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Editors

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PROCEEDINGS

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Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade



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Children with Additional Support Needs in Music Education

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Abstract

Inclusive education requires an individualized approach to developing a stimulative and friendly school environment for each student. The findings suggest that individualized educational support contributes to progress, especially integration in a peer group, self-confidence and more regular attendance of students with additional support needs (ASN). Moreover, the development and provision of individual educational support seem to nurture a partnership between parents and school. Research exploring the quality of individualized support in Serbia was focused on primary education, while the quality and effects of individualized support to ASN students in specialist education, such as music education, remain under-researched. The study aims at exploring the process and outcomes of addressing ASN students within specialist music education in Serbia. The research is focused on perceptions of ASN students, their parents, teachers and school psychologists related to (a) additional support; (b) parental involvement; (c) outcomes on ASN students. Questionnaires on outcomes of ASN students were adapted from the previous studies on inclusive education in Serbia, while questionnaires related to the provision of additional support and parental involvement were developed for the purpose of the research. The purposeful sample comprises data on 19 ASN students, 8 to 18 years old, attending music education. The analysis included descriptive statistics for quantitative data and content analysis of open-ended questions. The findings portray music schools as an environment which nurtures partnership with parents and provides quality pedagogical support for the majority of ASN students. At the same time, support for social interaction of ASN students with their peers seems to be an area in which music education is lagging behind.

Introduction

In 2009, the Law on Foundations of Educational System advocating the idea of inclusive education was introduced in Serbia. The Law mandated that mainstream schools have to enroll every child, regardless of the type and level of support needed. Moreover, the individual education plan (IEP) was recognized as a useful tool in the administration and implementation of inclusive policy. The current regulatory language defines IEP as a written document tailor-made for a particular student, which includes information on the student's current level of performance, long and short-term goals that serve to focus education interventions, information on support provided to the student, division of responsibilities regarding support provision, and a plan for monitoring progress. The IEP should be developed and periodically reviewed by a team established for each child needing additional support. The team must include the parent(s) of the student, class teacher and school associate, and can include other persons who have special expertise regarding the child (e.g., child pediatrician, personal assistant). The Serbian legislation recognizes three types of IEPs: IEP 1 that adapts content and approach but does not change expected achievement standards; IEP 2 where curriculum and standards of achievement are modified and IEP3 that provide opportunity for gifted and talented students to master more rigorous and enriched content (Rulebook on detailed guidelines for determining the right to the individual education plan (IEP), and its implementation and evaluation, 2018).

Research on quality of inclusive education in Serbia almost 10 years after its introduction

show that IEP still generates different views on its use, function, and even legitimacy (Kovač-Cerović, Jovanović, & Pavlović Babić, 2016a). Teachers and schools are struggling to develop compliant and meaningful IEPs, ensure parents' participation, and meet workload and paperwork requirements (Kovač-Cerović et al., 2016a). On the other hand, data suggest that individualized educational support contributes to ASN students' progress, especially integration in a peer group, self-confidence and more regular attendance of classes. Moreover, the development and provision of individualized educational support seem to nurture a partnership between parents and school (Friedman, Pavlović Babić, & Simić, 2015; Kovač-Cerović et al., 2016a).

Music Education in Serbia

The process of implementation and outcomes of inclusive education are context-dependent. Some authors recognizing the plethora of different conceptions of inclusive education suggested that we talk about different inclusions rather than inclusion (Dyson, 1999). Therefore, in order to understand the findings on individualized educational support ASN students receive in specialist music education in Serbia, the context in which it takes place will be described.

There are three levels of music education in Serbia: elementary music schools, secondary music schools, and higher music education. The primary education lasts for 2, 4 or 6 years (depending on the instrument), secondary – 4 years and higher – 4 + 1 years. Elementary music schools are attended in parallel with the primary schools, while secondary music schools may have their own departments for the general education or pupils can attend some other secondary school. At all levels the entrance exam is in place, ensuring that children who attend music education are musically gifted. Historically, music education in Serbia has been accessible for ASN students who are musically gifted – commonly referred to as “twice exceptional” students (Abramo, 2015). Nevertheless, the introduction of affirmative enrollment policies provides opportunities for ASN students

to enroll in secondary and higher education following different criteria. As a result, music education has become more diverse in terms of students' type and level of additional support needs.

