

# Preschool educators' attitudes regarding the inclusion of children with developmental disabilities in general kindergartens and nursery schools

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## Introduction

- Inclusion represents an effort aimed at the joint attendance of students with and without special educational needs within the same school setting (Hatzimanoli, 2005; Zigmond, 2003).
- Integrating children with developmental disabilities in general kindergartens reduces the possibility of later prejudice and negative attitudes towards people with a disability (Mohay & Reid, 2007).
- However, according to Elliot (2008), the perceptions of the educational staff's own competence interfere with their attitudes towards children with disabilities affecting thus the quality of the provided care in inclusive child care settings.
- It has been found that educators' attitudes are largely influenced by the severity of the disorders (Elliot, 2008), as well as the nature of the disorders themselves. In this way, educators are more willing to integrate children with behavior problems than children with brain damage (Mohay & Reid, 2007).
- Finally, Tzouriadou & Mparmpas (2003), and Mohay & Reid (2007) have found that educators that are well-informed on developmental disabilities, as well as the ones that have worked with such cases before, feel more confident of their handling on these children.

## Aim of the study

The present study aimed to investigate preschool educators':

- knowledge on children with specific developmental disabilities
- willingness to integrate them in class and
- self-efficacy beliefs regarding ability to handle them effectively.

## Method

### A. Sample

107 Greek kindergarten and nursery school educators (all females, mean-age = 31.7 years, SD = 7.2).

### B. Measures

The questionnaire is constructed by the authors and consists of 31 items grouped in three parts, in the form of multiple choice questions. The first part includes information about the educators, the second one investigates their knowledge and perceptions on developmental disabilities in general, and the third part studies their knowledge and perceptions on four specific developmental disabilities: autism, mild mental retardation, Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and cerebral palsy.

### C. Procedure

The questionnaire was completed by each educator separately.

