

COMPETENCIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CLASS TEACHERS

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Abstract: *Inclusion is an approach which emphasizes that diversity in strength, abilities is desirable and natural. Inclusion does not mean equalizing children, but respecting the diversity of each child and changing school and wider environment, while respecting individual differences and needs. The competencies of teachers for inclusive education include knowledge and skills for working with children with disabilities and positive attitudes that support the development of all students. The aim of this paper is to present the competencies of class teachers for inclusive education. The work analyzes the competencies of teachers necessary for quality work with children with disabilities in the lower primary school. It is about knowing the basic knowledge and skills necessary to work with children with disabilities; knowledge of different teaching strategies and creativity; work motivation; a positive attitude and professional development; knowing and nurturing teamwork and empathy. These competencies contribute to the quality of work with students with disabilities, on the one hand, and the development of their competencies, on the other hand.*

Key words: *competencies, teacher, children with disabilities, inclusion, education*

Introduction

Inclusive teaching represents an integral part of the educational reform and a burning issue of all teachers who have found themselves unready in the process while having none or minimal professional competencies for working with children with disabilities [1]. Children with low intellectual abilities, autistic, blind and short-sighted children, deaf and hard of hearing children, children with speech, voice and language disorders, children with motor disorders and chronic diseases, children with behavioral disorders, ADHD and children with specific learning disorders are considered as children with disabilities [2]. Children with disabilities are children with demanding needs that require a professional approach, additional teacher's effort, adequate educational work and optimal satisfaction of their needs that supports the development of their abilities and potential in every day activities' participation, both life and work [3]. Therefore, a competent teacher is necessary in order to instigate the rights of children with disabilities. A competent teacher possesses and constantly develops abilities and quality of understanding, acceptance and listening (children, colleagues, parents), inclusion, taking action, initiative, appreciation, negotiation, encouragement and similar while providing conditions for the recognition and

successful satisfaction of psychological, emotional, spiritual and other needs of each member of a class or school group [4].

When including children with disabilities in the regular education system, it is necessary to take into consideration the following principles of work [2]: a positive attitude towards diversity, socializing with peers; taking into consideration individual needs of children; engagement of experts; adequate material conditions, learning aid and help of an assistant; special educational needs of children.

Zrilić [2] emphasizes how teachers can contribute to better integration of children with disabilities if:

- they recognize beforehand the nature of a child's disability and his/her strong sides;
- they prepare other students in class for the arrival of such student;
- they foresee possible reactions of other students;
- they determine student's personal learning abilities and his/her potential reactions to school assignments.
- With respect to inclusive education, teacher should have a new conception of thinking, ability of understanding the impact of his/her professional competencies to children with disabilities and he/she should take the responsibility for the quality of results.

Teachers' competencies for work with children with disabilities

Diković [4] emphasized that the teachers' competencies for work with children with disabilities are: 1) having basic knowledge and skills that are necessary for work with children with disabilities; 2) having knowledge on different teaching strategies and creativity; 3) having motivation for work, positive attitude and professional development; 4) having knowledge about team work and nurturing it; 5) having empathy. It is about the competencies that support a quality work with students with disabilities and development of their competencies [4].

Having basic knowledge and skills necessary for work with children with disabilities

Each child with disabilities is an additional challenge for a teacher which is the reason why work with children and students with disabilities requires a life-long learning of a teacher in a form of a seminar or continuous reading of professional and scientific literature. In order to have a child successfully involved in the regular educational system, teachers must develop themselves professionally and acquire new competencies. It is necessary to know the causes of a disability, methods of work in a class, usage of numerous specific means and possession of professional and social competencies aimed at preventing social and emotional difficulties of children with disabilities. A teacher must possess competencies which create positive atmosphere and the feeling of respect, acceptance and safety for a child as well as a possibility for accomplishing successful results [2].

Simultaneously, a teacher must be a professional person who possesses good knowledge of pedagogy, didactics, methodology, psychology. He/she must be an

insightful and creative person who creates a pleasant and emotional atmosphere, never neglecting a child, his/her potential skills and meaning of the entire education and rehabilitation work [5]. Therefore, work with children with disabilities demands for professional staff to be adequately trained thus, it is necessary for all teachers to possess appropriate general special education of pedagogy.

