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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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

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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

PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCES IN THE FIELD OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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One of the most challenging system changes which employees in education have faced in the last ten years in our country is the introduction of inclusive education. The Law on the Basics of the Education System (*Službeni glasnik RS*, br.72/09, 52/11 and 55/13) and its accompanying bylaws define equal rights and access to education for all children. The legislation provides various mechanisms of support, including prolonging free preparatory preschool programs, educational opportunities through an individual education plan in regular schools and preschools, forming interdepartmental committees, and introducing personal assistants and other measures, based on the assessment of needs for additional educational, health and social support for children and students.

The aforementioned system changes require, among other things, the development and redefinition of existing professional competences of employees in education for the realization of the current model of inclusive education. In professional literature and official documents in the field of education there is a large number of different definitions and classifications of teacher² competences, where the authors, to a greater or lesser extent, allocate different meanings to the given dimensions (Korać, 2014). Without intending to go into details regarding the issue of different definitions and the division of competences, their context and content, for the purposes of this paper we will stick to the definition of preschool teachers' competence for the implementation of the current model of inclusive education, which was the framework for further contemplation about this phenomenon. Competences are defined as a dynamic combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes on values, that enable individuals to actively and effectively operate in a particular (specific) situation, or profession (Pantićand Wubbels, 2010). Thus defined, competencies are an integration of declarative (knowledge about), procedural (know how) and conditional (knowledge when) knowledge (Rajović & Radulović, 2007). In the context of inclusive education in its broadest terms, competences represent knowledge, skills

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The term "teacher" is used to denote all those working in the system of education and upbringing as well as those who educate and bring up, regardless of their level of education and age of children (teachers in preschools, teachers, subject teachers in primary and secondary schools).

and attitudes on values, that enable preschool teachers to meet the needs of children within the public education system, and to develop effective approaches focused on the organization of the learning environment, an environment that encourages the individual development of each child, and appreciation of his/her abilities, preferences, family and cultural heritage (Gutvajin & Korać, 2015).

As a form of support in the acquisition of the aforementioned competences, the legal framework defines professional training in this field as an integral and mandatory part of the professional development of employees in education. The Rulebook on continuous professional training and the career advancement of preschool and school teachers and expert associates (*Službeni glasnik RS*, br. 13/2012, 85/2013, 86/2015) establishes the institutional framework of authority and responsibilities within this field, defines the accreditation procedures for the programs of professional training and career advancement, but also other forms of professional training.

In order to strengthen professional teams for inclusive education in preschool institutions in accordance with the Law, and after the introduction of inclusion into the educational system, the Ministry of Education and Science organized two mandatory professional training programs through the DILS project (Delivery of Improved Local Services). These were *Inclusive Education and Individual Education Plans* and *Strategies and Actions to Adapt Teaching Methods to Children with Disabilities and Gifted Children in Preschools* (Izveštaj Ministarstva prosvete i nauke, 2012). The two professional training programs were attended by only 105 preschool teachers and expert associates from seven preschools in Serbia (Ibid). The objectives of the said program were aimed at strengthening the competences of members of expert teams for inclusive education in order to develop an inclusive culture and practice in institutions by developing individual education plans for children.

In addition to the professional training programs organized by the Ministry, the Rulebook defines that professional training can be achieved through participation in accredited programs, symposia, and through activities undertaken by preschool and school teachers in accordance with personal professional training plans and activities undertaken by schools or preschool institutions within their development activities. In the Catalogue of programs, accredited professional training programs in the field of inclusive education are grouped in a special area *Children/students in need of additional support in education* (Katalog programa stalnog stručnog usavršavanja nastavnika, vaspitača i stručnih saradnika za školsku 2014/15 and 2015/16.). In addition, since this area includes a wide range of competences needed to develop effective approaches aimed at organizing environment for children's learning and development, preschool teachers have the possibility to choose professional training programs from other fields listed in the Catalogue. However, the findings of numerous studies indicate that the accredited

