Editors Nikoleta Gutvajn Milja Vujačić

**CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES** 

# OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



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### CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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FACULTY OF TEACHER EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE • SERBIA

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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

### THE SYMPTOMS OF EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IN OLDER PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Students with disabilities in their emotional and social development constitute one of the categories of children to whom, in the context of an inclusive education system, it is necessary to provide additional support. Although prevalence rates of individual emotional and behavioral problems of school children varies across different countries, the range is on average from 10 to 20 percent in developed Western countries (eg. Abu-Rayya & Yang, 2012; Kieling et al., 2011; Ravens Sieberer et al., 2008) to 50 percent in countries in development (eg. Hussein, 2010; Muzammil et al., 2009; Reddy et al., 2011; Thabet et al., 2000). It is undisputed that early identification of students with disabilities in emotional and behavioral functioning has significance for further assessment and treatment of specific problems, and taking measures of additional educational, health or social support, especially because there is strong scientific evidence that school achievement and commitment to schoolwork are associated with emotional and behavioral difficulties (Hossain, 2013).

In addition to the multitude of instruments covering specific domains of emotional and behavioral problems (eg, ADHD, anxiety, behavioral disorders) two instruments that provide the possibility of valid and reliable assessment of a large number of problems of children and adolescents are well known and widely used in science: Achenbach system of Empiricaly based assessment - ASEBA (Achenbach, 1991) and Goodman's Strengths and difficulties questionnaire (The Strengths and difficulties questionnaire - SDQ; Goodman, 1997). The advantages of these instruments are reflected in the fact that they cover a wide range of emotional and behavioral problems, they are directed not only at weaknesses but also at positive behavioral characteristics, and there are versions available for different informants (teachers, parents and adolescent self-assessment) (Rothenberger & Woerner, 2004).

Achenbach's system of Empirically based assessment is primarily focused on the clinical evaluation of emotional and behavioral problems of children and adolescents. Because of test procedures, which are time-consuming, and the fact that they contain a

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number of items that are not relevant for the majority of children, this system is not often used for research purposes and for assessment needs in non-clinical terms (Koskelainen, 2008). Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is used much more frequently to assess emotional and behavioral problems in the general population, especially in terms of the school environment, because the implementation is not time-consuming, it is short in form, and it provides the possibility of a preliminary insight into the nature of the problem (Goodman & Scott, 1999; Goodman et al., 2000; Klasen et al., 2000; Stone et al., 2010; Woerner et al., 2004).

This questionnaire, translated into more than 60 languages, contains the basic version of 25 items covering five domains of emotional and social functioning: emotional problems, behavioral problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, and prosocial behavior. The first four domains are related to difficulties in the functioning of the child, while the fifth domain describes the strengths and potentials of the child. Symptoms of emotional problems, which are internalized by their nature, are reflected in somatic complaints (often complaints about headaches and stomach pains) and a series of emotional states that a child exhibits (when a child has a lot of concerns, is often unhappy, depressed or tearful, nervous or dependent in new situations, often fearful and easy to scare). Behavioral problems, as the next difficulty in emotional and behavioral functioning, primarily includes symptoms of externalized problems, such as anger tantrums and irritability, disobedience and refusal to oblige with the requests of adults, frequent fights and bullying other children, lying, and stealing at home, at school and elsewhere. Excessive activity and restlessness of the child, easily losing concentration, incompletion of tasks and rashness (when the child does not think before they do something) are symptoms of hyperactivity, while the indicators for problematic relationships with peers, as a fourth difficulty in emotional and social development, is linked with with the prevailing loneliness of a child, rejection, teasing and bullying by other children, as well as the absence of good friends. The last domain, referring to pro-social behavior as a kind of strength of a child, includes interpersonal interaction in terms of expressing interest for the feelings of others, willingness to share with other children, the desire to help anyone who was hurt or upset, voluntarily helping others, and dedicating attention to younger ones.

