

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATORS-IMPORTANT CONDITION FOR IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL WORK WITH CHILDREN WHO HAVE DISABILITIES**

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### **Abstract**

Education system, globally, is one of the most important part in any successfully developed society in the world. In terms of reform of the educational system, role, position and function of educators in preschool organizations is changing. In order to respond to new requirements posed by preschool organization and society in terms of globalization, it is necessary to continuously improve professionally. In this paper we will pay attention precisely on the professional development of educators in the field of promotion the inclusiveness of preschool organizations. The author emphasizes the need for planning and system support of educators on effective implementation of the inclusive programs in the system of preschool education and education through the concept of accredited programs in the program catalog for professional development of employees in education in Serbia.

There are some flaws in the system of professional development of educators in the area of inclusive education, and guidance and recommendations to overcome them are offered in this paper.

**Keywords:** *professional development, inclusive programs, educator, pre-school upbringing and education.*

### **Introduction**

During the nineties of the last century, the educational policy of the EU highlights the concept of lifelong learning and continuous improvement as one of the key tools for successfully coping with social change. Continuous professional development constitutes an integral and obligatory part of the professional development of the educator that involves the acquisition of new and improvement of existing competences, more recently, to work in an inclusive environment.

Education systems in many countries reformed last year in line with the inclusive principles. Intensified discussions on the topic of the need of every child, without discrimination and segregation, providing quality education from an early age. Promoting the value of inclusive education imposes the need for strengthening the capacity of educational institutions and professional competence of personnel who operate them.

Being inclusive practitioner does not only take to have highest score on the final exam or knowledge of the correct answer when the question is about inclusive education. The process of inclusion in kindergarten largely depends on teachers' staff training to recognize the development potential of children of preschool age, and on the other side to be able to implement the theoretical knowledge in practice.

The gap between theory and practice, and between education and reality of educators in preschool organizations is consistently identified in the discussions leading to the professional development of educators. It is not enough to teach the philosophy of inclusive education or to talk about the importance of inclusive education. The transfer of knowledge is successful only if educators in daily practice incorporate new competences, skills and knowledge, new ideas and viewpoints. Everything educators learn, they need to implement in ways that ultimately support the process of inclusion. What makes the difference in real life in kindergarten is not what educators know or believe, but what they do or are able to make in its real work context.

Working with children who have disabilities requires activation of specific sets of beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, skills and application of appropriate methods and processes thus it is not based only on isolated skills. The framework for inclusive practices takes competencies identified in the profile of inclusive teachers (European Agency, 2012) and extends in practice. In order for the teacher to develop inclusive practice is to provide the most optimal conditions. But it is worth mentioning: What is the real situation in practice when it comes to the implementation of inclusion in preschool organizations?

The willingness of developed countries to accept and inclusive education of children with developmental difficulties in pre-school system begins during formal education of future teachers and in further education of personnel already working in such conditions, with pre-specified material and technical conditions (Vandenbroucke, Urban, 2011), unlike in Serbia where knowledge for children who have disabilities is on informative level with many graduate teachers, not mentioning those teachers who have completed their education 30 years ago. In many countries, which is not the case with Serbia, for this occupation seeks to attract people with higher skills and motivation (Vizek-Vidović, 2009), because it a priori represents and quality investment in education and education, from preschool to higher levels of education.

### **Inclusive practice in R. Serbia**

Inclusive education (EB) is the biggest challenge we faced teachers from 2000s, when extensive reforms began in the educational system in Serbia.

The inclusive model of pre-school education is an integral part of the reform of the educational system in the Republic Serbia and current problem in almost all educators who in the process of its implementation are unprepared, with no or minimal professional competencies and minimum professional help from incomplete professional services in kindergartens, and quite often the families of children with disabilities.

The practice in our educational system showed it had undertaken certain inclusion as a world trend without analyzing the opportunities and needs in this regard planning of human, material and financial resources necessary to provide support to children with special educational needs, and without adequate expert support (special educator, psychologist, educator) and didactic-methodical approach of teachers / educators.

Most studies (Vilotić 2014; Gutvajn, 2015, Ivanović 2015; Tomic, 2015) suggest that educators are not sufficiently prepared to allow or encourage the active participation of children with disabilities. Today's educators face a majority of difficulties of the realization of inclusive teaching implicitly influence their attitudes. These difficulties primarily related to their lack of awareness and competency identification, observation and education of children with disabilities, architectural incoherence of pre-schools, a number of children in the group, lack of continuous

support that team that deals with monitoring of the child's needs and providing necessary support (assistant program), lack of permanent education of educators and school support staff.

### **Inclusive programs in the Catalogue of programs for professional development of employees in educational and educational institutions**

Well organized system for professional development of educators means quality monitoring and evaluation of vocational training.

