Croatian Journal of Education
Vol.17; Sp.Ed.No.2/2015, pages: 11-26
Original research paper
Paper submitted: 9th July 2014
Paper accepted: 11th May 2015
doi: 10.15516/cje.v17i0.1472

Students with Disabilities and Challenges in Educational Practice

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Abstract

It is well known that all educational policies promote inclusion as the major idea in a contemporary system of education. Inclusive education allows children with and without disabilities to attend the same age-appropriate classes at their local school, with additional, individually tailored support if needed. However, large equity gaps in education access and outcomes still exist between groups of children, because some marginalized groups of children experience shockingly low rates of access and learning. Children with disabilities are still faced with a lot of challenges in realizing their right to education and they are one of the most marginalized and excluded groups in education.

The Croatian laws clearly indicate that disabled children have the right to an inclusive education and that schools have to provide conditions which lead to successful education of all children. A question arises, however, regarding the level at which the Law is implemented in educational practice, due to the fact that it is unknown whether the conditions for its proper implementation exist in Croatian schools.

Some results of the research which was conducted in the frame of the project "Evidence-based early educational interventions" are presented in this paper. The main goals of the research are (1) to determine areas in which students with disabilities need additional support and (2) to analyse differences in the perceived inclusive dimension of the quality of educational processes, from the perspective of teachers as well as from the perspective of students, in five mainstream Croatian primary schools. The research was conducted on a sample of 97 students with disabilities and 97 of their peers without disabilities. Students and their teachers filled in two Questionnaires about students' behaviours that were developed for the purpose of the Project (the Questionnaire for students and the Questionnaire for teachers). The results

suggested that students with disabilities have a need for additional support in the educational process, as well as support in developing appropriate relationships with peers. However, they do not reach the expected level of socialization and academic success, which indicates that the policy of inclusion is still not well implemented into educational practice. Different reasons for such results and suggestions for overcoming this situation are discussed.

Key words: *inclusive education; inclusive policy and practice; quality of education; socialization; students with disabilities.*

Introduction

As mentioned in the OECD report "Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting disadvantaged students and schools" (OECD, 2012), the highest performing education systems are those that combine equity with quality, which means that these systems give all the children opportunities for a good quality education. This is in line with the main principle of inclusive education, which highlights the need of promoting the right of every child and family to be included, respected, and valued, to participate, to work toward common goals, and to reach their full potential with a special focus on the most vulnerable, as an integral part of quality pedagogy (ISSA, 2010). Inclusive education involves children learning together, in the context where each individual is valued and is actively engaged in what is learnt and what is taught (Spratt & Florian, 2013). As those authors mentioned, inclusion is a dynamic process which involves all children in the life and learning of the school. The central idea of inclusive education is that all students have equal opportunities to develop their abilities and talents individually and in cooperation with others (Bjørnsrud & Nilsen, 2011), which leads to a higher level of all dimensions of educational quality of - effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance and sustainability (Barrett, Chawla-Duggan, Lowe, Nikel, & Ukpo, 2006)

For the implementation of such education, it is crucial that daily educational practice reflects the beliefs embraced in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and national documents. Regarding students with disabilities, it is essential to take into account the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (*United Nations*, 2006) which is directed to the full and effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in society. That goal cannot be achieved without inclusive education which implies that students with disabilities are not excluded from the general educational system on the basis of disability (article 24 of the Convention). The Convention defines inclusive education as a substantial legal and moral human right. The Convention entered into force on 3 May 2008, after being ratified by 20 member states of the UN. Accordingly, each member state that signed and ratified the Convention had the obligation to develop the educational system in which it will be possible to educate students with disabilities in the same school as regularly developed students. Thus, "the right to education has become a right to human rights education. In this respect, the human right to education – seen as an

empowerment right – is not only a particular human right but also a fundamental instrument for the furtherance of other human rights" (Gordon, 2013, p. 758).

However, according to the data obtained by UNICEF (UNICEF, 2013), in the region of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe and Central Asia there are, as estimated, 5.1 million children with disabilities, out of which 3.6 million are estimated to be out of school. As pointed out in the same document, across all levels of education, there are millions more children that are enrolled and physically present in school, but that are silently excluded from learning. So, there is no doubt that a large equity gap still exists in the access to education and outcomes between groups of children, and that some marginalized groups of children experience shockingly low rates of access and learning.

