Romanian Preservice Educators’ Attitudes about Disabilities

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Purpose
The purpose of this study is to investigate how sympathetic or comfortable pre-service educators in Romania are towards people with disabilities.

The Article
The Romanian Workers Party came to power in 1948. Under communism, support organizations for students with disabilities became illegal, with the exception of organizations for students with visual and hearing impairment, thus disbanding university programs in special education. After a violent revolution, Romania became an emerging democracy in 1989 and adopted an “education for all” approach, including special education services. Given this history, this research investigates how comfortable pre-service teachers are with individuals with disabilities. Ninety-seven pre-service teachers completed a questionnaire to assess the social distance relative to various types of disabilities. Social distance measures how comfortable one feels at various levels of closeness with individuals of different groups. All eight of the disability categories yielded a negative correlation. Older participants were more comfortable with all disability categories than younger participants. Participants had a much greater social distance from people with behavior disorders than from people from people with any other category of disability. Participants were most comfortable with people who had learning disabilities, and physical disabilities. Sensory impairments, attention deficits, emotional disorders, and mental retardation fell in the middle range. This study did not find a pattern of statistically significant relationships between life experience with each of the disability categories.

What This Means for the Field
Participants with more experience tended to have somewhat lower social distance. This offers hope that programs promoting planned contact between preservice educators in Romania and people with disabilities would result in reduced social distance. Teacher education programs might consider incorporating more focus on these related categories of special education.

Citation

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