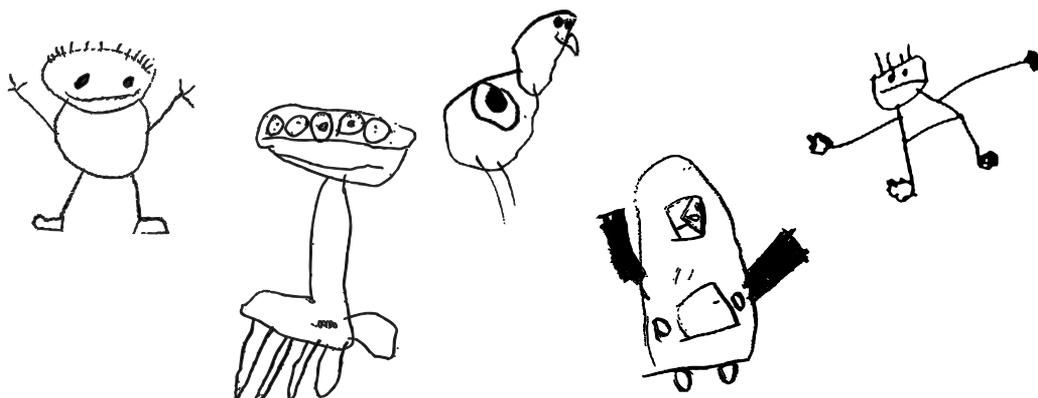




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# Kindergarten teachers' dispositions on the inclusion of students with special needs in public kindergarten classrooms

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## **Abstract:**

According to the principles of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as defined in the Salamanca Statement (1994) for the recognition of rights of students with special needs, the principle of inclusion should guide any educational policy. For this reason students with special needs should attend mainstream public schools. The Greek law for special education and training (Law 3699/2008) promotes the inclusion of students with special needs in the mainstream kindergarten classrooms. The aim of this study is to investigate how the dispositions of the kindergarten teachers could influence the inclusion of students with special needs in the kindergarten. The research was carried out during the school year 2012-2013 using questionnaires with kindergarten teachers who worked in public kindergartens in the city of Patras in Greece. The results revealed that the dispositions of kindergarten teachers could affect the inclusion initiative, as the participants in this research expressed low levels of agreement with the contemporary policy for Greek special education. Additionally, they showed a low level of readiness to educate students with special needs; they argued that they lack suitable knowledge, ability, teaching experience and training for this purpose. So, it appears likely that these teachers would feel anxiety, insecurity and fear in the event of students with special needs being enrolled in their kindergarten classrooms. Consequently, official in-service training programs on special education for kindergarten teachers need to be established in order to change their dispositions and facilitate the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream kindergarten classrooms.

## Introduction

From the study of current international scientific literature on special education, we conclude that issues related to the education of students with special needs, as well as perceptions and attitudes of teachers who interact with them in their classrooms, are an important area for researchers, politicians and educators (see: Alkhateeb, Hadidi, & Alkhateeb, 2016; Anati & Ain, 2012; Loreman *et al.*, 2016; Lundqvist, Allodi Westling, & Siljehag, 2016; Reindal, 2016; Sharma & Jacobs, 2016; Shin, Lee, & McKenna, 2016; Specht *et al.*, 2016; Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009).

The inclusion of students with special needs in classrooms in mainstream schools is a prevalent trend in educational policy internationally during the 21st century (Björn *et al.*, 2016; Cefai *et al.*, 2015; Hardy & Woodcock, 2015; Schlifer, 2005; Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2012; Qu, 2015). The enactment of Law 3699 (2008) for special education and training in Greece requires the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream kindergartens. This Law adopts the principles of UNESCO as defined in the Salamanca Statement (1994) for the recognition of the rights of students with special needs and the promotion of equal educational opportunities for them (Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). In addition, according to the contemporary curriculum for Greek kindergartens (Pedagogic Institute, 2011), the adoption of a 'differentiated pedagogical approach' [individualised education plan] is required for every single case of a student presenting with special needs. Therefore, teachers are required to meet the needs of children with a wide range of needs, and they are asked to design and implement different educational programs in order to cover the educational needs of these students that attend their class. This leads to the question: Are kindergarten teachers willing and have they the ability to implement the educational policy of inclusion for students with special needs?

