**CONSULTATIVE WORK OF EDUCATORS WITH TEACHERS WITH THE AIM OF PROVIDING ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT IN WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

**Abstract**

Cooperation between educators and teachers, their professional competence, mutual assistance and support in an inclusive approach to the education of students with developmental disabilities greatly influence the process and outcome of inclusion. The purpose of this paper is to present the advisory work of educators with teachers in order to achieve the process of individualizing teaching in the conditions of implementing an inclusive approach in education, i.e. in the conditions of working with students with developmental disabilities. In the research, we used a questionnaire for teachers and an interview protocol for educators. Based on the results and what we saw during the research, we can conclude that teachers cooperate with educators on a daily basis and ask them for some kind of help and support when it comes to working with students with developmental disabilities. The advisory work of pedagogues with teachers, which is implemented with the aim of providing assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities, takes place in the context of the pedagogue's daily work, is focused on specific educational practice, and is left to the professional competencies and personal motivation of both the pedagogue and the teacher.

***Keywords:*** students with developmental disabilities, individualized instruction, inclusive approach in education, counseling work

**Introduction**

In the process of implementing an inclusive approach to education, there is almost no teacher in schools who does not encounter students with special needs in their classrooms and who require additional educational support when working with them. Teachers, as one of the leading figures in education, should adequately respond to the needs of these students. Educators, as professional associates, have the task of providing teachers with the necessary support and assistance in working with students with developmental disabilities, and this task can be most effectively fulfilled through the implementation of advisory work. Possible positive effects of the advisory work of a school pedagogue with teachers in order to provide assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities are: preparation, implementation, monitoring and analysis of teaching work in classes that also include students with developmental disabilities; getting to know and understanding the individual characteristics and specific educational needs of students with developmental disabilities; development and implementation of strategies and techniques to encourage positive social relationships in the classroom and interactions between students with developmental disabilities and their peers; establishing and developing cooperation with parents of students with developmental disabilities, assistance in developing an individual educational plan, assistance in selecting and implementing procedures and techniques for assessing students with developmental disabilities, and providing assistance in implementing the process of professional development in the field of work with students with developmental disabilities. Each of the above possibilities for cooperation between teachers and pedagogues in educational work with students with developmental disabilities is most often achieved through various forms of advisory work .

**Research methodology**

*Research subject*

The subject of this research is the advisory work of pedagogues with teachers in existing school practice, which is carried out with the aim of providing assistance and support to teachers in working with students with developmental disabilities. The starting point was the assumption that based on the statements of pedagogues and the opinions of teachers, we can see the content, method and difficulties of work when providing assistance and support to teachers in working with students with developmental disabilities.

*Research goal and tasks*

The main goal of the research is to present and analyze the practice of advisory work of school pedagogues with teachers, which is aimed at providing professional assistance and support to teachers in working with students with developmental disabilities.

Tasks:

1. Based on the statements of school educators, present and analyze the forms and contents of advisory work that they use and implement in order to provide professional assistance and support to teachers in working with students with developmental disabilities;
2. Based on the statements of school teachers, provide an overview and analysis of the most common difficulties and problems that arise during the process of implementing advisory work with teachers with the aim of providing professional assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities;
3. To examine teachers' opinions on the effects of the school pedagogue's advisory work with teachers in order to provide professional assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities.

*Research sample*

The sample in our research consists of 15 pedagogues and 100 teachers from elementary schools in the city of Belgrade.

*Research methods, techniques and instruments*

For the purposes of this research, we used the descriptive-analytical method. In the research itself, we used two complementary data collection techniques: surveying and interviewing. Using the interview technique, we collected data on what forms and contents of advisory work the educator uses in order to provide assistance and support to teachers in working with students with developmental disabilities and what difficulties and problems arise during the process of implementing advisory work with teachers in order to provide assistance and support to teachers in working with students with developmental disabilities, and using the survey technique, we collected data from teachers on the effects of the implemented advisory work whose topic is students with developmental disabilities. In the research, we used a questionnaire for teachers and an interview protocol for educators.

