

## TRUST AND GREEK TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INDIVIDUALS WITH AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

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### ABSTRACT

*Individuals with intellectual disability are one of the most numerous groups which are integrated in the educational system. The educational system is the most supporting factor in their learning process. On the other hand teachers constitute a social team of professionals that directly contribute to the operation of the educational system. Teachers act, interact and are affected by the social environment, also teachers as active individuals take decisions; they give meaning to the regulative framework by acting with relative autonomy. In this framework, their attitudes towards individuals with a disability play an important role in educational system and related to the conversion and restructure of it. In the present research we have selected to investigate how the sense of trust teachers experience within the social structure related to teachers conceptualization of individuals with an intellectual disability and the interaction with these individuals. The sample of the present research consists of 240 teachers of the Greek Secondary Education, 135 of which are male and 105 (43.89%) female. For the materialization of the research the improvised questionnaire was used, which includes five units, which includes questions relating to the education and the training, to the attitude of the teachers towards the individuals with an intellectual disability, to the inclusion of the children with an intellectual disability and to the conceptualization of the teachers for the individuals with a disability. From the conclusions it was shown that most teachers have positive attitudes towards individuals with an intellectual disability, but there are differentiations related with the rate of trust among the educational community.*

*Keywords: Trust, Secondary Education, Intellectual Disability, Greece.*

### INTRODUCTION

Intellectual disability is one of the most common disabilities, demanding special training. According to the definition of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) (Luckasson et al., 2002), intellectual disability is a disability which is characterized by main restrictions in two domains : a) in intellectual operation and b) in adaptive behavior, which is expressed in cognitive, social and practical abilities. This new definition has serious repercussions in the assessment and the dealing with children with an intellectual disability in the educational system.

Although the above definition is still in use by AAIDD the name intellectual disability instead of mental retardation emphasizing, as the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO) for disability, on the individual's interaction with the environment and his adaptability, reaching the point of claiming that if the individual's ability for operation is effective, then it can not be defined as intellectual disability (Schroeder et al., 2002. Stainton, 2001). This nomination is in better accordance with contemporary professional practices, which focus in functional behavior and environmental factors and place individual's support on a social-ecological framework. The term is also less

unpleasant or insulting for individuals with a disability and in accordance with international terminology.

About 3% of overall population has got an intelligence quotient (IQ) less than the two typical inclinations under the average. In NCSR<sup>1</sup>'s research (1998), individuals with an intellectual disability consisted the 23,64%. Considering that diagnosis of an intellectual disability is also based on assessment of adaptation and not only on IQ, frequency varies upon age. Intellectual disability increases during the early stages of age of children and is reduced in adolescence because individuals with a mild intellectual disability abandon elementary education and "are assimilated" in the "normal" adult population (Behraman et al., 2000). The report of Eurostat (1995a,b) is about the educational level of individuals with an intellectual disability in Greece. 25.4% of them are illiterate, 59.9% have graduated elementary education, 5.7% are Gymnasium graduates, 5.6% are Lyceum graduates and 3.4% are tertiary education graduates.

Individuals with an intellectual disability are faced with contradictions, behaviors and stereotypes which could possibly led then in social exclusion. At the same time, not participating in the educational process or obtaining necessary knowledge and skills and the inadequate development of their personal abilities is connected with the phenomenon of the social exclusion, whereas on the contrary, their participation in education is a serious way to avoid the previous risk and the poverty as well (Jeffery, 2004).

## Trust

According to the ecological aspect for the human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), which supplies an important theoretical framework for the research and the understanding of the ways by which varying systems affect on the individual' s adaptation (Felner et al., 1995; McLoyd, 1990), teachers are considered to be an important factor in the individual' s socialization.

Both teachers and the rest educational staff play a prevailing role in the social-political and introductory process of the individuals with disabilities. They have got a position of strength in the process of the educational system and their conceptualization, as well as their stereotypical perceptions for the social phenomena and the acting persons in them influence the interaction among the students and contribute in the creation of categorizations and the social excluded persons in the educational evolution. The aspects of the teacher for the individuality and the image of the individual with an intellectual disability and their information about the ecological mechanisms (students' interaction, social structure of class-school) (Wehby, Symons and Hollo, 1977) influence their interaction.

