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DOCTORAL THESIS

ABSTRACT

Psycho-social variables impacting educators' attitudes towards the inclusion of children in normal kindergartens

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Key words: disability, kindergarten, inclusion, teachers, social and psychology factors, attitudes

INTRODUCTION

“Inclusive education as a landmark of education for all is a pressing need of this day and age. It takes each educator and everyone’s responsibility and implication to make it a reality that helps everyone learn and grow.

Ecaterina Vrasmaş, 20(12, p. 28)

This research initiative is based on the belief that approaching present challenges to inclusive education requires an in-depth understanding of the attitudes that govern the day-to-day practices of educational staff working in normal kindergartens.

The success of efficient inclusion is reliant, first and foremost, on the positive attitude of teachers towards it (Gelheiser, Meyers, 1996; Niemeier, Proctor, 2002; Van Laarhoven, et. al., 2007 apud Cullen et al., 2010) but also on the existence of special support teachers in schools (Wolery et al., 1994; Wesley, 1997), the providing of psychopedagogical services (Hammond, Ingalls, 2003) and the space and adequate resources to satisfy the educational needs of every child (Wolery et al., 1994).

In a research paper published in 2011, *La inclusión en las guarderías de Quebec: la situación de una etapa esencial*” Point and Desmarais show that inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools has many benefits not only for the disabled children, but for the other students as well. Specifically, the mainstream kindergarten can help build the framework for the inclusive schooling environment of later years (Odom, 2000).

Summarizing the conclusions of a number of recent studies, Point and Desmarais bring solid arguments regarding the early childhood and inclusion of special needs children. In this regard, (Palacio-Quintin, Coderre, 1999; Tremblay, 2003) present the benefits of quality educational services that contribute to the global development of all children and the particularities of children with disabilities, specifically.

The difficulties in achieving this inclusion process are augmented by the low level of acceptance for disabled children and the fact that psychopedagogy offers a customized approach to them. One must consider that, through the goals and values it promotes, inclusive education not only offers the necessary framework for changing attitudes, and consequently, psychopedagogy practices among teachers, relinquishing labeling and stigma, offering each child an equal chance at integration

in the community and society, but also paves the way for decision factors within the community to open themselves up to the needs of children that are at risk or suffer from various disabilities (Gherguț, 2006).

Based on the fact that educators' attitudes significantly influence teaching strategies they will use and activities they will involve the children in (Wilczenski, 1993, Forlin et al., 1999, apud Loreman, 2007), a need for discovering new information regarding the relationships between educators' attitudes and inclusion, with particular attention paid to a number of aspects of the process of inclusion is justified.

More specifically, research has shown that when teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusion they become more open minded towards adapting and changing their teaching techniques to adjust to the numerous learning needs of students (Shanma, 2008 apud Cullen, 2010).

The issue of teachers' roles in inclusion has been approached through various methodologies in a considerable number of researches, but the field still requires additional clarification as to the nature of this relationship. Moreso, this relationship cannot be approached on its' own, but must be investigated while taking into consideration the interaction between various factors that have proven relevant in the differentiation of attitudes. In this regard, studies have identified three categories of factors that play an important part in the differentiation of educators as to what concerns their attitudes towards inclusion (factors dependent on the particularities of educators, factors dependent on the particularities of children with disabilities, and factors dependent on the school environment).

Although previous studies have significantly contributed to the clarification of the field, the results are contradictory and show that attitudes vary greatly and that there is a slightly, or downright unfavorable trend regarding inclusion, with emphasis on its' disadvantages.

The goal of this research is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the nature of students' and teachers' attitudes and to supply ascertained information on the realities of inclusive education in normal kindergartens, especially considering that these aspects are part of a growing trend globally as well as locally. To investigate the psycho-social variables that significantly impact mainstream kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, a number of research tools have been used, each of them bringing added clarity to the investigation of certain aspects that are defining for this ample process.

Based on the theoretical framework, this paper tries to answer the main research question that leads to the three studies: „*What are teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens?*” In addition, there are two subsidiary research questions:

„How do some psycho-social and school environment variables influence teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens?” and „Are there any differences among kindergarten directors' attitudes regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens in relation to certain psycho-social variables and particularities pertaining to children with disabilities?”

The rationale behind the use of these three scales of attitude measurement was that it allowed the investigation of a relatively large number of subjects, the collection of rich material regarding the important aspects of inclusion, and also, that the resulting data was adequate for a quantitative analysis with statistically relevant output.

This paper uses the term „disability” with the meaning found in international terminology. The types of disability used in the investigative tools are: learning difficulties, intellectual disabilities, emotional disorders, eyesight and hearing impairments, speech impairments, physical disabilities, autism / pervasive developmental disorders, other health issues.

In addition, the terms „children with disabilities” , „disability” and „inclusion” are used in order to avoid repetition and confusion between continuously changing terms.

From among the theoretical models of attitude structure analysis, the paper uses the unidimensional model as a reference framework, because of its' frequent use in the field (Fishbein, Ajzen, 1974, Ajzen, 2005). Research has shown one factor that explains most of the variance in obtained data – the evaluative nature of attitude, focusing on its' cognitive aspect (Baker, 1992; Oppenheim, 1992; Richardson, 1996). Many authors support the evaluative nature of attitude as a response along a positive-to-negative continuum, or, as Chambers and Forlin (2010) note, „a learned response, an evaluation regarding an object or a problem [...] a cumulative result of personal convictions”.

The novelty of this research consists of the use of multiple validated tools to research the nature of attitudes towards inclusion in a large sample of subjects (mainstream kindergarten teachers and university students) as well as the study of how a number of socio-professional and academic variables impact said subjects. In addition, the paper studies the way research participants relate to various aspects of inclusion as presented in scientific literature.

Research took place in the spring of 2012 in the city of Cluj-Napoca on a sample of participants consisting of mainstream kindergarten teachers and university students from various Departments within the School of Psychology and the Sciences of Education, Babes-Bolyai University.

The research is divided into two main studies (Study I and Study II), with Study I divided into two sub-studies (study I.a and study I.b) based on the research tools used and the type of participant.

The paper is a quantitative research and the data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and statistical inference. The methods used in descriptive statistics allowed for the resulting data to be described and categorized in various ways. Also, in order to meet the research goals and verify the hypothesis, a multivariate analysis design (analysis of this type provides quantitative statistical data useful in identifying complex relationships between variables) has been used.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is comprised of five main chapters out of which the first two approach the theoretical foundations of the research, followed by a chapter that analyzes a number of scientific studies relevant to the topic, an ample chapter presenting personal contributions to the research, and finally, a chapter of conclusions and general discussion.

The first chapter, „Inclusion in Education”, presents a synthesis of the main points of view on the matter, taken from scientific literature – classical as well as more recent ones, underlining their importance to the research topic. The paper tries to integrate the theoretical perspectives of a number of foreign as well as Romanian authors as shown in their own current research. Thus, this chapter is divided into eight sub-chapters that aim to clarify terminology, present the main principles and concepts of inclusion, and then frame this ample inclusive process, offering insights ranging from its’ general to its’ specific aspects.

Regarding the clarification of terminological differences between academic integration and inclusion, one conclusion drawn from this research initiative is that the main difference between the two lies in the area of focus. Whereas integration focuses on the disabled child, his needs and the means for those needs to be met, inclusion focuses on the institutional level and targets major changes in the way school works.

Subchapter 1.2 shows the general principles of inclusive education and specific concepts while comparatively synthesising a number of perspectives from the scientific literature analyzed.

Subchapter 1.3 shows a recent theoretical model by Loreman (2007) presenting „the seven pillars of support for inclusive education” that the author considers to be a bridge between the need for inclusive education in mainstream schools and the concrete practices and strategies applied in reality. The model helps explain some aspects of inclusion that are investigated in this paper, more specifically one of the pillars mentioning the importance of „developing positive attitudes amongst teachers” regarding inclusion and how these attitudes impact successful inclusion of children with disabilities.

The following subchapter deals with the issue of education for children with disabilities in the past twenty years and relevant legislative aspects in Romania. These aspects are divided into two important stages (the stage of conceptual clarification and theorization, from 1990 to 1992, and the

stage of legislative collaborations, 1991 to 1995) in addition to a „current stage”, spanning from 1995 to the present day. The same subchapter highlights the main tendencies in inclusion in present-day Romania – such as the change in social attitude and legislation regarding the general issue of disabilities / handicaps, and, in a wider context, regarding human diversity and differences.

The main conclusion of this subchapter is that every individual has a right to education and this right must be insured progressively and based on equality of chances. Education must strive to achieve full development of human personality, a sense of dignity, and to strengthen the observance of human rights, of children’s rights, and of fundamental freedoms. Also, the idea is brought forth that in order to insure access to education for every child, including the discriminated and special needs ones, an educational system that is inclusive on all levels is necessary, so that equal, undiscriminative instruction is provided for all.

In regards to „Facilitating and hindering factors in inclusion”, and particular aspects of inclusion in normal kindergartens, **subchapter 1.6** synthesizes the most frequent factors that can, depending on the context, facilitate or hinder inclusion, as shown in numerous studies and recent research in the field of psychopedagogy. In addition, the main steps necessary in creating an ideal model for an inclusive academic system combining three fundamental aspects – culture, educational policy and strategy, and practice - are presented.

The final part of the first chapter analyzes a few distinctive aspects of inclusion in mainstream kindergartens in the case of disabled children (subchapter 1.8 Inclusion of disabled children in normal kindergartens). The results of recent empiric studies are shown that underline the benefits of inclusion for disabled children as well as for children without disabilities. These particular aspects are also key to the theoretical foundation of the research initiative that follows. Thus, it has been found that through significant interaction with peers of the same age, children with disabilities have shown significant progress on the cognitive, sensory-motor, language, social and emotional ability level (children learn „socializing” through communication and interaction with classmates, developing communication skills). Friendships are forged through daily interaction, learning by example occurs, interests and preferences towards certain activities are exchanged. All this contributes to an increase in self-confidence, an increased awareness of the uniqueness of each child, reduces frustration and emotional insecurity and makes children more tolerant and autonomous.

