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Summary

Competencies of pre-school teachers for inclusive practice

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The purpose of this paper is the analysis of professional competencies of pre-school teachers in terms of the quality of inclusive practice in Croatian pre-school institutions. This work is based on the hypothesis that a stronger manifestation of the teacher's professional inclusive competencies in pre-school education is related to a more successful social functioning of children with special needs. This hypothesis has been verified by a small-scale research based on the assessment of 93 teachers and children with special needs in Croatian nursery schools. By means of factor analyses it has been established that some of the most important pre-school teacher competencies include the cooperation with parents and professionals, coordination of the curriculum and the individual needs of the children, encouragement of inclusive culture in nursery schools and active participation of teachers in assessing the children's special needs. As for the social functioning of children, its basic characteristics have been identified as maladjusted/integrated behaviour and the level of suitability of the child's psycho-social development. Research results have confirmed the proposed hypothesis. Furthermore, it has been established that teachers significantly differ among themselves in terms of the degree of manifesting professional competencies for inclusive practice and that children with special needs may, but do not have to have socialisation difficulties. Thereby the author here offers some guidelines for the improvement of inclusive practice in Croatian pre-school institutions.

Keywords: pre-school teacher competencies, inclusive practice, social functioning of children with special needs.