A serious variable in the social action of the teacher is the social capital. The social capital, which is so defined as the total real or symbolic incomes, which are connected with the social nets and interactions, and are mutually correlated, recognized and trusted, (Bourdieu, 1985; Falk and Kilpatrick, 1999; Lin, 2000; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000), consists a main personal, social variable (Brehm & Rahn., 1997; Booth and Tusson, 1998; Giavrimis et al., 2007; Mac Gillivray, 2002; Putnam, 1993), as well as of academic development (Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000; Heyneman, 1998). The social capital is often considered as social trust in the structure of social life (Putnam, 2000) or else the social capital can be expressed in terms of trust (Cox, 1998). Trust is one of the main dimensions of the social capital (Coleman, 1998; Glaeser et al., 2000; Putnam, 2000).

In the international bibliography trust correlates with the possibility to anticipate future and the certainty of the individual' s decisions, about the actions of the other. Sztompka (1999) characteristically says that trust is a bet for other' s stable action and Misztal (1996) adds that it means believing more than the prevailing uncertainty. According to Fukuyama (1995) trust in community

<sup>1</sup> National Centre of Social Research (EKKE in Greek)

represents “normal” behavior, honesty and cooperation, whereas Seligman (1998) marks that without this, social structure is difficult to survive in the modern, complex globalized environment.

Luhmann (1979) makes a distinction between the personal and the trust of the system, which interact through prescriptive settings, stressing that uncertainty of the post-innovating season increases the necessity for more personal trust. Putnam (1995) confirming the above says that trust legislation led to the reduction of social improvement and the participation of the citizen in the public affairs in the USA. Individuals who do not trust others cooperate with them through a system of typical rules and laws, thus causing big cost (Fukuyama, 1995).

In the inorganic structure, trust facilitates interaction and cooperation of individuals (Gabetta, 1988) and increases the progress in their work (McEvity and Zaheen, 2006), while in the international bibliography trust has become an important research variable for the effective operation of an organization (Spector and Jones, 2004).

## AIM

The data presented above are part of a general research referring to the Greek educational system and the individuals with special educational needs. In the present research we have selected to investigate how the sense of trust teachers experience within the social structure related to teachers conceptualization of individuals with an intellectual disability and the interaction with these individuals.

## METHOD

### Sample

The sample of the present research consists of 240 teachers of the Secondary Education, 135 of which are male and 105 (43.89%) female. As far as the age is concerned, 21 (8.8%) are under thirty years old, 81 (33.8%) are between 30-40, 114 (47.5%) are 41-50 and 24 (10%) are 51-60. Moreover, 204 (85%) are permanent, 24 (10%) substitute and 12 (5%) are part-time teachers. As far as the time of the service of the teachers' sample, the mean is 166.25 months [Standard Deviation (S.D.) = 98.49]. The median is 168 months, with the minimum 8 months and the maximum 393 months.

### Data collecting ways

For the materialization of the research the improvised questionnaire was used, which includes five units : a) the first unit includes questions relating to the education and the training, b) the second unit includes questions relating to the attitude of the teachers towards the individuals with an intellectual disability, c) the third is about questions relating to the inclusion of the children with an intellectual disability, d) the forth unit includes questions relating to the conceptualization of the teachers for the individuals with a disability and e) in the last one there is a reference to basic demographic characteristics (sex, age, occupation, studies, official position et.). Participants' answers to the questionnaire were given through a four or five degrees of Likert scale. Furthermore, the questionnaire was given to thirty primary school teachers, who evaluated the scale's questions about the relevance of the content social exclusion of individuals with an intellectual disability based on a five-point scale (1 = not relevant and 5 = completely relevant). An analysis of the results of the evaluation (Mean = 4.79) showed the validity and adequacy of the content of the questionnaire. In addition, the reliability coefficient for the split-half test was found to be 0.915 and the internal consistency reliability coefficient was found to be 0.941.

## FINDINGS

At the question “Do you believe that during the last five years, trust level among the teachers of your school has been improved, worsened or remained the same”, which also was the basic variable measurement of the teachers’ sense of trust, there was found that 117 (48.8%) teachers said that trust level has been improved, whereas 123 (51.3%) said that it has been worsened or remained the same.

The correlation of the question “ If you were asked to accept a student with an intellectual disability in your class, what are the possibilities of your accepting him/her” with the trust levels are statistically important ( $\chi^2=34.301$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $sig=0.000$ ). From table 5, remaining at the total and relative frequencies it is obvious that individuals which experience higher trust levels among the educational staff state, in higher percentages, the possibility of accepting a student with an intellectual disability in their class. On the contrary, individuals which express lower trust levels state higher levels of refusal of accepting a student with an intellectual disability in their class.