The conflict arises between desires to embrace the difference based on the philosophy of 'equal rights' and prioritising educational performance, structuring it in such a way that it leaves little room for difference and creativity due to the highly structured testing and examination culture. Mărgărițoiu (2010) discusses the direct contrast of the principle of equity and the principle of excellence. If we consider schools as institutions which deliver knowledge, rather than institutions responsible for students' social outcomes, the inclusive dimension of education is lost.

Moreover, recent research indicates that actual 'inclusion' (the child *experiencing* inclusion as well as being *placed* in a mainstream environment) is not necessarily occurring in practice (Flem et al., 2004; Connor et al., 2008; Bouillet, 2013; Sadioğlu, 2013, etc.). The research which was conducted in a primary school in the north of England showed that the key barriers to inclusion are the lack of funding, resources and teachers' training for inclusive practice (Glazzard, 2011). As the most challenging and critical aspects of inclusive education development Chrowdhury (2011) highlights student access, retention and drop-out rates; finding, identifying and encouraging children to go to school; poverty and associated characteristics of the student background; attitudes toward students with disabilities; conditions of teachers' work; flexible, adaptive and functional life-skills curriculum relevant to students' lives; as well as the school climate and other related issues.

Among different obstacles which make that inclusive education is a largely unmet goal, Gordon (2013) particularly mentions expensiveness of inclusive education, due to the need of providing the pre-conditions for joint education, such as proper buildings and well-equipped classrooms, special training for teachers, team teaching, etc. Inclusive education requires a high quality of service, well-trained teachers, support personnel and material resources.

Authors agree that insufficient training and the lack of resources to enable teachers to develop the appropriate mindset or attitude are important impediments to enabling full inclusion in many countries and regions (Florian & Linklater, 2010; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Forlin, 2012; Sharma & Loreman; 2014; etc.). However, teachers are required to be able to cater for the needs of the most diverse student population both academically and socially. As Forlin (2012, p. 11) points out "People

fear what they do not know, and this is often the case with inclusion." Regarding that, it is clear that inclusion will remain a significant challenge if teachers are not committed to its principles and it will be impossible if they fail to embrace their responsibilities for the education of all children (Glazzard, 2011). However, not all teachers sympathise with the demands of inclusive practice. Their start-point is from a medical perspective which pathologized students with disabilities (Zaretsky, 2005). Students with a disability are thus faced with lower expectations regarding their learning and development.

That is why policy demands for inclusion have often been met with notional responses whereby all children attend school in the same building but continue to receive separate education - in the so called "special classes". According to Spratt and Florian (2013, p. 134) such divisions are also often evident within mixed-ability classrooms, whereby teachers differentiate work according to perceptions of ability. These approaches perpetuate labels of "special needs" and have been shown to place a ceiling on the learning opportunities of those thought to be less able. An inclusive approach means that children are learning together, that they are actively engaged in the process of learning and teaching. Teachers are required to provide instructions for diverse groups of students and are held accountable for covering the curriculum in a manner that all the students in the class learn (Bartolo et al., 2007a). Furthermore, when children feel that they belong to a class, they become more engaged and enjoy greater school success. When teachers take the time to create classrooms that are safe and united, and they recognize the centrality of relationships among students, each member of the classroom will experience a sense of belonging (Jones & Gillies, 2014, p. 32).

The focus on enabling all the students to participate actively and meaningfully in mainstream education raises challenges for understanding and responding to the different needs of each student (Bartolo, Lous, & Hofsäss, 2007a). According to the Theory of Choice (Glasser, 1998) these needs are (1) the need for survival; (2) the need to belong and be loved by others; (3) the need for power and importance; (4) the need for freedom and independence, and (5) the need to have fun. The behaviour which people choose is inspired by their needs and they behave in the most effective ways to satisfying these five needs. Of course, these choices highly depend on personal experiences which people collect in different human relationships and situations. All these circumstances reflect on their educational success and quality of students' socialisation. Systems that embrace change through the data generation, use and self-assessment are more likely to offer quality education to students (Glasser, 1990). Continuous assessment and improvement can focus on any or all dimensions of the system quality: learners, learning environments, content, process and outcomes.