In addition to the basic version of the questionnaire which evaluates symptoms of emotional and behavioral problems, there is also a version with the addition of the impact of difficulties, which provides an indication of the degree of deterioration in overall social functioning. This version contains a scale of five items that describe personal concern for the child's present difficulties, as well as the impact of symptoms on a sphere of life at home, the area of socializing, studying, and leisure activities.

The average duration of assessment by completing the questionnaire takes no more than 15 minutes, which greatly facilitates its use in the school setting. Moreover,

an additional advantage is reflected in the fact that on the basis of the manifestation of symptoms one can assess the degree of need for intervention. In fact, for all the individual scales of emotional and social functioning, including the scale of impact, as well as the integrated scale of difficulties, approximate norms or critical scores indicating a moderate to high need for intervention are proposed. Finally, the instrument is characterized by very good metric characteristics that have been evaluated in a number of international studies (eg. Bourdon et al., 2005; De Giacomo et al., 2012; Goodman, 2001; Goodman et al., 2003; Muris et al., 2003; Svedin & Priebe, 2008; Woerner et al., 2004).

Given the importance of early detection of children with difficulties in behavioralemotional functioning in order to facilitate adequate timely interventions, and taking into account the opportunities that are provided by use of Gudman's questionnaire, a survey was conducted to examine the frequency of symptoms of emotional and behavioral problems in students in higher grades of elementary school, and thus the possible need for providing additional support. In addition, for the sake of obtaining a more complete picture of the distibution of these difficulties, gender differences in the presence of symptoms were examined, as well as respondents' perceptions of the impact of difficulties on their own functioning.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Sample. The survey was conducted on a sample of 630 senior class students from five elementary schools in Belgrade. The average age of students was 13.4 years (SD=1.09), ranged from 11 to 15 years. The sample consisted of 22.1% fifth grade students (N=139), 29.5% sixth grade students (N=186), 27.1% of seventh grade students (N=171) and 21.3% of eighth graders (N=134). The sample consisted of 47.6% boys (N=280) and 52.4% girls (N=308).

Instrument. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ-Srp) (Goodman, 1997) version for the self-assessment of adolescents aged 11 to 16 years (S 11-16) was applied, with the addition of the impact of symptoms translated into Serbian language (Žegarac & Džamonja-Ignjatović, 2010). The basic version of the questionnaire consists of 25 items, grouped into 5 scales with 5 items, four of which assess problems (emotional problems, behavioral problems, hyperactivity, problems with peers), and one assess strengths (prosocial behavior). Answer items are presented on a three-point Likert scale (0 = false, 1 = somewhat true, 2 = completely true). Each scale can have a maximum of 10 points. A total score is obtained by adding the scores on scales of difficulties, not counting the scale of prosocial behavior, and can vary from 0 to 40 points. Orientation norms for the version of the questionnaire for self-assessment of adolescents shown in Table 1, are grouped into three categories according to the degree of need for intervention.

An average score on the scale indicates a low clinical significance of symptoms, which implies the absence of need for intervention. A "marginal" score, in terms of high scores on the scale of difficulties and lower scores on the prosocial scale, may indicate the presence of problems that are clinically significant, and the need for intervention is estimated moderate. A high score on the scales of difficulties, or low score on a scale of prosocial behavior is an "abnormal" score, indicating a significant risk of clinically significant problems, thus the need for professional help is considered high.

The appendix with the impact of symptoms consists of a scale of 5 items that are scored from 0 to 2, depending on the answer to a four-point Likert scale (0 = not at all or very little, 1 and 2 = quite = very much). A total score of influence can be from 0 to 10. A score of 2 or more indicates a high need to intervee, a score of 1 is moderate, while a score of 0 indicates a low need. A test question of the existence of difficulties relating to emotions, behavior, peers, or concentration precedes this part of the questionnaire and if the answer is negative, students do not continue to fill in the questionnaire and a recorded impact of 0 is automatically entered.