This paper focuses on the exploration of how the dispositions of Greek kindergarten teachers could influence the inclusion of students with special needs in kindergarten. This study begins with a theoretical framework followed by some information on Kindergarten Education in Greece, the research question and methodology, a presentation and discussion of the findings and some concluding remarks.

## Theoretical Framework

According to Bourdieu (1977) the term disposition '*expresses what is covered by the concept of habitus (defined as a system of dispositions)*' (p. 214). The

dispositions of a person are formed under the influence of experiences in the social environment in which these external structures are internalized (Swartz, 1997) setting limits in his/her actions and choices. These '*acquired dispositions*' define how each person understands, realizes and evaluates social reality, because they guide the formation of behaviours and strategies that he/she chooses in various social fields in which he/she participates (Bourdieu, 1990a).

In particular, Bourdieu claims that dispositions define the ways in which people act and they make up an internalization and incorporation of the basic social conditions of their being. The contribution of primary socialization within the family is important in the creation of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990b; Jacobs, 2007). This primary habitus is subject to change during the life of individuals under the influence of education and the exercise of a profession (Bourdieu, 1977). Consequently, habitus is a product of a person's past (Bourdieu, 1990a); that is why '*different conditions of existence produce different habitus*' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170).

In the case of this study, kindergarten teachers develop dispositions that determine their approach to students with special needs. These are formed as a result of the knowledge and experience that they have acquired during their previous experiences and actions in different social fields, of their education and training, and of their professional occupation with students with special needs such as learning disabilities (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a; Swartz, 1997). These dispositions are incorporated into teachers' daily practices and guide their pedagogical choices for the education of students in their classrooms. Habitus consists of embodied social knowledge and is detected in the practical effects of a person's actions, in his/her way of speaking, in his/her perceptions and the arguments that he/she expresses on specific issues (Bourdieu, 1990b), such as the implementation of an inclusion educational policy. Therefore, habitus consists of a practical logic that appears as an embodied conviction (Bourdieu, 1998). Also, habitus has a productive character on the grounds that it guides the way that people improvise and exhibit creative behaviours in order to face difficult or unpredictable situations (Sterne, 2003). Thus it can be suggested that kindergarten teachers, who do not have sufficient knowledge about special education, choose to formulate strategies that are shaped by their habitus to educate students with special needs that enrol to attend their classrooms.

Habitus is reshaped under the influence of experience that actors gain by their daily presence and activation within specific social fields (Bourdieu, 1998). This fact allows for a change of teachers' dispositions on the inclusion of students

with special needs in mainstream schools. In addition, it could push them to try to gain theoretical and practical knowledge on special education in order to be able to adapt to current educational requirements connected with the application of an inclusion policy.

Bourdieu (1977) uses the concept of 'hysteresis effect' to describe a type of relationship between habitus and field (Asimaki & Koustourakis, 2014; McDonough & Polzer, 2012). The dispositions (habitus) of a person are shaped by the social structure (field) and they change '*in response to new experiences*' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 161). Moreover, changes in the rules of a field, such as the introduction of a new educational law, will not usually produce quick changes in the dispositions of actors like teachers. Hysteresis effect is the experience of mismatch caused by the temporal lag between a person's dispositions and a changing social structure (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990b, 1998); people tend to maintain the dispositions already acquired even when they do not fit the new situation. More specifically, Bourdieu argues:

*as a result of heightened consciousness associated with an effort of transformation...there is an inertia (hysteresis) of habitus which has a spontaneous tendency to perpetuate structures corresponding to their conditions of production. As a result, it can happen that ... dispositions are out of line with the field and with the 'collective expectations' which are constitutive of its normality" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 160).*

Changes in the field of education (objective social structure) in Greece occurred by the enactment of the Law 3699 (2008) that promotes the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream kindergartens. The adoption of this educational policy has changed the working conditions in public kindergartens. Thus many of the teachers who work in these schools may experience the hysteresis effect, that is the lag between their dispositions (habitus) adjusting to the implementation of inclusion policy in contemporary classrooms.

