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**Some tendencies in teachers' preparation for work with children of atypical development in the Republic of Serbia**

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**Abstract.** The subject of this study is the research of teachers' attitudes towards their own preparedness for work with children of atypical development (AD) in elementary schools in Serbia. The aim of the research is to determine the teachers' attitudes towards (a) their basic preparation for work with children of AD, (b) whether their participation in the programs of the Institute for the Advancement of Education and Pedagogical Work contributes to their competence for work with children of AD, (c) whether they have support of school professional team in work with children of AD, (d) improvement of work organization which would contribute to the quality of the performance of individual educational program. The descriptive analytical method and the technique of survey were implemented in the research. The survey questionnaire was used as the instrument which, among other attitudes, specifically investigated attitudes of teachers in lower and upper grades of elementary school on their own preparedness for work with children of AD. One hundred and fifteen teachers participated in the survey in elementary schools in Serbia, who perform teaching according to individual educational programs suitable to capabilities of children of AD. The starting point of the research was a conception that teachers in elementary schools in Serbia are not adequately prepared for a quality planning and realization of individual educational program for work with children of AD. The research findings have shown that the attitudes of teachers in lower and upper grades of elementary school 1) do not differ in the assessment of basic preparation and competence for work with children of AD; 2) secondly, they do not differ in the assessment on cooperation with school professional team in work with children of AD; 3) finally, elementary school teachers see the reduction of total number of children in a class as the key indicator in measuring the quality improvement of individual educational program realization.

**Keywords:** education atypical development; lower and upper elementary teachers; integration; elementary schools in Serbia.

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**Некоторые тенденции подготовленности учителей к работе с детьми атипичного развития в республике Сербия**

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**Аннотация.** Предметом данной работы является изучение отношения учителей к собственной подготовленности к работе с детьми атипичного развития (АР) в общеобразовательных школах Сербии. Целью исследования является следующее: (а) определение отношения учителей к их базовой подготовленности к работе с детьми АР, (b) узнать, способствует ли участие в программах Института развития образования и воспитания (ЗУОВ) компетентности учителей в работе с детьми АР, (с) имеют ли они поддержку школьной экспертной команды по работе с детьми АР, (d) составить представление об улучшении организации работы, которая способствовала бы качеству реализации индивидуальной образовательной программы. В исследовании использовался дескриптивно-аналитический метод и методика опроса. Был использован инструмент – вопросник (анкета), в котором, помимо других пунктов, особое внимание уделено изучению отношения учителей младших и старших классов общеобразовательных школ к их собственной подготовленности к работе с детьми АР. Всего было опрошено 115 учителей младших и старших классов общеобразовательных школ Сербии, которые ведут преподавание в соответствии с индивидуальными образовательными программами (ИОП), отвечающими возможностям детей с АР. Исследование началось с основного предположения о том, что преподаватели общеобразовательных школ Сербии недостаточно компетентны в качественной подготовке и реализации индивидуальной образовательной программы для работы с детьми АР. Результаты исследования показали, что отношение учителей младших и старших классов общеобразовательных школ 1) не отличается в оценке базовой подготовленности и компетентности для работы с детьми АР; 2) они не различаются в оценке сотрудничества со школьной экспертной командой по работе с детьми АР; 3) наконец, основную меру повышения качества реализации индивидуальной образовательной программы преподаватели общеобразовательных школ видят в сокращении общего количества учеников в классе.

**Ключевые слова:** образование; атипичное развитие; учителя и преподаватели; интеграция; общеобразовательные школы Сербии.

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**Introduction.** Current social standards can provide favourable and unfavourable circumstances for development both of an individual and members of different social groups, i.e. they can offer the framework that will give them an opportunity to meet a certain number of needs or they can be obstacles for them. Normative context formed by numerous indicators (social, economical, political, cultural, religious etc.) affects the forming and character of social interactions and communication among different participants. The particularly sensitive “issue” is the relation of society towards individuals of the so called atypical development who are a part of the so called vulnerable groups.

The status of individuals with specific needs resulting from their atypical development is arranged by numerous legal and sub-legal acts. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette RS, 2006) prohibits discrimination on any basis (race, sex, nationality, social background, birth, religion, political or other belief, financial condition, culture, language, age, mental or physical invalidity). The legal acts in Serbia equal individuals and groups with specific development to all other individuals (and groups) and a relation of *positive discrimination* (Semprini, 1999) is often developed towards them.