On the other hand, children without disabilities also benefit from the inclusive classroom. They learn to accept differences more easily by diversifying their friendships, cooperation makes

them more receptive towards the needs of others, developing tolerance and unconditional acceptance. They learn to empathize and to accept everyone as a unique individual as opposed to labeling, prejudice and stereotype are lowered and socio-emotional intelligence grows.

In regards to the role of preschool pedagogy in inclusion, Ecaterina Vrasmaş shows, in a recently published work (2012, p.25), that “the ideas of quality education for every child are best achieved since kindergarten, and their results are increasingly visible in the daily practice of dedicated kindergarten teachers”. The author also ascertains that “[...] applying inclusive education capitalizes not only on the possibilities and premises for development in each child, but also the potential and motivation for change and professional development in each teacher. Thus, promoting more inclusive practices and policies in preschool education, therefore focusing on the success, participation and involvement of each preschool child in educational programs will not only result in generations more apt for academic and social integration, but also in better, more efficient professionals in education.”

The second chapter, “Theoretical Framework of Social Attitudes”, starts with a description of the origins and meanings of the “social attitude” concept, continues by describing the theoretical models, their features and structure, and finally concludes by analyzing the methods used in measuring attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities as shown in scientific literature. All of this is described in detail in the eight subchapters.

The first sub-chapter, “Approaches to the notion of social attitude” shows the importance of the concept in social psychology and the timeline of its’ terminological evolution; many authors’ points of view and the conclusions relevant to this paper are included. It has been ascertained that the field of social attitudes is complex and rich in explanatory paradigms and conceptual models. The unified definition of social attitudes is a difficult initiative, due to the complexity of the phenomenon as well as to the influences exerted on the development of the topic by authors’ general theoretical ideas. Thus, Iluţ (2004) puts forth an analytical definition of attitudes, which includes main features described in the most used definitions of the concept, focusing on the social aspect of attitudes: “attitude is an acquired mental disposition of a social nature; even if it means more than taking a stand towards certain social objects, it is a manifestation of the influence of the socio-cultural environment; the social nuance is specific to group attitudes as well as individual ones”. Therefore, attitude as a complex psychological phenomenon expresses a group or an individual’s stand towards varied aspects of reality, representing one of the fundamental concepts of psychology. Attitude is found at the crossroads between a number of mental phenomena:

cognitive, affective and volitional as the expression of their selective orientation in a framework that allows for the anticipation of a certain individual's behavior in a certain situation. (Moscovici, 1988).

Subchapter 2.2. “Structure and functions of attitudes – Theoretical models” synthesizes the structural model of attitudes (horizontally, involving relationships between same-level attitudes, and vertically, expressing the hierarchical organization of attitudes), then analyzes Boza's (2003) theoretical framework. The author makes a chronological description of known modern models in attitude structuring, interweaving them with models meant to explain the relationship between attitude and behavior. Her perspective has been correlated with other authors' work in the field (Radu, 1994, Gawronsky, 2007, Ilut, 2009).

From a chronological perspective, the first component of attitude to be analyzed is the evaluative one, that corresponds to the one dimensional model, characterized by a global evaluation of the object of attitude over a “continuum spanning from the favorable to the unfavorable extreme, passing through a theoretical zero-point corresponding to the area of indifference, indecision, conflict, ambivalence, ignorance, etc” (Radu, 1994). When it comes to the facets of attitudes, the great majority of psychologists promote the model initially described by Hovland, Rosenberg in 1960 - the tridimensional model that underlines the nature of an individual's responses to the subjects of attitude. The authors distinguish between three types of responses: cognitive, affective and behavioral (Wood, 2000, Johnson and Howell, 2009).

Boza's perspective (2003) also succinctly describes the schematic model raised from the necessity to answer a gestalt-type question: what is an attitude, and is it different from the beliefs that make it up? Lingle, Ostrom (1981), the model of attitude representation or ART – Attitude Representation Theory (Lord, Lepper, 1999) that tries to explain the changes in consistency in the case of individuals' responses to the same category of stimuli depending on the representations of that particular class of stimuli, types of responses offered and the contexts such responses appear in. Fazio proposes, in 1989, an associative model in which attitudes are a learned association between an object and an evaluation and are dependent on the existence of a very strong emotion or cognitive inference, the meta-cognitive model, MCM (Petty, 2006, Petty, Brinol, 2006 in Gawronsky, 2007). Similar to Fazio, Petty, Brinol (2006) consider attitudes to be memory representations on the principle of object-evaluation associations, the integrative principle of attitudes and variables of the self (another associative model), Greenwald, Banaji, 2002, the APE (Associative-Propositional

Evaluation) model (Gawronski, Bodenhausen, 2006), and a more recent model, the reprocessing (IR) model (Cunningham, Zelazo, 2007 apud Gavronsky, 2007).

One conclusion drawn from the theoretical models analyzed consists of the fact that these models are inconsistent and require additional clarification. On the one hand, some researchers have tried to prove the existence of the three components of attitude (Breckler 1984; Rosenbaum et al. 1986, Mahat 2007) and, on the other hand others have tried to confirm the tridimensional model (Fishbein, Ajzen, 1974). Ajzen, 2005, states that most of the data presented in scientific literature is consistent in regards to the one-dimensional model, as studies have shown a single factor explaining the vast majority of variance in obtained data. Presently, the inconsistencies are still there, requiring additional clarification – the failed attempts of certain studies to differentiate between the three components of attitude suggesting that there may be a lack of empiric data in some theoretical aspects.

The following subchapter describes the main functions of attitudes. Katz (1960 apud Ilut, 2004) identifies four important functions of attitudes: cognitive, instrumental, expressive, ego-defense. In addition, (Atkinson, 2002) there is also a social adaptation function.

Subchapters 2.3., 2.4. and 2.5. analyze several theoretical models in psychology. Reasoned action model – Fishbein, Ajzen (1975) and the theory of planned behavior – Ajzen, Fishbein (1980) explain the complex relationship between attitude and behavior and the predictive nature of attitudes for behavior. Next are balance theory, F. Heider (1958) that assumes a three way relationship between a person or preceptor (P), another person (O) that is an attitude object for (P) and a problem (X), and cognitive dissonance theory (L. Festinger, 1957) that analyzes the effects of discrepancy between attitude and behavior.

Subchapter 2.6. presents a number of conceptual integrations on the topic of social representations, ideologies and attitudes. Seca's (2001-apud Curelaru, 2006, p.69) theoretical approach that captures the strong connection between the concept of representation and attitude, opinion and ideology is important. The author produces a general schematic that tends to unify, on multiple levels, very different concepts such as fundamental categories of thought, religion and ideologies, social representations and scientific ones, as well as attitudes or opinions.

Subchapter 2.7 shows a number of theoretical perspectives regarding change in attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Cacioppo, Petty, 1985; Montmollin, 1990; Chelcea, 2006) and the final subchapter, "Methods used in measuring attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled children" lists and describes the most common methods and presents the advantages and disadvantages of each.

The limitations and insufficient methods to measure attitudes prove, on the other hand, the complexity of attitude-type reactions, hard to investigate using known methods. An in-depth understanding of attitude requires the complementary use of as many research tools as possible, each method bringing additional insights into certain defining aspects of attitude. To overcome the inconvenience caused by measurements based on a single direct question, researchers frequently use multiple-item questionnaires called “attitude scales”. The Likert scale, known as the scale of summed evaluations, 1932, is a nominal scale, with several answers ranging from complete disagreement to complete agreement, where the subject picks a single answer. The Bogardus social distance scale is recommended in the study of ethnic or racial prejudice and consists of a series of opinions by which an individual is situated, in a specific context, at certain social distances. The Thurstone scale or the method of equal-appearing intervals (1928) implies the grouping of items progressively, based on intensity, on 7, 9 or 11 stacks and keeping the median or modal opinion for each statement. The Guttman scale (1944) and the Osgood semantic differentiator (1957) are another two types of scales used.

Antonak and Livneh (1988) suggest that attitudes are best measured using Likert scales that give subjects the opportunity to offer direct answers that leave no room for interpretation.

Chapter 3, “Teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion” is based on the finding and selection of a number of recent studies in order to synthesize their conclusions and underline their importance to the research topic. Thus, the chapter focuses on the systematic investigation of psycho-social variables that impact the formation and alteration of attitudes regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities, and the main theoretical contribution consists of the introduction of the Avramidis, Norwich (2002) theoretical model, a revised version of the Salvia, Munson (1986) model. These authors group aforementioned variables into three categories: factors reliant on the particularities of teachers, factors reliant on the particularities of the child, and school environment factors. The variables are analyzed in a widely circulated paper, Avramidis, Norwich (2002) using statistical data from multiple studies in recent years, “Teachers’ attitudes towards integration / inclusion: a review of the literature”.

An important outcome of this chapter is the identification of significant psycho-social factors influencing teachers’ attitudes. First and foremost comes the type and severity of the disability in question, followed by factors pertaining to the environment and the administrative support mainstream schools receive, and lastly, by the factors pertaining to the socio-professional particularities of the teachers.

In the final part of the chapter, a table abstract of research analyzed by Rizzo, Vispoel, 1992, quoted by Elliot (2008) is presented, and the conclusions are augmented with references to results obtained by other authors in scientific literature both abroad and locally. To facilitate the reviewing of this data, the conclusions have been divided into three categories, according to the particularities of teachers investigated, the particularities of children with disabilities and the particularities of the school environment, as per the Avramidis, Norwich (2002) model.

