

Teachers' and students' attitudes and perceptions towards people with disabilities: A review of the literature

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SUMMARY

Nowadays, with the prevalence of disability models, teachers' attitudes and perceptions on disability and disabled people are sometimes positive and at other times negative. The same can be alleged as for children's attitudes and perceptions concerning disability and disabled persons. Children's attitudes and perceptions are primarily influenced by immediate family, then by school environment and inner circle and are lastly formed by the acquired experiences of children. The literature review showed that some teachers hold a positive attitude towards disability and the inclusion of disabled people, whereas others do not. Furthermore, research indicates that the more obvious the disabilities, the more positive are the attitudes of children. Teachers must develop more positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and promote their inclusion. To this purpose, they must have sufficient knowledge of the whole spectrum of disabilities. The same stands for children who need to develop more positive attitudes towards handicapped people, aiming not only at their acceptance, but also at contributing in their educational and social inclusion.

KEYWORDS: *attitudes, perceptions, disability, teachers, children*

INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes are social representations, objectified, namely cognitive and emotional structures around groups within social environment, which are widely accepted, emerge and spread under precise social circumstances in the passage of time (Papastamos, 1990). They perform a function that is quite important for the groups. Specifically, they intend to guide the behavior of the members of different groups, when these interact with each other. Gibson (1979) claims that "the purpose of perception is to serve the action and that the perception we have about another person's personality is connected to the way we behave".

Baron and Byrne (1994) define prejudice as "an attitude (usually negative) towards the members of a group, which is exclusively based on the fact that they belong to the particular group". Prejudices have different meaning from that of discrimination, for the reason that discrimination involves actions (usually negative) which aim at target persons of the particular group. As an attitude, prejudice functions like other cognitive forms (Friske & Taylor, 1991), and by that it is meant that the information supporting the prejudice is pointed and sounded out more often in comparison with the information which is not and, therefore, it is saved in memory more steadily. In the scope of prejudices, social representations justify the activation of social stereotypes, which, in turn, are expressed on the level of behavior, which also reproduces the corresponding social representations (Fragoudaki & Dragona, 1997).

The person without disabilities judges the disabled one, according to the type of his prejudices and stereotypes (positive or negative). Since interpersonal attraction is one of most

important factors in social interaction, a person without disabilities who has negative prejudices and stereotypes relating to disabilities, will almost never attempt to establish relations with a disabled person (Zoniou – Sideri, 2011).

Research has proven the very important role of the way teachers deal with students with disabilities in their class (Eiserman, Shisler, & Healey, 1995; Zoniou – Sideri & Vlachou, 2006). This depends on the attitudes and perceptions that they themselves shape over those persons (Lindsay, 2007). Teachers' positive attitudes towards disabled people and their willingness to handle the individual differences of children in the classroom positively and effectively, widely affect both the attitudes of their colleagues, of parents and children without disabilities, as well as the success of educational inclusion (Koster, Nakken, Pijl, & Van Houten, 2009).

The stereotypes of disabilities, as a personal tragedy, but also as a deduction from what defines what we consider human, are preserved by reproducing not just feelings of compassion, but also feelings of fear and perhaps of contempt (Hughes, 2009). It is also essential to point out that all (special) “needs” are not given the same recognition and do not have the same effects. Corbett supports that (1998: 41), “the labels are extremely important and their cultural investment is important”, especially in socio-cultural contexts that are directed by market forces.

The medical model has led society to restrict itself in the treatment of handicapped persons and to place societal treatment upon individual consciousness. The medical model promotes classification and its basic target seems to be the treatment and normalizing of persons with disabilities. Individuals adopting this model tend to protect, treat and care for disabled persons and they search for ways to control them and dominate, with the intention of prompting their individual adjustment within specific socio-political contexts (Oliver & Barnes, 1998). If disabled people are discriminated and excluded, because they are different in a fundamental way, then we will never accept them as complete members of our society (Morris, 1991). Thus, the more society remains focused on performance and homogenization, the more stigmatization and marginalization of different people are strengthened and the psychological and social problems of these people are intensified (Contopoulou, 2007).

Completing this introductory part, there will be a conceptual clarification of the terms “integration” and “inclusion”. “Integration” means “someone’s systematic placement within something else and the completion of the person as an independent, integral part of a wider total” (Zoniou-Sideri, 1998: 125). On the other hand, Zoniou-Sideri (2000) claims that “inclusive education” is a result of scientists’ attempt to expand the term “integration”, which is no longer a goal, but a means to change social data. Its aim is not to be applied only to the restricted boundaries of educational institutions, but to be spread to the wider social structures.