Zrilić [2] stresses that teachers play a significant role when it comes to education of children with disabilities. Teachers observe, make observation notes and make plan of work with the children in collaboration with experts. If a disability is not detected before a child starts school, teacher represents the first person to detect a problem and together with parents addresses the child to an expert for further continuous collaboration. At the same time, the author states that teacher must be competent in terms of methodological approach to a child and meet numerous requirements [2]:

- basic expertise pertaining to the category of professional need (in the context of etiology, new methods and means, different possibilities of classes implementation and similar);
- will and readiness for life-long learning;
- love toward children;
- maintaining contact with child's parents and social surroundings where child lives;
- developed social competencies for team work.

Simultaneously, Krampač-Grljušić and Marinić [6] emphasize that teacher has the main role when it comes to the detection of various needs of a child and his/her disabilities. Teacher conducts supervision and evaluation of specific learning matters and student's achievement, previous knowledge and skills, learning motivation and cognitive, metacognitive, social-emotional communication, language, speech and motivational features of the student.

Having knowledge on various learning and creativity strategies

Strategies for teaching children with disabilities – Apart from being necessary for teachers to understand and accept students with disabilities, they also have to possess a wide spectrum of teaching strategies in order to have a possibility of satisfying the students' needs in classroom [7]. Aimed at improving learning outcome and behaviour of students with special educational needs, it is necessary for teacher to implement the learning strategies which have been proven as effective [8]. Working with children with disabilities, it is necessary to use different learning strategies from those which teachers usually use in regular teaching process.

Individualized approach is necessary for each student. That is the reason why a teacher should choose the methods and means that will help students not to feel less valuable and successfully adopt the necessary knowledge [9].

Creativity – Aimed at providing quality teaching process, it is necessary to insist on constant and dynamic creative work that implies both teacher's and student's activity. Namely, a teacher must continuously work on his/her creativity in order to make impact on developing creative abilities of his/her students. A creative collaboration

between teacher and student accomplishes best results. A student is not only expected to memorize and reproduce the memorized, but also to make conclusions based on various information, create and form stances, that is, to develop his/her own skills. Creativity develops and it is necessary to work on it in order to bring it to a higher level. That is the only way of accomplishing satisfying results in teaching process [10].

A creative teacher represents a central factor in the formation of creative educational situations which will create an opportunity for creative learning and mutual creative student's and teacher's behaviour, that is, their interaction, impact on the development of creative potentials with students. It is necessary for teachers to become familiar with the basic work principles in order to have a possibility of activating the richness of the creative skills of students. At the same time, it is necessary for teachers to become more flexible, that is, capable of managing unpredictable situations. Teachers must have original opinion since nobody can assume unlimited number of factors that can appear during learning situations. They must be intuitive when it comes to decision making as well as judgement making [11].

Motivation for work, positive attitude and continuous professional development

Motivation for work, positive attitude toward children with disabilities –Inclusion of students with special needs into regular classes represents a basic pre-condition of school and social integration as well as a change of the existing stances about students with special needs [12]. In the educational process, teachers who prepare students for further life should have the main role, thus Knežević and his associates [13] emphasize that positive stances of all participants are necessary in order to have the inclusion successful. Persons and children with disabilities are excluded by ignorance, prejudices and fears that prevail in the society [12]. According to Karamatić-Brčić [14], attitudes toward children with disabilities are not innate, but learned through prejudices and ignorance. That is the reason why all people and primarily teachers who meet students with disabilities on daily basis should tend to develop positive attitudes toward inclusion [15].

Attitudes are very important within our everyday life, Behaviour is motivated by attitudes and that is the reason why they make impact on our actions and behaviour toward others. A positive attitude toward children with disabilities helps them to overcome the difficulties they experience because of their impairment. The most important factors in changing attitudes of peers toward persons with disabilities are considered positive attitudes and expectations of teachers as well as teaching peers about specific matters of certain impairment. If the afore mentioned beared in mind, it is evident that the positive attitude will give its contribution in overcoming difficulties that children with disabilities experience [16].

Unianu [17] concludes that there are several factors which make impact on teachers' attitudes toward children with disabilities such as: degree of disability with children, nature of children with disability, teachers' experience with children with disabilities and trust in personal skills for the implementation of inclusion activities.