*Research results and discussions*

1. *Forms and contents of advisory work of pedagogues with teachers with the aim of providing assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities*

Educators listed the following as the most common activities they implement in advisory work with teachers in order to provide assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities: individual conversations, organizing professional lectures; referring teachers to professional literature; analyzing pedagogical and legal documentation. Educators implement the aforementioned activities through continuous cooperation with teachers, visiting classes, through cooperation with professional institutions, conducting evaluations, and organizing workshops. With an individual teacher, pedagogues, through conversations, jointly identify the problem and come up with solutions for specific problems; discuss the individual needs of students; about developing a plan and program; about teaching work. When it comes to advisory work with a group of teachers, pedagogues organize professional lectures. We noticed that educators do more of the activities they implement in advisory work with individual teachers, which can be seen from the activities they listed, where they highlighted individual conversations in the first place. Creating a professional atmosphere and exchanging opinions between teachers and colleagues within the framework of educational work with students with developmental disabilities is a desirable type of activity, and the educator can contribute to encouraging collegial cooperation through his or her work. However, it can be seen from practice that this activity is not represented, that advisory work is most often based on individual conversations without encouraging cooperation and the exchange of professional experiences.

Specific topics of individual and group advisory conversations that pedagogues conduct with teachers in order to provide assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities relate to: social relationships between students with developmental disabilities and other students; cooperation with parents of students with developmental disabilities; methods of assessing students with developmental disabilities; methods and forms of work with students with developmental disabilities; familiarization with the characteristics of developmental disabilities. A topic that is not mentioned in educational practice within the framework of pedagogues' advisory work with teachers is professional development. Although the Law on the Foundations of the Education System stipulates continuous professional development for teachers, in order for them to be able to assess the needs of students and methods for encouraging learning, pedagogues did not list professional development as a topic of advisory work with teachers. We received interesting information when asked about the method of providing assistance and support in the professional development of teachers in the field of working with students with developmental disabilities, where 12 out of 15 teachers said that they refer teachers to professional literature and organize seminars. This information tells us that teachers improve the quality and content of the program by organizing seminars in schools, however, there is a lack of introduction of innovative, reputable and exemplary classes through which teachers, with the help of teachers, enrich and improve their work, teachers poorly motivate teachers for continuous professional development and do not encourage teachers to present at meetings and gatherings where an atmosphere of discussion about working with students with developmental disabilities would be created.

We would like to highlight that within the framework of professional development, the pedagogue, through advisory work with the teacher, should pay special attention to training in the development of individual work plans. The number of pedagogues who apply an individual educational plan in their educational work, provide assistance to teachers in developing a pedagogical profile of students, in choosing activities, didactic resources and defining goals, tasks and outcomes.

The modification of the curriculum and program for students with developmental disabilities has brought about a major problem of assessment. The teacher is the one who monitors the capabilities of the students and who adjusts the assessment and applies various assessment techniques. Educators provide assistance to teachers in the selection and application of techniques and procedures for assessing students with developmental disabilities, jointly devise the most adequate method of assessment; they use professional literature and the Assessment Rulebook. It is positive that in practice the teacher and the pedagogue jointly resolve the issue of assessing students with developmental disabilities. It would be even better and more acceptable for teachers if this topic were discussed in larger numbers, because then teachers would have the opportunity to transfer experiences and thus learn from each other.

When it comes to social relationships and interaction between students with developmental disabilities and their peers, from conversations with educators, we concluded that they provide assistance to teachers in fostering a positive climate in the school and classroom, in organizing group activities, in encouraging cooperation among students by organizing workshops, and help them prepare students to accept their peers with developmental disabilities. From the above, it can be seen that educators, through various activities, are truly responsible in fostering interaction and social relationships.

