

The Role of Occupational Therapists in Slovenia in Creating an Inclusive Educational System

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Introduction: Inclusion of children with special needs into regular school programs is an internationally promoted model of practice. However, its practical success is not guaranteed. In Slovenia, it has been acknowledged that the existing school system still often separates students. Moreover, it has not been fully recognized that an inclusive school would benefit all children, not just those with special needs.

Objectives: Partnership between teachers and other experts is crucial for the implementation of inclusion. In Slovenia, however, occupational therapists (OTs) are not able to continuously participate in the school setting. The aim of our study was to explore the experiences of OTs who currently work with inclusion and gather knowledge that could guide the development of a more collaborative model of practice.

Method: This was a qualitative study. Individual interviews were performed with nine OTs. Interviews were analyzed using a constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Results: Although children are at the center of inclusion, parents emerged as the main theme of salience. They had a crucial role in the development of collaboration. Five categories were developed around this theme: (1) first contact, (2) communication, (3) reasons for input, (4) OT work process, (5) barriers. The last category had two subcategories: (a) systemic barriers and (b) cruel school.

Conclusion: OTs in Slovenia experience various barriers when promoting the ideal of inclusion in practice. Nonetheless, several examples of good practice have been recognized that could inform future practice and help build a more inclusive society.