The main difference between these two definitions is that “integration” was implemented as a practice in absence of a theoretical and ideological context and this is the reason of its failure. The inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools required the effort of co-existence with the existing curriculum. On the other hand, “inclusive education” entails the features of “integration”, but also defines the modification of the existing social structures, the revocation of prejudices, the acceptance of dissimilarity, the review of standards and of educational goals, the reformation into a radical educational policy, the planning of new curricula and the training of educators (Ainscow, 1997; Lindsay, 1997).

FACTORS THAT AFFECT CHILDREN’S ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS DISABLED PERSONS

The factors that are likely to affect children’s attitudes and perceptions towards disabled persons vary. Some of them are: gender, age, family, educational and multicultural environment. Later, these attitudes and perceptions are shaped by the experiences that children themselves acquire with disabled persons (Innes & Diamond, 1999). In an article, Vignes et al. (2009) mention that several studies have found a positive correlation between

parents' attitudes towards disabled people and children's views on disabled people. On the other hand, in an article, Roberts and Lindsell (1997) advocate that those children's attitudes and perceptions towards various disabilities – especially as for pre-school children – are influenced at an early stage by their mothers' attitudes and perceptions towards these disabilities.

Several studies have been conducted (Bunch & Valeo, 2004; McDougall, Dewit, King, Miller, & Killip, 2004; Nikolarazi et al., 2005) examining the relationship between the shaping of children's attitudes and perceptions towards disabled persons, the existing atmosphere in the educational environment as the effects of inclusion. A large number of surveys have concluded that the inclusion of handicapped children in school, especially in mainstream education, has a positive impact on the development of positive attitudes and perceptions towards people with disabilities (Diamond, 2001; Gash & Goffey, 1995; Kalyva & Agaliotis, 2009). Gash and Goffey (1995) examined 125 female primary students from two different schools. The first school had special educational needs classes (inclusive classes) for children with disabilities, especially for persons with a moderate intellectual disability, whereas the second school had no special education classes. The results of the survey revealed that the schoolgirls attending the school with special educational classes had more positive attitudes towards their classmates with disabilities, as well as they showed to be more interested in social interaction with handicapped persons, compared to schoolgirls who attended the school that offered no special education classes for children with disabilities.

A comparative research by Tirosh, Shanin and Reiter (1997), Bossaert, Golpin, Pijl and Petry (2011) and Vignes et al. (2009) which was carried out on children who lived in Israel, Belgium, France and Canada, ascertained that children in Israel had developed more positive attitudes towards disabled children of the same age in comparison with children from Canada, Belgium and France. A similar survey by Nikolarazi and de Reybekiel (2001), which was carried out in Greece and in the United Kingdom and had a poll sample of 229 Greek students and 234 English students at the fifth and sixth grade in Primary School (10-12 years old), demonstrated that children from Greece had developed more positive attitudes towards persons of the same age with deafness, blindness and the ones using a wheelchair, compared to children who lived in the UK.

On the other hand, a comparable survey which was carried out by Diamond (2001), examined pre-school children's perceptions of providing help to handicapped persons, accepting them and being involved into social interaction with them. The results of the survey indicated that 45 children at pre-school age developed rapport with some classmate with disabilities. However, it was also found that children trying to have a closer relation to some disabled classmate were more sensitive in situations related to different emotions and they expressed a further acceptance of persons with disabilities.

Alike seem to be the conclusions of the survey conducted by Kalyva and Agaliotis (2009), in Greece, using a sample of 60 students at the sixth grade of a Primary school. Half of these students (30) attended a school where there was a student with a physical disability, whereas the other half (30) attended a school where there were no handicapped students or students dealing with any other type of motor disabilities. The results of the survey indicated that the group of the 30 students attending the school where there was the student with a physical disability, appeared to understand the emotional and social problems related to the presence of a motor disability better, compared to the remaining group of 30 students. Consequently, it was obvious that the students who interacted with a person with physical disabilities developed more positive perceptions and attitudes towards that person and his integration, compared to the remaining group of students.

CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS DISABLED PERSONS

Several surveys by (Nabors & Keyes, 1995; Nikolarazi et al., 2005; Royal & Roberts, 1987) have explored the attitudes of pre-school, school-aged and adult people towards persons with various types of disabilities. More specifically, a survey by Royal and Roberts

(1987) examined the perceptions of students aged 8, 11, 14 and 17 years old, as well as of students studying at university concerning 20 different disabilities. The sample of this survey was called upon to rate each one of the disabilities as for four features: 1. Visibility, 2. Severity, 3. Acceptance and 4. Familiarization. It is emphasized that the researchers studied these disabilities in a general context and not individually in a special framework. The survey concluded that older children are better familiarized as well as accept disabilities more, compared to children at the age of 8. Furthermore, it was found that the more obvious a disability was, the less acceptance it received by children at age of 8.

Nabors and Keyes (1995) examined the perceptions of 32 pre-school children, in whose classroom there were children with an intellectual or a physical/motor disability. Most of the children who participated in the survey preferred to play with a classmate who had no disabilities. Furthermore, the pre-school students commented more positively on children of the same sex of formal development. Concerning these two disabilities, children appeared to build more positive perceptions about their peers who had an obvious disability (physical-motor disability) compared to the ones who had a non-obvious one (intellectual disability). Generally, it was found that the pre-school students did not have so positive perceptions towards their disabled classmates, which makes an encouragement of positive attitudes towards people with disabilities an imperative.

Nikolarazi et al.'s survey (2005) analyzed the attitudes of 196 pre-school children from Greece and America, towards persons with disabilities. The results of the survey showed that both children in Greece and America accepted those persons. Additionally, children who attended an inclusive nursery school had more positive attitudes towards disabled persons, compared to children who had not attended an inclusive nursery school. However, it was proven that classes in Greece had few representations of disabled persons, compared to classes in USA who had a moderate to high-level representation of handicapped persons.

In a similar survey by Nowicki (2006) 100 attitudes of primary school students, at the age of 4-10 were evaluated. Their attitudes were evaluated on four different conditions: 1. Children of formal development, 2. Children with physical disabilities, 3. Children with intellectual disabilities, and 4. Children with simultaneous physical and intellectual disabilities. The results of the survey showed that the attitudes of students are affected by many factors, including the presence or absence of a disability, its type and the person's age. Specifically, all of the children appeared to be more negative and more prejudiced towards children with intellectual and intellectual/physical disabilities. The same can be claimed about their attitudes, which were equally negative towards these two types of disabilities.

Surveys (Morton & Campbell, 2007; Swaim & Morgan, 2001) examine the attitudes of school age children towards persons with autism. The attitudes and intentions of primary school children are more positive when students receive descriptive and explanatory information about autism (Swaim & Morgan, 2001). Older children form less positive attitudes than younger children, when they receive explanatory information by their parents rather than by the teacher of their class or a doctor (Morton & Campbell, 2007). However, as children get closer to adolescence, they build increasingly more negative attitudes towards educational inclusion (Ferguson, 1999).

DeLaat, Freriksen and Vervloed (2013) researched the attitudes of 344 high school and college students, towards four different types of disabilities: 1. Deafness, 2. Blindness, 3. Paralysis, and 4. Mental retardation. Their perceptions were examined with reference to age, self-esteem, gender, religion and familiarization of students with a disabled person. The results of this survey indicated that the participants had less positive attitudes towards persons with mental retardation compared to those with the other three types of disabilities. Furthermore, noteworthy is the fact that people with paralysis were treated more negatively in comparison with people with deafness and blindness.

Brook and Geva (2001) researched the knowledge and attitudes of high school students towards their peers with ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorder-Hyperactivity Disorder) and Learning Disabilities. These students were more informed about Learning Disabilities than about ADHD. Concerning their attitudes, they had more positive attitudes towards their peers

with Learning Disabilities than towards their peers with ADHD. However, they comprehended much more about disability while getting older.

De Boer, Pijl, Post and Minnaert (2012) point out that teachers' attitudes have a negative impact on students' attitudes towards people with ADHD, autism and mental retardation, whereas parents' attitudes have a positive impact. Rosenbaum, Armstrong and King (1988) found out that students who formed friendships with persons with Special Educational Needs at school maintained positive attitudes towards them, compared to people who had no contact with them. They also found out that students whose schools included students with Special Educational Needs, had more positive attitudes towards them than other students (see Table 1).

Table 1. Children's attitudes and perceptions towards disabled persons.