## Results

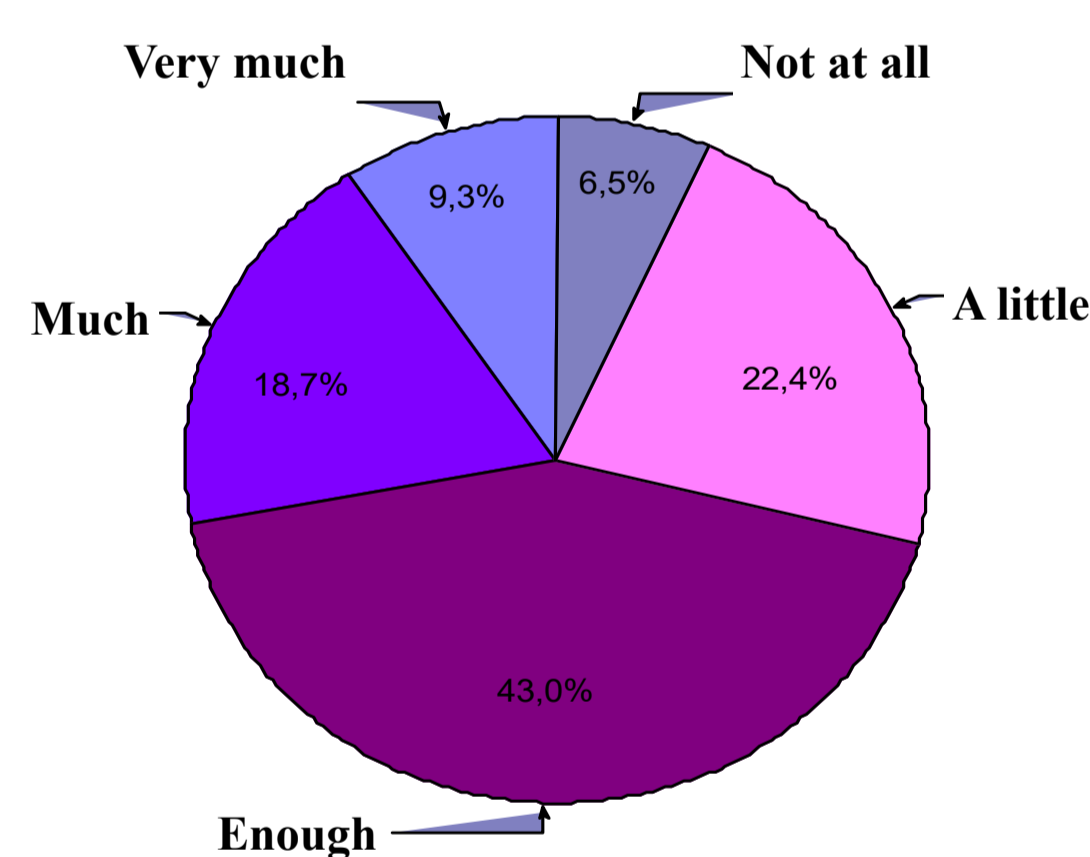


Figure 1. Educators' opinion regarding the benefit of inclusion for children with developmental disabilities

As we can see in Figure 1, more than 70% of the educators think that children with developmental disabilities are being benefited, at least enough, of their inclusion in general education.

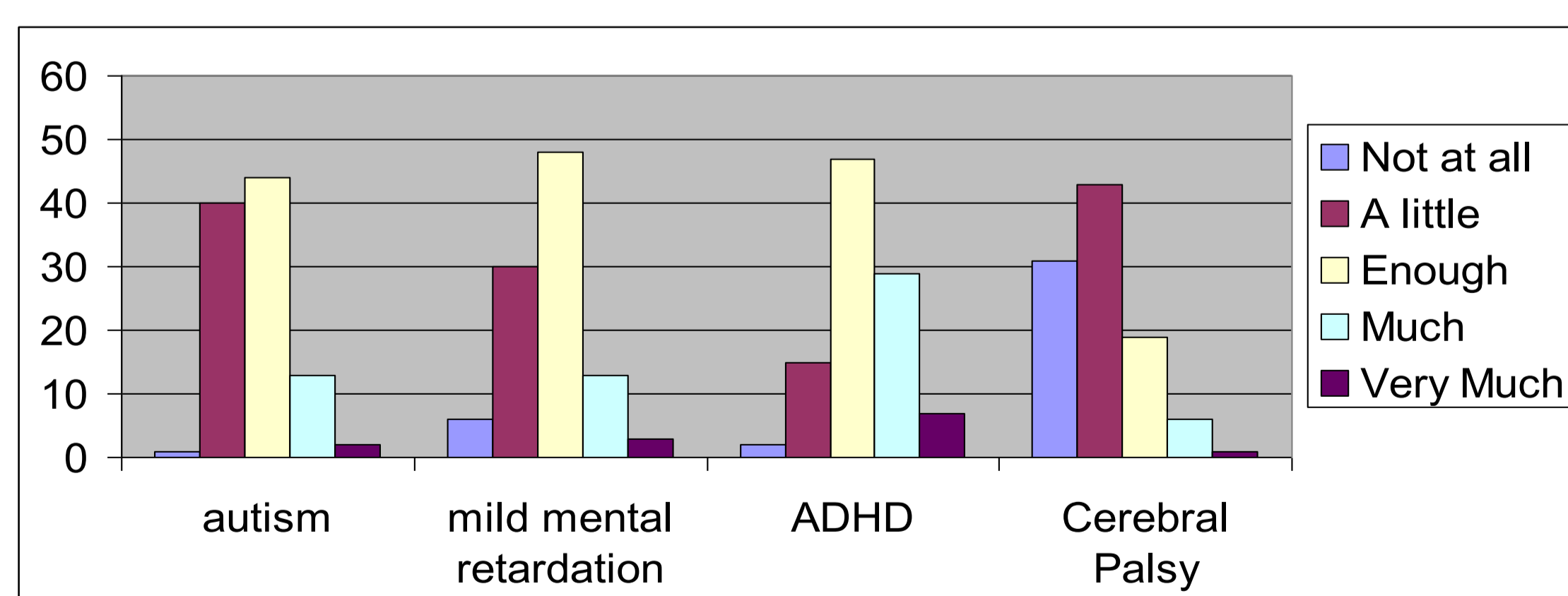


Figure 2. Educators' self-efficacy beliefs regarding ability to handle effectively children with specific developmental disabilities

As we can see in Figure 2, educators support that they could succeed "enough" in the effective handling of these children, with the exception of cerebral palsy where they state incapability (74%). These findings are in accordance with previous research where 60% of the educators claimed incapability of integrating these children in their classroom (Mohay & Reid, 2006).