Table 1. Approximate standard for S 11-16

|                           | The need for intervention |                |            |  |  |  |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|------------|--|--|--|
|                           | No needs                  | Moderate needs | High needs |  |  |  |
| Total difficulties score  | 0 - 15                    | 16 - 19        | 20 - 40    |  |  |  |
| Emotional symptoms score  | 0 - 5                     | 6              | 7 - 10     |  |  |  |
| Behavioral problems score | 0 - 3                     | 4              | 5 - 10     |  |  |  |
| Hyperactivity score       | 0 - 5                     | 6              | 7 - 10     |  |  |  |
| Problems with peers score | 0 - 3                     | 4 - 5          | 6 - 10     |  |  |  |
| Prosocial behavior score  | 6 - 10                    | 5              | 0 - 4      |  |  |  |
| Impact score              | 0                         | 1              | 2          |  |  |  |

Note: Approximate standards are set according to criteria based on information that 80% of children do not have problems in a particular area, 10% have some needs, while 10% have a high level of need.

Procedure. The research was conducted during regular classes in the period of the first week of April 2013. Testing was observed by the teacher and examiner, who, after general notes for the purpose and method of completing the questionnaire, was available to students to provide additional clarifications and eliminate any ambiguities in the formulation of items, although there was no such requirement. All students in a class were tested at the same time, and filling in the questionnaire took up to 15 minutes on average.

Data processing. Information relating to the total scores on the scales and the degree of need for additional intervention were analyzed by descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation). To check the statistical significance of gender differences among respondents the t-test for independent samples and chi-square test of independence were used. Correlations between scales were studied using Pearson coefficient of linear correlation. The internal consistency of the scale was checked with Cronbach reliability coefficient values and inter-item correlation. The data was analyzed by SPSS, version 19.

### RESULTS

The research results show that the reliability of the questionnaire as a whole, expressed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency, is relatively satisfactory with the value of .78, which is in line with the results of other studies (Giannakopoulos et al., 2009; Goodman, 2001, Hawes & Dadds, 2004; Koskelainen, 2008; Van Widenfelt et al., 2003). A slightly lower level of reliability, but acceptable given the number of items, was recorded on the individual scales, in which the values range from .57 (for behavioral problems) to .73 (for prosocial behavior). However, the value of the average inter-item correlations, which range from .31 to .43, indicate a satisfactory level of confidence for isolated scales.

Descriptive indicators for individual scales shown in Table 2 indicate that in the student sample, emotional and behavioral problems that require additional intervention were present. On average, about 6% of the students expressed symptoms assessed as clinically significant and requiring some intervensive treatment, while 9% of the students presented symptoms to the extent that pointed to a risk of further development of the problem, and the need for intervention was moderate. Exceptions are behavioral problems where a high score which indicates the existence of serious problems was noted in 11% of all cases. In addition, if the combined percentages of students who have above-average scores on scales of difficulties are observed as the most common problems problems with peers also stand out (20.3%) in addition to behavioral problems (21.7%). Emotional problems, viewed in this way, are present in 12.5% of cases, and hyperactivity, as the least frequent problem, in 8.4%. When it comes to pro-social behavior, the findings suggest that additional support should be provided in 10.3% of cases. From the aspect of the impact that the students attach to their own difficulties, the need for intervention was present in 23.9% of the students, of which at 15.3% a high level of need was estimated.