PERSONAL RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

This chapter evaluates the impact a series of psycho-social factors could have on mainstream kindergarten teachers' attitudes regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities.

The first study (I.a) focuses on the investigation of the nature of attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens, and the difference in attitude based on the socio-professional status of participants (university students and teachers). **Study 1.b** investigates the way socio-professional context and school context impact teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of all children with disabilities in normal kindergartens, and **study II** has two major goals. The first is to investigate the attitudes of kindergarten directors towards the inclusion of disabled children in normal kindergartens and how a number of socio-professional factors impact them, and the second is to investigate how the type of disability impacts directors' decision to integrate them in normal kindergartens.

Study I.a: the investigation of educators' and students' attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled children in normal kindergartens

Introduction

As long as negative attitudes persist, complete acceptance of disabled persons is very unlikely (Antonak et al, 2000, apud Nowicki 2006). A change in behavior towards disabled people can start from understanding prejudice and discrimination, myths that are firmly rooted in some groups such as school communities. Prejudice is reflected in negative attitude and hesitant behavior from some members of the community that can hinder the participation of disabled people to normal social, educational and professional contexts (Livenh et al., 1997, Brodwin et al., 2002 apud Rosenthal et al., 2006).

To support a change in teachers' attitudes towards the integration of disabled children in mainstream schools, it is very important to know the attitudes of university students during their time spent preparing to become teachers, and to understand what their expectations are regarding the process of inclusion (Sindelar et al., 2010) as they may become important factors in applying inclusion.

According to Stafford, Green (1996) the attitude of teachers involved in planning and implementing an inclusion program is vital to its' success, and the investigation of students' and teachers' attitudes in a single study is necessary, as there are a relatively small number of studies on the topic of inclusion for disabled children, and particularly, on inclusion in normal kindergartens.

Research goals and hypotheses

The first study (I.a) aims to investigate the nature of attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens and differences in attitudes based on the socio-professional status of the participants (students and teachers).

General hypothesis: university students and teachers of kindergarten will register significant differences in attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Specific hypothesis 1:

University students and teachers of kindergarten will show significant differences in attitude regarding the inclusion of disabled children, generally, and in attitude regarding the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities, particularly.

Specific hypothesis 2:

There are significant differences between teachers and university students regarding views on the potential advantages and disadvantages of inclusion, the role and professional capacity to educate disabled children, the philosophical and logistical aspects of inclusion.

Specific hypothesis 3:

There are significant differences between university students and teachers regarding views on the academic success of all children in an inclusive environment, the need to create and develop professional relationships in order to satisfy the educational needs of all children and the need to create an inclusive environment for all children.

Research methodology

Distribution and description of participant sample

Considering the goal of this study, the research participants (N=421) have been divided into two groups, based on socio-professional status: university students and teachers. The groups originate in the university environment – students (N=189) and teachers from normal kindergartens (N=232).

The student sample has been selected from among students of The School of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj Napoca, majoring in Special Psychopedagogy (N=92), Preschool and Primary Pedagogy (N=51), Pedagogy (N=7) and Psychology (N=39). The sample comes from all years of study (freshmen – N=67, sophomores – N=71, seniors – N=42 and master’s students – N=9)

The teacher sample (N=232) has been selected from normal kindergartens in Cluj county and exhibit the following socio-professional traits described in this study to match the research needs identified. Thus, a third of the teachers (32.75%) are under 30 years old and only 12.93% are over 50 years old, the rest are either 31 to 40 years old or 41 to 50 years old and predominantly (96.98%) are female.

From the entire teacher sample, 50 have between 1 and 3 years teaching experience, 61 have between 4 and 9 years teaching experience, 65 have between 10 and 20 years teaching experience, and 54 have over 20 years teaching experience, while 11 have no teaching experience at all in mainstream kindergartens. 36% have had between 1 and 3 years experience in instructive-educative activities with disabled children and only 51% have had formal training in the field of inclusive education, the nature, duration and type of which is unspecified.

In addition, grouping the results by disability type, in order of occurrence, shows a larger number of children with learning disabilities (23.8%) and speech deficiencies (24.5%) integrated in normal kindergartens, followed by autistic children / children with pervasive development disorders (22.1%) and less children with sensory impairments (sight and hearing).

Research design

For this study, a simple research design has been chosen (descriptive, using inferential statistics) where the dependent variable is the attitude towards inclusion, quantified by the general score for each scale, and the independent variable is the socio-professional status of participants, with two states: university students and teachers.

Research procedure

The multi-dimensional list for the investigation of attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled children – student version and teacher version – (Annex 1) has been distributed in printed form to most of the students, and most of the teachers answered online, on www.isondaje.ro. The data has

been turned in immediately after completion of the questionnaire. Incomplete responses on the attitude scales have been eliminated, resulting in a final sample of 421 participants.

Every questionnaire is filled in individually and there is no time limit (each takes about 25-30 minutes). For the first Questionnaire, participants must read each item carefully and show to what extent they think a number of statements apply to them, then for the STATIC scale they must choose one answer that they feel is most appropriate on a five-point continuum: “strong disagreement”, “disagreement”, “neutral / do not know”, “agreement”, “strong agreement” and for the ATTAS-mm scale pick the most appropriate answer on a seven-point continuum: “very strong disagreement”, “strong disagreement”, “disagreement”, “neutral / do not know”, “agreement”, “strong agreement”, “very strong agreement” (Likert scale).

In accordance with the legal terms for use of the scales, posted on the authors’ website and following an e-mail agreement from them, English versions of the scales, translated into Romanian, and properly referenced have been approved for use in research and publication.

Research instruments used

In order to achieve the research goal and to verify the hypothesis, three instruments have been used: a questionnaire on the socio-professional particularities of the participants, particularities of children with disabilities and school environment particularities, and two scales for measuring social attitudes, combined under the name “The multidimensional list for investigation of attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities”.

The detailed description of all instruments used in this research contains several important aspects, such as the description of each scale, each subscale and the validity of the original scale. All this is presented in depth in chapter 4.2. “Psychometric properties of research instruments used”, divided into four subchapters.

The STATIC (Scale of Teachers’ Attitudes Towards Inclusive Classrooms) scale developed by Keith Cochran in 1997 contains 20 items (Annex 4) and the ATTAS-mm (Attitudes Towards Teaching All Students), developed by Lori A. Noto (University of Bridgeport) and Jess L. Gregory (Southern CT State University) in 2011 contains nine items (Annex 3). These scales measure the attitude of teachers towards inclusion, generally, and their perception of various aspects of the process of inclusion.

The first instrument used, STATIC, is comprised of four subscales that describe a number of dimensions of inclusion. The first is S1 - Advantages and disadvantages of inclusion, the second, S2

– The role and professional abilities for educating children with disabilities, the third, S3 – Aspects pertaining to the philosophy of inclusion and the fourth, S4 – Logistical aspects of inclusion. In STATIC, scores range from 20 to 110 and result from the summation of scores obtained in the 20 items. Subscale S1 contains 7 items, 3 of which are reversed-scoring and 4 direct-scoring (score interval: 7-35, summation of the 7 items), subscale S2 contains 5 items, 2 of which are direct-scoring and 3 reversed-scoring (score interval 5-25, summation of the 5 items), subscale S3 contains 4 items, all of which are direct-scoring (score interval 4-20, summation of the 4 items), and subscale S4 contains 4 items, all of which are direct-scoring (score interval: 4-20, summation of the four items).

According to Cochran's specifications, a large score indicates an attitude favorable to inclusion, whereas a low score indicates an unfavorable one (sample size N=481, mean=58.91, standard deviation = 7.94).

The second instrument, ATTAS-mm evaluates *the attitude towards the inclusion of children, specifically those with slight and moderate disabilities, in mainstream kindergartens and perceptions on the three aspects of the inclusion process*, reflected in the three subscales. The first subscale, A1 – evaluates *beliefs regarding the academic success of all children in an inclusive environment*, the second subscale, A2 – evaluates *the need for teachers' personal and professional development in order to meet the educational needs of all children* and the third subscale, A3 – evaluates *the capacity to create an inclusive educational environment*.

Scores in ATTAS-mm range, overall, from 9 to 63, as a result of the summation of scores from the 9 items. Each subscale has 3 items (scores ranging from 3 to 21, summation of the three items).

According to Noto, Gregory (2011), a large score indicates an attitude favorable to inclusion, whereas a lower score indicates an unfavorable one (sample size N=48, mean=34.67, standard deviation=4.92).

Data analysis and result interpretation

Data obtained has been sorted and grouped for statistical analysis and data processing (preliminary statistical procedures). Building a database in SPSS has allowed for the grouping and centralization of data in tables or graphic form.

To analyze the fidelity of the instruments in measuring attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, the Alpha-Cronbach coefficient for the internal consistency of each scale

and subscale has been calculated for the entire sample (N=421). In the case of the STATIC scale, the coefficient for the entire sample and across the entire scale is close to the author's coefficient (N=421, $\alpha=0.822$) and presents a good overall internal consistency (except in the case of subscale S4 where a weak coefficient has been found, $\alpha=0.450$).

The Alpha-Cronbach coefficient for the entire sample on the ATTAS-mm scale is, overall, close to the authors' coefficient (N=421, $\alpha=0.831$). Generally, the values obtained for each subscale are slightly lower than the ones found by the authors.

Preliminary data analysis – testing the normality of distribution

The statistical analysis has been augmented by testing the normality of distribution – a rescaling of values; for this purpose, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test has been applied to the entire sample of participants, as well as to both scales (STATIC and ATTAS-mm) and each of their respective subscales.