Education in specialized music schools in Serbia is characterized by an individualized approach. The individualized approach may include personalizing the curriculum with opportunities to respond to the learner's needs, curriculum differentiation through changes in pace, complexity and teaching method, accelerated learning programs designed for gifted and talented students who are capable of working at a significantly faster pace and in greater depth than their peers. Lessons are delivered through individual or small group instruction, depending on the subject. Additionally, comparing with general education, education in specialist music schools is characterized by a lower student-teacher ratio.

Summarizing the above-mentioned, it seems that specialist music schools could be an environment conducive to the development of inclusive practices. However, the quality of inclusive education in Serbia so far has been explored mainly at the level of compulsory primary education. It remains unclear how inclusive educational policies translate to practices in specialized education, such as music education.

Aims

The study aims at exploring the process and outcomes of addressing ASN students within music education in Serbia. Research questions are focused on (a) additional support; (b) parental involvement; (c) outcomes on ASN students.

Method

Participants

The purposeful sample comprises data on 19 ASN students, 8 to 18 years old, attending music education in four music schools in Serbia. Out of 19 ASN students, 12 students receive education according to individual education plan with the adjusted curriculum (IEP1), two students according to individual education plan

with the modified curriculum (IEP2) and 5 students receive individualized education.

Instruments

Questionnaires on outcomes of ASN students were adapted from the previous studies on inclusive education in Serbia (Hrnjica, 2004; Kovač-Cerović, Pavlović Babić, Jokić, Jovanović, & Jovanović, 2016b), while questionnaires related to the provision of additional support and parental involvement were developed for the purpose of the research. Scales used proven to have satisfactory internal consistency ($0.65 \leq \alpha \leq 0.93$). Data on process and outcomes of additional support to ASN students included perspectives of ASN students, their parents, teachers and school psychologists, resulting in data triangulation (Denzin, 1970). However, data triangulation in this research design is not aimed merely at validation, but at deepening and widening understanding of the process (Olsen, 2004).

Data Analysis

The analysis included descriptive statistics for quantitative data and content analysis of open-ended questions.

Findings

Who are ASN Students in Music Education in Serbia?

The result of our study shows that the structure of students in music schools becomes rather diverse in terms of type and level of support. Based on the school associates' survey, group of ASN students is composed of: children with autism spectrum disorder (7), children with sight impairments (5), children with learning difficulties (3), children with motor difficulties (2), children with communication difficulties (1), children with neurological conditions (1). As for the level of support needed, the majority of ASN students require adaptations of the teaching/learning process (i.e., 12 students receive education according to IEP1 and 5 students receive individualized education), while two students receive education according to the

modified curriculum (IEP2). However, it remains unclear if these ASN students could be considered twice-exceptional.

Parents' and school psychologists' responses shed a light at this issue. Namely, when reporting on criteria for school choice, the parents of ASN students most frequently list the good reputation of a teacher and school (7) and home-school proximity (5) as criteria for choice. In line with this, parents expect that music education will contribute to the general development of their child ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.59$), while the expectations that a child will become a professional musician are the least present ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.08$) (Figure 1).

Similarly, assessment of school psychologists is that 33.3% of ASN students attending music schools do not show music giftedness.

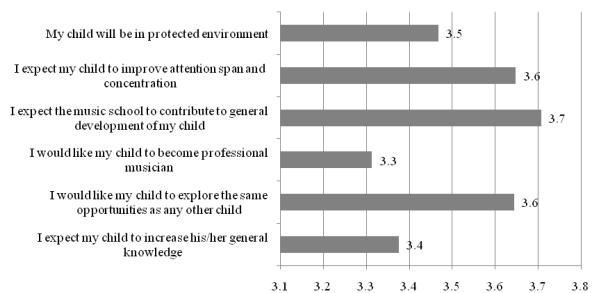


Figure 1. Parents' expectations from music education.

Our results cast a new light on the structure of students in music schools, suggesting that music schools become attractive for ASN students and their parents primarily due to schools' good reputation and accessibility.

What Kind of Additional Support do ASN Students Receive in Music Schools?

Parental involvement. A collaborative effort between classroom teachers, school associates and parents is needed to identify ASN students and implement strategies to meet their diverse needs. The majority of parents of ASN children (82%) report that they are actively engaged in the team supporting a child's education. Moreover, parents frequently act as personal assistants for their children (7). The new role of par-

ents as personal assistants requires additional exploration of its benefits and potential risks.