Parents of students with developmental disabilities are an indispensable part of the team when it comes to their children. It is the teacher who needs to develop a partnership with parents and maintain regular communication with them. The help of educators is essential in establishing and developing cooperation with parents of students with developmental disabilities. From the responses of educators, we saw that teachers do not have a well-developed cooperation with parents of students with developmental disabilities. Educators unanimously emphasize the necessary continuous cooperation between teachers and parents of students with developmental disabilities, and state that for these reasons, they often invite parents of students and initiate cooperation with them, plan visits from parents to teachers in order to motivate parents to actively cooperate. Through the conversation, they give teachers instructions on how to talk to parents, how to inform them about their children's work at school, and inform them of the problems that parents of such students face. Educators believe that it is important for teachers to gain the trust of parents because this will be reflected in the student in terms of providing coordinated and adequate attention and education. Most educators believe that parent education is of great importance, and they try to refer teachers and parents to professional literature and to organize joint activities between teachers and parents of students with developmental disabilities in order to encourage them to communicate, work as a team, socialize, and all of this, of course, in the interest of students with developmental disabilities.

1. *Difficulties in implementing the advisory work of educators with teachers in order to provide assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities*

The following difficulties are most commonly cited:

* insufficient school capacity (i.e. large number of students in classes);
* poorly equipped schools;
* insufficient number of professional associates employed in schools;
* insufficient training of teachers;
* insufficient motivation of most teachers.

The above difficulties are caused by the fact that teachers and professional associates do not possess the necessary knowledge and skills necessary to work with students with developmental disabilities. Furthermore, overly extensive curricula force teachers to work frontally because this is the only way to implement the assigned program, and they fear that the presence of students with developmental disabilities in their large class would mean that they would have to devote a lot of time to individual work with them and that they would therefore not be able to implement the curriculum.

One of the topics was what is currently possible to do to overcome the aforementioned difficulties. There were many interesting ideas on this topic. The most interesting ones are:

* The most frequently mentioned need was professional development for principals, teachers and professional associates, as well as familiarization with examples of good practice and exchange of experiences with colleagues in the country and abroad;
* reduction of department size;
* increase in financial resources;
* harmonized working hours of employees so that they have more time to work with students with developmental disabilities;
* active, responsible and conscientious work performance;
* reduction of administration;
* raising awareness among parents and students;
* work in the field of improving cooperation between school professional associates and teachers.

In order to overcome these difficulties and problems, teamwork is needed from all those involved in the work of students with developmental disabilities. According to the pedagogue, the school principal, parents, professional associates, experts from the local community, a special education teacher and all other employees of the school institution should participate in resolving the above difficulties.

1. *Teachers' opinions on the effects of the advisory work carried out on students with developmental disabilities*

**Table 1.** Teachers' opinions on whether the advisory work of the school pedagogue with teachers helps teachers in implementing the listed tasks and activities within the framework of educational work with students with developmental disabilities

TEACHER'S OPINION

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Effects of advisory work** | **Counseling helps.** | | **Counseling doesn't help** | |
| **f** | **%** | **f** | **%** |
| Preparation, implementation, monitoring and analysis of teaching work in classes that include students with developmental disabilities | 88 | 88.0 | 12 | 12.0 |
| Getting to know and understanding the individual characteristics of the specific educational needs of students with developmental disabilities | 78 | 78.0 | 22 | 22.0 |
| Development and implementation of strategies and techniques to encourage positive social relationships in the classroom and interactions between students with developmental disabilities and their peers | 74 | 74.0 | 26 | 26.0 |
| Establishing and developing cooperation with parents of students with developmental disabilities | 81 | 81.0 | 19 | 19.0 |
| Professional development in the field of educational work with students with developmental disabilities | 80 | 80.0 | 20 | 20.0 |