For the STATIC and ATTAS-mm scales overall, the normality of distribution is assumed (at the $p=0.05$ threshold) for university students as well as for teachers (mesokurtic distribution). Histograms show a satisfying match to the theoretical model of normal distribution, indicating the fact that residual values are within normality.

Presentation of statistical indicators

In order to determine the nature of students' and teachers' attitudes (the participants' tendency towards a more favorable or a less favorable attitude towards inclusion) scores, means, and standard deviation have been calculated for each of the scales, overall, and for each of their respective subscales.

Because the STATIC scale contains both direct-scoring and reversed-scoring items, scores for favorable attitudes have been calculated as follows: if the item is direct-scoring, strong disagreement=1, disagreement=2, neutral/do not know = 3, agreement=4, strong agreement=5, and if the item is reversed-scoring, points are granted in reverse, strong disagreement=5, disagreement=4, neutral/do not know=3, agreement=2, strong agreement=1.

The ATTAS-mm is comprised of 9 direct-scoring items, and therefore calculating scores for favorable attitudes has been done as follows: very strong disagreement=1, strong disagreement=2, disagreement=3, neutral/do not know=4, agreement=5, strong agreement=6, very strong agreement=7.

Description of results from the university students' sample (N=189), STATIC

An mid-level attitude favorable to the inclusion of children with disabilities has been observed in university students, overall (for STATIC, overall, the scores vary from 35 to 89, out of a possible 20-110, with a mean=69.61 and standard deviation=8.82).

Also, results show a tendency among participant students to accept and acknowledge the benefits of inclusion (scores vary from 7 to 33, out of a possible 7-35 with a mean=23.09 and standard deviation=4.07), to acknowledge the role and professional abilities in educating children with disabilities (scores ranging from 9 to 25 out of a possible 5-25, with a mean=17.56 and standard deviation=3.32) as well as the philosophical and logistical aspects of inclusion (scores ranging from 6 to 20 out of a possible 4-20, with a mean=15.14 and standard deviation=2.66).

Description of results from the teachers' sample (N=232), STATIC

Teachers show a slightly favorable attitude towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens, overall (scores ranging from 46 to 96 out of a possible 20-110, with a mean=71.16, slightly higher than the students' sample, standard deviation=10.29)

Results also show a tendency among teachers to accept and acknowledge the benefits of inclusion, the role and professional abilities in educating children with disabilities, the philosophical and logistical aspects of the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Description of results from the students' sample (N=189), ATTAS-mm

Results show an overall mid-level tendency towards an attitude favorable to the inclusion of children with moderate and mild disabilities in normal kindergartens (ATTAS-mm scores range, overall, between 19 and 63 out of a possible 9-63, with a mean=44.30 and standard deviation=8.26). Also, a tendency has been noticed to more easily accept the fact that all children integrated in normal kindergartens can achieve success through the activation of their present psychological potential, to acknowledge the importance of personal and professional relationship development as well as the creation of an acceptive environment for all children.

Description of results from the teachers' sample (N=232), ATTAS-mm

Results show medium level attitudes, overall favorable to the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities in normal kindergartens (for ATTAS-mm, overall scores vary from 17 to 63 out of a possible variance of 9-63, with a means of 46.94 and standard deviation=7.77). A

noticeable tendency is seen in the results for teachers to more easily accept the fact that all children integrated in mainstream kindergarten can achieve academic success by the activation of their psychological potential and to acknowledge the importance of personal and professional relationship development and the creation of an accepting environment for all children.

Frequency distributions and graphs

For the qualitative analysis of results a description of indicators of attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens has been made for each STATIC and ATTAS-mm item.

Thus, the frequency of responses and the percentage values (alongside a graph rendering) has been calculated for STATIC items, grouped by subscale, as well as the values for the ATTAS-mm scale. Based on this statistical data, it was possible to show a favorable or unfavorable tendency regarding inclusion among research participants (students and teachers) grouped by the socio-professional status variable.

The analysis of responses on the STATIC and ATTAS-mm items leads to a detailed portrait of participants' particularities. Thus, the analysis of items with a high rate of responses favorable to inclusion shows the following conclusions: *there is a need for professional training in the field of inclusive education for all teachers working in normal kindergartens; all children can accomplish progress in most learning environments, regardless of their individual particularities; there is an acceptance towards integrating children with mild and moderate behavioral problems in mainstream learning groups; locations in which mainstream education takes place need to change in order to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities. Also, most of the participants acknowledge the benefits inclusion presents for all children (focusing mainly on the learning of social abilities, the increase in disabled children's self-esteem, the accomplishing of significant academic progress) and stress the importance of additional material resources and support teachers in the inclusive group".*

Nevertheless, a significant number of teachers and university students consider that mainstream education is not the right place to integrate all disabled children, and that special needs kindergartens should not be abolished. Results show a very low level of support for the integration of children with severe intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities in normal kindergartens. Forlin has obtained similar results in a 1995 study that shows teachers' acceptance of the inclusion

of disabled children in mainstream classes decreasing depending on the severity and type of the disability in question.

Conclusions

The two participant groups show statistically significant differences in the attitude towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities in normal kindergartens. More specifically, mainstream kindergarten teachers show attitudes more favorable to inclusion than university students; these attitudes are also reflected in their tendency to believe that all children can succeed in mainstream groups, that the development of a professional and personal relationship is important, and last, but not least, that an environment of acceptance for all children must be created. Some authors have explained the role and responsibilities of teachers in educating disabled children and creating an accepting environment for all children (Villa et al., 1996; Lombardi, Woodrum, 1999) concluding that if teachers do not feel properly qualified and are not willing to adapt the resources of an inclusive environment, inclusive practices are less likely to succeed.

This, alongside previously discussed responses, leads to the following conclusion: the study of attitudes shown by university students from the field of socio-psychopedagogy has been useful in providing some answers regarding the particularities of including disabled children in normal kindergartens. In addition, the main advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion process, as well as the developmental needs that university students find important have been found. Identifying the attitudes of university students, in their role as potential future inclusive classroom teachers in schools and kindergartens, is necessary in order to inflict a positive change during their higher education, sustained through theoretical means and practical positive inclusive experience.

Results obtained in this study confirm the data from other scientific studies stating that, on the one hand, while the majority of teachers support the principles of an inclusive education for all, their attitudes towards disabled children integrated in their own classrooms are often times ambivalent or negative (Smith, 2000, apud Parker, 2009), and on the other hand, unfavorable attitudes towards inclusion are correlated with low expectations among teachers in regards to integrated disabled children's potential for academic achievement (Loreman, 2007).

Study I.b: the identification of socio-professional and schooling environment particularities that influence mainstream kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled children

Introduction

A question that is still open to psychopedagogy research is the nature of teachers' attitudes and the way various socio-professional and environmental factors contribute to creating differences in aforementioned attitudes. As Forlin (2009) shows, the academic success of disabled children is largely dependent upon mainstream school teachers' willingness to work with them.

Generally, researchers have found a large number of attitudes towards inclusion among teachers, varying from completely unfavorable to very favorable, and this is explained through a theoretical model that shows a very large number of variables influencing teachers' attitudes in one way or another.

The factors influencing attitudes are grouped into three major categories: teachers' particularities, disabled children's particularities, and school environment particularities (as shown in the model of Salvia, Munson, 1986, updated by Avramidis and Norwich in 2002). Aside from these particularities, this work aims to verify the extent to which the Avramidis and Norwich (2002) model can be improved by adding a variable that has proven relevant in regards to teachers' attitudes: *teachers' professional statuses*, used herein for three positions (teachers, school counselors and kindergarten directors). Another important contribution consists of juxtaposing these variables in the research process with instruments to measure teachers' attitudes, thus contributing to the explanatory nature of this undertaking and conferring it specificity.

In addition, a recurring question in scientific literature aims to find individual variables that can differentiate responders in regards to their attitudes towards inclusion. In other words, the fact that some individuals tend to have more favorable attitudes than others in regards to the same process can be explained through statistical patterns, in that some socio-professional characteristics clearly and significantly lead to a predisposition towards favorable or less favorable attitudes regarding inclusion.

Research goals and hypotheses

This study is based on the following goals and hypotheses, subsidiary to the main goal – to investigate the attitudes of mainstream kindergarten teachers towards the inclusion of disabled children.

The general goal of this study is to investigate the way socio-professional and academic contexts impact teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled children in normal kindergartens.

General hypothesis: teachers' socio-professional particularities, as well as school environment particularities significantly impact teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens.

Specific hypothesis 1

Experience in mainstream education causes significant differences in kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities.

Specific hypothesis 2

Experience in working with disabled children causes significant differences in kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities.

Specific hypothesis 3

Having direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children with various types of disabilities causes significant differences in kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities.

Specific hypothesis 4

Training courses in the field of inclusive education cause significant differences in kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities.

Specific hypothesis 5

There are significant differences in kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities, depending on each teacher's professional status.

Research methodology

Distribution and description of participant sample

For this study, a number of teachers (N=232) have been selected from normal kindergartens in Cluj county.

The participant samples are relatively equal in size and all contain a sufficient number of subjects to allow for statistical analysis. This part of the work describes the participants based on the following parameters: age, gender, professional status, teaching experience, experience in teaching disabled children, direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children suffering from various types of disability, training courses in the field of inclusive education and their distribution by number of children enrolled in the mainstream kindergarten and by number of disabled children integrated. This data is shown in table and graph form for each variable.

Results show that the participants – teachers – (N=232) are divided by socio-professional status into three categories (kindergarten teachers, school counselors and mainstream kindergarten directors), and the kindergarten teacher sample (N=134) is the largest. Only kindergarten teachers and school counselors have between 1 and 3 years teaching experience, whereas more than half of the kindergarten directors have over 21 years of experience. Half of the participants have not taken professional development courses in the field of inclusive education and a large number of teachers have stated that they have had no direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children exhibiting various types of disability. In regards to the number of children integrated in normal kindergartens, results show a relatively small number integrated completely or partially in a kindergarten program.