## **Kindergarten Education in Greece**

Two years of schooling are included in Greek Kindergarten Education that administratively is considered as part of primary education and is offered in both public and private kindergartens (K1 for 4 year old students and K2 for 5 year old students). K1 and K2 children are usually placed together in one classroom, and only the attendance of K2 children in kindergarten is compulsory. Public kindergartens in Greece are state-funded and are free of charge. The number

of public kindergarten schools is far bigger than private ones and there are both regular kindergartens (timetable from 8:30 until 12:30) and all-day kindergartens (timetable from 7:45 until 16:00). The majority of Greek kindergarten teachers are females as male teachers make up only about 4% of the kindergarten workforce. Currently the staff working in kindergarten are either 2-year graduates from Preschool Pedagogical Academies (closed in 1988) and 4-year university graduates (from 1989 onwards). Kindergarten teachers are under the pedagogic/didactic guidance, supervision and surveillance of a specific Preschool Advisor who is responsible for evaluating their work and helping them to overcome difficulties with everyday serious educational problems that could arise. Matters related to students with special needs are the remit of the Advisor of Special Education who offers his/her services to all primary and secondary education schools in a large geographical/educational periphery. Thus, teachers that face relevant problems in their classrooms have to inform first their Preschool Advisor and then they can also communicate with the Advisor of Special Education to ask for help (Doliopoulou, 2006; Oberhuemer, Schreyer, & Newman, 2010; UNESCO, 2012; Zacharos, Koustourakis, & Papadimitriou, 2014). Moreover, public Centres of Differential Diagnosis and Support (CEDDS) for the diagnosis and assessment of students with special needs were established in 2000. CEDDS are the official scientific committees that decide whether a specific student should be integrated in a normal kindergarten classroom or if he/she has to attend a special kindergarten. In the case of the latter kindergartens, the students with special needs are educated by "special" early childhood teachers (Law 3699, 2008).

## **Research Question and Methodology**

The main research question of this study is: Could kindergarten teachers' dispositions influence the inclusion of students with special needs in their classrooms?

## **Participants**

The research sample consists of 44 kindergarten teachers. Table 1 presents the profiles of kindergarten teachers that participated in this research which was carried out during the spring semester of the school year 2012-2013.

**Table 1. Profiles of the sample (n=44)**

<b>Gender</b>	43 Females (97.7%) and 1 Male (2.3%)
<b>Age</b>	Average Age: 42.5 years old (Standard Deviation/SD=6 years old, Minimum Age=32 years old, Maximum Age=53 years old)
<b>Teaching experience</b>	Average Teaching experience: 15.3 years (SD=6.9 years, Minimum=7 years, Maximum=31 years teaching experience)
<b>Qualifications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-years Preschool Pedagogical Academy graduates: 11 kindergarten teachers (24.4%).</li> <li>• Preschool Pedagogical Academy graduates with in-service education in Universities: 8 kindergarten teachers (18.2%).</li> <li>• 4-years University graduates: 34 kindergarten teachers (75.6%).</li> <li>• Master's degree: 3 kindergarten teachers (6.7%).</li> </ul>

The research sample consists of 44 kindergarten teachers (43 females and 1 male). Their average age was 42.5 years old and their average teaching experience was 15.3 years. Thirty-four (75.6%) of the teachers were university graduates and 11 individuals (24.4%) were two-years Preschool Pedagogical Academy graduates. 8 of the latter had attended early childhood university department programmes offered to graduates of Preschool Pedagogical Academies in order to give them the opportunity to complete their education by taking a university degree. Moreover, three kindergarten teachers (6.7%) had a master's degree. In conclusion, overall 93.3% of the kindergarten teachers of the sample were university graduates and 6.7% had studied only in a two-year Preschool Pedagogical Academy.