Table 2. Descriptive indicators of the scales scores and the degree of need for intervention

| Scale                          | N   | Min-Max | М     | SD   | The level of need for intervention $N$ (%) |           |
|--------------------------------|-----|---------|-------|------|--|-----------|
|                                |     |         |       |      | Moderate                                   | High      |
| Total difficulties             | 604 | 0-35    | 10.04 | 5.41 | 55 (9.1)                                   | 36 (6.0)  |
| Emotional difficulties         | 626 | 0-9     | 2.68  | 2.20 | 37 (5.9)                                   | 43 (6.9)  |
| Behavior problems              | 620 | 0-10    | 2.50  | 1.67 | 66 (10.6)                                  | 69 (11.1) |
| Hyperactivity                  | 621 | 0-9     | 2.75  | 1.99 | 25 (4.0)                                   | 27 (4.4)  |
| Peer problems                  | 619 | 0-10    | 2.05  | 1.89 | 90 (14.5)                                  | 36 (5.8)  |
| Prosocial behavior             | 625 | 0-10    | 8.03  | 1.90 | 33 (5.3)                                   | 31 (5.0)  |
| The impact of the difficulties | 626 | 0-10    | .62   | 1.43 | 54 (8.6)                                   | 96 (15.3) |

The results shown in Table 3 were obtained by crossing the established degree of need for intervention to be carried out on the basis of the total difficulties score, on one hand, and the score of the impact of difficulties, on the other hand. In these terms, 2.8% of students are in a state of high need for intervention, both from the standpoint of the estimated total difficulties and in terms of their personal perception of the impact of difficulties. The percentage of students for whom it can be said that they have a moderate need for intervention (high scores on one scale and a moderate score on the other scale) is 5.6%, while 11.5% of students presented a low need for intervention (moderate scores on both scales, as well as a high score on the one scale, and a low score on the other scale).

Table 3. Descriptive indicators of the need for intervention based on crossing the total score of difficulties and the impact score

| The need for intervention |          | Total difficulties score |            |             |  |
|---------------------------|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------------|--|
|                           |          | None                     | Moderate   | High        |  |
|                           | None     | 417 (69.4)               | 23 (3.8)   | 15 (2.5)*   |  |
| Impact score              | Moderate | 41 (6.8)                 | 9 (1.5)*   | 2 (0.3)**   |  |
|                           | High     | 54 (9.0)*                | 23 (3.8)** | 17 (2.8)*** |  |

Note: Students who have no perceived difficulties are also included, and they automatically have a score 0 on the scale;\*\*\* Students who have a high level of need for interventions; \*\* Students who have a moderate level of need for interventions; \* Students who have a low level of need for intervention.

Descriptive indicators of achieved scores on scales within the categories of boys and girls are shown in Table 4. Testing the statistical significance of differences, significant gender differences were found in the direction of higher frequency of behavioral problems, problems with peers, and hyperactivity in boys rather than in girls. On the other hand, girls recorded higher scores on the scale of emotional problems and prosocial behavior

**\*\*\*** 

scale. There were no significant differences obtained between boys and girls in terms of overall difficulty scores and the impact of difficulties.

Table 4. Descriptive indicators score on the scales by gender and results of the t-test

| Scale               | Gender       | M (SD)      | DF  | t         |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|-----|-----------|
|                     | Boys         | Girls       |     |           |
| Total Difficulties  | 10.20 (5.44) | 9.73 (5.15) | 564 | 1.063     |
| Emotional problems  | 2.28 (2.10)  | 3.06 (2.20) | 583 | -4.419*** |
| Behavioral problems | 2.66 (1.72)  | 2.28 (1.50) | 578 | 2.888**   |
| Hyperactivity       | 2.93 (2.04)  | 2.58 (2.04) | 578 | 2.068*    |
| Peer problems       | 2.29 (1.94)  | 1.76 (1.71) | 575 | 3.505***  |
| Prosocial behavior  | 7.71 (1.96)  | 8.35 (1.73) | 581 | -4.201*** |

Note: Maximum total on the total difficulties scale is 33 for boys and 28 in girls. On other scales range of scores is ranging from 0 to 9, except for prosocial behavior scale, where the maximum score in both gender groups is 10.