Research design

This study employs a multifactor, intergroup design, with attitude towards inclusion, quantified through the general score on each scale as the *dependent variable* and certain professional characteristics of teachers as *independent variables*: 1.experience in mainstream education (with five possible levels: 1-3 years, 4-9 years, 10-20 years, over 21 years, not applicable); 2.experience in teaching children with disabilities (two levels: no experience in teaching children with disabilities and some experience in teaching children with disabilities, regardless of length); 3.direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children exhibiting various types of disability (two levels: have had, or have not had any psychopedagogy experience with children exhibiting various types of disability); 4.training courses in the field of inclusive education (two levels: has or has not attended

courses) and 5. teachers' professional status (three levels: kindergarten teacher, school counselor and director).

Procedure

The research took place in the spring of 2012 in the city of Cluj-Napoca, and the Multidimensional checklist for the investigation of attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities – students' and teachers' version (Annex 1) has been given out in printed form to most of the teachers; the rest responded online, on the www.isondaje.ro website, as in the case of Study I.a. The printed list has been turned in immediately after completion. Participants with incomplete responses on the attitude scales have been eliminated, resulting in a final sample of 232 participants.

Research tools used

The research tools used are the same as in the previous study, I.a.: questionnaire on the socio-professional particularities of participants, the particularities of children with disabilities and the particularities of the school environment, the STATIC and ATTAS-mm scales. These all come together in the form of *The multidimensional checklist for the investigations of attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities* – teachers' and students' versions.

Data analysis and result interpretation

To verify the hypotheses, the difference between means within the teacher lot, based on the levels identified for each independent variable has been analyzed using parametric *t* testing for independent samples or the simple, one-factor ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) with a statistical significance of alpha ($p < 0.05$).

Differences in attitudes based on teachers' teaching experience

For each of the instruments used, STATIC and ATTAS-mm, the difference in means for the independent variable *teaching experience* has been analyzed. There are five levels of experience: 1-3 years, 4-9 years, 10-20 years, over 21 years and no experience, making the use of spread analysis justified when evaluating the difference in means. Thus, the simplest of Analysis of Variance techniques, the one-factor ANOVA has been used. Prior to that, each scale and subscale has been checked for normality (the normality analysis for score distribution is presented in Study I.a.)

In regards to the differences in teachers' attitudes regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities, overall (on the STATIC scale) the ANOVA procedure has not shown any significant difference $F(4,227)=1.217$, $p=0.304$) between the five categories of teachers.

Also, the ANOVA procedure has not shown any significant differences between these categories in regards to the advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion of children with disabilities, $F(4,227)=0.662$, $p=0.619$), in regards to the role and professional abilities needed to instruct children with disabilities $F(4,227)=1.230$, $p<0.229$), in regards to the philosophical aspects of inclusion $F(4,227)=0.246$, $p=0.912$) or in regards to the logistical aspects of including disabled children in normal kindergartens $F(4,227)=1.948$, $p=0.103$).

As to what concerns the difference in teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities in normal kindergartens, based on teaching experience in mainstream education (ATTAS-mm scale), the ANOVA has not shown any significant difference $F(4,227)=0.775$, $p=0.542$). It can be safely stated that teaching experience in mainstream education does not significantly influence teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities.

In addition, the ANOVA procedure has not shown differences between these categories of teachers as to what concerns the development of a personal and professional relationship $F(4,227)=0.192$, $p=0.942$) and the creation of an environment of acceptance for all children $F(4,227)=0.409$, $p=0.802$).

The means of the scores differ significantly $F(4,227)=3.008$, $p=0.09$) between teachers grouped by teaching experience in regards to the belief that all children can be successful in mainstream groups (subscale A1).

Consequently, the first specific hypothesis, according to which experience in mainstream education causes significant differences in kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities, is dismissed. The variable "teaching experience in mainstream education" has significantly influenced the perceptions of kindergarten teachers regarding the success of all children in a mainstream kindergarten group, teachers belonging to the 1-3 years of experience group showing more openness towards this aspect of inclusion.

Differences in attitudes based on experience in working with disabled children

For each of the instruments used, STATIC and ATTAS-mm, the difference in means based on teachers' answers for the independent variable *experience in teaching children with disabilities* has been analyzed, using the two levels: has / doesn't have teaching experience with disabled children.

In this particular case, the use of the parametric *t* test for independent samples is justified; a significance coefficient alpha ($p < 0.05$) has been used.

In regards to the differences in teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, overall, (STATIC scale), the *t* test for independent samples has shown significant differences between teachers that have experience in teaching disabled children and teachers that do not have experience in teaching disabled children, $t(2.992)=230$, $p < 0.003$. In this case, the means are smaller in the case of teachers without experience. Thus, teachers that do have experience in teaching disabled children show significantly more favorable attitudes regarding inclusion, overall.

Also, the *t* test for independent samples has shown differences between the two categories of teachers as to what concerns the advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion of disabled children $t(2.457) = 207.652$, $p < 0.015$, as well as the role and qualifications needed in teaching disabled children $t(4.191)=230$, $p < 0.000$; in these situations the means are much higher in teachers with experience in teaching disabled children, which proves that they acknowledge the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion, and their own role in the teaching process in inclusive classrooms. Teachers with no experience in teaching disabled children show lower means.

In the matter of the philosophical aspects of including disabled children in normal kindergartens, $t(1.909)=230$, $p < 0.058$, and the matter of the logistic aspects of integrating disabled children in normal kindergartens $t(0.356)=230$, $p < 0.722$ the *t* test for independent samples does not show significant differences between the two categories of teachers.

The *t* test for independent samples has not shown any significant difference between teachers that have experience in teaching disabled children and teachers that do not $t(1.615)=195.499$, $p < 0.108$ in regards to the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities (ATTAS-mm scale). The same test has also not shown significant differences between the two categories of teachers in regards to their perception of every child's academic achievement in an inclusive classroom $t(1.579)=230$, $p < 0.116$, the perceived importance of the professional and personal relationship $t(0.431)=230$, $p < 0.667$ and their openness towards creating an accepting environment for all children $t(1.805)=230$, $p < 0.072$.

It can be safely stated that the hypothesis according to which experience in working with disabled children causes significant differences in kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities is partially confirmed.

Differences in attitudes based on direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children exhibiting various types of disability

For each of the instruments used, STATIC and ATTAS-mm, the difference in means based on teachers' answers for the independent variable *direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children exhibiting various types of disability* has been analyzed, using the two levels: has / has not had direct contact / psychopedagogy experience with children exhibiting various types of disability.

In this particular case, the use of the parametric *t* test for independent samples is justified; a significance coefficient alpha ($p < 0.05$) has been used.

The *t* test for independent variables has shown significant differences in the attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, overall (STATIC scale) between teachers that have declared not having had any kind of direct contact or psychopedagogy experience with children exhibiting various types of disability and teachers that have had that kind of contact or experience, $t(3.273)=230$, $p < 0.001$. In this case, teachers with psychopedagogy experience show higher means, and thus, it can be safely stated that they have more favorable attitudes towards inclusion, overall.

In addition, the *t* test for independent variables has shown differences between the two categories of teachers as to what concerns the advantages and disadvantages of including children with disabilities $t(2.621)=230$, $p < 0.009$, the role and qualifications in teaching disabled children $t(3.351)=230$, $p < 0.001$, and the philosophical aspects of including disabled children in normal kindergartens $t(2.406)=67.57$, $p < 0.019$.

In the aforementioned situations, means are higher in teachers that have had direct contact or psychopedagogy experience in working with disabled children, which shows that they are more supportive of the benefits of inclusion, they acknowledge the importance of the teacher in an inclusive classroom and the role their qualifications play, and also, they exhibit a higher tendency to believe that all children can learn and obtain important achievements in most school environments.

The *t* test for independent variables has not shown any significant difference between these categories of teachers regarding the logistical aspects of the inclusion of disabled children in normal kindergartens $t(1.161) = 230$, $p < 0.247$.

On the ATTAS-mm scale, the same test has shown significant differences between the two categories of teachers as to what concerns the way they perceive the academic success of all children in an inclusive classroom $t(2.535)=230$, $p<0.012$, the importance of a professional and personal relationship $t(2.534)=230$, $p<0.012$ and significant differences in how they perceive the creation of an accepting environment for all children $t(3.682)=230$, $p<0.000$.

Consequently, the specific hypothesis according to which having direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children with various types of disabilities causes significant differences in kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities is confirmed.

Differences in attitudes based on attending training courses in the field of inclusive education

For each of the instruments used, STATIC and ATTAS-mm, overall, and their respective subscales, the difference in means based on teachers' answers for the independent variable *training courses in the field of inclusive education* has been analyzed, dividing the teachers into two categories: has attended / has not attended training courses in the field of inclusive education.

In this particular case, the use of the parametric t test for independent samples in order to evaluate the difference in means is justified; a significance coefficient alpha ($p<0.05$) has been used.

The t test for independent samples revealed significant differences between the attitudes of teachers who said they had not received training in inclusive education and those who have completed training $t(3.107)= 230$, $p<0.002$, in regards to inclusion, overall (STATIC scale). Means are higher for teachers who said they had received training in inclusive education and thus it is safe to state that, overall, they have more favorable attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Testing has also shown significant differences between these two categories of teachers concerning the logistical aspects of including disabled children in normal kindergartens, $t(2.763)=230$, $p<0.006$, the role and qualifications involved in teaching disabled children $t(3.925)=230$, $p<0.000$ and the philosophical aspects of including disabled children in normal kindergartens $t(2.050)=230$, $p<0.041$.