According to international acts, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the act “A World Fit for Children” a document adopted on the special session of General Assembly of the United Nations (2002) there has been agreed a legal regulative concerning education of children of atypical development in Serbia. Council for Children’s Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia created a strategic document “National Action Plan for Children” (2004). It contains basic problems in realizing protection and improving rights of the children with difficulties in development and accepting the educational model of “Schools Fit for Children”, which led the education into a new cycle of reform. The intention, according to proponents of the reform in progress, was to create accommodating environment in

which every child can be educated no matter of the nature of developmental disorder (Avramidis et al., 2000) and it represents a way of struggle against prejudices about children of atypical development (Polat, 2011). By adopting the Law on Basic Education System (2009) in Serbia, a new framework is being created for education of children of atypical development, children with disorders of cognitive, intellectual, perceptive and attentive functions, with disorders of physical nature (invalidity), with damage of sensor functions (eyesight damage, hearing damage and balance damage) and with disorders in behaviour. The new model of education has created a need for reforming study programs of educational and pedagogical faculties (Petrović, 2017).

The results of the research of implementing individual educational program so far show that there are positive, negative and neutral attitudes of teachers. Teachers with positive attitudes are: those who worked with one child of AD in class; who worked with a class with not more than 20 children and who had constant support and organized help of special pedagogues and teachers (Avramidis, Norwich, 2002; Booth, 2000). However, the conducted research shows that teachers more often have negative and neutral attitudes towards implementing inclusive education without previously introduced thorough preparations (Gaad, 2001). The crucial reason for such attitudes is nature of the disorder which a child has in his development: including children of atypical development into the system of regular schooling should be selective, children with greater intellectual limitations or disorders in behaviour should be educated in special classes, but they should participate in some common activities together with the children from regular classes (Đević, 2009a).

When describing unsatisfactory development, the most frequently used terms are delayed and atypical development. A child with delayed development is late comparing to children of his age – his development is slower than expected. “Atypical development is every noted delay in development, and a

deviation from developmental norms comparing to peers of typical development” (Tadić, 2006: 135). Children of atypical development need additional support or special care in the field of health care, rehabilitation, education, social welfare or other forms of support (Matijević, Sokal Jovanović, Rudić, 2010).

In Serbian educational area children of typical and atypical development share the same classroom, they are taught by the same pre – school, lower and upper teachers. Only the educational programs are different: there are unique educational – pedagogical programs for children of the so called typical development on different levels of education and there are individual educational programs (IEP) for children of atypical development. Such an institutional solution is the result of new educational policies based on the process of homogenization of education. According to proponents of this idea, including children of atypical development into regular pedagogical – educational groups in schools is aimed to support performing all available potentials and accepting these children as equal members of society (Stanković-Đorđević, Stanković, 2003). However, the new strategy of education was not successful in repressing the ambivalent attitudes of teachers towards including children of atypical development into the so called regular schools (primary, secondary) and forming the general attitude that in special conditions (schools) they can achieve better results (Jovanović-Popadić, 2016). There are also different data, according to S. Borić and R. Tomić (2012), the majority of the interviewed teachers consider that children of atypical development should be included into primary schools; future and present boarding teachers have a positive relation towards children of atypical development and their inclusion into primary schools (Milanović, 2018).

The conducted research suggests that negative attitudes towards persons of atypical development can be recognized in individuals who are insufficiently informed on the specific nature of their development, or they did not have experience in work with them, and were

not adequately trained for work with this part of the population. Well prepared educational programs, better equipped schools and an adequate teachers’ training significantly contribute to moving their attitudes towards children of atypical development in a positive direction (Đević, 2009b).

**Methodology and methods.** The legal introducing of the model of education of children with developmental disorders in regular schools in Serbia (2009), were preceded by research projects. Among the first projects was the research of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia and the UNICEF on inclusive education which was realized in 2003 on the territory of Serbia. The results of the research have shown that the number of teachers who expressed their readiness to accept children with developmental difficulties was not sufficient for introducing the inclusive program. It was confirmed that there was a difference in attitudes of teachers who worked with children from 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> grades and teachers who perform teaching from 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grades, i.e. the attitudes of the first mentioned were more positive. A year later (2004) followed the pilot project “Inclusion of students with developmental difficulties in regular primary schools – schools fit for children” implemented by Save the Children fund and the Institute for Psychology of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade. The aim of the project was testing the individual educational programs created for each child included into the project and implemented in two primary schools in Serbia. The results of the implemented project showed that the easier acquiring of the teaching content was possible, and consequently the expected cognitive achievement. The Centre for Evaluation, Testing and Research conducted a research project on “Support and barriers for inclusive education in Serbia”. The results showed that teachers consider that they are insufficiently prepared to work with children of atypical development; they doubt the possibility of realization of teaching programs, having in mind their volume; they do not believe that they can take the same attention to all children and that they are

not sure about whether they would rely on a continual professional support.