Differences between boys and girls in terms of the percentage of the difficulties in emotional and social functioning, and the degree of the need for interventions are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive indicators of the need for intervention by gender

| Scale                  | The need for intervention N(%) |           |           |           |  |  |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--|--|
|                        | Moderate                       |           | High      |           |  |  |
|                        | Boys                           | Girls     | Boys      | Girls     |  |  |
| Total difficulties     | 26 (9.6)                       | 25 (8.4)  | 15 (5.6)  | 16 (5.4)  |  |  |
| Emotional problems     | 12 (4.3)                       | 22 (7.2)  | 15 (5.4)  | 25 (8.2)  |  |  |
| Behavioral problems    | 41 (14.8)                      | 22 (7.3)  | 37 (13.4) | 24 (7.9)  |  |  |
| Hyperactivity          | 5 (1.8)                        | 17 (5.6)  | 14 (5.1)  | 12 (3.9)  |  |  |
| Peer problems          | 46 (16.7)                      | 35 (11.6) | 18 (6.5)  | 13 (4.3)  |  |  |
| Prosocial behavior     | 16 (5.8)                       | 16 (5.2)  | 21 (7.6)  | 6 (2.0)   |  |  |
| Impact of difficulties | 24 (8.7)                       | 26 (8.5)  | 39 (14.1) | 52 (16.9) |  |  |

When it comes to relations between the scales, the results of the Pearson correlation test, shown in Table 6, confirm the existence of a statistically significant positive correlation between the various difficulties in emotional and social functioning. The strongest relationship was observed between hyperactivity and behavioral problems, a relatively strong correlation was recorded between problems with peers and behavioral problems, as well as emotional problems. When it comes to the connection between

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> p<.001; \*\* p<.01; \* p<.05

the prosocial behavior scale and individual scales of difficulties, the results indicate a statistically significant negative correlations with all scales except the emotional problems scale, where the connection with behavioral problems and hyperactivity is stronger than the connection with problems with peers. Relationship difficulties of individual scales with the impacts scale are statistically significant and positive, with the strongest relationship observed with emotional problems and the weakest with behavioral problems. The connection between prosocial behavior and the impact of difficulties has a negative sign, but this is not statistically significant.

Table 6. Correlations between the scales

| Skale                    | 1       | 2       | 3       | 4      | 5   |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------|-----|
| 1 Emotional problems     | -       |         |         |        |     |
| 2 Behavioural problems   | .230*** | -       |         |        |     |
| 3 Hyperactivity          | .266*** | .475*** | -       |        |     |
| 4 Peer problems          | .372*** | .369*** | .186*** | -      |     |
| 5 Prosocial behavior     | .007    | 412***  | 382***  | 244*** | -   |
| 6 Impact of difficulties | .404**  | .191**  | .286**  | .299** | 038 |

Note: N=626 \*\*\* p<.001, \*\* p<.01

Results of the perceived impact of difficulties show that 46.7% of students (N=294) believe that they have difficulties in emotions, concentration, behavior or the ability to get along with other people (41.7% minor difficulties, 4% greater difficulties, serious difficulties 1%). These are the students who responded positively to the question in the annex concerning the impact of symptoms. Data on the impact of the perceived difficulties in different life domains is given in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive indicators of the impact of difficulties in different life domains by gender and results of the chi-square test

| Life domains      | Impact of difficulties N (%) |           |           |       |  |  |  |
|-------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------|--|--|--|
|                   | Gender                       |           | Total     | χ2    |  |  |  |
|                   | Boys                         | Girls     |           |       |  |  |  |
| Personal concerns | 30 (23.8)                    | 37 (24.2) | 67 (24.0) | .731  |  |  |  |
| Life at home      | 20 (15.9)                    | 25 (16.3) | 45 (16.1) | .556  |  |  |  |
| Friendships       | 25 (19.8)                    | 31 (20.3) | 56 (20.1) | .643  |  |  |  |
| Studying          | 38 (30.2)                    | 53 (34.6) | 91 (32.6) | 2.473 |  |  |  |
| Leisure           | 16 (12.7)                    | 15 (9.8)  | 31 (11.1) | .032  |  |  |  |

Note: N = 279. Exclusively students who perceived significant difficulties ("quite" or "very") are included.