As can be seen from Table 1, the largest number of teachers surveyed in our study, 88 of them, believe that consulting with a pedagogue helps in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and analysis of teaching work in classes that include students with developmental disabilities. It is interesting to note that 81 teachers believe that consulting with a pedagogue helps in developing cooperation with parents of students with developmental disabilities. From the previous data analysis, we saw that pedagogues do indeed help teachers in developing cooperation with parents, which has proven to be a positive effect of the consulting work carried out, according to the surveyed teachers. As many as 80 teachers believe that consulting with a pedagogue helps in professional development in the field of educational work with students with developmental disabilities. It is contradictory that we received information from pedagogues that professional development is not a topic of conversation they have with teachers. Educators organize seminars and refer teachers to professional literature, but they do not hold discussions about professional development and do not agree with teachers about the organization of such. Teachers clearly do not share the opinion of pedagogues; judging by the answers, the help of pedagogues in the area of professional development is quite sufficient for them. 78 teachers believe that consulting with a pedagogue helps in getting to know and understanding the individual characteristics of students with developmental disabilities, and 74 of them believe that consulting with a pedagogue helps in encouraging positive social relations between students with developmental disabilities and other peers.

**Table 2.** Teachers' opinions on whether the advisory work of the school pedagogue with teachers helps teachers in implementing the listed tasks and activities within the framework of educational work with students with developmental disabilities

TEACHER'S OPINION

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Effects of advisory work** | **Counseling helps.** | | **Counseling doesn't help** | |
| **f** | **%** | **f** | **%** |
| Modification and adaptation of the official curriculum to the specific educational needs of students with developmental disabilities | 87 | 87.0 | 13 | 13.0 |
| Teacher selection of teaching methods and forms and teaching aids in accordance with the age of the students, the composition of the students in the class, individual characteristics and specific educational needs of the students | 82 | 82.0 | 18 | 18.0 |
| Selection of teaching aids in accordance with the age of the students, the composition of the students in the class, individual characteristics and specific educational needs of the students | 78 | 78.0 | 22 | 22.0 |
| Preparation and creation of tasks of varying levels of complexity for individual and individualized teaching work | 74 | 74.0 | 25 | 25.0 |
| Developing strategies to encourage student engagement in the learning process | 75 | 75.0 | 24 | 24.0 |
| Development and preparation of various techniques and procedures for evaluating teaching work | 75 | 75.0 | 23 | 23.0 |
| Other | / | / | / | / |

Based on the data in Table 2, we can conclude that consulting with a teacher helps teachers modify the curriculum to the specific needs of students with developmental disabilities. 82 of them stated that consulting with a teacher helps them choose teaching aids and work methods in accordance with the age of students with developmental disabilities. 74 teachers confirmed that consulting with a teacher helps in creating tasks of different levels of complexity for individualized work. This data indicates that when it comes to creating tasks, teachers work independently.

**Table 3.** Teachers' opinions on how a pedagogue can, through advisory work, assist teachers in the selection and application of procedures and techniques for assessing students with developmental disabilities

TEACHER'S OPINION

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Selection and application of procedures and techniques for assessing students with developmental disabilities** | **F** | **%** |
| By referring teachers to the Rules on Student Assessment in Primary Education | 64 | 64.0 |
| By creating knowledge tests | 15 | 15.0 |
| By determining the level of achievement for each student individually | 8 | 8.0 |
| By attending classes | 5 | 5.0 |
| Through discussion with the teacher, they find concrete solutions. | 4 | 4.0 |
| Through the seminar | 4 | 4.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

Table 3 shows that 64 teachers first of all pointed out that pedagogues most often refer them to the Student Assessment Rulebook when it comes to assessing students with developmental disabilities; then 15 of them say that pedagogues help them by jointly developing tests to test knowledge; 8 teachers point out that the pedagogue helps them by jointly determining achievement levels for each student separately; 5 teachers say that the pedagogue helps them by visiting classes. Only 4 teachers stated that through conversations with the pedagogue they receive specific solutions on how to proceed in choosing assessment techniques for students with developmental disabilities. Out of a total of 100 teachers, 36 of them receive specific help from the pedagogue through various activities, and the remaining 64 teachers, as we have seen from the attached, refer to the Assessment Rulebook.