In these cases means are higher in teachers who have received training in inclusive education, which shows that they are more open to change in the classroom environment in order to meet the needs of all children, they acknowledge and support kindergarten directors' involvement in

the inclusion process, the importance of the teacher in an inclusive classroom and the role their professional training plays, in addition to exhibiting a high tendency to believe that all children can learn and obtain important academic progress in most school environments.

The t test for independent samples has not shown any differences between these categories of teachers regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion of disabled children $t(2.263)=230, p<0.208$.

On the ATTAS-mm scale, testing has shown significant differences in attitudes towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities between teachers who have attended and completed training in the field of inclusive education and teachers who have not, $t(1.967)=230, p<0.040$.

In addition, the t test for independent samples has shown significant differences in attitudes towards creating an accepting environment for all children between teachers who have attended and completed training in the field of inclusive education and teachers who have not, $t(2.474)=230, p<0.014$.

The specific hypothesis according to which attending training courses in the field of inclusive education causes significant differences in kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities is confirmed.

Differences in attitudes based on teachers' professional status

For each of the instruments used, STATIC and ATTAS-mm, the difference in means based on answers for the independent variable *teachers' professional status* has been analyzed, dividing the teachers into three categories: kindergarten teachers, school counselors and kindergarten directors. In this case, a spread analysis of the difference in means is justified, and thus, the simple ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) procedure has been used.

Concerning the differences in teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled children, overall (STATIC scale), the ANOVA procedure shows significant differences $F=(2.229)=4.777, p=0.009$ between teachers, depending on their professional status.

Also, the procedure has shown differences between these categories of teachers as to what concerns the role and professional qualifications needed in teaching disabled children $F=(2.229)=5.926, p <0.003$ and the philosophical aspects of the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens $F=(2.229)=3.391, p=0.035$.

Also, the differences in perception and the way these categories of teachers relate to the advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion of disabled children $F=(2.229)=2.884$, $p=0.058$) and to the logistical aspects of including disabled children in normal kindergartens $F=(4.777)=2.440$, $p=0.089$) were close to being statistically significant.

Since significant differences between subject groups have been obtained, multiple analysis techniques have been employed, namely post-hoc analysis, that differentiates between pairs of groups.

Thus, for the S2 subscale, the role and professional qualifications needed in teaching disabled children, the Hochberg GT2 post-hoc test shows that means differ significantly between kindergarten teachers and school counselors ($p=0.003$), with higher means in the case of school counselors.

In regards to the philosophical aspects of the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens (S3 subscale), the GT2 post-hoc test shows that means differ significantly between kindergarten teachers and school counselors ($p=0.031$), with higher means in the case of school counselors.

In addition, for the STATIC scale, overall, the Hochberg GT2 post-hoc test shows a significant difference in means between kindergarten teachers and school counselors ($p=0.011$), with higher means in the case of school counselors.

In regards to the difference in teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities (ATTAS-mm scale) the ANOVA procedure has shown significant differences $F=(2.229)=3.776$, $p=0.024$) between teachers, based on their professional status.

ANOVA testing has also shown differences between these categories of teachers in regards to the development of the personal and professional relationship $F=(2.229)=3.116$, $p<0.046$) and the need to create an accepting environment for all children $F=(2.229)=4.897$, $p=0.008$).

In regards to the development of the personal and professional relationship, the GT2 Hochberg post-hoc test has not shown two categories based on professional status that have significantly different means (on a $p=0.05$ threshold), and therefore the LSD (least significant difference) test has been used; this is based on t statistics and is the most liberal way to do multiple comparisons, in that it most often accepts a significant difference. Testing has shown that means differ significantly between kindergarten teacher groups and school counselors ($p=0.025$), with higher means in the case of school counselors.

In regards to the need for creating an accepting environment for all children, the GT2 post-hoc test shows that the means differ significantly between kindergarten teachers and school counselors ($p=0.008$) with higher means in the case of school counselors.

The same Hochberg test has shown significant differences in attitudes towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities between kindergarten teachers and school counselors ($p=0.043$), with higher means in the case of school counselors.

Factorial analysis of variance (two-way ANOVA)

Because it has been found that some variables significantly differentiate between the attitudes of groups of teachers and the way they relate to a number of aspects concerning inclusion, a factorial analysis of variance has been employed, to test, firstly, the global effect (of all factors), the main effects (one for each factor in the analysis), and the effect the interaction of these factors has.

The only variables that have been found to be significantly related to the attitudes of mainstream kindergarten teachers towards inclusion, overall, are variables F1 – direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children exhibiting various types of disability $t(3.273)=230$, $p<0.001$ and F2 – attending courses in the field of inclusive education $t(3.107)=230$, $p<0.002$. In addition, variable F1 has been found to significantly relate to teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities in normal kindergartens $t(3.514)=230$, $p<0.001$, and so has variable F2 $t(1.967)=230$, $p<0.040$.

The global effect of variables F1 and F2 on the attitude of teachers, reflected on the STATIC scale is overall significant.

Both F1 ($F=10.920$; $p=0.001$) and F2 ($F=6.561$; $p=0.011$) significantly impact the STATIC scale scores. Thus, the value for F1 shows a significant main effect of the *experience in working with children exhibiting various types of disability* factor on the attitudes of teachers. The *partial eta squared* (0.046) shows an insignificant effect size. The value of F2 shows a significant main effect of the *courses in the field of inclusive education* factor on the attitude of teachers. The *partial eta squared* (0.028) shows an insignificant effect size. Also, their cumulated effect is insignificant ($F=0.001$; $p=0.970$).

The global effect of F1 and F2 on the attitudes of teachers reflected on the ATTAS-mm scale, is overall, significant.

Only F1 ($F=12.382$; $p=0.001$) shows a significant main effect on the scores of the ATTAS-mm scale, whereas F2 ($F=1.848$; $p=0.175$) shows an insignificant main effect. Thus, the value of F1 shows a significant main effect of the *experience in working with children exhibiting various types of disability*

factor on the attitudes of teachers. The *partial eta squared* (0.052) shows an insignificant effect size. Also, the cumulated effect of F1 and F2 is insignificant ($F=0.801$; $p=0.004$).

Conclusions

Analysis has shown that the differences in teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are due to factors pertaining to the particularities of teachers, factors pertaining to the particularities of the disabled child and factors pertaining to the school environment, as per the updated Avramidis, Norwich (2002) theoretical model.

Experience in teaching disabled children, direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children exhibiting various types of disability, attending professional development courses in the field of inclusive education and the professional status of teachers all uniquely and significantly explain the differences in scores on the attitude scales.

More specifically, teachers in their roles as educational players show significantly more favorable attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled children, overall, if they have had experience in working with these children, than teachers that have not had the same experience. Also, they show a higher tendency to acknowledge the benefits of inclusion and the role teachers play in the teaching process in inclusive classrooms. The results of the study confirm some of the data obtained by Avramidis et al. (2000) that underlines the importance of experience in working with disabled children in the forming of teachers' opinions regarding inclusion. Similar conclusions have been reached by Marston, Leslie, 1983, Rizzo, Vispoel, 1991.

Direct psychopedagogy experience (in working with children exhibiting various types of disability), obtained through various projects, educational partnerships with public or private institutions, or by working in inclusive classrooms in normal kindergartens significantly influences teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities. Also, views on the advantages and disadvantages of the inclusion of disabled children, the role and professional qualifications needed in teaching disabled children in an inclusive classroom, and the philosophical aspects of the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens are significantly more favorable among teachers that have had direct contact with disabled children. Significant differences among these teachers also occur in regards to their perception of academic achievement for all children in the inclusive classroom, the importance of the personal and professional relationship and the creation of an accepting environment for all children.

Teachers that have declared attending training courses in the field of inclusive education have significantly more favorable attitudes regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities, overall, and regarding the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities, than teachers that have not taken any training course in the field of inclusive education. These teachers tend to be significantly more aware of their own role in the teaching / learning process in inclusive classrooms and to acknowledge the philosophical and logistical aspects of including children with disabilities.

Detailed analysis shows statistically significant differences between groups of kindergarten teachers and groups of school counselors, in that school counselors show a significantly more favorable attitude towards more sides of the inclusion process: the development of a personal and professional relationship, the need to create an accepting environment for all children, the role and qualifications of teachers working with disabled children, and the philosophical aspects of the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens.

Teaching experience in the mainstream classroom has proven not to be a significantly influential factor on the attitudes of teachers concerning the inclusion of children with disabilities, generally, and the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities, particularly. A tendency exists, though, for teachers with little teaching experience (1 to 3 years) to acknowledge the fact that all children can be academically successful in the mainstream classroom, as opposed to their more experienced (4 to 9 years) peers.

Study II: the impact of socio-professional and schooling environment particularities, as well as the particularities of disabled children on mainstream kindergarten directors' attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled children

Introduction

This study aims, first and foremost, to identify mainstream kindergarten directors' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in order to determine the extent of their openness in regards to implementing inclusion. Secondly, the study investigates the relationship between some socio-professional characteristics of kindergarten directors and their attitudes towards inclusion, in order to draw a comprehensive portrait of the kindergarten educator, with potential considerable impact on teacher training programs.

Last but not least, the study aims to investigate how the type of disability impacts directors' decisions to integrate them in mainstream kindergarten programs. This inquiry aims to shed some

light on the current tendency to include children in schools or kindergartens based on the type of disability they are suffering from. In a 1995 study, Forlin has found that the degree of acceptance among educators for the inclusion of disabled children in mainstream classrooms decreases as the severity of the disability in question increases, and is also dependent upon the type of disability (physical disabilities are more favored than cognitive disabilities) and the time spent in a mainstream classroom (part-time rather than full integration). Aforementioned studies have shown that teachers in normal kindergartens were, generally, more reluctant to teach children suffering from intellectual disabilities, but were more open to teaching children with moderate physical disabilities or mild behavioral problems.