programs provide a modest contribution to innovation in the educational process (Džinović, 2009; Ševkušić, 2011), that the contents of the programs are not aligned with the needs and expectations of school and pre-school teachers nor the context they work in (Korać, 2015 Pavlović Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2012; Ševkušić, 2011), besides which there is a need for diversification of professional training (Vujačić et al., 2011). They also show that horizontal learning is not present enough within educational institutions, that school and preschool teachers rarely present talks in the meetings of professional bodies on topics pertaining to the attended program of professional training (Korać, 2015; Pavlović Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2012; Stanković, 2011). Pavlović Breneselović and Krnjaja (2012) point out that the existing concept of professional training has the characteristics of an industrial model, which emphasizes that professional learning is in its nature generic, that professional competences are acquired by practicing them, and lessons learned can be applied in different contexts, regardless of the specifics of the educational process. Parallels can be drawn from the model of professional training of teachers, which is described by Radulović (2011). The author believes that the existing concept of professional training, so-called training as acquisition of skills, lies on the approach from theory to practice as a starting point to understanding teachers' actions. In contrast to this concept, a large number of authors argue for a systematic approach to the professional training of teachers (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Hargeaves & Fullan, 2000; Hill, 2009; Korać, 2015; Pavlović Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2012; Radulović, 2011). This approach focuses on the concept of reflective practice and teachers as reflective practitioners who, in the process of cognition, explore and examine the theoretical assumptions through their own practice, review their practice, and construct their own theories about it. In this approach to teachers' professional training, teaching and learning are conceived as "collaborative processes that take place in the network of relationships" (Pavlović Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2012:146), and the essence of changes lies in structuring and acculturation of a school/preschool institution as a system.

The authors are unanimous in the view that it is important for the child (i.e. student) and learning to be placed at the center of the entire process of teacher training. During the process of professional training it is also necessary to connect individual and organizational changes, define the vision to be achieved by "small steps", and ensure continuity of professional training integrated into the daily activities of the institution (Guskey, 2000, by: Djerić, Milin, Stanković, 2014).

METHODOLOGY

This paper presents a segment of research whose purpose was to examine the opinion of teachers on the contribution of professional training to the development of competences in the field of inclusive education. In relation to the defined goals and tasks the first part of the questionnaire was designed around questions on: (a) how preschool teachers perceive the contribution of professional training to the development of competences in the field of inclusive education, (b) how satisfied they are with the offer of accredited programs of professional training in the field of inclusive education, (c) what their suggestions are on ways in which to improve professional training programs, and (d) preschool teachers' opinion about additional professional training in this field. The second part of the questionnaire was designed as a sort of marking scale, where certain claims refer to various competences for the implementation of the current model of inclusive education, and each described competence is given at the level of knowledge (declarative), and then, at the level of application in a particular context. The preschool teachers had the opportunity to assess whether and how they developed the described competence. When constructing this part of the questionnaire we used a modified questionnaire of authors Rajović and Radulović (2007)³. The reliability of the used instrument was obtained by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient. As measures of correlation between the variables, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated, Pearson χ^2 and χ^2 . To determine the significance of differences between variables, analysis of variance was used.

In the questionnaire, we selected demographic variables about previous initial education and years of service. In addition, to increase the validity of the results, we constructed questions in order to select the respondents, based on both their participation in professional training and experience in working with children who need additional support. The research was conducted on a sample of 150 preschool teachers employed in preschool institutions in Belgrade, Kragujevac, Sremska Mitrovica, Novi Sad, Čačak, Žagubica, Raška and Niš. The sample consisted of 114 female teachers and 36 male teachers. Among the surveyed preschool teachers, most of them had been working for between 4 and 10 years (38.7%), compared to teachers who had 11 to 20 years of work experience (32.7%), teachers with less than 4 years (16%) and those working in preschools for more than 20 years (12.6%). As for the structure of the sample according to the type of initial education, the majority of preschool teachers had graduated from universities (53.3%), followed by those from colleges (43.3%), 2% of teachers have specialization in some field and 1.6% of them have a high school (college) or university degree.

The subject of the study was to examine how teachers, from the perspective of their practice, perceive the role of their undergraduate education in relation to other sources of knowledge and professional competences. The research was conducted on a sample of 175 teachers of history and Latin in secondary schools throughout Serbia.