**\*\*\*** 

### DISCUSSION

The key research results show that 15% of surveyed students have difficulties present in emotional and social functioning, of which 6% of the students present symptoms to an extent that points to clinical significance of the problem and a need to undertake appropriate treatment interventions. Observed by specific difficulties, behavior problems (22%) and problems with peers (20%) stand out as the most common problems, present in one fifth of the students,. The third most frequent symptoms, but almost twice-lower in prevalence, are emotional problems (13%), followed by problems in the domain of prosocial behavior (10%) and hyperactivity (8%). However, when considering only students whose symptoms indicate a high level of need for intervention, the order and differences in the frequency of difficulties are somewhat different. Behavioral problems, viewed in this way, retain first place (11%), but emotional problems (7%) are behind them, while problems with peers occupy third place (6%), followed by problems in prosocial behavior (5%) and hyperactivity (4%). Comparing the percentage ratio between students with established moderate levels of need for intervention and those whose level of need is high, a ratio of 2:1 is notable, meaning that the percentage of students with moderate levels of need is twice higher than those with high needs. Exceptions are problems with peers in which this ratio is 3:1, which can indicate the existence of a somewhat less favorable peer climate among students, causing an increased risk of developing problems. However, we should bear in mind the developmental phase in which students are tested, usually characterized by increased feelings of loneliness and rejection by peers, as well as more frequent mutual teasing, which can have an impact on the results.

Compared with the data on the prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems in adolescents from other European countries, the results obtained in our sample do not differ significantly in terms of the frequency of total dificulties, but there are differences in terms of individual problems. For example, the mean value of scores obtained by self-reporting of adolescents in Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) (Koskelainen et al., 2001; Obel et al., 2004) show that problems with peers, problems in prosocial behavior, emotional problems, and especially hyperactivity are less frequent among adolescents in our sample, but, on the other hand, behavior problems are more prevalent. Compared with adolescents from different countries of southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal) (Marzocchi et al., 2004; Ortuño-Sierra et al., 2014), as well as Great Britain (Van Widenfelt et al., 2003) respondents in our sample have higher scores on the behavior problem scale and on the scale of emotional problems, while more favorable scores are recorded on the scale of prosocial behavior and hyperactivity. In terms of problems with peers, scores are not significantly different. On the other hand, in comparison with countries of South Asia, for example Pakistan or India, adolescents in our sample have

a significantly favorable scores on all scales of difficulties. In these countries, more than 35% of adolescents have difficulties present in their emotional and social functioning, with almost 40% in behavioral problems or problems with peers (Seenivasan & Kumar, 2014).

The results of analysis of emotional and behavioral problems in terms of their impact on different life domains of adolescents indicate that the need for intervention, estimated by the score on the scale of impact of difficulties, is present in nearly one-quarter of the students (24%), with 15% of students having a high level of needs estimated, which is twice higher than when the need for intervention is assessed on the basis of the score on the scale of total difficulties (6%). However, crossing the level of need for intervention carried out on the basis of the total difficulties score and the impact score, we get data that shows that a very high level of need, taking into account both aspects, is present in only 2.8% of students. This percentage is lower than that which was found in other studies where this type of analysis was conducted, for example in Norway, where this percentage is 3.7% (Van Roy et al., 2006) or Germany where it reaches 4.9% (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2008), but slightly higher than the average established in adolescents from American countries, in which the level of need is 2.1% (Pastor et al., 2012). It is interesting that 9% of pupils perceived their difficulties as requiring a high need for intervention, butfrom the standpoint of the overall presence of difficulties it is estimated that they do not have a need for additional support. This finding suggests that it is possible that this is a case of symptoms that were not included in the screening, but which students believe have a strong impact on their functioning, so further investigation in this direction would be desirable. On the other hand, 2.5% of students indicated the presence of clinically significant symptoms in their total difficulties score, but they themselves did not perceive their negative impact.