ARTICLE	RESEARCHERS	SAMPLE	COUNTRY	DISABILITY	RESULTS	JOURNAL
The Effect of Contact on Greek Children's Understanding of and Attitudes Towards Children with Physical Disabilities 2009	Efrosini Kalyva and Ioannis Agaliotis	60 students at the sixth grade of a Primary school	Greece	Physical disability	Pupils who studied at a school where there was a disabled pupil developed more positive attitudes towards that individual and his integration, compared to the group of pupils who studied at a school where there were no physically disabled pupils	European Journal of Special Needs Education
Students' perceptions of and attitudes toward disabilities: A comparison of twenty conditions 1987	George P. Royal and Michael C. Roberts	Students aged 8, 11, 14, 17 years old	USA	Various disabilities	Older children appeared more familiar with, and were more accepting of disability, compared to children aged 8. The more obvious the disability, the less children aged 8 were able to accept it	Journal of Clinical Child Psychology
The attitudes of Belgian adolescents towards peers with disabilities 2011	Goele Bossaert, Hilde Colpin, Sip Jan Pijl and Katja Petry	167 young people aged 11-20 years	Belgium	Various disabilities	Belgian adolescents were tolerant of the disabled. All those who watched an info-video about the disabled, as well as girls, had more positive stances towards the disabled	Research in Developmental Disabilities
Preschoolers' Reasons for Accepting Peers With and Without Disabilities 1995	Laura Nabors and Lynette Keyes	32 children aged 43-60 months	USA (N. Carolina)	Mental and physical disability	Pupils of pre-school age did not have very positive views about disabled fellow pupils, but did have more positive views about people of the same age with clear disabilities (physical disability), compared to those who did not have clear disabilities (mental disability)	Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities

A cross-cultural examination of typically developing children's attitudes toward individuals with special needs 2005	Magda Nikolarazi, Poonam Kumar, Paddy Favazza, Georgios Sideridis, Dafni Koulousiou and Ann Riall	196 preschool children	Greece and USA	Various disabilities	Children in kindergartens in Greece and the U.S. accepted the disabled. Children studying in integrative kindergartens were more positive towards individuals with special needs compared to children not studying at integrative schools	International Journal of Disability Development and Education
A cross-sectional multivariate analysis of children's attitudes toward disabilities 2006	Elizabeth A. Nowicki	100 primary school students aged 4-10 years old	Canada	Physical and mental disability	Children were more negative and more biased towards children with mental and mental/physical disability	Journal of Intellectual Disability Research
Information source affects peers' initial attitudes toward autism 2007	Jane F. Morton and Jonathan M. Campbell	296 elementary students	USA (Georgia)	Autism	Attitudes towards autism differ depending on who provides the information about the disability	Research in Developmental Disabilities
Children's Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions Toward a Peer with Autistic Behaviors: Does a Brief Educational Intervention Have an Effect? 2001	Karen F. Swaim and Sam B. Morgan	233 students (112 121 third grade and sixth grade)	USA	Autism	Boys and girls showed equally less positive attitudes towards individuals with autistic behavior compared to individuals of the same age who did not have autism.	Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders
Attitudes of children and adolescents towards persons who are deaf, blind, paralyzed or intellectually disabled 2013	Stijn de Laat, Ellen Freriksen and Mathijs P.J. Vervloed	200 high school students	Holland	Deafness, blindness, paralysis and mental retardation	Participants had less positive views about individuals with intellectual disability compared to three other forms of disability. People suffering from paralysis were viewed more negatively compared to people who were blind and/or deaf.	Research in Developmental Disabilities

Knowledge and attitudes of high school pupils towards peers' attention deficit and learning disabilities 2001	Uzi Brook and Diklah Geva	104 high school students	Israel	ADHD and learning disabilities	Secondary school pupils were more positive towards children of the same age with learning difficulties compared to children of the same age with ADHD	Patient Education and Counseling
Which variables relate to the attitudes of teachers, parents and peers towards students with special educational needs in regular education? 2012	Anke de Boer, Sip Jan Pijl, Wendy Post and Alexander Minnaert	1113 elementary students and high school	Holland	ADHD, autism and mental retardation	The attitudes of teachers had a negative effect on the pupils' attitudes towards children with ADHD, autism and intellectual disability, whereas the attitudes of parents had a positive effect	Educational Studies
Determinants of Children's Attitudes Toward Disability: A Review of Evidence 1998	Peter L. Rosenbaum, Robert W. Armstrong and Susanne M. King	More than 1,200 elementary students	Canada	Various disabilities	Pupils studying at schools where there were pupils with special educational needs, who had been integrated, had more positive attitudes than other pupils. Compared to boys, girls were more positive towards the disabled	Children's Health Care
Determinants of students' attitudes towards peers with disabilities 2009	Céline Vignes, Emmanuelle Godeau, Mariane Sentenac, Nicola Coley, Felix Navarro, Helene Grandjean and Catherine Arnaud	1509 high school students	France	Various disabilities	Pupils with a good quality of life, who were friends with someone disabled, and who had been given information about the disabled by parents or the media, as well as girls, had a more positive attitude towards the disabled	Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology

High School Students' Attitudes toward Inclusion of Handicapped Students in the Regular Education Classroom 1999	Janet M. Ferguson	196 high school students	Canada	Various disabilities	Including the disabled in general classes does not necessarily mean that the disabled will interact with their classmates. Girls and pupils who participated in remedial teaching for the disabled had more positive attitudes towards the disabled	Educational Forum
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FACTORS WHICH AFFECT TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS DISABLED PERSONS

Research has confirmed (Al-Faiz, 2007; Avissar, Reiter, & Leyser, 2003; Center & Ward, 1987; Clough & Lindsay, 1991; Eiserman et al., 1995; Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Forlin, 1995; Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995; Leyser, Kapperman, & Keller, 1994; Leyser & Lessen, 1985; Padelidou & Lampropoulou, 1997; Stainback, Stainback & Dedrick, 1984; Shimman, 1990; Stoiber, Gettinger, & Goetz, 1998) that teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards handicapped persons are affected by many factors, such as their gender, age and educational experience, the experience of dealing with disabled people, their preparation and education as well as their beliefs.

Specifically, surveys which have studied the effect of gender on attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards people with disabilities (Aksamit, Morris & Leuenberger, 1987; Eichinger, Rizzo & Sirotnik, 1991; Harvey, 1985) have shown that female teachers have a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of disabled children, compared to male teachers. Further surveys which have studied the age and educational experience of teachers (Avissar et al., 2003; Center & Ward, 1987; Forlin, 1995; Leyser et al., 1994; Padelidou & Lampropoulou, 1997) showed that younger teachers and the ones with less years of working experience are more avid supporters of the inclusion of disabled persons. In Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden's (2000a) research, teachers' working experience did not appear to be related to teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards the inclusion of disabled children.

Regarding teachers' experience with disabled persons, surveys (Al-Faiz, 2007; Avissar et al., 2003; Janney et al., 1995; Leyser et al., 1994; Leyser & Lessen, 1985; Stainback et al., 1984; Shimman, 1990) have shown that teachers who had a thorough educational experience and interacted more with disabled people, had a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of disabled children, compared to teachers with less educational experience and interaction with people with disabilities.

Surveys carried out in the USA, Australia and England concerning teachers' preparation and training (Avramidis Bayliss, & Burden, 2000b; Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, & Scheer, 1999; Van-Reusen, Shoho & Barker, 2001) showed that the training that teachers undergo in various preparatory and further educational programs on Special Educational Needs is considerably connected to a more positive and larger acceptance of inclusion.

Finally, surveys on teachers' beliefs (Clarebout, Elen, Luyten, & Bamps, 2001; Guralnick, 2008; Jordan, Lindsay & Stanovich, 1997; Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Schommer-Aikins, 2004; Soodak, Podell & Lehman, 1998) showed that beliefs and attitudes (negative or positive) have an effect on the teaching strategies of these teachers. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards disabled persons have quite a meaningful effect on their attitudes and perceptions towards these children's inclusion. The results of Soodak et al.'s survey (1998) confirmed that teachers who accept the education of disabled children feel more confident, due to the fact that they feel more capable and apply efficient classroom management and they can also better gear inclusion in practice.

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS DISABLED PERSONS

Greek literature has a limited number of researches concerning teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs in a mainstream school, and their results are consistent with the results of international surveys (Doikou, 2006). Surveys have shown that teachers who have been involved in the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs are more likely to aim at working with them (Stanovich & Jordan, 2002). Undeniably, it is necessary that both teachers of general and special education express their beliefs, attitudes and disputes about inclusion (Galis-Allan & Tanner, 1995). However, in spite of teachers' positive statements on students' with special needs and/ or disabilities attendance of school or inclusion in mainstream classes, they frequently develop feelings of hesitation regarding the teaching of these persons. They think that they do not have the time, the appropriate training, the relevant knowledge and skills, nor the knowledge of the

appropriate teaching methods or approaches applying to these persons (King-Sears, 2008; Rix, 2009).