RESULTS

Research findings show that more than half of the preschool teachers surveyed (56%) said that they were not satisfied enough with the offer of accredited programs of professional training in the field of inclusive education, followed by 42.7% who were largely satisfied, while 1.3% stated they were not at all satisfied. None were fully satisfied. The application of χ^2 test showed no statistically significant differences with respect to years of service and the formal education of teachers and their satisfaction with the offer of accredited programs in the field of inclusive education.

Regarding benefits obtained from accredited programs of professional training in the field of inclusive education, teachers name: acquisition of knowledge about legislation in this area; improving competence in the field of planning gaining experience in writing pedagogic profiles; sensitization to the needs of children from marginalized groups, overcoming personal prejudices, better access to children who need support and better cooperation with parents; knowledge how to involve all children in planned activities; record keeping; and the possibility of learning through the experiences of others. An important fact of our research is that a number of preschool teachers pointed out that professional training programs in the field of inclusive education are the only source of competences, as it is a novelty in the education system, and that teachers are, therefore, not sufficiently professionally prepared to work in inclusive education. This is confirmed by other studies conducted in our country (Gašić-Pavišić & Gutvajn, 2011; Gutvajn & Lalić-Vučetić, 2010; Gutvajn, 2014; Stanisavljević-Petrović & Stančić, 2010). The research results of Gutvajn & Lalić-Vučetić (2010) show that preschool teachers generally have a positive attitude towards the inclusion of children with disabilities into regular preschool groups, but they most often mention their lack of professional qualifications to work with this group of children as one of the biggest problems at work. Gašić-Pavišić & Gutvajn (2011) point out that one of the reasons for insufficient preparedness of preschool teachers to work with children with disabilities is that in Serbia, by the time inclusive education was introduced in the regular educational system there had been no schools that prepared preschool teachers for such work, as opposed to education for experts in educational work with children in specialized institutions. The research findings of Gutvajn (2014) indicate that there is a difference in self-assessment of the level of preparedness to work in inclusive conditions between preschool teachers who had some kind of training about working with children with developmental disabilities and those who did not have such training. However, additional training regarding support strategies for children with disabilities and the methods of program implementation are felt to be equally needed by preschool teachers who feel prepared and those who believe they are not sufficiently prepared. The findings indicate that there is a need for certain changes in the system of

professional development of preschool teachers that would enable the development of their competences to work in inclusive education.

We were interested in whether there are differences in the perception of preschool teachers regarding the contribution of professional training in the field of inclusive education in relation to different categories of children who need additional help.

Table 1. Preschool teachers' evaluation of professional training contribution in work with children who need additional support

	It did not help me in work	It slightly helped me	Cannot estimate	It helped me	It significantly helped me
Children with disabilities	-	8.7%	19.3%	59.3%	12.7%
Children from socially non-stimulating environment	0.6%	17.3%	26.7%	44.7%	10.7%
Gifted children	4.7%	18%	18.7%	48.7%	9.3%

The findings, presented in Table 1, indicate that more than half, 59.3%, of the surveyed preschool teachers, recognize that their professional training helped in working with children with disabilities. A somewhat smaller number (48.7%) said that it helped in working with gifted children and 44.7% confirmed help in working with children from socially non-stimulating environments. A small number of teachers are able to recognize significant help in working with children, in all three categories.

Furthermore, when it comes to the contribution of various forms of professional training in working with children with disabilities, the results show that most of the surveyed preschool teachers (44%) believe that participation in projects related to inclusive education significantly helped them in their work, while only 3.3% of teachers recognized participation in professional meetings and conferences as helpful. When it comes to working with children from socially non-stimulating environment, the results show that most of the surveyed preschool teachers (30%) believe that the experience of working in preschools significantly helped in their work, followed by counseling and peer support (24.7%). Similar findings were obtained about the work with gifted children. In fact, most of the teachers surveyed (40%) believe that work experience in preschools significantly helped in their work. The second most important factor in improving the quality of preschool teachers' work in this area is counseling, peer support (35.3%), then support of professional services in preschools (27.3%). When it comes to participation in professional meetings and conferences, only 4% of preschool teachers recognized this as a source that significantly helped in working with gifted children.