When it comes to gender differences in the prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems, this study confirmed the findings consistent with all previous studies (Giannakopoulos et al., 2009; Koskelainen et al., 2001; Marzocchi et al., 2004; Ortuño-Sierra et al., 2014; Saur & Loureiro, 2014; Van Roy et al., 2006; Van Widenfelt et al., 2003), according to which emotional problems are more common in girls, and all other problems, especially behavioral ones are more common in boys. In this study it was also determined that the only scale on which girls achieved higher scores than boys is the emotional problem scale. These problems are present in 15% of girls and 10% boys. On the other hand, behavioral problems, problems with peers, problems in the domain of prosocial behavior, and hyperactivity were more common in boys. The most pronounced difference is in behavioral problems, whose presence is recorded in one third of the boys in the sample (28%) but in less than half as many of the girls (15.2%).

In terms of specific areas in which students perceived the negative impact of their own difficulties, results indicate that 23% of students (of those who said they experienced some difficulties in emotions, concentration, behaviour, or the ability to get along with other people) are quite or very worried and upset because of the difficulties they have. In fact, 33% of students believe that the present difficulties adversely reflect on the quality of their studies, 20% of students perceived negative impacts in the area of friendships, 16% in the field of life at home, while the lowest percentage (11%) linked the impact of their difficulties to leisure. Although differences between boys and girls are not statistically significant, the results indicate an increasing perception of the impact of difficulties on the area of studying when it comes to girls, and greater influence on leisure-time activities when it comes to boys, which has been confirmed in other studies (eg. Van Roy et al., 2006). Taking into account differences in the prevalence of specific problems among students of different sexes, the findings can be interpreted in the context of the fact that emotional problems, which are over-represented among the girls, to a greater extent affect the quality of their studying, while behavioral problems, more prevalent in boys, have a greater impact on their free time.

Finally, when analyzing the correlations between scales, these findings suggest that there are joint behavioral problems and hyperactivity symptoms in a number of students, which, given the nature of the symptoms that were evaluated, can be regarded as expected since both are related to externalized problems. This is in line with the suggestions of the author regarding the instrument that in smaller samples and in nonclinical terms these two scales can be treated as one (Goodman et al., 2010). The situation is similar to the relationship between emotional problems and problems with peers, since both scales are basically assessing internalized problems, and in accordance with the previously mentioned suggestions of the author these two scales can also be viewed jointly. However, although the nature of these correlations should be examined further, it is significant that a number of students who have emotional problems are at the same time largely isolated and rejected by their peers, or a subject of their ridicule and teasing. On the other hand, one should mention that a positive correlation between behavioral problems and problems with peers was also established, which supports the view that pupils with behavioral problems are often unpopular in their peer group, and that rejected students can manifest their dissatisfaction with peer relationships through various forms of problematic behavior. The finding of the interconnectedness of the difficulties and strengths is also significant, which suggests that pupils with behavioral problems and those with symptoms of hyperactivity are prosocially oriented to a lesser extent and less willing to express sympathy when interacting with their peers, and unwilling to provide voluntary help or support. In addition, if we take into account the negative impact of difficulties in emotional and social functioning on their daily live,, according to the perceptions of students it is possible to assume that pupils with behavioral problems are