*Defining the problem.* In implementation of the acquired international and national regulative on children's rights on indiscriminate in education, teachers have the key role. Therefore, implementing a social integration of children with developmental disorders includes very high expectations for them. Their already requiring role which in the pedagogical – educational plan assumes applying the best teaching methods and creating an ambient of creative expressing and development of students' potential, in circumstances of working with children of atypical development, makes the role even more complex. Teachers are expected to have: expert competence in creating personal program adjusted to needs and capabilities of a child of atypical development with the aim to obtain the expected cognitive development; strong motivation directed towards acquiring the corresponding system of social values significant for liberation from prejudices and development of social adjustment; a high level of closeness and support aiming to gain emotional security and positive interaction (Pianta, 1999; Patrick, Ryan, Kaplan, 2007).

Due to such a significant role which teachers have in education and total development of children, it is important to research their attitudes towards their own preparedness for work with children of atypical development. Summing up the results of the researches so far shows that the process of including children of AD has been followed by insufficient preparedness of schools, poor professional training of teachers, a great number of students in a class, a negative social – cultural context with a certain stigmatization of children with developmental disorders, lack of expert support, special education teachers,

special teachers, pedagogical assistants, and also by insufficiently adjusted spatial and technical – didactical conditions for performing individual teaching. The aim of the research is to determine the attitudes of teachers towards their own preparedness for work with children with AD, their assessment whether they get an expert support in work with them and an assessment what should be changed in school organizing in order to contribute to the quality of work with children of atypical development.

*Research methodology. General Background.* Practice of integrated education cannot be studied only as a function of cognitive – social capacities of individual, it is also, like any other educational practice, connected with social – cultural particularities of the environment in which it is realized. Of a great importance is social knowledge related to acquaintance with social norms and social behaviour of groups to which one belongs, whilst social understanding relates to the capability of recognizing relationships and connection among elements in a social situation, and assumes predicting other person's reaction and an exact perception of other person's emotional state, as well as a capability of reacting in a socially acceptable way, and at the same time keeping spontaneity and authenticity (Katz, McClellan, 1997). It is assumed that teachers have acquired the needed social knowledge during the basic preparation for their profession and that they possess the capability of social understanding, and thus they represent a valuable source for research of integrated educational practice. In this context, there was a research on attitudes of teachers in primary schools as direct participants in integrated education referring to their preparedness and limitations. The list of four research field (F1 – F4) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Fields in which the attitudes of lower and upper grade teachers were assessed

Item	Field
F1	Basic preparation for work with children of atypical development
F2	Competence for work with children of atypical development
F3	Expert support to lower and upper grade teachers' work
F4	Organizational solutions

The attitudes of the interviewed primary school teachers towards preparedness and work with children of atypical development obtained in this research are similar to the attitudes of the teachers presented in the pilot project "Inclusiveness of students with developmental difficulties in regular primary schools – schools fit for children" conducted by the fund Save the Children and the Institute for Psychology of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade (2004), in the part which shows that teachers consider that their preparation for applying individual education programs in work with children of AD is important; they are also similar to the research "Support and barriers for inclusive education in Serbia" (2006) in part showing that teachers consider that they are insufficiently prepared for work with children of atypical development.

*Instruments and Procedure.* The questionnaire "Teachers' attitudes towards education of children of atypical development in primary schools in Serbia" was used as an instrument for collecting the data. The questionnaire is aimed for self evaluation of primary school teachers who work with children of atypical development according to individual educational program. The questionnaire consists of three parts: the first part embraces the items referring to social matrix of the participants themselves; the second part embraces the items referring to basic preparations of teachers with children of AD (research fields presented in Table 1); the third part embraces the items referring to the total achievements of children of AD (cognitive and social) and the facts which followed the relationship between children of typical and atypical development. The participants were given a task to assess the adequacy of the existing strategy of work with children of atypical development in primary schools inside each of the observed research fields (items F1 – F4).