## Research Tool

To accomplish this study a two-part anonymous questionnaire was utilized. The first part of the questionnaire included questions on demographic characteristics of the sample. The second part of the questionnaire was composed of closed questions related to: the kindergarten teachers' opinions on the educational

policy of inclusion, their self-efficacy on their ability to educate students with special needs, and their thoughts and reactions when they are informed that a student with special needs is going to attend their classroom. The closed questions of this questionnaire answered using a five-point Likert scale (Not at all, A little, Not sure/don't know, a lot, very much) that allows for the statistical analysis of the research data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Robson, 2007). For the selection of the types of special needs that were included in the questionnaire we consulted an Advisor of Special Education and a Preschool Advisor. When the questionnaire was set up in its final form, a pilot study was conducted with three kindergarten teachers, who were excluded from the research, and the questionnaire was revised accordingly (Robson, 2007). Convenience sampling was used to distribute the final version of the questionnaire to kindergarten teachers in public kindergartens in the region of the city of Patras (Cohen et al., 2007). More specifically 80 questionnaires were distributed and 44 of them were returned fully completed (a response rate of 55%). Consequently, it should be noted that the findings of this research are not generalizable but are both indicative and revealing of the dispositions of a significant part of current Greek kindergarten teachers on inclusion. Finally, after the collection of the research data the reliability analysis showed that the reliability coefficient Cronbach's Alpha was 0.84. This result proves that the data collection procedure was reliable and adapted to the targets of our research.

## Results

Thirty five kindergarten teachers (77.8% of the sample) had teaching experience with students with special needs at some time during their educational career. The types of special needs encountered were:

- Students with speech problems (35 cases, 100% of the kindergarten teachers that had experience with students with special needs),
- Students with learning disabilities (34 cases, 97.1%),
- Students with behavioural problems (30 cases, 85.7%),
- Students with diagnosed attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (13 cases, 37.1%),
- Students with autism (13 cases, 37.1%),
- Students with mental delayed development (5 cases, 14.3%),
- Students with physical limitations (4 cases, 11.4%),

- Students with vision problems (4 cases, 11.4%),
- Students with hearing problems (3 cases, 8.6%)
- Students with Down syndrome (2 cases, 5.7%).

A significant part of the kindergarten teachers of the sample, who had taught students with special needs, classified their experience as neither positive nor negative (18 teachers, 39.6%). In addition, 10 kindergarten teachers (22%) evaluated their teaching experience with students with special needs as negative, and 7 individuals (15.4%) as positive or very positive.

When the kindergarten teachers were asked whether they thought that “the policy that determines the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classes is right?”, 29 of them answered negatively (categories “not at all” and “a little”, 64.4%), 8 (17.8%) stated that they were not sure and only 8 teachers (17.8%) had a positive attitude towards the inclusion policy. Moreover, when they were asked to choose whether they would prefer to teach either in a classroom in which students with special needs attended or in another classroom with students without special needs, only 1 kindergarten teacher (2.2%) chose to work with the first group of students, 39 (86.7%) chose the second group of students and 5 teachers (11.1%) stated that they were unsure about their choice.

Table 2 presents the answers given by the kindergarten teachers of the sample when asked about which of the students with special needs should attend in regular kindergarten classes, as defined by Law 3699/2008.

The results in Table 2 reveal that the majority of kindergarten teachers responded positively (“a lot” and “very much” categories) to the inclusion of students in normal classrooms with speech disorders (32 teachers, 71.1%; Mean=3.6, SD=1.1), learning disabilities (31 teachers, 68.9%; Mean=3.58, SD=1.08), and behavioural problems (26 teachers, 57.8%; Mean=3.24, SD=1.05). In contrast, there were negative responses (categories “not at all” and “a little”) from the majority towards the attendance in normal classrooms of students with autism (33 teachers, 73.3%; Mean=1.82, SD=0.94), mental delayed development (31 teachers, 68.9%; Mean=1.78, SD=1.00), Down syndrome (29 teachers, 64.5%; Mean=1.84, SD=1.07), physical limitations (27 teachers, 60.0%; Mean=2.42, SD=1.23), hearing problems (24 teachers, 53.4%; Mean=2.24, SD=1.15) and vision problems (24 teachers, 53.4%; Mean=2.2, SD=1.14).

