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## A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CREATIVE ATTITUDES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHING STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES\*

**Introduction:** Teacher professional competence may be an indicator of general, special and inclusive education quality. However, creative attitudes of teachers may contribute to an increase in their motivation, self-awareness and subjective well-being. Furthermore, teachers' professional competence may constitute grounds for developing creative competence which enables an analysis of the relationship between teachers' creative attitudes and teachers' professional skills in working with students with disabilities and without special needs.

**Research Aim:** The present study aimed to compare the levels of perceived professional competences in teaching students with and without disabilities as well as to examine the relationship between the creative attitudes and the aforementioned competences in a sample of secondary school teachers.

**Research Method:** A diagnostic survey method as well as the following instruments were used: Creative Behavior Questionnaire KANH by Popek, Teachers' Perceived Professional Competences Questionnaire by Byra and Kazanowski, a short demographic survey aimed at teachers.

**Results:** The teachers place greater emphasis on evaluative and innovative competence in teaching students with disabilities. However, psychological and communicative competence in working with students without special needs are rated higher. There is a relationship between teachers' creative attitudes and the self-reported professional competences in teaching students with and without disabilities. The interdependencies are more recognizable regarding the students without special needs. The hypothesis was partially verified.

**Conclusions:** The findings prove that fostering teachers' creative attitudes may improve teachers' professional competences in special, mainstream and inclusive education. Pedagogically, it is important to promote both student and teacher creativity.

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**Keywords:** teacher creativity, creative attitudes, teacher professional competence, secondary school, special educational needs

## INTRODUCTION

Teacher competence has been a crucial research topic for the debate on determinants of special, mainstream and general education quality over several decades (Sass-Lehre and Wolk, 1984; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009; Kleickmann et al., 2013; Byra and Kazanowski, 2015). Teachers' professional skills may be an indicator of teacher preparation and effectiveness, high and low teaching quality which is usually linked to student achievement, success or failure in a general education classroom (Sachs, 2004; Brownell et al., 2010; Stronge et al., 2011; McConnell et al., 2019; Yu, 2019; Pennington et al., 2021). Teachers' competences may also determine special education teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach individuals with severe disabilities (Ruppar et al., 2016). Terminologically speaking, teachers' competence resembles teachers' self-efficacy as long as the latter of these two terms places emphasis on the distinction between teachers' perception of competence and actual performance or competence (Goddard et al., 2004).

Creativity and creative attitude are likely to support human agency and they are believed to be crucial for education and everyday living. Moreover, the research results reported by Csikszentmihalyi (1996), Gardner (1990), or Sternberg (1999) indicate that "involvement in creative activity is highly motivating, enhancing of intelligence and a condition within which we may achieve our highest selves, greatest happiness" (Barnes, 2003, p. 41). Equally, creative attitudes may be a central part of continuing professional development, and a vital factor for perceived teacher competence.

Creative attitude of a teacher may be described and assessed in relation to a set of psychological (personal, cognitive, emotional and volitional); social and pedagogical components. It may be an essential condition for positive general, special and inclusive education teachers' coping with students' diversity. Importantly, the challenges to education systems such as: social justice, equity or inclusion should be the issues that unite not divide creative educators (Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling, 2012). However, a deeper sense of the associations between teachers' creative attitudes and the self-reported professional competences should be discovered, given that a researcher's intention is to design a comprehensive study on both teaching skills and certain creative teacher personality characteristics such as: openness to experience (Kozuch, 2016; Lee and Kemple, 2014); independence, nonconformity (Bernacka et al., 2019).

Teacher professional competence, as related to continuous vocational development, self-education, as well as teaching content knowledge, instructional and moral-ethical skills may constitute grounds for developing creative competence which

enables an analysis of the relationship between teachers' creative attitudes and their professional skills in working with students with disabilities and without special needs (Magda-Adamowicz, 2021). Unfortunately, the aforementioned link is a rare research topic in education, and let alone in special education, because it is not easy to find the studies on an assessment of the interdependencies between teachers' creativity and the above-mentioned self-reported competences. Taking into account creativity in education, the research topics infrequently cover teachers' creative or noncreative attitudes but are rather focused on a role played by educators in the process of developing or identifying student creativity (Kettler et al., 2018).

## RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

The purpose of the study was to compare the levels of perceived professional competences in teaching students with and without disabilities as well as to explore a relationship between teachers' creative attitudes and those competences in a sample of secondary school teachers. The following research questions were asked:

1. How do the teachers rate their professional competences taking into account teaching students with disabilities and without special needs?
2. What are the correlations between teachers' self-assessed professional competences in teaching students with as well as without disabilities and the self-reported creative attitudes of educators?

In the absence of the studies with a similar comparative approach confirming the aforementioned relationship with regard to teaching students with and without disabilities, it was difficult to propose any hypothesis. However, based on a few studies, teacher creativity may be considered a contributing factor in terms of developing teacher professional competences, and creative competence may constitute grounds for fostering other teacher skills in either regular or inclusive education (Kozuch, 2016; Magda-Adamowicz, 2021). Furthermore, based on one study investigating a link between creativity of middle school teachers and their professional competence, a positive, statistically significant correlation was found (Zainuddin, 2023). Therefore, considering the second research question, it was assumed that there is a relationship between teachers' creative attitudes and the self-reported professional competences regardless of students' special needs.

## RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The study utilized a diagnostic survey method. In order to achieve the research goals, the following instruments were used: Creative Behavior Questionnaire KANH by Popek, Teachers' Perceived Professional Competence Questionnaire by

Byra and Kazanowski, a short demographic survey aimed at teachers, which ensured the additional information on their gender, age, marital status, employment.

The final version of Teachers' Perceived Professional Competence Questionnaire (TPPCQ) contains 43 items clustered around 5 factors encompassing evaluative competence (EC), psychological competence (PC), innovative competence (IC), communicative (CC) and substantive-methodical competence (SMC). The final combination of the TPPCQ items was established using a factor analysis, principal components method along with a varimax normalized rotation. All the factors explained 61.30% of the total variance. A random sample of 246 elementary and secondary school teachers was used for the questionnaire construction study. EC pertains to a teacher's ability to use educational measurement and school achievement tests for instructional purposes. PC is focused on a teacher's coping with stress at school and his/her ability to establish a special relationship with a student which is based on sensitivity, openness, patience and acceptance of a student's exceptionality. IC concerns a teacher's capacity for playing an innovative role in the educational process by way of creative teaching strategies. CC places emphasis on verbal and nonverbal communication skills which are crucial for high quality conversation and dialogue between a teacher and a student. SMC refers to a teacher's pedagogical content knowledge as well as her/his ability to choose an optimal teaching method in terms of attaining educational targets (Byra and Kazanowski, 2015).

Creative Behavior Questionnaire (KANH) enables us to assess two separate dimensions of creative attitude: cognitive and personal (characterological). The cognitive dimension includes, e.g. semantic memory, creative imagination, divergent thinking or cognitive flexibility. The characterological dimension denotes, e.g. independence, human activity, spontaneousness, courage, openness, self-reliance, resilience and perseverance. The cognitive dimension may be measured with a predominance of heuristic behaviors (H) over algorithmic behaviors (A). The characterological dimension makes us also aware of personality dependent conditions for actualizing individual cognitive predispositions and it may be described as nonconformist (N) or conformist attitude (K) (Popek, 2010). High levels of nonconformity and heuristic behaviors are a sign of creative attitudes, hence high levels of conformity and algorithmic behaviors are indicative of noncreative, reconstructive attitudes (Popek, 2010, p. 25). Thus, creative attitude is detected by adding the total scores obtained in the heuristic behavior (H) and nonconformity (N) subscales and in the case of noncreative attitude the overall scores for algorithmic behavior and conformity are summed.

A total of 60 teachers (women 70.00%; men 30.00%) who enrolled in apostgraduate special education course at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University participated in this quantitative study. The participants' age ranged between 30 and 65, but a predominant age was between 34 and 50 (76.66%). Considering marital

status, the majority of teachers were married (83.33%). They were employed in 15 secondary schools of various types: regular (70.00%), regular schools with inclusive classrooms (15.00%), inclusive schools (8.33%), special schools with self-contained classes (6.67%). All the teachers undertook the postgraduate studies because they claimed that their professional preparedness was inadequate to face a challenge of teaching students with special needs.

## STATISTICAL DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The quantitative data analysis was performed by means of Statistica for Windows 13. Considering the majority of the scores for the subscales, the frequency distributions deviated from the expected normal curve (Shapiro–Wilk’s normality test results were statistically significant). Thus, to accomplish the goal of the study, descriptive and nonparametric statistics methods were utilized. To determine the differences between teachers’ self-rated competences in working with students with and without disabilities, a selection of descriptive statistics values (median, upper and lower quartile, minimum, maximum score) was used. To examine the relationship between teachers’ creative attitudes and the perceptions of professional competences with respect to those two educational contexts, the rank order Spearman’s correlation coefficients were computed.

## RESULTS

Answering the first main research question, a comparison between the levels of teachers’ perceptions of professional competences in teaching students with disabilities (SD) and the respective levels regarding students without disabilities (SND) was made. The statistical data selected for the comparative analysis such as: median, lower and upper quartile, minimum, maximum score, interquartile range are summarized in Table 1.

The differences concerning teachers’ self-assessments of professional competence can be found with regard to the four dimensions of vocational skills. The teachers’ ratings of their evaluative competence in working with SD are higher than in working with SND, because not only the median values ( $Me_{SD} = 34$ ;  $Me_{SND} = 32.50$ ) but also both the quartiles and minimum values are higher taking into account the professional skills in teaching SD. The innovative competence in working with SD is also rated higher compared to SND, while a difference between the medians is even more apparent ( $Me_{SD} = 41$ ;  $Me_{SND} = 34$ ). The median, lower and upper quartile, minimum values for the self-evaluations of this sort of competence in teaching SD are superior to the corresponding values for educating SND, as well

(Table 1). It may imply that teachers realize that teaching students with disabilities is more demanding and a special competence is required, e.g. in terms of coming up with innovative solutions to educational problems.

