

PUPILS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND THEIR SOCIAL INTEGRATION

MAJDA SCHMIDT

received: November '97.

accepted: January '99.

The results of our empirical research clearly show that the social, emotional, and motivational integration of pupils with learning disabilities who attend regular primary schools is lower in comparison to that of the pupils from schools with special education programs. The achievements of pupils with learning disabilities in regular primary schools were also lower, whereas the structure of perceptual-motor and cognitive abilities was better than that of pupils from the schools with special education programs.

The poor or even critical social and emotional state of the pupils with learning disabilities attending regular primary schools signals that integration requires the establishment of the least restrictive environment.

Therefore, it is necessary for professionals, researchers, and theoreticians to systematically follow and scrutinize the impact of integration models on pupils with learning disabilities and to take Slovene research results into consideration.

Key words: pupils with learning disabilities, integration into regular primary school, social integration, emotional integration, motivational integration.

INTRODUCTION

The process of integrating pupils with special educational needs still reveals several dilemmas and issues, predominantly when it comes to implementation. This is the reason why integration is a popular theme of discourse between professionals and theoreticians from the area of special education. The term **integration** is used as a collective noun for all attempts to avoid educating of students with disabilities in a segregated and isolated environment (Pijl, S.J.; Meijer, C.J. W., 1991). Its scope ranges from the actual integration of regular and special schools (or classes) to measures that aim to reduce the outflow of regular education to special education. The organizational structures of integration vary from country to country, ranging from regular classes without support, regular classes with support, and regular classes as the basis with part-time special classes to full time special school.

Attempts to introduce integration into regular schools require some consideration of social integration which is more complex and more intimate. The term **social integration** includes frequent and intensive social contacts

between handicapped and nonhandicapped pupils (Kobi, 1983). Significant social integration within the whole setting of school life may often present itself as harder to achieve than teaching pupils in one room.

While the organizational and objective issues of integration are being solved, obscurities still remain in the specialized professional areas. Worthy of mention are the problems with diagnoses that are related to deficient instruments and assessment criteria, as well as the problems of stigmatization, while at the same time environmental factors and social interaction are not taken sufficiently into consideration. School legislation in Slovenia (1996) has decided upon a developmental process arrangement with individual educational plans for children with special needs instead of a categorical approach.

In the literature and among professionals the area of defining learning disabilities reveals several deficits. For example, we still

* Majda Schmidt, PhD Faculty of Education, University of Maribor, Koroška c. 160, 2000 Maribor, Slovenija.