Providing a quality education for all the students in an inclusive setting is therefore acknowledged as the most challenging issue in contemporary education (Amer et al., 2009), where the key notion related to issues of inclusion and social justice is equity - a moral issue due to the meaning of that word – fairness (Muthukrishna & Schlüter, 2011).

The main goals of the research which is presented in this paper are (1) to determine areas in which students with disabilities need additional support and (2) to analyse differences in the perceived inclusive dimension of the quality of educational processes, from the perspective of teachers as well as from the perspective of students, in five mainstream Croatian primary schools. The research starts from the assumption that difficulties experienced by students with disabilities in the educational setting result from the ways in which schools are currently organised, and from the lack of support which is provided to them.

The research is based on the hypothesis that students with disabilities have statistically significantly more educational and socialisation problems than students *without disabilities*, which leads to a lower level of socialization and academic success of students with disabilities.

Methodology Description

The participants of the research were 194 students from grades 1 to 4 of mainstream primary schools in five Croatian counties (Koprivničko-križevačka, Sisačko-moslavačka, Vukovarsko-srijemska, Osječko-baranjska county). In order to protect the anonymity of the participants in the research, the original data about the schools are available only from the authors.

Schools were selected on the basis of their participation in the IPA project "Evidence-Based Early Educational Interventions" which is led by the NGO Forum for Freedom in Education and which is financed by the European Union[1]. The Project's main aim is the development of early educational intervention that should provide equal educational opportunities for students with behavioural problems through the development of Evidence-Based Practice model of early intervention, which will be applicable within the Croatian primary educational system. The epistemological research about students' behaviour was conducted within the frame of this Project, in the autumn of 2013. A total of 904 pupils participated in this research. 97 pupils with disabilities and their 97 peers *without disabilities* (equal by gender, age and school they attend) were selected from the sample for the purpose of this analysis.

Of the 194 participating students, 36.1% are students in the first grade, 26.3% in the second, 19.1% in the third and 18.6% in the fourth grade. Among them, 26.8% are females, and 73.2% are males. The majority of the students live with both parents (82.3%). More than half of the students with developmental disabilities are educated through the regular educational program (51 or 54.8%), 19 (20.4%) of them are educated through the regular educational program with an individualized approach, while 23 (24.7%) students are educated through the special educational programme in regular classes.

[1] Contract number is: IPA 4.1.2.2.02.01.c37

Of the 97 students with disabilities, the majority have difficulties with reading and writing (27 students) and difficulties in communication (20 students). 15 students have multiple difficulties, while 13 students have behavioural disorders. The students with severe disabilities are very little involved in regular schools (8 students with visual impairments, 7 students with intellectual disabilities, 5 students with motor disorders, 1 student with a hearing impairment and 1 with autism).

For the purpose of the above mentioned Project, two questionnaires were constructed – the Questionnaire for teachers and the Questionnaire for students (Bouillet & Pavin-Ivanec, 2013). Both instruments are intended for the assessment of students' behaviour. The Questionnaire for teachers contains 54, and the Questionnaire for students contains 44 variables (forms of student behaviour which describe the quality of their educational process). Teachers assessed students' behaviour in the first questionnaire, while students self-assessed their behaviour in the second questionnaire. The variables in both questionnaires have four categories – never, sometimes, often and almost always.

Additionally, the Questionnaire for teachers contains general data about students (grade, gender, academic success, family's circumstances, etc.). The previous analysis shows that the questionnaires cover the following behaviours: externalized and internalized behavioural problems, assertive behaviour, difficulties in the learning process, appropriate behaviour and relationships with peers (Bouillet & Pavin-Ivanec, 2013). All these behavioural models are indicators of the quality of the educational process, due to the fact that inclusive education implies the creation of a learning community where relationships among teachers and all the students are developed, and where all students have a chance to be valued according to their abilities and other relevant characteristics.