The application of χ^2 test revealed significant differences with respect to years of service and contribution of teachers' professional training in the work with all three categories of children. Namely, preschool teachers with more years of experience see significant importance in professional training programs in working with children with disabilities (df=3, F=2.890, p<0.05), as well as the greater importance of cooperation with colleagues from other preschools (df=3, F=2.663, p<0.05). Also, preschool teachers who have more years of experience give increasing importance to professional training programs (df=3, F=3.398, p<0.05), as well as to presentations, and training for colleagues in preschools (df=3, F=3.646, p<0.05) and visiting observation classes of their colleagues (df=3, F=3.404, p<0.05) in working with children from socially non-stimulating environments. Preschool teachers who have more years of experience recognize the greater contribution of professional training programs (df=3, F=3.442, p<0.01) and personal participation in projects relating to inclusive education (df=3, F=5.007, p<0.01) as well as thehigher contribution of the use of professional literature and information available on the Internet in working with gifted children (df=3, F=4.192, p<0.01).

Furthermore, preschool teachers recognize personal experience from preschools as the dominant source of declarative knowledge in ten out of thirteen given competences. In addition, personal experience is the dominant source of knowledge to act (a source that enables them to apply their knowledge) for nine of thirteen given competences. Similar results were obtained in the aforementioned studies, whose sample consisted of schoolteachers (Korać, 2015; Rajović & Radulović, 2007). Professional training is recognized as the dominant source of competences in the area of inclusive education on the level of declarative knowledge (56%) when it comes to knowledge regarding the provision of support for children with disabilities. In this area, professional training is recognized and ranked as second (35%) when it comes to knowledge to act.

When we look at the contribution of accredited programs of professional training in the acquisition of all the competences in the field of inclusive education, research findings, presented in Graph 1, show that the preschool teachers surveyed perceive professional training programs as the most important source of acquiring knowledge to act and declarative knowledge related to supporting children with disabilities. Ranked second is the knowledge relateing to planning and organizing activities (knowledge of various methods, forms, techniques, organization of the learning environment, the elements of individual education plan), i.e. knowledge on how to choose, design and implement a variety of work methods, forms, techniques adequate for particular content, objectives and children, how to develop individual education plans and the like. The minimum contribution of professional training is recognized in the scope of decision-making skills and knowledge regarding the Law and bylaws in the field of inclusive education.



Graph 1. Preschool teachers' perception of professional training contribution to the development of competences in the field of inclusive education

We were especially interested to see how preschool teachers assess the effects of their professional training in the educational process. We wanted to hear their opinion on how useful the knowledge and skills developed through participation in accredited programs were in working with children who need additional support. Almost half of teachers (48%) responded that they were largely useful, followed by 46.7% who thought they were of little use, while few of them said they were extremely useful (4%), and the smallest number that they were not at all useful (1.3%). Slightly more than one-fifth of surveyed teachers (27%) believe that the programs influence change in their work such as: a new way of documentation (creation of individual educational plan and pedagogical background of a child), the application of new methods, more cooperative work within the institution, or better cooperation with parents and the local community. As for the difference in preschool teachers' opinions on the use of knowledge and skills developed by participating in accredited programs for working with children who need additional support, using the χ^2 test showed no statistically significant differences in relation to their years of experience and formal education.

As recommendations for improving the accredited programs of professional training, slightly more than half of the teachers surveyed (52%) suggest including ones related to the content of professional training programs: the concretization of the content; more presentations of examples of best practice; specific instructions and guidelines for working with children from sensitive groups; implementation and presentation of videos of observation activities held by program facilitators and preschool teachers