Goals and hypotheses of the research

This study has the following goals and hypotheses, subsidiary to the main purpose – to investigate the attitudes of kindergarten directors towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens.

Research goal 1: To investigate the nature of kindergarten directors' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens, and the impact socio-professional and environmental particularities have on these attitudes.

Research goal 2: To investigate how the type of disability the child is suffering from influences directors' decisions to integrate them in the mainstream kindergarten.

General hypothesis:

Socio-professional and school environment particularities, as well as the particularities of children with disabilities cause significantly different attitudes towards inclusion among mainstream kindergarten directors.

Specific hypothesis 1:

Experience in mainstream education causes significantly different attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities among mainstream kindergarten directors.

Specific hypothesis 2:

Experience in working with disabled children causes significantly different attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities among mainstream kindergarten directors.

Specific hypothesis 3:

Direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children exhibiting various types of disability causes significantly different attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities among mainstream kindergarten directors.

Specific hypothesis 4:

Attending training courses in the field of inclusive education causes significantly different attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities among mainstream kindergarten directors.

Specific hypothesis 5:

The type of disability a child is suffering from significantly influences directors' decisions to integrate them in the mainstream kindergarten.

Research methodology**Distribution and description of participant sample**

The study took place in the spring of 2012, in the city of Cluj-Napoca, on a participant sample consisting of 35 kindergarten directors from normal kindergartens in Cluj County. The subjects show the following personal and professional characteristics: almost half of the kindergarten directors are over 50 years old (15 out of 35), and only a third of them are under 40 years old. The majority of them are female (32 out of 35 directors) and only 5 have declared that they know a family member suffering from a disability. In terms of experience as directors, half of the subjects have been in this position for over 10 years (17 out of 35 directors). Also, the majority of subjects have stated that there are children with various types of disability integrated in the mainstream kindergarten they work in.

Results show that 22 out of 35 directors have over 21 years of experience in mainstream education, but more than half have never taught children with disabilities (N=19). In regards to direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children exhibiting various types of disability, whether through projects, educational partnerships with other state or private institutions, or in inclusive classrooms in a mainstream kindergarten, 29 out of 35 directors have declared having had such experiences. More than half (N=20) have stated they have never attended any training course in the field of inclusive education.

Research design

This study employs a multifactor, intergroup design, with attitude towards inclusion, quantified through the general score on each scale as the *dependent variable* and certain socio-professional characteristics of directors, as well as characteristics of the school environment, as *independent variables*. To complete the model, a variable concerning the type of disability has been introduced. Thus, the study uses the following independent variables: 1. direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children exhibiting various types of disability (two possibilities – subject has had or has not had direct contact with children exhibiting various types of disability); 2. experience in teaching children with disabilities (two possibilities: subject has or does not have experience in teaching children with disabilities); 3. experience in mainstream education (two possibilities: subject has under 20 years of experience, or over 21 years of experience in mainstream education); 4. training courses in the field of inclusive education (two possibilities: subject has attended or has not attended training courses in the field of inclusive education); 5. disability type (nine possibilities: learning difficulties, intellectual disabilities, emotional disorders, sight impairments, hearing impairments, speech impairments, physical disabilities, autism / pervasive developmental disorders, other health issues).

Procedure

The multidimensional checklist for the investigation of attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities – kindergarten directors’ version has been filled in online, on the www.isondaje.ro website, following the participants’ agreement submitted by email. Subjects that have had incomplete answers on the attitude scales have been eliminated, resulting in a total sample of 35 participants.

Research tools used

In order to meet the research goal and to verify the hypotheses, several instruments have been used, a questionnaire and three scales for the measuring of social attitudes, combined into the *Multidimensional checklist for the investigation of attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities*: the Questionnaire containing demographics and data pertaining to the participants’ qualification and professional experience, the STATIC (“Scale of Teachers’ Attitudes Toward Inclusive Classrooms”) scale by H. Keith Cochran, (1997), the ATTAS-mm (“Attitudes Towards Teaching All Students) scale by Lori A. Noto (University of Bridgeport) and Jess L. Gregory

(Southern CT State University), (2011), and the PIS (“Principals and Inclusion Survey”) by Cindy Praisner, (2003), comprised of two parts: Part I: the SASI (“Superintendents’ Attitude Survey on Integration”) scale, adapted by G.H. Stainback (1986) from “The Autism Attitude Scale for Teachers” (Olley et al., 1981), and Part II: “Most Appropriate Placements for Students with Disabilities” , Cindy Praisner, (2003).

Data analysis and result interpretation

In order to analyze the fidelity of the instruments used to measure attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, for the selected sample (N=35) the Alpha Cronbach coefficient for internal consistency has been calculated for each scale and its’ respective subscales, and results have, overall, been satisfactory and close to the internal consistency results of the original instruments (STATIC scale $\alpha=0,899$; ATTAS-mm scale, $\alpha=0,861$; PIS scale, Section I, $\alpha=0,715$).

Preliminary data analysis – testing the normality of distributions

For the STATIC and ATTAS-mm scales, overall, and for each of their respective subscales, the normality of score distributions is assumed (for a $p=0.05$ threshold) in the case of the kindergarten directors’ sample. Similarly, for the Section I-PIS (with a $p=0.05$ threshold), normality of score distributions is assumed.

Description of statistical indicators

Scores obtained by the kindergarten directors’ sample have been calculated for the STATIC and ATTAS-mm scales, overall, and for each of their respective subscales, as well as for Section I-PIS, then the means and standard deviation have been calculated and used to interpret the results.

Description of results from kindergarten directors (N=35), STATIC

Kindergarten directors generally show medium level attitudes, favorable to the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens. In addition, results show a slightly favorable tendency to accept and acknowledge the benefits of inclusion, the role and qualifications in teaching children with disabilities, the philosophical and logistical aspects of including children with disabilities.

Description of results from kindergarten directors (N=35), ATTAS-mm

Results show a slightly favorable attitude towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities in the mainstream kindergarten, as well as the directors' slightly favorable tendency towards accepting the fact that all children integrated in mainstream education can achieve academic success through the activation of their psychological potential, and acknowledging the importance of the personal and professional relationship and of the creation of an accepting environment for all children.

Description of results from kindergarten directors (N=35), Section I-PIS

Results shown in table form, for the kindergarten directors' sample, on Section I-PIS: scores vary from 22 to 44 (out of the possible values for this scale – 10 to 50) with a means (m=35.91). Thus, the conclusion is that this scale, too, shows a medium level attitude in kindergarten directors, slightly favorable towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens.

Frequency distributions and graphic representations

For the qualitative analysis of results, a description of the indicators of attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities has been made for each STATIC and ATTAS-mm item, and then for Section I-PIS.

To begin with, the frequency of responses to STATIC items, grouped on the four subscales, has been calculated; then, the same has been done for the ATTAS-mm and Section I-PIS scales. These statistical analyses have been used as a starting point for an attempt to identify the nature of mainstream kindergarten directors' attitudes and to outline a favorable or unfavorable tendency regarding some aspects of inclusion among research participants.

As a conclusion, the assertion can be made that, overall, research participants consider normal kindergartens to be appropriate for the inclusion of children with disabilities (in a mixed group containing children with and without disabilities, providing a better learning context) and emphasize the benefits of inclusion for all children (the development of social skills and self esteem, the accomplishment of academic progress).

The majority of kindergarten directors advocate the need for policy and legislation that is favorable to the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens. Also, they are aware of the need for professional development and training for teachers in order to properly meet the needs of children with disabilities. The study shows that all kindergarten directors involved agree that the right to an education is a fundamental principle in assuring equality of chances for all children. On the other hand, they are

more hesitant concerning the inclusion of children with severe disabilities (intellectual disabilities) in mainstream kindergartens or concerning their confidence in their own ability to teach these children and the qualification they have to meet the needs of children with disabilities. To this extent, Praisner shows in a 2003 study that directors he has studied express positive attitudes as long as the concept of „inclusion” is loosely defined, and negative attitudes when inclusion is discussed on a practical level.

Next, the differences in attitudes, based on each independent variable have been analyzed for each of the instruments used – STATIC, ATTAS-mm and Section I-PIS.

Differences in attitudes based on mainstream kindergarten directors' teaching experience

This variable comes with two possibilities: directors that have up to 20 years teaching experience in mainstream education (N=13) and directors that have over 21 years teaching experience in mainstream education (N=22).

For the STATIC scale, t testing for independent samples has shown significant differences between the two groups $t(2.313)=33, p<0.027$. In this case, means are lower for directors that have up to 20 years teaching experience. Thus, kindergarten directors that have over 21 years teaching experience in mainstream education show significantly more favorable attitudes towards inclusion, overall.

Also, t testing for independent samples has shown differences between the two groups in regards to the role and professional qualifications needed in teaching children with disabilities $t(3.449)=32.161, p<0.002$ and the logistical aspects of including children with disabilities in normal kindergartens $t(2.418)=33, p<0.021$; in these cases, kindergarten directors with more than 21 years of experience in mainstream education show higher means.

In regards to the advantages and disadvantages of inclusion $t(0.485)=33, p<0.631$ and the philosophical aspects of including children with disabilities in normal kindergartens $t(1.492)=33, p<0.145$ it is visible that t testing for independent samples has not shown any differences between the two groups of kindergarten directors.

For the ATTAS-mm scale, t testing for independent samples has not shown any significant difference between kindergarten directors with up to 21 years of experience in mainstream education and those that have over 21 years of experience $t(0.059)=33, p<0.953$ in regards to the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities (ATTAS-mm scale); the same goes for Section I-PIS.