Teachers' attitude towards inclusion is closely related to the acceptance of students with disabilities. Research has shown that even though some teachers believe that a child with a disability has the right to equal educational opportunities, their attitudes towards its inclusion are however, frequently negative and affect the result of its inclusion (Vlachou, 2014). Penna (2008:74) mentions that: "Teachers'" attitudes towards inclusion have to be understood through a highly emotional aspect, namely teachers' acceptance of students with Special Educational Needs. It is generally recognized that where there are conditions of acceptance within the educational process, students' mental health, self-esteem, social behavior and cognitive processing are promoted. Teacher's readiness of inclusion becomes all the more important as there is an increasing talk of teachers' burden at work".

There are many factors which affect teachers' attitudes towards persons with autism. It is proven that teachers' perceptions, concerning the schooling of students with disabilities in a mainstream class, can be negatively affected, when students without disabilities in a classroom reject them and stigmatize them (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Three major surveys carried out in England have emphasized the importance of teachers' attitudes in the success of the educational objectives, when it comes to autistic students (Helps, Newsom-Davis & Callias, 1999; Mavropoulou & Padelidou, 2000; McGregor & Campbell, 2001). Significantly, these educators note the need for changing their perceptions about autism (Nind, 1999).

The research of Padelidou and Lampropoulou (1997) has revealed that many Greek educators do not have a positive attitude towards inclusion, whereas younger and less experienced teachers appear to have more positive attitudes towards school inclusion than the older and more experienced ones. On the other hand, research by Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) made clear the fact that many Greek teachers have opposing views as for the need of inclusion. Sixty two point one % of the teachers put the blame for the discriminating practices in Greek schools on the lack of knowledge, 56, 3% of them on the lack of infrastructure and 52, 5% of them on the lack of educational opportunities for the co-existence of students with and without disabilities.

Al-Faiz (2007) investigated the attitudes of 231 primary school teachers towards the inclusion of children with autism in public schools in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The researchers used a questionnaire to discover if the 11 variables (gender, nationality, age, family status, level of training, age of education, teaching context, teaching experience, teaching program, autism in family and interaction with students with disabilities) affected the attitudes of these teachers. Survey results indicated that the teaching context, the teaching experience and the existence of a disabled relative in a family, were the three crucial factors that affected teachers' attitudes. On the other hand, Avissar et al. (2003) support that age, level of education and experience of principals in primary schools in Israel are positively correlated with their attitudes towards inclusion, whereas Finke and her colleagues (2009) prove that the involvement of general education teachers in the education of students with autism affects their attitude towards inclusion in a positive way.

Guralnick (2008) argues that negative attitudes and beliefs can be an obstacle to the successful inclusion of children with disabilities, thus marking the importance of positive attitudes that the early childhood teachers must have. Research on kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities, shows that the type and degree of disability are crucial factors affecting the attitudes (Eiserman et al., 1995; Stoiber et al., 1998). Rafferty and Griffin (2005) compared perspectives concerning the benefits and risks of inclusion as reported by 237 parents of children with and without disabilities and by 118 teachers in the same preschool age program. Regarding the attitudes of kindergarten teachers, the researchers' findings reinforce the results of previous studies which had revealed that the severity of a disability was a crucial factor affecting attitudes: children with emotional problems, autism and cognitive impairments received less support by teachers compared to children with speech problems, hearing and orthopedic problems.

Segall (2008) investigated the experiences, knowledge and attitudes of teachers both in general and special education and of educational managers towards inclusion and practices used in the classroom for autism spectrum disorders. Using the tool “Autism Inclusion Questionnaire”, he found out that professional teachers had a generally positive attitude towards the inclusion of students in the autism spectrum disorders as part of the general education. However, a 75% of the sample agreed that full inclusion was not possible for all students in the autism spectrum disorders. The number of known and inclusive practices used by professional teachers was better predicted by the experience, rather than by the knowledge and attitudes of teachers. General education teachers had fewer experiences regarding autism spectrum disorders and less knowledge of inclusive practices. The knowledge and practices of special needs education teachers did not greatly differ from those of general education teachers. The survey results highlighted the need for training programs or in-house presentations which will offer teachers the necessary knowledge of autism spectrum disorders.

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) found out that general education teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusion in a general form, but there were no findings related to the acceptance of a fully inclusive program. Teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion were largely influenced by the nature and severity of the disability of each child. Furthermore, their attitudes towards inclusion were affected by variables related to the educational environment, such as the availability of natural and human support (see Table 2).