themselves; providing more opportunities during the seminar to exchange experiences with colleagues within the institution and to share experiences with preschools where inclusive practice is more developed; and more study visits. In addition, 45% of teachers make recommendations concerning the organization of professional training programs: it is necessary to provide a larger number of professional training programs in this area, with greater availability and the possibility for all employees to attend training (not just team members); to involve parents in the training because this would be an opportunity to hear their experiences and expectations from preschool teachers; to organize shorter but more frequent training by modules; to better organize training in terms of time, frequency, and duration; to organize training for preschool teachers from different institutions; and to have smaller groups of attendees. Other relevant findings (Garrett et al., 2001, by: Pavlović & Vujačić, 2012) indicate that the organization of time of professional training programs represents an important factor in their effectiveness. Namely, greater effects are achieved by those programs that last longer, whose duration is sequenced in longer intervals. In the recommendations concerning the organization of training, 35% of surveyed preschool teachers say that they often submitted to institutions a list of training programs they would like to attend based on the self-assessment of personal competences. However, the institution selects the programs with minimum cost or those that are free of charge. Similar findings were obtained in the study which involved schoolteachers (Korać, 2015). As a solution for the above-mentioned problem, teachers suggested that the Ministry should fund and provide more free-of-charge programs from its budget. A number of responses (7%) relate to the evaluation of training and the application of knowledge and skills: monitoring the application of knowledge acquired at seminars through practical tasks; implementation that would be binding for all in practice but under the supervision of training facilitators; ensuring the implementation through supervisory seminars, consultation with facilitators after training. Furthermore, a number of recommendations relate to additional support in preschool teachers' work (7%); additional support by the facilitators after training (conversations on obstacles, challenges, help in their work); the help of a personal assistant; help from professional services within institutions; publication of examples of best practices in inclusion; publication of a handbook with examples of written individual educational plans; useful websites, literature; greater availability of professional literature. Preschool teachers (4%) believe that training facilitators need to be more competent and have more experience in working directly with children.

It is interesting that on one hand, the surveyed preschool teachers recognize the need for all employees within preschools to participate in an inclusive process through professional training, but on the other hand, the results show that 74% of the teachers have never conducted an observation activity or activity with a discussion and analysis, or presented a talk at meetings of professional bodies and organs on a topic that relates to the attended training. Thus, despite the recognized need of preschool teachers, and the

fact that the said Rulebook on continuous professional training defines that professional training can also be achieved through activities undertaken by the preschool institution within its diverse activities (conducting research and project within the institution, experiment programs, performing observation classes, presenting talks at the meetings of professional bodies on topics related to the attended professional training programs, presenting didactic materials and professional papers, through study visits, etc.), research findings show that horizontal learning within educational institutions is barely present.

Since participation of preschools in projects entails participation of all employees, and thus opens the possibility of horizontal learning, we were interested to learn how the preschool teachers who participated in projects relating to inclusive education assess the importance of their participation in the work with children who need additional support. Out of 46.7% of surveyed teachers who said they had participated, as many as 62.9% recognize that the participation significantly helped them in the work, followed by 32.9% who answered that it was helpful in the work, and only 2.9% think that the participation is of little help. Findings of other relevant research projects indicate that preschool and school teachers who have been involved in projects of inclusive education are more willing to accept students from sensitive groups. As the most acceptable form of professional training, participants recognize horizontal learning, i.e. learning from colleagues who have experience in working with students with disabilities (Djević, 2009). Similar results were obtained in the research of the Institute for Quality Education and Evaluation and the Teachers' Association of Serbia (Assessment of teachers' capacity and development needs for inclusive education, 2010). Participation in projects of inclusive education has largely contributed to positive change in the attitudes of teachers towards the implementation of inclusive education, more intense personal contact with students who have developmental difficulties, being better informed about them and more willing to accept these students. It gave them an opportunity for diverse training in working with students who have developmental difficulties, as well as cooperation with experts of various profiles, and continuous professional training in this field.

In order to gain a better insight into the needs of teachers for further professional training in the field of inclusive education, respondents were asked to assess their own needs for further development in this field. The most important areas for which the surveyed preschool teachers expressed the need for additional professional training are: areas related to work with gifted children (57%), adjusting the organization of work in preschool institution in accordance with the needs of children from sensitive groups, children with developmental difficulties and disabilities, and children from socially non-stimulating environment (44.9%), use of different work methods, forms and techniques (38.3%), evaluation and revision of the individual education plan (37.9%), and teamwork and cooperation in preschool institution (36.5%).

