M. 79, 81, 83, 84, 85 P Scott, S. 138 Pajares, F. M. 79, 83, 84, 85 Seenivasan, P. 146 Parmenter, T. R. 57 Ševkušić, S. 91 Passeron, J. C. 109 Sharma, U. 22, 50, 56, 58, 79 Pastor, P. N. 146 Shaukat S. 56 Pavlović-Babić, D. 17 Singal, N. 106 Pavlović, J. 23, 36, 37, 44, 91, 97, 99 Slee, R. 65, 178 Peček, M. 16 Smederevac, S. 124 Pellegrini, A.D. 161 Sokal, L. 50 Pešikan, A. 39, 103 Sortheix, F. M. 202 Petrović, D. 16, 93 Soudien, C. 65 Pogorevc Merčnik, J. 82 Sretenov, D. 50, 52, 56 Polat, F. 106 Stančić, M. 93, 186 Popović, D. 137, 186 Stančić, V. 93, 186 Porter, J. 56 Stanisavljević-Petrović, Z. 93 Priebe, G. 139 Stanković, D. 22, 91 Stefanović, S. 16 0 Steliou, M. 57 Štemberger, T. 79, 82 Queck C. L. 196 Stempien, L. R. 203 R Stojanovic, J. 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 129, 132 Radovanović, S. 121, 122 Stoll, L. 99 Radulović, L. 89, 91, 92, 95 Stone, L. L. 138 Rajović, V. 16, 17, 50, 54, 56, 89, 92, 95 Subban, P. 22 Rancer, A.S. 155 Šućur, Z. 103 Ravens-Sieberer, U. 146 Suzić, N. 50 Reddy, B. K. 137 Svedin, G. C. 139 Reichl, C. 195 Swart, E. 57 Reškovac, T. 175 Swearer, S.M. 153, 159 Ricci, A. 159

Rieser, R. 110

Т

Taylor, R.L. 80 Thabet, A. A. 137 Theoharis, G. 20 Thijs, A. 21 Tinto, V. 109 Tovilović, S. 124 Tsakiris, V. 50 Turner-Cobb, J. M. 109

U

Unianu, E. M. 80, 81

V

Valeo, A. 49
Vamvakari, M. 57
Van Petegem, K. 21
Van Reusen, A. K. 22
Van Roy, B. 146, 147
Van Widenfelt, B. M. 141, 145, 146
Vandenberg, B. 196
Vučinić, V. 184, 189
Vujačić, M. 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 91, 97
Vujičić, L. 79
Vukajlović, B. 56
Vuković, D. 104
Vuković, O. 104

W

Walberg, J. H. 21
Wallace, M.
Wang. Q. 196
Watkins, A. 78, 79, 81, 83, 85
Watt, H. M. G. 195, 202
Wehmeyer, M.
Weisel, A. 80
Wentzel, K.R. 155, 157
White, J. 78, 122, 123, 124
Winter, E. C. 79, 179
Woerner, W. 137, 138, 139
Woodcock, S. 49, 56
Woodhead, M. 33, 36, 37, 43
Wubbels, T. 89

Υ

Yang, B. 137 Yazbeck, M. 57 Yeo, L. S. 196 Yoon, K. S. 91

Z

Zhang, D. 196 Zovko, G. 186 Žegarac 139







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)