In-school support. School psychologists' responses indicate that support measures are diverse, oriented at changing environments and holistic support to a child's learning and development (Figure 2). 11.8% of parents report that they are mostly and 88.2% that they are completely satisfied with the IEP of their child.

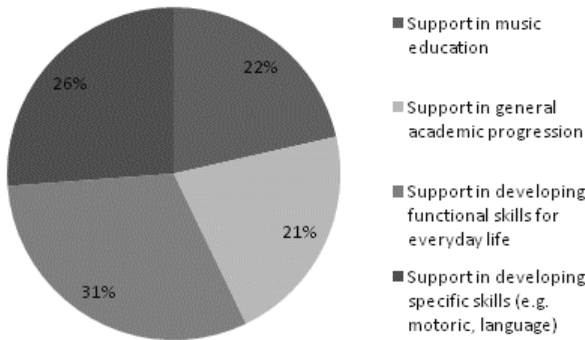


Figure 2. School psychologists' responses regarding the goal of support to ASN students.

Out-of-school support. ASN students could have needs that cross health, social, educational and functioning domains and require a multidisciplinary response. Therefore, inclusive education usually requires a broader and coordinated approach. The majority of ASN students in our study receive additional support outside of school (12), which in most cases involves speech therapy. The open question is if these services are stand-alone or there is alignment between types of support emerging from different sectors.

What are the ASN Student's Outcomes in Music Education in Serbia?

Multiple studies highlight a relationship between music learning and development across several domains (e.g., Forgeard, Winner, Norton, & Schlaug, 2008; Hallam, 2010; Hetland & Winner, 2004).

An important thing to consider before talking about the positive effects of

music education on various aspects of cognitive and emotional development is that they only occur when it is a pleasant experience for the child (Hallam, 2010). Therefore, the consensus among different stakeholders on high levels of ASN students' psycho-social wellbeing is promising finding (Figure 3). Namely, ASN students report on high wellbeing ($M = 3.47, SD = 0.59$), stressing efforts teachers put to support their learning ($M = 4.0, SD = 0.0$). Moreover, interaction with teachers is the aspect of inclusive education receiving the highest average grade from the perspective of ASN students ($M = 3.82, SD = 0.39$). A relatively low level of cognitive demand, indicates that tasks and activities for ASN students are adequately designed to enable their cognitive engagement. The above-mentioned findings suggest high competencies of teachers in music education to individualize educational support adequately and foster a range of wellbeing possibilities.

Yet, results suggest that music education is failing to address the problem of poor social interaction between ASN students and their peers. The items receiving the lowest ratings from the perspective of ASN students are related to peer interaction within ($M = 2.82, SD = 1.13$) and out of school ($M = 2.56, SD = 1.03$). These findings should be taken with caution, having in mind that students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) consist of around one-third of our sample. Namely, findings of peer

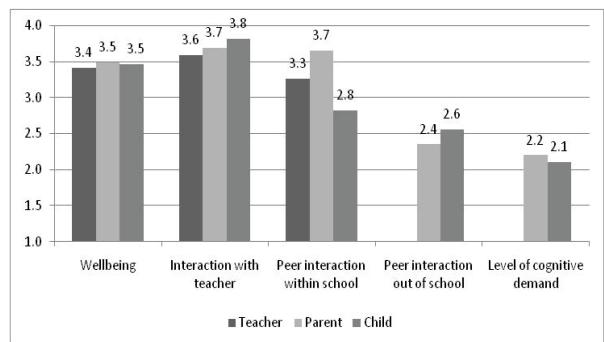


Figure 3. Perception of ASN students' outcomes in music education from the perspective of teachers, parents and ASN students.

interaction research on adolescents with ASD show that they tend to socialize less and seem to be more alone than their peers (Humphrey & Symes, 2011). For further understanding of the process leading to poor social interactions, individual and environmental aspects should be considered.

Conclusion

Specialist music schools are proven to be an environment which nurtures partnership with parents, provides quality pedagogical support for the majority of ASN students and ensures the progress of ASN students. However, support for the social interaction of ASN students with their peers seems to be an area in which music education is lagging behind.

Since the study was designed as descriptive, we should have in mind certain limitations. An apparent limitation of the study is the purposeful small size sample, which is conditioned by the number of ASN students in music schools. Another limitation is the assessment of ASN students' outcomes in music education through perceptions. We tried to overcome this limitation through the triangulation of data sources (Olsen, 2004).

Regardless of limitation, the study offers directions for further exploration of the quality of additional support to ASN students in music education.

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