In this analysis, 10 variables are used about assessment and self-assessment of the same components of students' behaviour, which are part of both questionnaires and which represent some indicators of the quality of the educational process (see Table 2 and Table 3). Two variables from the Questionnaire for Students are reversed[2]. Some variables about assessment of different aspects of students' family and social circumstances from the Questionnaire for teachers are also used. These characteristics are: family relationships, student's status in a peer group, the school's praises and rewards, the general school success as well as the rating of the student's behaviour.

The data obtained were analysed on the quantitative level. Firstly, certain quantitative data regarding the difference between students with disabilities and their peers *without disabilities* in different aspects of students' family, educational and social circumstances are presented on the manifested level (χ^2 test is used). Indicators of the inclusive aspect of the quality of educational process are analysed through descriptive statistics. Differences in students' behaviour according to their developmental characteristic are analysed through the t-test.

[2] Those variables are marked with "*" in tables.

Results

The experience of the students, as well as behaviours which they choose to satisfy their personal needs, is strongly connected with relationships and opportunities which they have in families, school and peer groups. A supportive relationship among students, teachers and family members are the key elements of a caring and inclusive classroom climate. Literature informs us that disabled children live in different personal situations from their non-disabled peers, and are more likely to experience higher levels of poverty and personal and social disadvantage than other children (Blackburn et al., 2010). To create inclusion, teachers have to be sensitive and critical to inter-individual dynamics of their students and each inclusive education should start from the social circumstances in which students live. That is why the analysis begins with different aspects of students' family, educational and social circumstances, both of the regularly developed students and the students with disabilities (Table 1).

Table 1

Teacher's assessment of some aspects of students' family and social circumstances

Students' family relationships (χ^2 = 37.582; df = 4; p = .000)					
	extremely inharmonious	mainly inharmonious	not able to estimate	mainly harmonious	extremely harmonious
Students without disabilities	.0%	1.0%	17.3%	44.9%	36.7%
Students with disabilities	7.3%	13.5%	34.4%	33.3%	11.5%
Total	**3.6%**	**7.2%**	**25.8%**	**39.2%**	**24.2%**
Students' status in the peer group (χ^2 = 29.068; df = 4; p = .000)					
		rejected	neglected	rejected by some, favoured by others	favoured
Students without disabilities		.0%	3.0%	33.3%	63.6%
Students with disabilities		6.4%	17.0%	45.7%	30.9%
Total		**3.1%**	**9.8%**	**39.4%**	**47.5%**
Schools praises and rewards (χ^2 = 32.712; dr = 3; p = .000)					
				praise	reward
Students without disabilities				67.3%	5.1%
Students with disabilities				32.3%	.0%
Total				**50.3%**	**2.6%**
The general school success (χ^2 = 44.360; df = 2; p = .000)					
				very good	excellent
Students without disabilities				19.4%	77.6%
Students with disabilities				31.9%	34.0%
Total				**25.5%**	**56.3%**
The rating of student's behaviour (χ^2 = 10.890; dr = 2; p = .004)					
				good	excellent
Students without disabilities				20.4%	79.6%
Students with disabilities				29.8%	62.8%
Total				**25.0%**	**71.4%**

Based on the data presented in Table 1, it is possible to conclude that students with disabilities have experience which is significantly worse than the experience of students *without disabilities*, in all analysed areas. It means that the majority of students who live in families with inharmonious relationships are the students with disabilities. They also make up the majority of the students who are rejected and neglected by their peers, as well as the majority of the students' with a lower academic achievement. The behaviour of the students with disabilities is also statistically significantly more often badly rated by the school's authorities. At the same time, students with disabilities received statistically significantly less praises than their peers *without disabilities*.

The above mentioned data illustrates that students with disabilities do not have a lot of chance to satisfy their personal needs in the educational setting without additional support of educational staff; even an inclusive education implies that teachers meet the students' unique needs. It means that teachers and other school's professionals should help students with disabilities to reach better academic success, as well as more quality relationships with peers. Furthermore, family circumstances of some students require additional support of educational staff, since their families are burdened with numerous problems.

Table 2 shows influences of this unequal position of students with disabilities on their behaviour at school, according to the teachers' assessment.