CONCLUSIONS

The research results show that more than half of the respondents recognize that their professional training helped them in working with children who need additional support. A number of preschool teachers even point out that the professional training programs in the field of inclusive education are the only source of acquiring their professional competences. At the same time, the survey results show that preschool teachers do not recognize professional training programs as the dominant source of acquiring knowledge to act. The above findings lead to the conclusion that the current concept of professional training focuses on how to compensate for the shortcomings of certain competences of teachers in the field of inclusive education emphasizing the adoption of ready knowledge, which are in turn decontextualized. Therefore, if we want the system of professional training to contribute to the preschool teachers' acquisition of professional competences for the implementation of the current model of inclusive education, it is necessary to enable their greater participation and reflective practice through professional training programs. This means that the program facilitators need to be open to participants' personal meaning in activities of professional learning in professional training programs (Korać, 2015). Through professional training programs, teachers should have the opportunity to awaken and question the individual significance of certain problems of inclusive educational practices. In addition, there is a need for greater participation of teachers in defining the needs and trends of personal professional development.

Furthermore, the findings show that at meetings of professional bodies, teachers rarely open the topics relating to professional training programs, that horizontal learning within the institution is quite poor in range, although it is recognized by preschool teachers as an important form of training. The focus of professional training is competence development of preschool teachers as individuals, without connecting individual and organizational change. It neglects the idea of pre-school as a community of learning, learning as social interaction, and a collaborative process that takes place in a network of relationships (Stoll at al., 2006). It should not be forgotten that inclusion is a change and challenge for the organization, which requires the involvement of different participants who need to network from different positions, roles, and responsibilities. The essence of the change lies in the transformation, structuring, acculturation, and improvement of the preschool institution as a system (Pavlović Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2012). Therefore, teachers professional training should be achieved not only through activities carried out in accredited professional training programs, but also through the implementation of various projects of the institution, action research, the application of observation activities, focus groups, supervision, coaching and other models that involve partnership, exchange of

information, joint activities, a long-term, continuous process of learning, and improving teachers competencies.

Future programs of professional training in the area of inclusive education need to focus on the following areas in which we can recognize a lack of competence for: (a) working with gifted children, (b) adjusting the organization of work in preschool institution in accordance with the needs of children who need additional support, (c) evaluation and review of individual education plans, and (d) teamwork and cooperation in preschools.

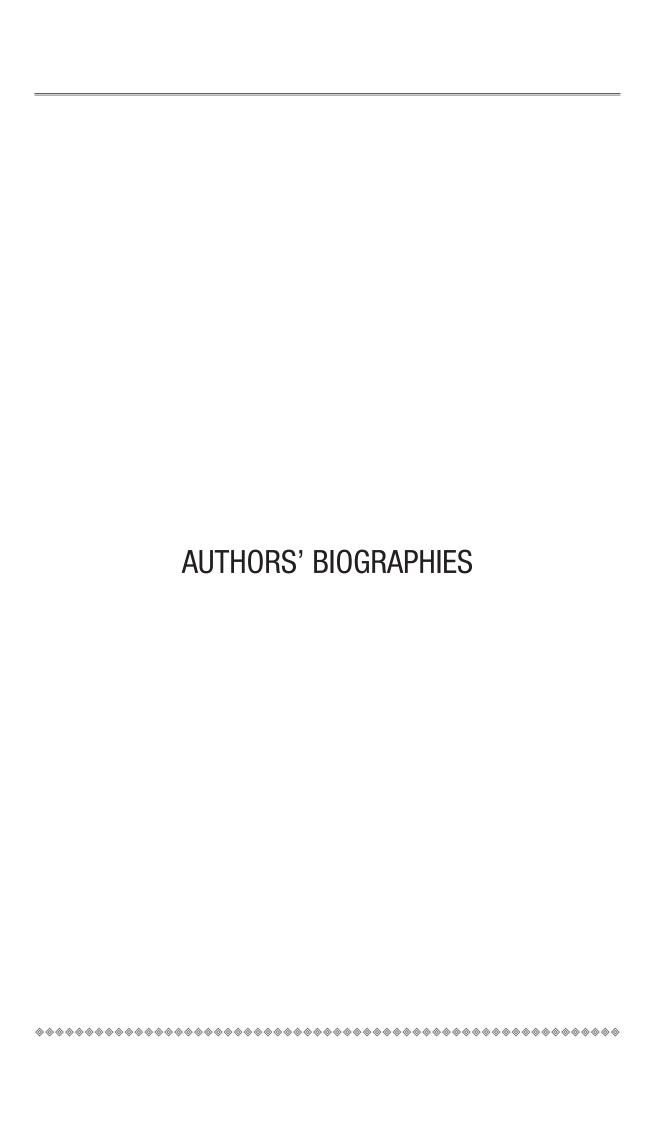
Finally, it should be noted that there is a need for a strategy for long-term monitoring of the effects of professional training in education, for more comprehensive and systematic research on the effects of professional training. The methodology of monitoring and evaluation should include self-evaluation by teachers, self-evaluation at the level of institutions, external evaluation of the quality of institutions, but also a special analysis of the effects of professional training programs. The evaluation of effects should be organized at different stages: before and after the completion of certain segments of the program, upon completion of the entire program, but also as delayed evaluation (through discussion groups, analysis of products, by organizing supervisory training programs, through discussions with program facilitators etc.). The above involves the use of various methods (Banjac & Baucal, 2015) that would enable the tracking of individual and group changes which provide fuller, more valid and reliable information about the effects of professional training programs.