Table 1. Level of trust and possibilities of accepting a S.In.D. in class

Level of trust			Possibilities of accepting a student with an intellectual disability in class;					Total
			20%	40%	60%	80%	100%	
Has been improved	Count	3	18	18	54	24	117	
	%	2,6%	15,4%	15,4%	46,2%	20,5%	100,0%	
Has remained the same or has worsened	Count	24	27	27	36	6	120	
	%	20,0%	22,5%	22,5%	30,0%	5,0%	100,0%	
Total	Count	27	45	45	90	30	237	
	%	11,4%	19,0%	19,0%	38,0%	12,7%	100,0%	

From the data it is also observed that, as far as the differences relating to the level trust of the teachers is concerned, they are statistically important to the questions relating to: a) the guilty feeling about the inclusion or not of an individual with an intellectual disability in their class (Mean improvement trust [M.IT.] = 1.26, Mean stable trust [M.ST]= 1.98,  $t(235)=-6.007$   $p<0.001$ ) and b) in evaluation if this is against their principles (M.IT.= 3.74, M.ST =3.41,  $t(233)=-3.431$   $p=0.001$ ). As for the rest questions relating to the inclusion policy and the problems which individuals with intellectual disabilities meet in the educational system, the aspects of the two levels have no important statistic difference. That is, whereas persons of the two levels of trust admit that individuals with intellectual disabilities go through discriminations, that services are inadequate and they rather agree to the inclusion policy, the persons which believe that the atmosphere of trust in the educational system has been improved, indicate a higher eagerness to access these individuals in their class (table 2).

Table 2. Inclusion and levels of trust.

QUESTIONS	Trust*	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
I would feel guilty if I would accept my student in my class **	1,00	1,26	0,672	-6,007	235	0,000
	2,00	1,98	1,111			
Not accepting in class the student is against my beliefs **	1,00	3,74	0,579	3,431	233	0,001
	2,00	3,41	0,865			
Do you agree with the inclusion policy of individuals with an intellectual disability to normal schools***	1,00	2,74	0,759	1,813	238	0,071
	2,00	2,54	0,861			
Individuals with an intellectual disability meet with difficulties in the educational system because of discriminations and prejudices ***	1,00	4,15	1,002	-0,218	238	0,827
	2,00	4,17	0,797			
Individuals with an intellectual disability meet with difficulties in the educational system because of lack of specialized state service for their information / their service ***	1,00	3,97	0,706	-0,701	238	0,484
	2,00	4,04	0,927			

Notes: \*1= Has been improved, 2= Has remained the same or has worsened. \*\*1=Disagree to 4=Agree, \*\*\*1=Not at all to 5=Very much

From the data it is also observed that as far as the differences in relation to the teachers' level trust is concerned, they are statistically important to the questions about activities out of class, as theater, cinema, outing (M.IT.= 3.55, M.ST =. 3.33,  $t(238)=-3.214$   $p=0.001$ ), a birthday party of a student (M.IT. =3.52, M.ST =3.33,  $t(238)=-2.365$ ,  $p>0.001$ ), common use of same water closet (M.IT. =3.65, M.ST = 3.33,  $t(238)=-3.457$   $p=0.001$ ), the help with the school lessons (M.IT. =3.78, M.ST = 3.46,  $t(238)=-3.475$   $p=0.001$ ), the influence of the school progress of the rest students (M.IT. =2.59, M.ST.=,  $t(238)=-2.981$   $p>0.001$ ). Individuals which believe that the trust level among the teaching staff relating to the rest has been improved, seems to believe more in activities and approaching behaviors of the individuals with an intellectual disability and their inclusion to the community. So they are willing to accompany their class to activities away from school with individuals with an intellectual disability, to propose to their students ways of getting together and to help them with their school records (table 3).

Table 3. T-test, Mean, standard deviation of questions relating to the trust levels.