Table 2

Teachers' assessment of students' behaviour according to disabilities (descriptive statistics and t-test)

	Students with disabilities		Students *without disabilities*					
Student's behaviour:	M	SD	M	SD	t-test	df	p	Cohen's d
The student quickly gives up problem solving and initiated activities.	2.48	.882	1.74	.679	10.526	193	.001	.839
The student has difficulties in concentration during teaching.	2.63	.876	1.68	.793	.734	192	.392	
The student has difficulties in understanding the contents of teaching.	2.71	.857	1.69	.649	7.334	193	.007	1.190
The student refuses to participate in games and activities with other children during the break.	1.90	.770	1.33	.495	6.998	194	.009	.740
The student disrupts classes.	2.01	1.015	1.45	.689	16.829	194	.000	.551
The student behaves in a manner that disturbs other students.	2.04	.957	1.56	.759	6.722	194	.010	.501
The student follows the conventional classroom behavioural rules.	2.86	.804	3.41	.671	.511	193	.476	
The student asks for permission to leave the classroom.	3.10	1.168	3.26	1.157	.003	194	.958	
The student asks for an explanation when he doesn't understand something.	2.56	.866	2.82	.901	.944	193	.332	
The student asks for help in solving tasks.	2.57	.805	2.25	.733	6.131	193	.014	.397

As evident from Table 2, according to the teachers' assessment of the students' behaviour, students with disabilities significantly more often quickly give up problem solving and initiated activities, have difficulties in understanding the contents of teaching and learning, refuse to participate in games and activities with other students, and disrupt classes and other students. Students with disabilities more often ask for help in solving tasks, but the differences are significant at the middle level. However, they do not ask for an explanation when they do not understand something more than students *without disabilities* and between these two groups of students there are no differences in the concentration on learning and teaching process.

In view of teachers' opinions, there appears to be significant room for improving the inclusive education process. Obviously, it is the support of the students with disabilities to clearly express their needs and receive appropriate individual assistance in developing their social relationships and learning process.

The question is, however, whether students share the same view as their teachers and whether the differences between students with and without disabilities remain statistically significant from the students' point of view (Table 3).

Table 3

Self-assessment of students' behaviour according to disabilities (descriptive statistics and t-test)

	Students with disabilities		Students *without disabilities*					
Student's behaviour:	M	SD	M	SD	t-test	df	p	Cohen's d
When I start doing something, I quickly quit.	1.38	.724	1.49	.833	1.911	190	.169	
During the classes my thoughts wander.	1.64	.810	1.57	.732	.802	190	.372	
I understand the teaching matter we learn at school*.	1.78	.870	1.45	.662	6.316	192	.013	.379
I hang out and play with other students during the break*.	1.59	.873	1.42	.625	9.875	190	.002	.195
The teacher keeps warning me during the class teaching.	1.84	.851	1.57	.706	.849	186	.358	
My behaviour disturbs other students.	1.60	.794	1.46	.690	2.983	191	.086	
I follow the agreed classroom behavioural rules.	3.17	.888	3.54	.661	10.204	187	.002	.417
If during the class I have to get out of the classroom, I raise my hand and ask the teacher for permission to do so.	3.46	.965	3.62	.829	4.331	188	.039	.166
If I do not understand something during the class teaching, I ask the teacher for an explanation.	3.17	1.017	3.21	.812	7.559	188	.007	.039
I ask someone to help me when I can't solve the task.	2.74	1.083	2.64	.981	1.598	188	.208	

The data presented in Table 3 illustrate that students' self-assessment of their behaviour much less depends on their disabilities than it is the case with teachers' assessment. The greatest differences between students exist in the area of respecting the school's rules of behaviour (d=.417), while other differences are statistically significant at the low or middle level. These are the differences in the level of understanding of teaching matter, in common play with peers, in the level of warnings that students received from teachers, etc. However, students with disabilities do not use teacher's help more than students *without disabilities*.

Generally, from the above presented data, it is possible to conclude that students with disabilities experience more difficulties in their socialization and learning process; even if they are doing the best they can to meet the demands of school and schooling.

From the abovementioned analyses, we can conclude that teachers' assessment of students' behaviour according to their disabilities is more diverse than the student's self-assessment. The hypothesis that the students with disabilities have statistically significantly more educational and socialisation problems than students *without disabilities*, which leads to a lower level of socialization and academic success of students with disabilities, is confirmed.