**Table 2. Cases of students that should be included and study in regular kindergarten classes**

Students presenting with:	Not at all	A little	I don't know	A lot	Very much	Mean (SD)
Learning disabilities	1 (2.2%)	10 (22.2%)	3 (6.7%)	24 (53.4%)	7 (15.5%)	3.58 (1.08)
Behavioural problems	1 (2.2%)	15 (33.3%)	3 (6.7%)	24 (53.4%)	2 (4.4%)	3.24 (1.05)
Speech disorders	2 (4.4%)	8 (17.8%)	3 (6.7%)	25 (55.6%)	7 (15.5%)	3.6 (1.1)
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder	12 (26.7%)	10 (22.2%)	9 (20.0%)	14 (31.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2.56 (1.2)
Physical limitations	12 (26.7%)	15 (33.3%)	8 (17.8%)	7 (15.5%)	3 (6.7%)	2.42 (1.23)
Vision problems	18 (40.1%)	6 (13.3%)	16 (35.5%)	4 (8.9%)	1 (2.2%)	2.2 (1.14)
Hearing problems	17 (37.9%)	7 (15.5%)	15 (33.3%)	5 (11.1%)	1 (2.2%)	2.24 (1.15)
Autism	22 (48.9%)	11 (24.4%)	10 (22.2%)	2 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1.82 (0.94)
Mental delayed development	26 (57.8%)	5 (11.1%)	12 (26.7%)	2 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1.78 (1.00)
Down syndrome	26 (57.8%)	3 (6.7%)	13 (28.9%)	3 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1.84 (1.07)

**Table 3. Self-evaluation of kindergarten teachers' knowledge and abilities regarding their readiness to teach students with special needs**

	Not at all	A little	I am not sure	A lot	Very much	Mean (SD)
<b>I'm trained to teach students with special needs in my classroom.</b>	25 (55.5%)	17 (37.8%)	1 (2.2%)	2 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1.56 (0.76)
<b>I can identify which students have special needs.</b>	1 (2.2%)	17 (37.8%)	2 (4.4%)	22 (48.9%)	3 (6.7%)	3.2 (1.1)
<b>I can design and implement individualized teaching programs for students with special needs.</b>	25 (55.5%)	18 (40.0%)	2 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.49 (0.59)
<b>I have experience to support the educational needs of students with special needs.</b>	20 (44.0%)	19 (42.2%)	3 (6.7%)	3 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1.76 (0.86)
<b>I am mentally and emotionally prepared to work in classes with students with special needs.</b>	22 (48.9%)	18 (40.0%)	2 (4.4%)	2 (4.4%)	1 (2.2%)	1.71 (0.92)

From Table 3 we can see that although most of the kindergarten teachers of the sample said they could identify which pupils are students with special needs ("a lot" and "very much" categories: 25 teachers, 55.6%; Mean=3.2, SD=1.1), almost all of them replied they could not design and implement

individualized educational programs for these students as required by the modern kindergarten curriculum (43 teachers, 95.5%). This is because they feel they lack the necessary education and training for this purpose (42 teachers, 93.3%). Thus, they do not feel mentally and emotionally prepared to work in classrooms that have students in attendance with special needs (40 teachers, 88.9%). They also believe that their experience is not sufficient to help them respond to the education of students with special needs (39 teachers, 86.2%).

Table 4 presents the thoughts and emotional reactions of the kindergarten teachers in the sample when presented with the case in which they are informed during the school year that a student with special needs is going to unexpectedly enrol and attend their classroom. It can be concluded that the majority of kindergarten teachers participating in the survey did not have appropriate dispositions to accept and educate students with special needs. More specifically, the raw emotional reactions of most kindergarten teachers ("a lot" and "very much" categories) in such a case are: concern (35 teachers, 77.8%), fear (31 teachers, 69%) and insecurity (30 teachers, 66.7%). This is because they believe that their work will become very difficult (29 teachers, 64.5%) and will upset their teaching programming and teaching preparation (27 teachers, 60%). Also, many believe there will be problems in maintaining the operating rules of their class (24 cases, 53.4%) because students with special needs face difficulties adjusting to the "new" classroom environment. So they feel it is imperative to seek immediate help and support from specialists (42 teachers, 93.3%; Mean=4.31, SD=0.73). Therefore, there seems to be an apparent reluctance of kindergarten teachers to work with students with special needs. At the same time a small number of teachers (4, 8.9%) expressed a desire to work in classrooms that include some of these children.