It can be stated that the hypothesis according to which experience in mainstream education causes significantly different attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities among mainstream kindergarten directors is partially confirmed.

Differences in attitudes based on experience in working with disabled children

Results on the STATIC, ATTAS-mm and Section I-PIS scales show that there are no statistically significant differences in attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities between directors that have experience (N=16) and those that do not have experience in working with disabled children (N=19).

It can be stated that the hypothesis according to which experience in working with disabled children causes significantly different attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities among mainstream kindergarten directors is dismissed.

Score distribution comparisons using the Mann-Whitney nonparametric U test

In order to compare the two groups of directors based on the variable *psychopedagogy experience in working with children exhibiting various types of disability*, that divides the subjects into directors that have had and that have not had previous psychopedagogy experience in working with children exhibiting various types of disability, the Mann-Whitney U test, thought to be one of the most powerful nonparametric tools, has been employed. The test takes into account the rank of each score in the general classification and helps test the null hypothesis (Ho) that scale score distribution is the same in the population consisting of directors with previous psychopedagogy experience (N=6) and directors without previous psychopedagogy experience in working with children exhibiting various types of disability (N=29).

The Mann-Whitney U test shows that there are no significant differences between the attitudes of mainstream kindergarten directors that have not had previous psychopedagogy experience and the attitudes of directors that have had psychopedagogy experience in working with children with disabilities in regards to the inclusion of children with disabilities in the mainstream kindergarten.

Consequently, the hypothesis according to which direct contact (psychopedagogy experience) with children exhibiting various types of disability causes significantly different attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities among mainstream kindergarten directors is dismissed. The variable – previous psychopedagogy experience in working with children exhibiting various types of disability – has significantly influenced directors' views on the role and qualifications in teaching children with disabilities and on the academic success of all children in an inclusive classroom. More specifically,

mainstream kindergarten directors that have had previous experience in working with children exhibiting various types of disability show more openness towards these particular aspects of the inclusion of children with disabilities.

Differences in attitudes based on attending training courses in the field of special education

In this case, the difference in means has been analyzed by employing the parametric *t* test for independent samples, with a significance coefficient alpha ($p < 0.05$).

Results show that *t* testing for independent samples has not highlighted any significant differences between directors that have attended training courses and those that have not attended training courses in the field of inclusive education. The hypothesis according to which attending training courses in the field of inclusive education causes significantly different attitudes towards inclusion, overall, and towards the inclusion of children with mild and moderate disabilities among mainstream kindergarten directors is dismissed.

The final stage of this study, using the mainstream kindergarten directors' sample ($N=35$), and in order to create a comprehensive image of all variables involved, aims to verify the hypothesis according to which the type of disability a child is suffering from significantly influences directors' decisions to integrate them in the mainstream kindergarten. To this extent, the nine types of disabilities are shown (Section II, PIS). Participants have been given a choice of six school environments, displayed on a continuum ranging from segregating environment to fully inclusive school environment, and had to choose one that they believe to be fit for children exhibiting various types of disability. These environments are: 1 – special education services, outside of the mainstream kindergarten (in special kindergartens), 2 – special education services, within the mainstream kindergarten (special classrooms), 3 – partial integration in the mainstream kindergarten (schooling effort), 4 – education in the mainstream kindergarten and individual therapy in specialized clinic (with support teacher any time it is necessary), 5 – education in the kindergarten classroom for most of the day, 6 – complete integration in the mainstream kindergarten with specialized support (support teacher).

Statistical indicators Section II-PIS

Lowest and highest scores obtained by kindergarten principals on this section have been calculated, and then data has been analyzed using the means and standard deviation. To calculate the scores and determine favorable attitudes towards the integration of children with disabilities in the

mainstream kindergarten, each type of disability has been considered an item in this section (9 items total), over a scale of six points (rankings). Thus, the lowest score possible on this section is 9 and the highest is 54, resulting from the summation of the 9 items. A high score indicates a favorable tendency of participating directors towards integrating children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Praisner, 2003).

In order to investigate whether there is a relationship between the type of disability children exhibit and directors' decision to integrate them in the mainstream kindergarten, a response frequency analysis has been used. The most segregated school environments are considered to be the ones where children receive special education outside of the mainstream kindergarten (in special kindergartens), or within the mainstream kindergarten but in special classrooms. The inclusive school environment is that in which there is a complete integration in the mainstream kindergarten, with added specialized support (support teacher).

Statistical analysis shows that almost half of the participating kindergarten directors consider that students with sight and hearing impairments should be integrated in special kindergartens, and only 6 out of 35 directors think these children could be fully integrated in a mainstream kindergarten with added specialized support (support teacher).

In regards to the integration of children with emotional disorders, half of the directors consider that they should be integrated in the mainstream kindergarten, and should have access to individual therapy and a support teacher any time it is necessary. Only a quarter of the directors interviewed think these children can be fully integrated in a mainstream kindergarten with added specialized support (support teacher). For children suffering from autism / pervasive development disorders, a third of the directors asked chose integration in the mainstream kindergarten with access to therapy and a support teacher any time it is necessary, while 10 out of 35 chose the inclusive environment, with added specialized support (support teacher).

Also, a significant number of directors chose the mainstream kindergarten with added specialized support (support teacher) for children with learning difficulties (N=21), intellectual disabilities (N=15), speech deficiencies (N=16), physical disabilities (N=13) and other health issues (N=17).

It is safe to conclude that the majority of kindergarten directors approves of the inclusion in mainstream classrooms for children exhibiting various types of disability, but less so in the case of sensory impairments (sight and hearing), where more than half of the directors chose special kindergartens or special classrooms in normal kindergartens. In the case of children suffering from

emotional disorders and autism, directors chose integration in the mainstream kindergarten with access to individual therapy and support teacher any time it is needed.

The specific hypothesis according to which the type of disability a child is suffering from significantly influences directors' decisions to integrate them in the mainstream kindergarten is confirmed.

Conclusions

The majority of kindergarten directors advocate the need for policy and legislation that is favorable to the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens. Also, they are aware of the need for all teachers to undergo training and professional development in order to properly meet the needs of children with disabilities. Overall, these kindergarten directors agree that the right to an education is essential to the equality of chances for all children. On the other hand, they are more reluctant concerning the inclusion of children suffering from severe disabilities (intellectual disabilities) in the mainstream kindergarten, or concerning their own ability to teach these children, and the level of qualification they have in order to meet the needs of children with disabilities. To this extent, Praisner has found, in a 2003 study, that participating directors show positive attitudes as long as "inclusion" is loosely and generically defined and negative attitudes when inclusion is discussed on a practical level.

These results are possibly due to particularities of participating kindergarten directors, a large number of which have stated they had not attended training courses in the field of inclusive education, had not had previous experience in teaching children with disabilities, and that a very small number of children with disabilities are integrated in the kindergarten they work in. Results also show a medium level attitude among kindergarten directors, slightly favorable to the inclusion of children with disabilities in normal kindergartens and to some of the aspects of inclusion.

CONCLUSIONS AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of this research highlight the fact that most mainstream educational institutions, generally, and normal kindergartens, specifically, are in a state of reform-change in order to meet the “education for all children” goal, an education that is comprehensive and integrating by its’ very nature, that meets the needs, potential and aspirations of all children, including those with disabilities. In this context, the theoretical acceptance and the step-by-step construction of the inclusive school become not only a matter of concept and political decision, but also a matter of strategy and concrete, coherent action pedagogy-wise, of organizing and developing systems and support structures for integrated special education.

Interpreting the results creates an overall picture of the way the transition towards inclusive education is perceived in the field. Thus, it is possible to better assess the preparedness of educational agents and the climate in which the principles of inclusive education will be implemented.

In conclusion, the results of the research do not entirely sustain the Avramidis and Norwich (2002) theoretical model regarding the influences of certain variables on teachers’ attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities, but this model has been improved by adding a variable that has proven relevant in regards to teachers’ attitudes: educators’ professional status, used in this study with three possible levels (kindergarten teachers, school counselors and kindergarten directors).

The studies employed in this research adhere to the principles of research ethics regarding the confidentiality of data and the anonymity of participants. Results have been interpreted so that they cannot be used for stigmatization and discrimination. The instruments used are non-invasive and, even though some have been tedious, they do not cause stress or frustration among participants.

LIMITATIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS OF RESEARCH

Through the complex analyses employed, these studies contribute to progress in the field of psychological research, including, but not limited to generating questions and dilemmas as suggestions for further study.

This research has not used all the independent variables identified in scientific literature for its' statistical analysis, and it cannot be stated that the strategy to combine studies in various categories depending on the research participants is the only one possible, or the most adequate one. Also, this study has opened the way for analyzing other variables that can influence the attitudes of teachers, in addition to the ones the Avramidis and Norwich (2002) model offers.

In addition, it is very important that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion be studied before and after attending various training sessions, in order to confirm the role mainstream kindergarten teachers' qualifications in the field of inclusive education plays.

Literature has found and shown many of the challenges involved in successfully applying inclusion for children with disabilities. The results of this research have confirmed that inclusive programs can be successfully implemented, given that a series of prerequisites is fulfilled. Describing this reality presents government bodies able to finance and support the facilitation of inclusion with a challenge, and shows the need to adequately train educators.

The grounding of new professional competences that offer a view of the profession based on reflection and conviction is becoming a major goal in the initial and continuous training of educators. In the current educational paradigm it is necessary that each subject act rationally, that they have a realistic view on the space of their actions and carefully choose the resources needed to reach the goals. In this context, professionalism in education requires the redefining of the concept of professional development in order to support a system of inclusive education, on the initial training level as well as in continued professional development throughout the teaching career.

In regards to future perspectives, extending the research to geographically larger sample, nation-wide, as well as adding teachers from other educational levels in mainstream schools (elementary, middle-school and high school) can be considered.

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