QUESTIONS	Trust*	Mean**	Std Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Would you encourage your class students to be friendly with a student with an intellectual disability (In. D.) ?	1.00	3.74	0.544	1.576	238	0.116
	2.00	3.63	0.532			
Would you accompany a student with In. D. to the theater-cinema or any other action with your class ?	1.00	3.55	0.549	3.214	238	0.001
	2.00	3.33	0.520			
Would you let your class students use the same water closet with a student with In. D. ?	1.00	3.65	0.546	3.457	238	0.001
	2.00	3.33	0.864			

Would you allow a student with In. D. from a special school play in the school yard with your class students	1.00	3.40	0.558	1.589	238	0.113
	2.00	3.28	0.631			
Would you ask from a student of your class invite to the birthday party a student with In. D. ?	1.00	3.52	0.610	2.365	238	0.019
	2.00	3.33	0.671			
Would you let your child sit down with a student with In. D. ?	1.00	3.58	0.619	1.428	238	0.115
	2.00	3.46	0.657			
Would you allow a student of your class help a student with In. D. with the lessons?	1.00	3.78	0.510	3.475	238	0.001
	2.00	3.46	0.842			
Would you visit a special school/institute with your class to meet with students with In. D.?	1.00	3.80	0.495	1.444	238	0.15
	2.00	3.70	0.613			
Do you believe that the inclusion of a student with In. D. will influence the school progress of the rest students ?	1.00	2.59	0.894	2.981	238	0.003
	2.00	2.96	0.990			
According to you would the various bodies inform more the public about the abilities of the individuals with In. D.?	1.00	3.85	0.466	0.599	238	0.549
	2.00	3.88	0.353			
According to you can the individuals with In. D. be trained ?	1.00	3.77	0.462	1.792	238	0.074
	2.00	3.66	0.493			

Notes: \*1= Has been improved, 2= Has remained the same or has worsened. \*\*1-No to 4-Yes.

## DISCUSSION

Individuals with an intellectual disability are one of the most numerous groups with special educational needs, which are integrated in education and need specialized attention as well as dealing. These individuals, both in the open community and in the educational system, are facing with perceptions and stereotypes concerning their abilities and their inclusion in the above groups, which potentially could end to social exclusion (Azizi-Kalantzi, Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou 1996; Dimos 1996; Hannah and Pliner 1983). Characteristically, in our research the teaching staff state that they rather agree that these individuals meet with difficulties in the educational system because of discriminations, prejudices and there is lack of specialized state service for their information and their service. A basic mover of facing the difficulties which arise in the school life of these individuals is the teaching community. In the present work we have tried to focus our interest to the teachers of the Secondary education, because there is not an extensive bibliography in Greece referring to these teachers in relation with the subject of special education.

Teachers interact both with the students and their families in the frame-work and with their colleagues and the administration of the educational system. From within these systems they receive feed-back, influences, solidarity and they are led to initiatives and innovations, developing their social identity, their social capital as well and, what is more, their social trust. The development of supporting networks and the certainty for their future acts assist them in their educational task and, most times, dispel inhibitions, insecurities and fears, which could confine their social activity and their educational effectiveness. So, from our results it was shown that teachers who enjoy higher levels of trust, feel that they can possibly deal with educational challenges, caused by the entering of an individual with an intellectual disability in their class and state, more eagerly than the others that they would proceed with such an act. Relating to all the rest, too, they seem to believe more in the approaching activities and behaviors of individuals with an intellectual disability and their inclusion in the community.

Consequently, we can state that there is a majority of teachers in the Secondary education which are well-disposed towards individuals with an intellectual disability, as well as the inclusion policy which is in practice both in the E.E. level (E.U., 2003; Venieris, 2002), and in Greece (L. 2817/2000 and L. 3699/2008). The development of social trust seems to improve the level of understanding and supporting of the individuals with an intellectual disability and creates a protective cover contra the social exclusion. So it is demanding : a) that the pedagogical training of the teachers of the Secondary education should be developed in university, as far as the special education is concerned, so that they can be sensitized and informed on subjects relative to learning difficulties and disability, b) a culture of solidarity and participation should be developed in school units, through procedures based on local initiatives of the community, the headmasters of the schools, the educational administrations as well as from the Ministry of Education, so that a sense of collectiveness and support to be signaled, necessary for an effective educational work and c) so that it will be understood that the exercise of the educational policy, aiming at the inclusion of the individuals with an intellectual disability in the social evolution, it is necessary that the existing structures should be transformed, that the educational staff should be professionally improved, and the whole population to be rendered sensitive in subjects of respect and acceptance of differentiation.

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