Visit to the accredited programs for professional development is one of the components of the professional development of educators (*Rulebook for professional development and acquisition of knowledge of teachers, educators and professional associates*, 2015).

For more effective implementation of the program for professional development of employees of educational institutions Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, in cooperation with the Institute for improvement of education, each year, starting in 2006/2007<sup>55</sup>. year issued *Catalogue of programs for professional development of employees in education, classified in several areas* (Velickovic 2014), as an official document, where employees of education choose programs for their development, and it should represents operationalization of educational policy in the field of promotion quality of work of educational staff in educational institutions. By decision of the Government of the Republic Serbia 08.14.2003. year established *Regional centers for professional development of employees in education*, which have the function of monitoring the supply and demand of seminars in the region and monitoring the effects of the implementation of programs in practice.

One of the areas in the program catalog consecutive rest is education of children / pupils with special needs. The analysis of accredited programs for area EB in the Catalogue of programs for professional development of employees in education starting from the academic year 2006/2007 including the latest Product 2016-2018. year program for the school, which made the author for the purposes of this paper (Table .1) indicates that continuously increasing their number.

**Table 1 Accredited programs for county Inclusive Education**

School year	Total number of accredited programs	Number of accredited programs for county Inclusive Education
2006/2007	173	12
2007/2008	360	15
2008/2009	571	24
2009/2010	840	46
2010/2011	826	53
2011/2012	921	58
<b>2012/2014</b>	<b>1002</b>	<b>65</b>
2014/2016	1277	77
2016/2018	919	56

Unfortunately, despite big supply of programs in the field of EB, no system of monitoring and evaluation of the effects of professional development of educators, that there are no mechanisms in the education system for checking what they learned is applied in educational practice (Pavlovic & Vujacic, an indication Velickovic, 2014), and thus there is no monitoring of

<sup>55</sup> Since the school year 2012/2013. years. The catalog program for regular professional development of teachers, professional associates and directors approved two years.

the effects of inclusion programs. First of all, the existing system of monitoring and evaluation of accredited programs is only understood after implementation of the program, educators completed evaluation papers, the authors and implementers of program's written report.

This tells us that in our system there is no effective professional development of educators aimed at promoting inclusive practice in pre-school organizations. Without monitoring and support, educators have to apply the lessons learned from the organizers and implementers of training, as well as without the joint action of all the factors involved in the professional development of educators in the field of working with children who have disabilities, the changes will not revive and become part of the daily work of teacher. If we have a good monitoring system the implementation and evaluation of inclusive programs, though their implementation will be higher quality, and therefore children with developmental difficulties will get better system support and acceptance in all spheres of social life.

## Conclusion

Professionally competent and contemporary educator, who permanently professionally mastered, has the power and ability to implementable their knowledge in practical work with preschool children, creating preconditions for establishing kindergartens that meet all the attributes - modern educational institutions, as the first rock in the educational system.

Creating conditions for inclusive education process in kindergarten requires changing role and didactic-methodical approach of educators, which in return requires changes in higher education in terms of the development of general and specific competencies of future educators. In R. Serbia many pedagogical faculties and colleges for education of educators who do not even have modules for inclusive education as an important prerequisite for a better preparation of future teachers for the implementation of inclusive policy in kindergarten. Promoting the values of inclusive education imposes the need for strengthening the capacity of educational institutions and professional competence of staff flattening them act:

Above all it is:

- Adequate and well-planned training and support educators in their work with children with developmental difficulties;
- Rethinking the motivational measures to support educators in their positive experience from practice can streamline their programs for professional development in the field of inclusive education;
- Establishment of institutional form / frame advancement, reward or other form of evaluation of labor and work of educators, as would be enthusiasm, quality and high motivation to work with children with developmental difficulties;
- To promote cooperation between pre-schools and special institutions working experts who will assist educators and school support staff in working with children who have disabilities;
- Continuous training of existing staff and preparation of students from teacher training colleges and high schools vocational application and realization of inclusive didactical-methodical approach in daily pedagogical practice;
- To launch an initiative towards educational institutions in designing joint actions to strengthen the of future educators to readily and more reliably develop inclusive practice

- in kindergarten (including practitioners in educational work with students, practitioners, participation of students in research on inclusive practice;
- Match legislation, administration and documentation;
  - Develop a profile of inclusive teachers following the example of the highly developed European countries.

Preschool organizations must as soon as possible change their practice, and the way the first instance is changing caregivers, and then clear defined tasks and job duties of individual associates with the initial thesis, that of children who have disabilities more it needs specific professional and therapeutic help, not only acceptance, which is often only formally and declaratively. It is clear that more efforts are needed to enable all educators to be prepared for inclusive practice.

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