**Table 4.** Teachers' opinions on how a pedagogue can help teachers get to know students with developmental disabilities through advisory work

TEACHER'S OPINION

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Getting to know students with developmental disabilities** | **F** | **%** |
| By educating teachers on the issue of developmental disabilities | 47 | 47.0 |
| Through the creation of a student file | 32 | 32.0 |
| By sharing experiences with the teacher | 14 | 14.0 |
| By proposing an appropriate working method | 3 | 3.0 |
| Through lectures, seminars, individual conversations | 2 | 2.0 |
| By referring teachers to professional literature | 2 | 2.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

Of the 100 teachers surveyed, 40 stated that referral to the issue of developmental disabilities is the most common way in which a teacher can help them get to know students with developmental disabilities through advisory work. 32 of them believe that a teacher can help them get to know developmental disabilities, individual characteristics and specific educational needs of students with developmental disabilities through monitoring students and creating student files. Only 14 teachers believe that a teacher can help them get to know students with developmental disabilities by creating a professional atmosphere and encouraging collegial cooperation and exchange of experiences among teachers. We noticed that very few teachers think that a teacher can help them get to know individual characteristics of students through professional development.

**Table 5.** Teachers' opinions on the ways in which a pedagogue can, through advisory work, help teachers in encouraging interaction and social relationships between students with developmental disabilities and their peers

TEACHER'S OPINION

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Encouraging interaction and social relationships between students with developmental disabilities and their peers** | **F** | **%** |
| By organizing workshops | 37 | 37.0 |
| Introducing students with developmental disabilities to other students in the class at the beginning of the school year | 22 | 22.0 |
| Implementation of sociometric testing | 14 | 14.0 |
| By encouraging a positive climate in the department | 10 | 10.0 |
| By including all students in common sections | 6 | 6.0 |
| Introducing parents of other students in the class to the types and characteristics of students with developmental disabilities | 4 | 4.0 |
| Encouraging other students to help students with developmental disabilities | 3 | 3.0 |
| By giving a lecture | 2 | 2.0 |
| Positive examples from pedagogical practice | 2 | 2.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

From Table 5, we see that teachers emphasize organizing workshops as one of the ways in which educators can help them encourage interaction and social relationships between students with developmental disabilities and their peers. 22 of them think that introducing students with developmental disabilities to other students in the class at the beginning of the school year is an effective way for educators to provide assistance. Out of a total of 100 teachers, 14 believe that educators can contribute to improving social relationships by creating sociograms in the class. Although in school practice, educational work is based on teamwork of all employees, only 10 teachers emphasized that one of the ways in which educators can help them encourage interaction is through joint or team work of educators and teachers aimed at improving the climate in the class. Although acceptance of others occurs most easily in group activities in cooperative situations, out of the 100 teachers surveyed, 6 stated that interaction and social relationships can be encouraged by including students in joint sections and that they need the help of educators in organizing these group activities. Through the teachers' responses, we see that only 4 of them believe that educators can help them through professional development and through the exchange of positive examples from pedagogical practice.

**Table 6.** Teachers' opinions on the ways in which a pedagogue can, through advisory work, help teachers in establishing and developing cooperation between teachers and parents of students with developmental disabilities

TEACHER'S OPINION

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Establishing and developing cooperation with parents of students with developmental disabilities** | **F** | **%** |
| Organizing meetings between teachers and parents of students with developmental disabilities | 40 | 40.0 |
| Introducing parents to the characteristics of students with developmental disabilities | 21 | 21.0 |
| Providing advice to teachers on how to communicate with parents of students with developmental disabilities | 15 | 15.0 |
| Organizing and participating in conversations between parents of students with developmental disabilities and teachers | 8 | 8.0 |
| Encouraging parents to provide accurate information about the child's health, physical, intellectual and social condition | 6 | 6.0 |
| Organizing professional development for parents | 5 | 5.0 |
| Introducing parents to their children's potential | 3 | 3.0 |
| Guiding teachers to collaborate with parents of students with developmental disabilities | 2 | 2.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