**Table 4. Thoughts and emotional reactions of kindergarten teachers at the sudden arrival of students with special needs attending their classes**

	Not at all	A little	Some-what	A lot	Very much	Mean (SD)
<b>Concern because they are not trained.</b>	1 (2.2%)	8 (17.8%)	1 (2.2%)	21 (46.7%)	14 (31.1%)	3.87 (1.12)
<b>Fear of facing serious teaching problems.</b>	2 (4.4%)	10 (22.2%)	2 (4.4%)	20 (44.5%)	11 (24.5%)	3.62 (1.21)
<b>Insecure that they would not succeed to educate students with special needs.</b>	3 (6.7%)	10 (22.2%)	2 (4.4%)	23 (51.1%)	7 (15.6%)	3.47 (1.19)
<b>Overtake their teaching plan.</b>	1 (2.2%)	13 (28.9%)	4 (8.9%)	22 (48.9%)	5 (11.1%)	3.37 (1.09)
<b>Interfere with operating rules of their class.</b>	0 (0.0%)	14 (31.0%)	7 (15.6%)	17 (37.8%)	7 (15.6%)	3.38 (1.09)
<b>Belief that their work in kindergarten will be more difficult.</b>	0 (0.0%)	12 (26.6%)	4 (8.9%)	21 (46.7%)	8 (17.8%)	3.55 (1.08)
<b>Need to ask immediately for help and support by experts.</b>	0 (0.0%)	2 (4.4%)	1 (2.2%)	23 (51.1%)	19 (42.2%)	4.31 (0.73)
<b>Confidence that they will manage to work as expected.</b>	15 (33.4%)	24 (53.3%)	2 (4.4%)	3 (6.7%)	1 (2.2%)	1.91 (0.92)

**Table 5. Proposed actions of kindergarten teachers when a student with special needs comes to attend their classroom**

	Not at all	A little	I am not sure	A lot	Very much	Mean (SD)
<b>They would simultaneously inform both the Preschool Advisor and the Advisor of Special Education.</b>	0 (0.0%)	4 (8.9%)	1 (2.2%)	14 (31.1%)	26 (57.8%)	4.37 (0.91)
<b>They would ask for immediate assistance from the Preschool Advisor.</b>	1 (2.2%)	10 (22.2%)	5 (11.1%)	12 (26.7%)	17 (37.8%)	3.75 (1.12)
<b>They would ask for immediate assistance from the Advisor of Special Education.</b>	0 (0.0%)	5 (11.1%)	2 (4.4%)	14 (31.1%)	24 (53.3%)	4.27 (1.0)
<b>They would seek frequent support mainly from the Preschool Advisor.</b>	3 (6.7%)	20 (44.4%)	4 (8.9%)	10 (22.2%)	8 (17.8%)	3.00 (1.0)
<b>They would seek frequent support mainly from the Advisor of Special Education.</b>	0 (0.0%)	3 (6.7%)	2 (4.4%)	16 (35.6%)	24 (53.3%)	4.35 (0.87)
<b>They would ask the parents to ensure an examination of their child by a CEDDS in order to offer clear assistive instructions.</b>	1 (2.2%)	5 (11.1%)	2 (4.4%)	16 (35.6%)	21 (46.7%)	4.13 (1.09)
<b>They would ask for the examination of the child by a CEDDS in order to be transferred to a special kindergarten or to a special classroom.</b>	4 (8.9%)	11 (24.4%)	7 (15.6%)	11 (24.4%)	12 (26.7%)	3.35 (1.23)