Professional development – In order to have teachers' work efficient, it is necessary for teachers to professionally develop. In accordance with the fact that teachers are immediate participants in education, it is necessary for them to be familiar with the important development characteristics of students with special needs, their specific learning factors, selection of didactic and methodological forms of work and possibility of creating a positive atmosphere in class.

It is a fact that a lot is expected from students in regular schools. Professional development system for teachers and support staff ensures the necessary competency level for work with students with special needs, from the detecting special needs of the students, selection of the most adequate didactic and methodological approaches and forms of work to evaluation of achievement while taking care of potential and need for success of each student [2].

The knowledge obtained in university should represent only the grounds for further development of class teachers/subject teachers. Professional development primarily improves teachers' work, however, one should not neglect the resulting professional satisfaction. In order to have such process efficient, it is necessary for class teachers and subject teachers to be motivated for the acquisition of new knowledge.

During their work, teachers develop professionally by taking part in various professional meetings such as seminars, lectures, symposiums, trainings, workshops, round table meetings, various camps and similar that are organized within a school, municipality, city or at international level [18].

The curriculum of the teachers' professional pedagogue development includes professional development and permanent guidance to life-long learning as a safe ground for improvement of constant innovations and new knowledge. Teachers' professional development assumes going beyond a qualified craftsman while providing new quality and insights in teaching and learning [19].

Acquiring knowledge and cherishing teamwork

Experts who work with children with disabilities collaborate with few other experts in various teams. It is about teams which usually consist of several disciplines' experts who work on providing overall care about a child. Dedication and close, positive exchange between team members is very important for team work's success. Teams' efficiency is conditioned with experts' method of work in order to meet their patients' needs [20].

Educational, pedagogical, psychological, rehabilitational and health care about children with disabilities demands involvement of children in professional treatments of various professions aimed child care, that is, providing direct or indirect assistance to a child [21]. Mutual collaboration and accordance of experts, that is, team work is necessary for ensuring good quality, comprehensive and professional educational and rehabilitational intervention. Teachers are required to collaborate closely with experts who take part in providing assistance and support, such as pedagogues, rehabilitators, psychologists, social pedagogues, speech therapists, social workers, physician and other [22]. Teacher is assigned to provide assistance to school support staff in the identification of students with disabilities since they do not have contact with children

as much as teachers do. That is the reason why it is difficult for them to identify all children who need assistance. At the same time, it is necessary for teachers to talk to other experts on regular basis and provide feedback related to the result of the application of the advice received from them [23].

The collaboration of teachers with a pedagogue psychologist, defectologist – school support staff as well as social worker and physician in accordance with the needs is suppose to provide appropriate actions, means, methods, work conditions and similar which will facilitate the process of overcoming the difficulties for students and adjust them to their special needs so the they do not experience pity, mockery and ridicule. There must be a permanent collaboration with a defectologist. It is important to emphasize the fact that a teacher is not obliged to possess knowledge on the work methodology with children with dissabilities to the same extent as a defectologist, however, a teacher must not improvise and impoverish cognitive development of a student with disabilities. A teacher should also pay special attention to collaboration with other teachers in order to accomplish, along with acquiring prescribed knowledge, a wider goal together – social integration of students with disabilities in the surroundings they live in [5].

Empathy

Empathy represents mental identification with emotional conditions of other person and understanding of his/her position based on conceived or perceived situation in which a person is. It is about a cognitive process that is followed by emotions which are not identical as the emotions of the person who the empathy is directed to unlike cases where it is about a crush [24]. Spasenović and associates [25] emphasize the existance of two empathy elements: cognitive component – understanding other people's feelings and ability to imagine themselves in their situation; adequate component – observer's adequate emotional response to other person's emotional condition.

A demanding task is before a teacher when a child with disabilities arrives in a class. From the beginning, the child must feel accepted primarily by the teacher. That is the grounds for the teacher's process for building the child's trust. Teacher should work with other students in class as well from the start. A student with disability can be very sensitive, introverted, avoiding peers if exposed to curious looks and/or unpleasant questions related to his condition by other children. The afore mentoned must be prevented through an open teacher's talk about child's disabilities with all students. Unconditional acceptance of a person and his/her stance about the situation with no evaluation and judgement is a significant pre-condition for empathic communication. In order to understand an interlocutor, it is important to use active listening and communication observation skills thus check if we understood a student well [9]. The key of a tecaher's empathy lies in communication between a student and teacher.