Primary education in the Republic of Serbia, following the preparation program for entering children primary school conducted in pre – school institutions is organized in two levels:

1) From 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade (lower grades of primary school), children of this age are taught by teachers who acquired their basic knowledge in faculties of education (or in the course of study Teacher);

2) From 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade (upper grades of primary school), children of this age are taught by teachers who acquired their basic knowledge in faculties for subject teachers (study courses which prepare teachers for performing teaching in one scientific discipline).

Study programs in these faculties are different i.e. initial education of these two groups of teachers is different. Therefore, the Institute for Providing Quality of Education organizes activities (seminars, trainings) in order to develop teachers' competencies so that the teachers would successfully meet the new challenges of their profession. A great number of seminars performed by teams of experts specialized in specific educational area are devoted to work of teachers with children of AD according to the Individual Educational Program. It is assumed that due to the differences in their basic education, teachers who work with lower grades of primary school are more prepared for work with children of atypical development than the teachers who work with upper grades, and their assessments in framework of each research field are different. A representative research sample was formed in cooperation with local school authorities.

*Research Sample.* Based on the cooperation with the local school authorities of Pomoravlje district, the research sample was consisted of 115 primary school teachers who work with children of atypical development in their classes. The description of the research sample is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Research sample description

Gender	- 22 males, 93 females
Teachers who work with children from 1 <sup>st</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	- 40 participants
Teachers who work with children from 5 <sup>th</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	- 75 participants
Number of schools	- 10 primary schools

The number of males and females presented in the research samples reflects the present feminization of teachers' profession in Serbia, as well as a greater number of the employed in upper grades of primary school.

*Data Analysis.* The obtained research data were processed by descriptive statistics. The difference between the groups of participants was specifically monitored according to the characteristics – work with students of primary school depending on their age (work with children of atypical development from

1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade and work with children of atypical development from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade). Occurrence of the statistically significant differences was observed on the statistical significance level  $p < .05$  which is a standard level of significance.

**Research Results and Discussion.**

When asked whether they have acquired knowledge and skills needed for work with children of atypical development during their academic education, teachers gave the answers presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Knowledge and skills for work with children of AD

		In the process of academic education knowledge and skills for work with children of atypical development are acquired			Total
		I agree totally	I agree partially, only initial knowledge and skills that need addition are acquired	I do not agree, neither theoretical knowledge nor skills needed for work with children of AD are developed	
1-4 Grade	Frequency	2	21	16	39
	%	5.1	53.8	41.0	100.0
5-8 Grade	Frequency	4	32	38	74
	%	5.4	43.2	51.4	100.0
Total	Frequency	6	53	54	113
	%	5.3	46.9	47.8	100.0

The obtained data show that few participants consider that their academic education offered them enough knowledge and skills for work with children of atypical development. Only 5,3% participants completely agree with this statement. The rest of the participants, almost the same percent divided into two groups: one claims that they have acquired *only initial knowledge and skills which need additional work for children of AD* (46, 9%); the other claims that their academic education

*have offered neither enough theoretical knowledge nor it has developed skills needed for work with children of AD* (47,8%).

The calculated Chi – Square (Chi-Square Tests) contains values of the Chi – Square test ( $\chi^2$ ), degree of freedom ( $df$ ) and a level of significance ( $p$ ) which in this case test the statistical significance of the differences. In this case, the value of Chi – Square Test is  $\chi^2=1.186$ , with  $df=2$ , and  $p= .553$ . Specifically, *in the assessment whether they have ac-*

quired enough knowledge and skills for work with children with atypical development during their academic education, the level of significance show that there is no statistically significant difference among teachers referring to whether they perform teaching in lower or upper grades of primary school. In other words, the zero hypothesis was confirmed since it always implies, as the assumption, that the difference is always equal to zero (i.e. there is no difference). If the difference is to be statistically significant this value of signif-

icance level has to be lower than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Teachers are obliged to continually develop their own competencies through the program of seminars organized by the Institute for the Improvement of Education. When asked whether they consider that this program gives them enough training and preparation for work with children of atypical development, i.e. whether they have acquired and developed the corresponding competencies, teachers answered in the way presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Competence for work with children of AD