	Not at all	A little	I am not sure	A lot	Very much	Mean (SD)
<b>They would seek support from qualified staff in order to keep the student in their classroom.</b>	2 (4.4%)	5 (11.1%)	3 (6.7%)	19 (42.2%)	16 (35.6%)	3.93 (0.87)
<b>They would ask for support from a special teacher.</b>	1 (2.2%)	1 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	15 (33.4%)	28 (62.2%)	4.51 (0.81)

Table 5 presents what the proposed actions of the kindergarten teachers of the sample would be in the case that during the school year a student with special needs unexpectedly arrives to attend their classroom. An examination of the data in Table 5 shows that the kindergarten teachers that participated in this research would react as follows: They would inform the Preschool Advisor and the Advisor of Special Education, as they have to according to rules of their agency (40 teachers, 88.9%), but they would seek immediate help from the latter (38 teachers, 84.5%) and they would seek to ensure that his/her support will be permanent (40 teachers, 88.9%). That is teachers of the sample desire the assistance of the Advisor of Special Education to be stable and permanent. Also, they would like their teaching work to be supported by a "special" early childhood teacher (43 teachers, 95.6%). Moreover, they would ask the child's parents to ensure the examination of their child by the CEDDS, as they expect that this Centre will make the proper diagnosis and will give them instructions on how they should approach and work with the particular student (37 teachers, 82.3%). An interesting finding is the lesser degree of confidence in the Preschool Advisor, who has a direct employment relationship with the kindergarten teachers of the sample, compared with the Advisor of Special Education, to deal with issues related to students with special needs. The teachers of the sample recognise that the latter possesses the scientific knowledge to help and advise them how to educate and include these students in their classrooms. Therefore, the number of kindergarten teachers who would seek immediate help and advice by the Preschool Advisor is smaller (29 cases, 64.5%) compared to the number who would seek the advice of the Advisor of Special Education (38 teachers, 84.5%). Even smaller is the number of those who would like frequent support mainly from the Preschool Advisor to deal with problems related to the education of students with special needs in their classrooms (18

cases, 40%). Moreover, it seems that a large part of the kindergarten teachers of the sample maintain a traditional rationale in approaching the students with special needs. Thus, in order to keep specific students in their classrooms they ask for permanent support by qualified staff (35 teachers, 77.8%). Also, many kindergarten teachers (23 cases, 51.1%) would request the examination of a student by the expert committee (CEDDS) in order to decide whether to move him/her to a special kindergarten or to a kindergarten that includes a special classroom for students of a specific group. Therefore, these views seem to reflect the existence of dispositions favouring the separation rather than the inclusion of students with special needs in ordinary kindergarten classrooms.

**Table 6. Requirements for the education of kindergarten teachers to teach students with special needs in mainstream classes**

	Not at all	A little	Some-what	A lot	Very much	Mean (SD)
<b>A kindergarten teacher in order to be effective should know how to approach students with special needs.</b>	1 (2.2%)	2 (4.4%)	3 (6.7%)	18 (40.0%)	21 (46.7%)	4.24 (0.93)
<b>Current kindergarten teachers should be trained in teaching students with special needs.</b>	2 (4.4%)	5 (11.1%)	5 (11.1%)	17 (37.8%)	16 (35.6%)	3.89 (1.15)
<b>If I had trained on issues related to the education of students with special needs I could succeed.</b>	0 (0.0%)	9 (20.0%)	5 (11.1%)	26 (57.8%)	5 (11.1%)	3.6 (0.92)

Table 6 presents the opinions of the kindergarten teachers on the educational and training requirements for teachers that could facilitate the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream kindergarten classrooms. The elements in Table 6 show that a significant number of kindergarten teachers (categories 'a lot' and 'very much': 31 teachers, 68.9%) believe that if they had participated in in-service training programs in special education they could have managed the education of students with special needs in their classrooms. It is

obvious that they believe that current kindergarten teachers should be trained in teaching students with special needs (33 teachers, 73.4%) in order to be able to be effective in their job (39 teachers, 86.7%).

