



PEER ACCEPTANCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Milja Vujačić and Rajka Đević (2022). *Peer acceptance in inclusive education*. Belgrade: Institute for Educational Research, 9.45 in, 205 pages

The scientific monograph entitled *Peer Acceptance in Inclusive Education* authored by Milja Vujačić and Rajka Đević was published in 2022 by the Institute for Educational Research (Belgrade). The monograph is the result of research on inclusive education practices in primary schools in Belgrade that aimed to assess the social acceptance of students with developmental disabilities. Different forms of student discrimination in the education system constitute a major issue in society today and students with developmental disabilities are at the highest risk. On the other hand, the peer acceptance of students with developmental disabilities is a prerequisite to their successful development, as evidenced by the content of this monograph. The authors thoroughly analyze different aspects of the phenomenon of social acceptance of students with developmental disabilities in regular education. In their words, social acceptance is conditioned by numerous factors related to students themselves, but also to their peers, teachers, school, and society as a whole.

The content of *Peer Acceptance in Inclusive Education* is divided into five major chapters: 1) Students' Social Acceptance in Theory and Research; 2) The Status of Children with Developmental Disabilities in the Family and Society; 3) Inclusive Education – Towards Social Acceptance of Students With Developmental Disabilities; 4) Methods and Results of Research Conducted at Primary Schools in Belgrade; 5) Concluding Remarks. An extensive list of references is provided at the very end that reflects the authors' dedication and meticulous approach to researching this issue.

In the first chapter, *Students' Social Acceptance in Theory and Research*, the authors introduce the meaning of the key concept of *students' social acceptance* and focus on different aspects of an individual's social functioning. They further highlight the significance of social acceptance in the context of student development and provide an overview of methodological procedures used in previous studies

of this phenomenon. At the end of the chapter, the authors summarize existing empirical findings obtained in research on the social acceptance of students with developmental disabilities. This chapter provides a basis for understanding the social acceptance of students within the entire education system.

In the second chapter entitled *Inclusive Education – Towards Social Acceptance of Students with Developmental Disabilities*, the authors substantiate their key assumption that the unhindered development of all individuals hinges on their growing up in a functional environment marked by quality relations between all actors. Special attention is dedicated to analyzing the unique characteristics of the family environment of children with developmental disabilities and the social status of these children and their parents.

In the third chapter, entitled *Inclusive Education – Towards Social Acceptance of Students with Developmental Disabilities*, the key question the authors aim to address pertains to the qualities of educational environments that ensure stimulating developmental and learning conditions for children with developmental disabilities. In line with this question, the authors trace the development of the idea of inclusive education, which gradually formed as a result of recognizing the unfavorable social position of children with developmental disabilities. The chapter further emphasizes the role of the teacher in the encouragement of students' social acceptance. This role involves forming positive attitudes towards students with developmental disabilities, fostering a favorable socio-emotional climate in the classroom, creating a flexible learning environment characterized by the acknowledgment of differences between students, and supporting the development and improvement of students' social skills.

The fourth chapter, *Methods and Results of Research Conducted at Primary Schools in Belgrade* provides an in-depth insight into the methodology of the authors' research. In addition to the research aim mentioned at the beginning of this review, the authors describe the research sample. They endeavored to form their approach to researching the issue at hand by taking into consideration the perspectives of different actors in the education process, including class teachers, subject teachers, who also performed a homeroom teacher role, and students of different ages who belonged to two groups (the group of students with no developmental disabilities and the group of students with emotional, social, cognitive, and physical developmental disabilities). The inclusion of class and subject teachers in the sample contributes to the scientific value of this research and separates it from numerous studies in this field in which students' social acceptance was viewed only from students' perspective. This chapter further presents the quantitative and qualitative research methods used during the processes of data gathering and analysis. The sociometric techniques of peer nomination and ranking were used to determine the level of social acceptance and social status of students with developmental disabilities. To survey the perceptions of teachers and homeroom teachers regarding the social status of students with

developmental disabilities, a questionnaire was distributed to the teachers and homeroom teachers of all classes involved in sociometric research. The combination of different techniques and instruments contributed to a more comprehensive insight into the problem at hand. The obtained research results are presented within six themes: 1) the level of social acceptance of students with developmental disabilities; 2) various dimensions of their social status; 3) how students' social acceptance is linked to gender, academic achievement, and parent's education level; 4) teachers' perceptions of the social status of students with developmental disabilities; 5) the key factors shaping students' social status; and 6) ways to promote social interactions and acceptance of students with developmental disabilities in regular classes.

The final chapter entitled *Concluding Remarks* features an overview of the key findings obtained in the above-mentioned research, along with analysis of their implications in the context of contemporary challenges associated with the practice of inclusive education. The chapter further elaborates on pedagogical implications for the improvement of the social status of students with developmental disabilities and their acceptance in their peer group. Finally, the authors offer suggestions for future research in the field.

The reasons why this monograph is uniquely engaging include its conciseness and relatively simple style. Hence, the volume is not only intended for researchers, but also for teachers, parents, students of socio-humanistic sciences, and everyone interested in inclusive education. Furthermore, the creative design of the book cover indicates that the authors' work on this scientific monograph did not only focus on the content, but on the form as well, which further contributes to the publication's overall quality. It should be noted that this volume is a result of the authors' years-long research in the domain of inclusive education, which has also yielded numerous papers of great scientific value.

Having in mind all previous statements, we can conclude that this publication is sure to ignite interest among a broad readership and represents a valuable contribution to science and a significant resource for future researchers in the domain of inclusive education.

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