		I consider myself competent for work with children of atypical development				Total
		I agree completely	I agree partially	I do not agree	I cannot assess	
From 1 <sup>st</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Count	4	22	6	8	40
	%	10.0	55.0	15.0	20.0	100.0
From 5 <sup>th</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Count	4	41	13	15	73
	%	5.5	56.2	17.8	20.5	100.0
Total	Count	8	63	19	23	113
	%	7.1	55.8	16.8	20.4	100.0

The obtained data show that only 7,1% of the participants consider themselves competent for work with children of AD; the greatest percent of teachers (55,8) partially agrees with this statement; a group of 16,8% of teachers do not agree with the statement that they are competent, while 20,4% of teachers cannot assess their own competence for work with children of AD.

The calculated Chi – Square (Chi-Square Tests) show that the value of Chi – Square Test  $\chi^2 = .877$ , with  $df = 3$ , and  $p = .831$  and that in this case the zero hypothesis is confirmed. In assessment *whether they have acquired the needed competencies for work with children of AD through programs of the Institute for the Improvement of Education*, the level of significance shows that there is no statistically significant difference in partici-

pants' attitudes depending on whether they perform teaching in lower or upper grades of primary school.

The results presented in Tables 3 and 4 correlate with the research results (2016) which showed that the greatest number of participants considers that: 1) in the institutional education through which they have passed through they have not developed competencies for work with children of atypical development and that 2) the system of professional development under authority of *the Institute for the Improvement of Education* and which implies attending seminars, tribunes, professional meetings or participating in various projects, does not offer enough knowledge and it does not develop competencies for work with children of atypical development in a sufficient quantity (Jovanović-Popadić,



2016). The lack of needed competencies of teachers for work with children of atypical development was also noticed in the research of V. Radomirović (Radomirović, 2013).

Preparation and realization of individual educational program is a very complex task given to teachers, and it bears a great responsibility for the whole development of children of atypical development. Teacher's assessment on the level of developmental difficulties and children's abilities directs creating an individual program which can encourage cognitive, social and emotional development of a child. It can also limit it by low requirements, or it can compromise it by its high requirements. Therefore, the cooperation between teachers and the school expert team consisting of a speech therapist, a special education teacher, a pedagogue, a psychologist, a pedagogical assistant with their continual support to a teacher is of a great importance.

In realization of an individual approach to education of children of atypical development teachers have the most difficult role. They are expected to, on one hand, identify the best affinities of children; create social

ambient which will stimulate their cognitive and emotional development; cherish an interactive relationships in order to strengthen tolerance, empathy and care for others (Maldo-nado-Carreño, Votruba-Drzal, 2011). On the other hand, teachers are also expected to work with children of atypical development: recognizing and supporting development of the existing potentials; creating individual educational programs; cooperating with parents and expert associates; creating conditions for social interaction of children of AD in which they will be accepted. Due to complexity of the task they were given, teachers express worry and doubt about their quality fulfilling educational standards expected for work with children of typical development and implementation of individual programs specially prepared for every child of atypical development (Stainback, Stainback, 1989).

Table 5 shows the answers of the participants to the question whether they have support of their school expert team in preparation and realization of the individual educational program.

Table 5

Teachers and expert support

		In preparation and realization of individual educational program I have support of school expert team			Total
		Continual support of a special educational teacher, a speech therapist, a pedagogue, a psychologist, a teacher's assistants	Support of a special educational teacher, a speech therapist, a pedagogue, a psychologist, a teacher's assistants from time to time	I have no support	
From 1 <sup>st</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Count	9	23	8	40
	%	22.5	57.5	20.0	100.0
From 5 <sup>th</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Count	22	35	17	74
	%	29.7	47.3	23.0	100.0
Total	Count	31	58	25	114
	%	27.2	50.9	21.9	100.0

The obtained answers show that 27,2% of the participants underline that they have a continual support of expert team in preparation and realization of individual educational program (IEP); the largest number of the participants (50,9%) claims that they have their support from time to time, while 21,9% of the participants claims that they have no support by school expert team.

The calculated Chi – Square (Chi-Square Tests) indicates that the value of Chi – Square Test  $\chi^2 = 1.135$ , with  $df=2$ , and  $p= .567$  and in this case the zero hypothesis has been confirmed. In the assessment on whether they have support by school expert team in preparation and realization of IEP the level of significance indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the participants' atti-

tudes depending on whether they perform teaching in lower or upper grade of primary school. Other researches also emphasize: 1) sensitiveness of preparations of individual programs and 2) importance of expert support to teachers in work with children of AD. Fulfillment of new tasks of lower and upper teachers needs a professional responsibility and commitment, as well as an institutional and an expert support (Rubie-Davies, 2007; Vujačić, 2011).