When a child's developmental disability is identified, the most vulnerable part of the family are the parents. Parents are an important link in the relationship with the teacher, all with the aim of the child's most successful progress. In establishing and developing cooperation between teachers and parents of students with developmental disabilities, the educator, according to the teachers, can help them organize meetings with the parents of the students, then in introducing the parents of other students to the specificities of students with developmental disabilities. What is important and what few teachers, 15 of them, recognized as a way of providing assistance by the educator is giving advice to teachers on how to communicate with the parents of those students, how to address them, what to expect from them during the conversation, how to lead and direct the conversation. Only 8 teachers believe that educators should be present at the conversation between parents and teachers. And 5 teachers point out that the pedagogue can help them organize professional development for parents, with the aim of raising their awareness and involving them in certain forms of school work.

**Table 7.** Teachers' opinions on how the advisory work of educators can help teachers in achieving the process of professional development in the areas of work with students with developmental disabilities

TEACHER'S OPINION

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Suggested answers** | **YES/NO** | **F** | **%** |
| Selection of professional literature and other challenges for individual professional development | Yes | 59 | 59.0 |
| No | 41 | 41.0 |
| Selection of accredited professional development programs that teachers can attend | Yes | 62 | 62.0 |
| No | 38 | 38.0 |
| Selection of content of professional lectures organized at the school | Yes | 44 | 44.0 |
| No | 56 | 56.0 |
| Selection of methods and forms of work for various forms of professional development organized at school | Yes | 37 | 37.0 |
| No | 63 | 63.0 |

Table 7 shows that the advisory work of educators can help teachers in the process of professional development in the field of working with students with developmental disabilities in choosing accredited professional development programs that teachers can attend and in choosing professional literature and other challenges for individual professional development. Teachers believe that pedagogues do not help them through advice in choosing methods and forms of work for different forms of professional development organized in school and do not help them in choosing the content of professional lectures organized in school. These data obtained from teachers are consistent with the data we obtained from educators.

**Conclusion**

Based on the results of this research, it can be concluded that:

* The advisory work of pedagogues with teachers in order to provide assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities, according to the pedagogues, takes place through the following activities : individual conversations, organizing professional lectures; referring teachers to professional literature; analysis of pedagogical and legal documentation;
* The topics of individual and group counseling conversations that educators conduct with teachers in order to provide assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities relate to: social relationships between students with developmental disabilities and other students; cooperation with parents of students with developmental disabilities; methods of assessing students with developmental disabilities; methods and forms of working with students with developmental disabilities; familiarization with the characteristics of developmental disabilities;
* Educators encounter the following difficulties in implementing advisory work with teachers in order to provide assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities: lack of time; burdened by the regular curriculum; large number of students in classes; poor equipment in schools; insufficient number of professional associates employed in schools; insufficient training of teachers; insufficient motivation of the majority of teachers;
* According to teachers, the advisory work of pedagogues with teachers in order to provide assistance and support in working with students with developmental disabilities, mostly helps teachers in: preparing, implementing, monitoring and analyzing teaching work in classes that include students with developmental disabilities; in modifying and adapting the official curriculum to the specific educational needs of students with developmental disabilities; in choosing teaching methods and forms of teaching work and teaching aids in accordance with the age of the students, the composition of the students in the class, individual characteristics and specific educational needs of the students.

From all of the above, we can conclude that continuous professional development of both teachers and pedagogues is necessary in order to jointly solve problems in educational practice and to be able to adequately respond to all the demands placed on them when it comes to working with students with developmental disabilities.

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