Table 2. Teacher's attitudes and perceptions towards disabled persons.

ARTICLE	RESEARCHERS	TEACHERS	COUNTRY	DISABILITY	RESULT	JOURNAL
Attitudes of Special and Regular Education Teachers Towards School Integration 1997	Susana Padeliadu and Venetta Lampropoulou	190 teachers of general education and 187 teachers of special education	Greece (Central Macedonia and Peloponnese)	Various disabilities	Many Greek teachers aren't positive towards school integration, while younger and less experienced teachers have more positive attitudes towards school integration than the older and most experienced teachers	European journal of special needs education
Which variables relate to the attitudes of teachers, parents and peers towards students with special educational needs in regular education? 2012	Anke de Boer, Sip Jan Pijl, Wendy Post and Alexander Minnaert	44	Netherlands	ADHD, autism and Mental Retardation	The teachers' attitudes had a negative impact on students' attitudes, whereas parents' attitudes had a positive impact	Educational Studies
Greek teacher's Perception of Autism and Implication for Educational Practice 2000	Sophia Mavropoulou and Susana Padeliadou	35 teachers of general education and 29 teachers of special education	Greece	Autism	Teachers were aware of the autistic spectrum disorders and that autism is not always related to mental retardation. However, a confusion was found about the causes of autism and best educational practices	Autism
Inclusion in Elementary Schools: A Survey and Policy Analysis 1995	Susan Allan-Galis and C. Kenneth Tanner	460 teachers and principals of general and special education	USA (Georgia)	Various disabilities	Teachers with many years of experience, have more positive attitudes towards inclusive education. General education teachers are less confident about the effective teaching strategies for disabled persons, in comparison to teachers of special education	Education Policy Analysis Archives

Greek teacher's belief systems about disability and inclusive education 2006	Athina Zoniou-Sideri and Anastasia Vlachou	641 general education teachers (136 teachers of pre-school education, 272 of primary education, 233 of secondary education)	Greece	Various disabilities	Many Greek teachers have opposing views about disability and the necessity of inclusion	International Journal of inclusive Education
Attitudes of elementary school teachers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia toward the inclusion of children with autism in public education. ProQuest Information & Learning 2006	Hessah S. Al-Faiz	231	Saudi Arabia	Autism	The teaching context, the teaching experience and the existence of a disabled relative in the family, greatly affect teachers' attitudes towards people with autism	Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences
Principals' views and practices regarding inclusion: The case of Israeli elementary school principals 2003	Gilada Avissar, Shunit Reiter and Yona Leyser	110 principals of primary schools	Israel	Various disabilities	The age, the level of education and experience of the principals of primary schools in Israel is positively correlated with their attitude towards inclusion	European Journal of Special Needs Education
All Children Can and Should Have the Opportunity to Learn: General Education Teachers' Perspectives on Including Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder who Require	Erinn H. Finke	5 teachers of primary education	USA	Autism	The involvement of general education teachers in teaching students with autism affects their attitude towards inclusion in a positive way	Augmentative and Alternative Communication

AAC 2009						
A Community Assessment of Preschool Providers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion 1995	William Eiserman, Lenore Shisler and Suzanne Healey	220 teachers and administrators	USA (Florida)	Various disabilities	Kindergarten teachers had positive attitudes towards inclusion. The type and severity of disability are important factors which affect the attitudes of kindergarten teachers	Journal of Early Intervention
Exploring Factors Influencing Parents' and Early Childhood Practitioners' Beliefs About Inclusion 1998	Karen Stoiber, Maribeth Gettinger and Donna Goetz	128 teachers of preschool education	USA (Wisconsin)	Speech impairments, learning disabilities, moderate mental disability, autism, neurological disorders	The type and severity of disability are important factors which affect the attitudes of kindergarten teachers: children with speech impairments, learning disabilities and a moderate mental disability are easier included in the school environment than children with autism and neurological disorders	Early Childhood Research Quarterly
Benefits and risks of reverse inclusion for preschoolers with and without disabilities: Perspectives of parents and providers 2005	Yvonne Rafferty and Kenneth Griffin	118 teachers of preschool education	USA (New York)	Various disabilities	Children with emotional problems, autism and cognitive impairments were less supported by their educators in comparison to children with speech, hearing and orthopaedic problems	Journal of Early Intervention
The attitudes of Teachers in Scotland to the Integration of Children with Autism into Mainstream Schools 2001	Evelyn McGregor and Elaine Campbell	23 special education teachers and 49 general education teachers	Scotland	Autism	General Education teachers were positive towards the inclusion of people with autism, whereas the experienced ones in students with autism were more self-confident than the non-experienced. Yet, special education teachers showed more	Autism