By choosing the changes in work organizing in primary school which would contribute to the quality of realization of IEP, the participants created an attitude that a reduced number of children in classes up to 20 would contribute to that quality in a significant extent (Table 6).

Table 6

Smaller number of children and the quality of IEP

		Work with smaller number of children in class (up to 20) would contribute to the quality of realization of IEP			Total
		I agree completely	I agree partially	I do not agree	
From 1 <sup>st</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Count	28	11	1	40
	%	70.0	27.5	2.5	100.0
From 5 <sup>th</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Count	58	14	2	74
	%	78.4	18.9	2.7	100.0
Total	Count	86	25	3	114
	%	75.4	21.9	2.6	100.0

The largest number of teachers consider that the work with a smaller number of children, up to 20 in a class, would contribute to the quality of realization of IEP; 21, 9% of teachers *partially* agrees with the mentioned statement, while only 2, 6% of teachers *do not agree* with the statement that reduction of number of children in class contributes to the quality of realization of IEP.

The calculated Chi – Square (Chi-Square Tests) indicates that the value of Chi – Square Test  $\chi^2 = 1.118$ , with  $df=2$ , and  $p= .572$  and in this case the zero hypothesis has been confirmed. In the assessment *whether the reduction of the number of children in classes*

*contribute to the quality of realization of IEP*, the level of significance indicates that there is no statistically difference among the attitudes of the participants, considering the fact whether they perform teaching in lower or upper grades of primary school.

The results shown in Table 6 are similar to the research findings conducted in 2011, in which, among other problems in educational work with children of AD in primary school, there was emphasized the problem of organizational nature – *a large number of children in a group* (Klemenović, Marić-Jurišin, 2011).

**Conclusions.** On the basis of the previous ten-year experience in the implementation of the model of integrated and inclusive education in Serbia, which is summarized through its preparation, beginning and current phase of implementation, the differences in the working conditions of teachers were determined, and thus also of their opinions. In the tests that were carried out in the period prior to the introduction of this mode of education (2003-2009), teachers expressed great doubts about the possibility of adequate and quality implementation of educational standards, primarily due to lack of experience and feeling of personal doubt. In the second period (2009), from the beginning of the legal implantation of individual educational programs in regular schools, the results of the research show the growth of positive attitudes of teachers that can be related to the intensification of their professional development, which has given good experiential effects, and thus enhanced the sense of personal and professional security. However, the barriers identified by teachers at the very beginning, i.e. teaching in classes of more than 25 children and lack of professional assistance to teachers are weaknesses that are not in the domain of their personal engagement, but rather are issues that are decided at the national level. Hence, most teachers prefer a model of education in special classes of regular schools rather than in common classes.

Teachers of both groups do not differ from each other in assessing their own readiness to work with children of atypical development: the vast majority of teachers think that they have "certain skills" but do not feel sufficiently prepared to work with AD children, which reveals the multidimensionality

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and complexity of working with school children of atypical development in Serbia. The result, in fact, raises a new question as to whether the existing legal solutions have been made with the intention of affirming this minority groups, i.e. integrate the children with atypical development into regular schools, and provide them with better quality education?

The conducted research has shown that the attitudes of teachers in lower grades of primary school (1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade) and teachers in upper grades of primary school (5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade) differ neither in assessment of their own preparedness for work with children of atypical development, nor in assessment of cooperation with expert teams in primary schools (a speech therapist, a special education teacher, a pedagogue, a psychologist); their attitudes do not differ in assessment of positive effect of reduction of number of children in classes up to 20 – a work organizing with smaller number of children offers a teacher an opportunity to realize the requirements of integrated teaching more completely. The final conclusion is that *the basic preparation* of teachers cannot explain their presented attitudes – they are shaped by some other determinants. The question what determinants they are can be answered by future researches. However, the presented basic findings, since they present the attitudes of the representative groups of participants, can help the creators of educational policies in the Republic of Serbia to review this issue more thoroughly and offer innovated solutions which would be most favourable for all children at the age for compulsory primary education.

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