Discussion

In Croatia, a new inclusive policy was introduced within the legislative framework in the form of the new Law on Education in Primary and Secondary School (Official Gazette, 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10, 90/11, 5/12, 16/12, 94/13). The intention of the legislator is to ensure that the educational needs of all the children in primary and secondary schools are satisfied. An attempt is made to ensure the necessary assumptions for the adaptation of didactic and methodical ways of teaching students with disabilities. For example, these students have the right to a delayed school attendance, to individualised and adapted programmes, to additional courses, to rehabilitation, to professional interventions, to teaching at home or in hospital, etc. Furthermore, the Law promotes collaboration between all the participants of the educational process (including parents), as well as collaboration between schools and local medical and social institutions. The National Pedagogical Standards for Elementary Education (Official Gazette, 63/2008; 90/2010) have also been adopted. These standards reduce the number of students in classes that include students with disabilities, as well as establishing the maximum of three students with disabilities per class. The Standards also foresee new actors in the inclusive education process, such as mobile teams, teaching assistants, sign language interpreters, etc.

As evident, the Law respects the contemporary approach to students in inclusive educational situations by promoting conditions that ensure that children with disabilities can attain the required standards of knowledge, abilities and skills.

Beliefs in each child's potential and the right to a quality education have to be transacted into action. However, the results obtained in our research show that current

educational strategies and programmes are not sufficient to meet the needs of the students with different developmental difficulties. Moreover, with respect to the fact that the research sample contains only a few students with serious disabilities (such as autism, intellectual and multiple disabilities), it seems that a lot of disabled children are still in specialized educational institutions[3]. It can be argued that the Croatian educational system is faced with two contrasting situations:

1) current policy documents tend to favour inclusive education that respects all children's diversities;
2) we continue to witness a wide experience of school exclusion, as reflected in the teachers' assessment of students' behaviour.

The results of this research show that teachers tend to evaluate students with disabilities as students who do not reach expected standards or follow expected norms. Students with disabilities are thus usually faced with lower expectations in their learning and developing process. These students are inappropriately treated and find their learning potential miscalculated, with consequences on their behaviour and learning achievement. At the same time, students with disabilities tend to evaluate themselves as every other student, having in mind that their needs are the same as the needs of others, and that they do the best they can in the environment that is not always inclined to them.

Other authors also warn about insufficiencies in inclusive educational process. For example, Bouillet (2013) found that some teachers still do not believe that all children, regardless of their ability or disability, are valued members of the school and classroom community. DiGennaro Reed et al. (2011) showed with their research that less than 20% of students with disabilities identified a reciprocal friend, in contrast to over 50% of non-disabled peers. On the other hand, Gorgiadi et al. (2012) found that the type of school differentiated attitudes of regularly developed students towards students with disabilities, the students from inclusive setting being more positive towards peers with intellectual disabilities and choosing less negative adjectives to describe them than children from non-inclusive settings.

Authors agree that students' relationships are the major feature of students' classroom experience and they make a distinct contribution to students' engagement, motivation and achievement (Bartolo, Janik, Janikova, Hofsäss, Koinzer, Vilkiene, & Humphery, 2007b)... That is why teachers have to be sensitive and critical to intra- and inter-individual dynamics in the school that can create inclusion or exclusion. The results of the research which is presented in this paper indicate that teachers in Croatian schools are still far away from such efforts. Furthermore, they tend to blame students for their lower success and some kind of misbehaviours, while even these students have the right to the need for an additional support which they do not receive.

[3] In Croatia 12% of total population have some kind of disabilities (around 34,000 children between 0 and 18 years old, Benjak, 2013).

Conclusions

Education must be viewed as a facilitator in everyone's human development and functionality, regardless of the barriers of any kind, physical or otherwise. However, results obtained by the research which is presented in this paper show that special educational needs of students with disabilities often remain without required additional support of educational staff in Croatian primary schools.

According to the first goal of the research (to determine areas in which students with disabilities need additional support) it is found that students with disabilities have statistically significantly more educational and socialisation problems than students *without disabilities*, which leads to a lower level of socialization and academic success of students with disabilities.