					positive attitudes than general education teachers	
Inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder: Educator experience, knowledge, and attitudes 2008	Matthew Joel Segall	9 general education teachers and 20 special education teachers	USA (Georgia)	Autism	Teachers were generally positive towards the inclusion of students in the spectrum of autism disorders in general education context. However, 75% of the sample believes that full inclusion was not possible for all students in the autism spectrum disorders	Unpublished master's thesis
Autism: The Teacher's View 1999	Sarah Helps, I. C. Newsom-Davis and M. Callias	72 teachers and other support staff	England	Autism	Teachers and the support staff had different views from healthcare professionals on autism. Most of them had little or no training about the disorder and they emphasized the need of training	Autism

DISCUSSION- CONCLUSIONS

Inclusion is an essential prerequisite and precondition of democratic societies, as it is based on the need of all persons for an equal and effective education, within the framework of mainstream classes. It is part of human rights and social justice. It recognizes and accepts the diversity of all persons, as contributing to a better and rounded education of all the students. Consequently, it is considered positive and is based on the social model of disability, "placing the obstacles of participation in school, in university and in broader society" (Zoniou-Sideri, Deropoulou-Derou & Vlachou-Balafouti, 2012:51). It perceives the experience of handicapped persons themselves as being of paramount importance, condemning the viewing of disability as a personal tragedy, as a negative situation, which should be eliminated, in order to bring about the normalising of disabled people (Padeliadou, 2007).

Regarding the attitudes and perceptions of children towards disabled persons, a research showed that students in Greece, the USA, Canada and France who attend a school with a student with disabilities, develop more positive attitudes towards this person and its integration, compared to students who attend a school that has no students with disabilities (Kalyva & Agaliotis, 2009; Nikolaraizi et al., 2005; Rosenbaum et al., 1998). The same is also confirmed by the research of Vignes et al. (2009), who claim that students who have good quality of life and are friends with a disabled person, have more positive attitudes towards him. The same applies to students who participate in a supplementary teaching program for people with disabilities (Ferguson, 1999). However, the same researcher (Ferguson, 1999) notes that the inclusion of disabled persons in mainstream classes does not always imply their interaction with their peers.

Information relating to people with disabilities is another factor that helps to create positive attitudes towards people with disabilities (Bossaert et al., 2011; Vignes et al., 2009), whereas the research of Morton and Campbell (2007) showed that attitudes towards autism differ depending on who provides the information about disability. Furthermore, the research showed that the attitudes of teachers in Netherlands have a negative effect on students' attitudes towards people with ADHD, autism and mental retardation, whereas the attitudes of parents have a positive effect (de Boer et al., 2012). A further factor which appears to affect the attitudes and perceptions of students towards disabled people is age. Older children demonstrate broader familiarity and acceptance of disability, compared to younger children (Royal & Roberts, 1987). Furthermore, the students' gender greatly influenced their attitude towards disability, as girls appear to have more positive attitudes towards people with disabilities, compared to boys (Bossaert et al., 2011; Ferguson, 1999; Rosenbaum et al., 1998; Vignes et al., 2009).

Finally, the type of disability and the degree of its visibility influences the attitudes and perceptions of students towards their peers with disabilities. Therefore, in the USA, the more obvious a disability is, the less 8 year old children accept it (Royal & Roberts, 1987). As opposed to research of Royal and Roberts (1987), the research by Nabors and Keyes in the US (1995), indicated that pre-school students do not to have entirely positive perceptions towards their peers with disabilities, but they formed more positive perceptions towards their peers with a visible disability (physical disability), compared to those who had no obvious disability (mental disability). In Canada, children were more negative and more prejudiced towards children with intellectual and mental/physical disability (Nowicki, 2006), a finding that agrees with the research of de Laat et al. (2013) in Netherlands. In this research, the students had less positive attitudes towards people with mental retardation compared to people with paralysis, deafness and blindness. Equally negative attitudes were shown by students in the USA towards people with autistic behaviors (Swaim & Morgan, 2001), whereas high school students in Israel had more positive attitudes towards their peers with Learning Disabilities rather than to their peers with ADHD.

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