A teacher understands how a student feels through communication.

An empathetic teacher has the possibility of recognizing and understanding feelings and stances of other person and creating trustful and close relations with his/her

personality. An empathetic teacher recognizes and understands child's feelings, name them and talks about them honestly with no evaluation and classification of children. He/she possesses an ability of accepting a child in a way of unique personality and separate individual independently from his/her origin, appearance and abilities that he/she has. Such an honest relationship can enable a child an emotional experience which will significantly help in the formation of his/her internal psychological world in a new and more rich way. Close relationship and true human involvement will stimulate social and emotional development of a child and enable a more positive and qualitative outcome. However, establishment of mutual trust and intensive understanding of a child's needs is possible only if a teacher possesses a stable, empathetic and mature personality [3].

Conclusion

A good quality didactic and methodological approach in inclusive teaching process includes teacher's competencies for follow up, evaluation and marking of students in accordance with student's individual abilities. It is important to stress that a teacher is a key person in school who can help a child with disabilities in such way that he/she will foresee barriers and develop support strategies for the child. It is necessary to educate competent teachers who possess the needed knowledge and skills, various teaching strategies as well as empathetic, creative and very much motivated teachers for the work in inclusive classes in order to have the teaching of a child with disabilities as good as possible.

There is no such program during an initial education of a teacher that can entirely provide him/her with complete knowledge, skills and competencies that are necessary for his/her future work in an educational institution with respect to regular teaching process as well as inclusive teaching. It is a fact that education is viewed in a form of life-long learning within a modern educational concept. Significant differences are obvious compared to the traditional concept within which the education is acquired mainly during the formal education. The general concept of life-long learning is considered as a key for XXI century. It is about a concept of society that is constantly learning while learning opportunities are available everywhere. New skills within inclusive education are definitely necessary as well as additional knowledge and competencies that results in the need for teachers' development. Teacher's professional development starts with the completion of the initial education and acquisition of a degree which enables entry to the teacher's profession. It is about a continuous activity that comprises various processes such as trainings, practice, receiving and giving feedback. Such a development represents a part of the educational system within which appropriate time and support to teachers is given in their life-long learning.

It is necessary for teachers to develop constantly and acquire inclusive education competencies in order to make learning easier for children with disabilities. The necessary competencies include: having fundamental knowledge and skills that are necessary for work with children with disabilities; knowledge of different teaching strategies and creativity; motivation for work, positive attitude and professional development; knowledge about team work; empathy. A teacher who possesses the

afore mentioned competencies will perform a good quality work with children with disabilities and develop the students' competencies on the other hand.

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KOMPETENCIJE NASTAVNIKA RAZREDNE NASTAVE ZA INKLUZIVNO OBRAZOVANJE

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Sažetak: *Inkluzija predstavlja pristup u kojem se naglašava da je različitost u snazi, sposobnostima poželjna i prirodna. Pod inkluzijom se ne podrazumeva izjednačavanje dece, već uvažavanje različitosti svakog deteta i menjanje škole, i šire sredine uz poštovanje individualnih različitosti i potreba. Pod kompetencijama nastavnika za inkluzivno obrazovanje podrazumevaju se znanja i veštine za rad sa decom sa smetnjama u razvoju, i pozitivni stavovi koji podržavaju razvoj svih učenika. Cilj rada je prikazivanje kompetencija nastavnika razredne nastave za inkluzivno obrazovanje. Kroz rad su analizirane kompetencije nastavnika neophodne za kvalitetan rad sa djecom sa smetnjama u razvoju u mlađim razredima osnovne škole. Riječ je o poznavanju osnovnih znanja i vještina neophodnih za rad sa djecom sa smetnjama u razvoju; poznavanju različitih strategija podučavanja i kreativnosti; motivisanosti za rad; pozitivnom stavu i profesionalnom usavršavanju; poznavanju i njegovanju timskog rada i empatičnosti. Navedene kompetencije pružaju doprinos kvalitetnom radu sa učenicima sa smetnjama u razvoju, sa jedne strane, i razvoju njihovih kompetencija, sa druge strane.*

Ključne riječi: *kompetencije, učitelj, deca sa smetnjama u razvoju, inkluzija, obrazovanje*