## Discussion

The findings of this study show that the majority of kindergarten teachers in the sample have negative dispositions both towards the acceptance of inclusion educational policy and to the prospect of teaching in classrooms in which students with special needs attend. According to the theoretical framework on which this research is embedded, the kindergarten teachers' dispositions could be said to have emerged as a result of the construction of their habitus during their history in the fields of education and from the exercise of their profession (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990a). It is striking that these kindergarten teachers consider their education and in-service training to approach issues of students with special needs inadequate. Also, this study revealed that the majority of kindergarten teachers (84.4%) did not have a positive experience in their attempt to educate students with special needs in their mainstream classrooms.

As habitus is directly linked to the experiences of individuals and determines their perception of everyday and professional reality (Bourdieu, 1990a), we observed that teachers of the sample had worked in their classrooms primarily with students who had speech problems (77.8% of the total sample), learning disabilities (75.5%) and behavioural problems (66.7%). These experiences seem to have contributed to shaping acceptance dispositions, as these were the three categories of special needs that teachers were most likely to accept as suitable for inclusion in mainstream kindergarten classrooms (Table 2).

Furthermore, this study noted the existence of a cultural lag or "hysteresis effect" in the kindergarten teachers' habitus (Bourdieu, 1984; Swartz, 1998). This is because, although the objective conditions for the education of students with special needs have changed by Law 3699/2008 and the contemporary kindergarten curriculum (Pedagogic Institute, 2011), it appears that many kindergarten teachers maintain outdated perceptions in their educational and pedagogical approach towards specific students because of their previous working experience that contributed to shaping their professional habitus (Bourdieu, 1990b, 1998). More specifically, before the establishment of Law 3699/2008 in Greece the students with special needs attended usually in special classes. Thus, it is typical that the expectation of a significant part of the kindergarten teachers of the sample (51.1%) is that the examination by the

CEDDS of students with special needs who attend their classrooms will lead to either moving them to a special kindergarten or to a kindergarten that has a special classroom. Also, there seems to be a dominant misconception in the minds of kindergarten teachers (77.8%) about the possibility of negotiating with educational authorities to accept that students with special needs stay in their classroom if they are supported by the appointment of an assistant special early childhood teacher. That is why we pinpointed feelings of insecurity, anxiety and fear in teachers of the sample at the prospect of working in classrooms that include students with special needs. Indeed, kindergarten teachers trying to improvise to tackle difficult professional situations (Bourdieu, 1990b; Sterne, 2003), such as the arrival of a new student with special needs in their classroom, stated that they will be immediately active in order to guarantee themselves the provision of moral and scientific support mainly by the Advisor of Special Education. Simultaneously, the new educational conditions brought about in Greek contemporary preschool education by the enactment of Law 3699 (2008), such as the obligation to include and educate students with special needs in their classrooms, creates preconditions for changing their habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). That is why the kindergarten teachers who participated in this study recognize the necessity of education and training of modern teachers in issues of special education in order to be able to approach and educate students with special needs in their ordinary classrooms

## **Concluding Remarks**

In this study we tried to answer the question whether kindergarten teachers' dispositions could influence the inclusion of students with special needs in their classrooms. The results revealed that the dispositions of kindergarten teachers could affect the attempt of inclusion on the grounds that a) kindergarten teachers who participated in this research expressed a low level of agreement to this specific policy of inclusion and, b) kindergarten teachers showed a low level of readiness to educate students with special needs because they argued that they lacked suitable knowledge, ability, teaching experience and training to meet the demands that this brings. Thus, when students with special needs enrol in their kindergarten classroom, it is likely that in all probability teachers would feel anxiety, insecurity and fear about their ability to cope with the consequent demands on them. Also, they would immediately ask for help and support from advisors for the kindergarten school and especially from the Advisor for Special Education, and would request if possible the assistance of special personnel for the education of students with special needs. This research

leads to the conclusion that official in-service training programmes on special education need to be established for kindergarten teachers in order to change their dispositions and in order to facilitate the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream kindergarten classrooms.

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