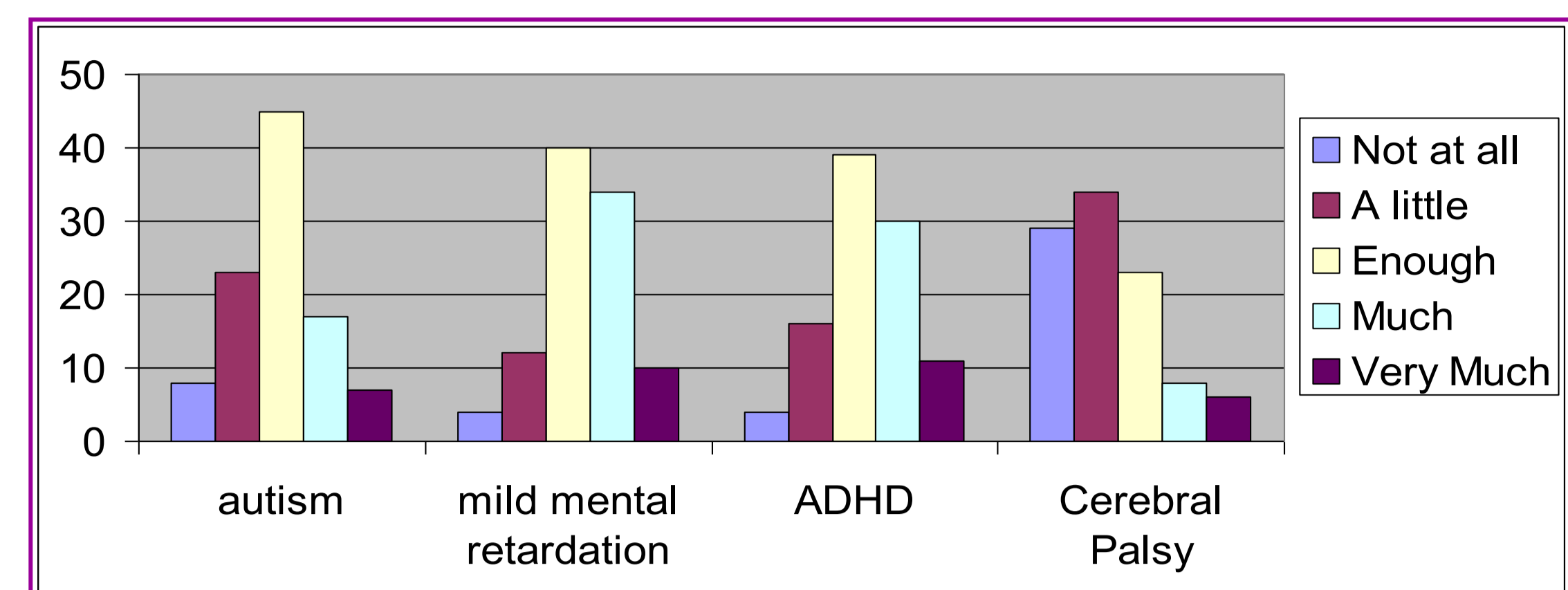


Figure 3. Educators' willingness to integrate children with specific developmental disabilities in their classroom

In Figure 3 it is clear that one half of the educators refrain from taking a clear position regarding their willingness to include children with specific developmental disabilities in their classroom. Moreover, it is noticeable that 60% of the participants hesitate to include children with cerebral palsy in their class, supporting Elliott's investigation (2008) where educators' attitudes were strongly influenced by the severity of the disorders.