those who minimally feel the consequences of their own difficulties, while, on the other hand, the adverse impact of difficulties is largely perceived by students with emotional problems.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Despite the limitations of this research, which are primarily related to the relatively small sample (not large enough to retrieve reliable data on the prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems), as well as the non-use of comparative assessment measures from other informants, the results can still be a significant starting point for planning additional measures of educational, social and health support for pupils with difficulties in emotional and social development. The research data supports the initial assumption that in the context of an inclusive education system, students with symptoms of emotional and behavioral problems require special attention. The finding that 15% of surveyed students have difficulties in emotional and social functioning, where 6% of the students present problems of clinical significance, indicates the necessity of planning and implementing early intervention in the school curricula, which would, by engaging parents, teachers and students, not only workin the direction of reducing existing and preventing the possible future development of difficulties, but also be effective in terms of maintaining achieved positive changes. In doing so, the focus of intervention, according to the incidence and gender distribution of individual difficulties, should be directed toward behavioral problems and problems in peer relationships, especially when it comes to boys, (since the presence of these difficulties is observed in one-fifth of the students) while among the girls the focus should follow the symptoms of emotional problems. In addition, it should be noted that a significant percentage of pupils (24%) self-perceived the negative impact of perceived difficulties, primarily on the quality of their own studying and establishing positive peer relations, which can be a good motivational basis for their active participation in programs of early intervention. In addition, taking into account the advantages of using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire in the school environment, and especially the simplicity of its application and the fact that it provides a solid insight into the presence of symptoms of emotional and behavioral problems, one should consider its wider use by teachers, for the purposes of early identification of students with difficulties in emotional and social functioning and possible referral for further assessment and treatment of the individual.

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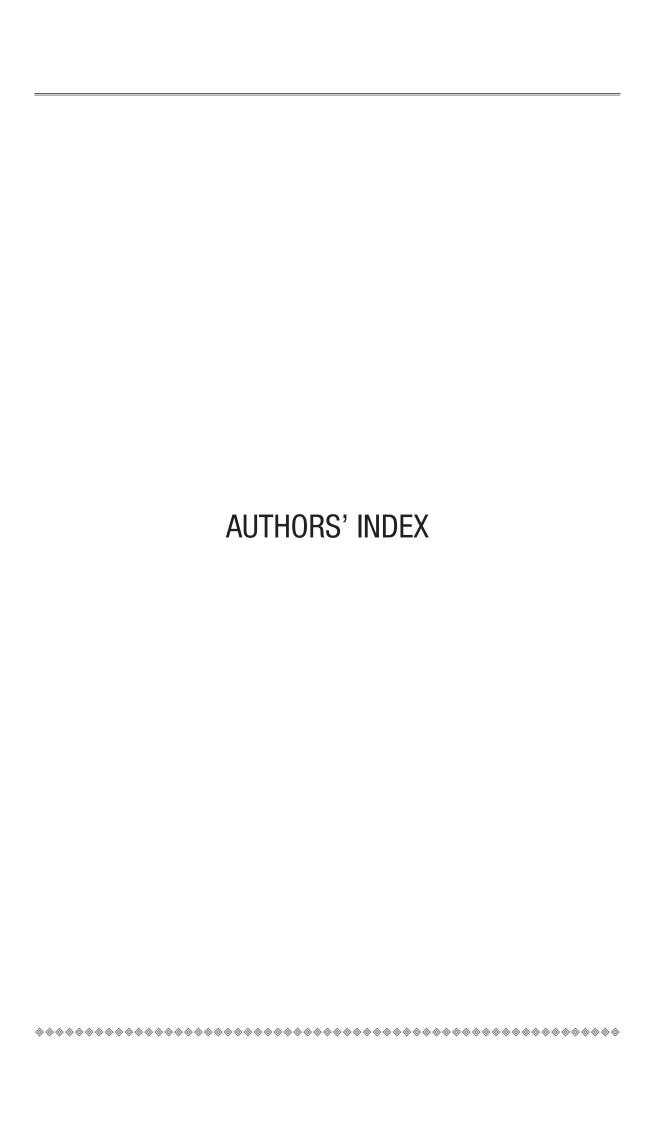
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Milja Vujačić

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)