According to the second goal of the research (to analyse differences in the perceived inclusive dimension of the quality of educational process, from the perspective of teachers as well as from the perspective of students) it is found that teachers' assessment of students' behaviour according to their disabilities is more diverse than the student's self-assessment.

Teachers estimate that students with disabilities need more support to clearly express their needs and receive appropriate individual assistance in developing their social relationships and learning process. This is also confirmed by the self-assessments of students who indicate a problem with respecting the school's rules of behaviour of students with disabilities.

The results lead to the conclusion that students with disabilities have statistically significantly more educational and socialisation problems than students *without disabilities*, which leads to a lower level of socialization and academic success of students with disabilities. Unfortunately, most of them remain without appropriate educational support.

It seems that inclusive education is not possible without changing school cultures, policies and practice towards a child-centred pedagogy that embraces the needs and strengths of all students, including those with disabilities.

Inclusion is about "how to develop regular school and classroom communities that fit, nurture, and support the educational and social needs of every student in attendance by making the regular school a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community" (Bartolo et al., 2007b, p. 50). According to our research, omissions in educational practice lead to the lower level of socialization and academic success of students with disabilities, as well as to the poorer teachers' estimates of their behaviour.

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Učenici s teškoćama i izazovi obrazovne prakse

Sažetak

Dobro je poznato da sve obrazovne politike promoviraju inkluziju kao glavnu ideju svakog suvremenog obrazovnog sustava. Inkluzivno obrazovanje omogućuje djeci s teškoćama i bez njih da zajedno uče u istim razredima, u skladu sa svojom dobi, uz dodatnu, individualno prilagođenu podršku djeci koja je trebaju.

Međutim, u obrazovanju još uvijek postoje velike nejednakosti u pristupačnosti obrazovanja i ishodima učenja nekih skupina djece, budući da postoje marginalizirane skupine koja doživljavaju izuzetno nisku razinu pristupačnosti obrazovanja i kvalitete učenja. Djeca s teškoćama još su uvijek suočena s mnogim izazovima u ostvarivanju svog prava na obrazovanje i ona u tom smislu predstavljaju jednu od najmarginaliziranijih i isključenih skupina.

U hrvatskom je zakonodavstvu jasno naglašeno da djeca s teškoćama imaju pravo na inkluzivno obrazovanje i da su škole dužne osigurati uvjete koji vode uspješnom obrazovanju sve djece. Pitanje se, međutim, postavlja u odnosu na razinu u kojoj se zakon provodi u odgojno-obrazovnoj praksi, budući da je nepoznato postoje li uvjeti za njegovu primjerenu primjenu u hrvatskim školama.

U ovom je radu prikazan dio rezultata istraživanja koje je provedeno u sklopu projekta „Rane odgojno-obrazovne intervencije temeljene na pokazateljima uspješnosti". Osnovni ciljevi istraživanja su (1) utvrditi područja u kojima učenici s teškoćama trebaju dodatnu podršku i (2) analizirati razlike u doživljenoj inkluzivnoj dimenziji kvalitete obrazovnog procesa iz perspektive učitelja i iz perspektive učenika, u pet hrvatskih redovnih osnovnih škola. Istraživanje je provedeno na uzorku od 97 učenika s teškoćama i njihovih 97 standardno razvijenih vršnjaka. Učenici i njihovi učitelji ispunili su dva upitnika o ponašanju učenika koji su razvijeni za potrebe projekta (Upitnik za učenike i Upitnik za učitelje). Rezultati pokazuju da učenici s teškoćama imaju potrebu za dodatnom podrškom u obrazovnom procesu, ali i za podrškom u razvoju primjerenih odnosa s vršnjacima. Međutim, oni ne postižu očekivanu razinu socijalizacije i akademskog uspjeha, što pokazuje da se inkluzivna politika još uvijek nedovoljno dobro implementira u obrazovnu praksu. Autori raspravljaju o različitim razlozima dobivenih rezultata i mogućim načinima prevladavanja uočenog nesuglasja.

Ključne riječi: *inkluzivno obrazovanje; inkluzivna politika i praksa; kvaliteta obrazovanja; socijalizacija; učenici s teškoćama.*