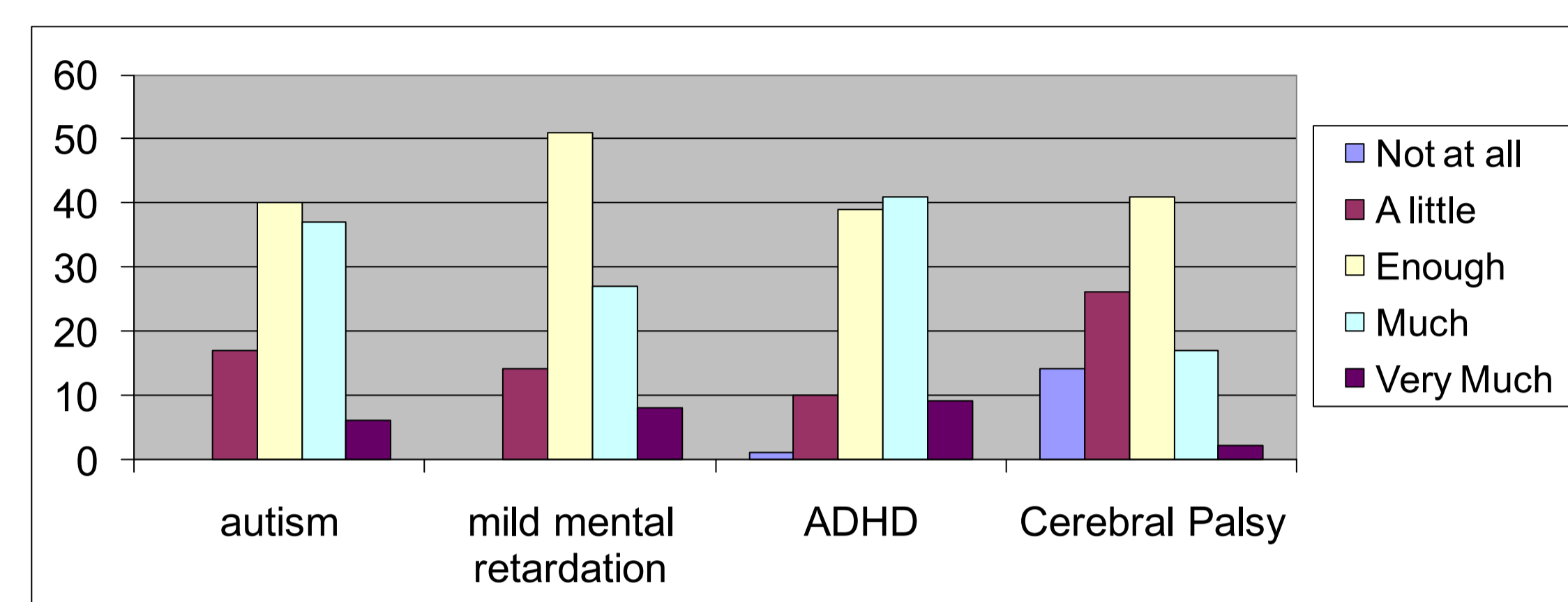


Figure 4. Educators' ability to contribute to the peer group acceptance of children with specific developmental disabilities

Figure 4 shows that the majority of educators give modest responses when it comes to facilitating the peer group acceptance of children with such disabilities, with the exception again of cerebral palsy, where their responses range from

## Discussion

- Educators' beliefs as well as their lack of knowledge about these disabilities make them usually feel little capable and may influence their willingness to include children with developmental disabilities in their classroom. Besides, it is known that educators who have previously worked with such cases are keener in inclusion (Mohay & Reid, 2006).
- However, it is essential to investigate the availability and effectiveness of support received by teachers in order to successfully integrate students with disabilities in their classrooms.
- Additionally, as Zoniou-Sideri (2005) states, in order to be able to talk about successful inclusion of all children, we should reconsider the curriculum. This would also mean the reconsideration of the requirements of the obtained knowledge, the way of teaching, as well as the students' and educators' evaluation.
- Moreover, promoting the interaction of teachers with students with developmental disabilities during the course of their training could have a positive effect on their willingness to include these children into their classroom. (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009).
- Finally, it is necessary to obtain strategies to promote teachers' positive attitude toward inclusion. These strategies may be consisted of seminars with successful inclusive educators as guest speakers, evidence based demonstration of successful inclusion programs, and mechanisms of disability simulation in order to give teachers the opportunity to experience how it feels to have a disability (Elhoweris & Asheikh, 2006).
- In conclusion, children with developmental disabilities could largely benefit of their inclusion in general education on the condition of certain changes promoted in educators' attitudes toward developmental disabilities. This requires changes in their training and in the way they are supported as well as alterations in the curriculum.

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