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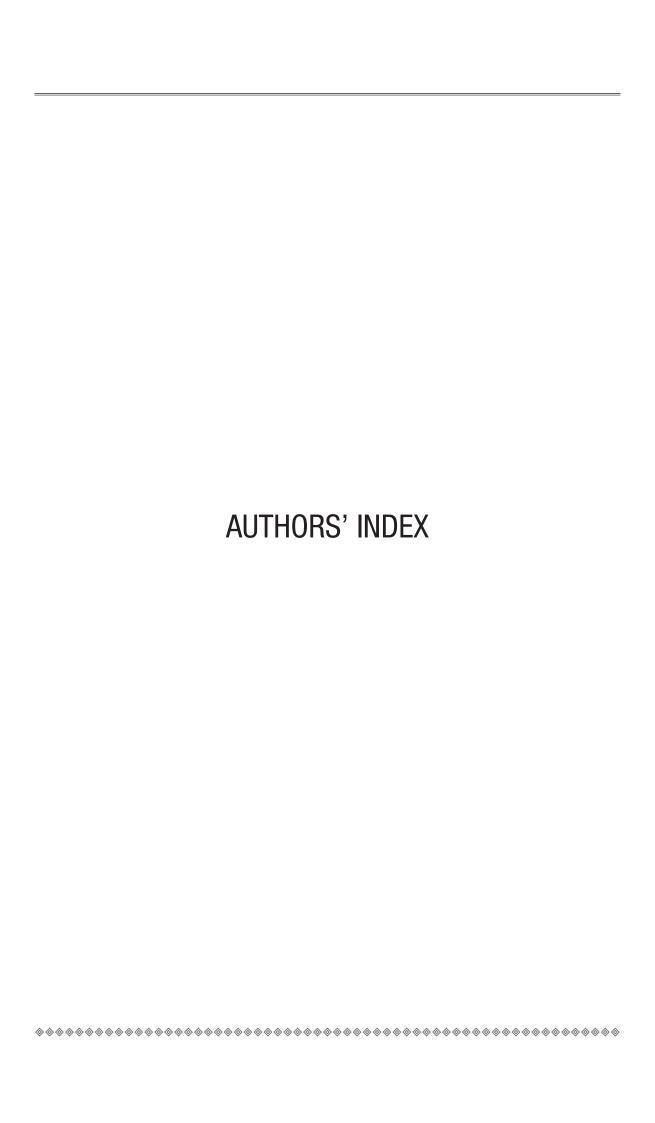
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Milja Vujačić

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)