Table 1.

*Perceived teachers' professional competences in teaching students with disabilities (SD) and students without disabilities (SND). Descriptive statistics*

Categories of professional competences		Me	Min	Max	Q1	Q3	QR
Evaluative Competence (EC)	SND	32.50	10	39	28	35	7
	SD	34	25	40	32	37.50	5.50
Psychological Competence (PC)	SND	43	33	45	38	45	7
	SD	36.50	24	45	33	40	7
Innovative Competence (IC)	SND	34	21	45	31	37.50	6.50
	SD	41	31	45	39	44	5
Communicative Competence (CC)	SND	31.50	23	35	28	34	6
	SD	30	22	35	27	32	5
Substantive-Methodical Competence (SMC)	SND	43	32	50	40.50	48	7.50
	SD	42	31	52	39	46.50	7.50
Total Score	SND	184	127	212	169	193	24
	SD	179	148	215	170.50	198	27.50

Me = median; Min = minimum; Max = maximum; Q1 = lower quartile; Q3 = upper quartile; QR = inter-quartile range

Source: Author's own study.

However, the psychological competence in terms of working with SD was perceived by teachers as less important than SND, since the median for teaching SD was much lower ( $Me_{SD} = 36.50$ ,  $Me_{SND} = 43$ ). This outcome may mean that teachers are aware of their personal weaknesses and at the same time they feel the strong need for continuing personal development in terms of creativity, tolerance for diversity, coping with stress, because teaching SD is just a bigger challenge to accept. Teacher psychological competence is also necessary for socio-emotional learning at school and it is also considered a great advantage in special needs education (Gimbert et al., 2023). According to teachers' perceptions, more importance is given to the communicative competence in teaching SND compared to teaching

SD, although a disparity in the median values is not so obvious this time ( $Me_{SD} = 30$ ,  $Me_{SND} = 31.50$ ), but the upper quartiles are quite distinguishable, emphasizing a role played by this competence category in education of SND ( $Q3_{SD} = 32$ ,  $Q3_{SND} = 34$ ). In light of some studies, teachers' verbal communication skills may be linked to high general education quality (Andrew et al., 2005).

Regarding the sample of female and male teachers, the levels of self-reported creative and noncreative (reconstructive) attitudes measured with Creative Behavior Questionnaire KANH were also compared. The descriptive statistics values which pertain to creative and noncreative attitudes are available in Table 2. The values such as: mean, median, lower and upper quartile are higher with respect to creative attitude. Comparing the mode values, it might be noticed that the most frequent score observed for creative attitudes is twice as high as the relevant score for the noncreative ones (Table 2). Therefore, educators demonstrate higher levels of the self-reported creative attitudes than those noncreative ones, hence they are more likely to be nonconformist about their behavior and usually prefer heuristic to algorithmic thinking.

Table 2.  
*Descriptive statistics regarding self-reported creative and noncreative (reconstructive) attitude in the research sample (N = 60)*

Variable	M	Me	SD	Min	Max	Mode	N Mode	Q1	Q3	QR
Creative attitude	41.50	43.00	10.36	15	57	51	6	34.50	50.50	16
Noncreative (reconstructive) attitude	25.15	23.50	9.78	8	47	25	5	18	31.50	13.50

M = mean; Me = median; SD = standard deviation; Min = minimum; Max = maximum; Q1 = lower quartile; Q3 = upper quartile; QR = inter-quartile range; N Mode = mode frequency

Source: Author's own study.

Responding to the second research question, the rank order correlation coefficients including the interdependencies between the self-reported creative/noncreative attitudes and the specific categories of teachers' professional competences in working with students with disabilities and without special needs were computed (Table 3). As we could see, there are three positive, statistically significant correlations between teachers' creative attitudes and the perceptions of professional, teaching skills, but no such interdependencies were found in relation to teachers' noncreative attitudes. There are fewer statistically significant correlations between the above-mentioned variables in terms of working with students with disabilities (one couple of variables: CA/PC,  $\rho = 0.25$ ) compared to the correlations which may be noted for working with students without disabilities (three couples of variables: CA/EC,  $\rho = 0.39$ ; CA/CC,  $\rho = 0.43$ ; CA/TS,  $\rho = 0.35$ ). Thus,



boosting teachers' creative attitudes is linked to higher levels of teachers' self-assessed psychological competence in teaching students with disabilities as well as higher levels of teachers' readiness for empathy and openness in social interactions with those students. However, considering education of students without special needs, an increase in teachers' self-reported creative attitudes is connected with a greater emphasis placed on evaluative competence, i.e. measurement of student achievement as well as communicative competence, pointing to a key role of verbal and nonverbal communication, a dialogue in education. Moreover, higher levels of the teachers' self-reported creative attitudes are associated with higher levels of the self-assessments of global professional competence in working with students without disabilities.

It can also be noted that despite the statistical insignificance and the minor strength, negative correlations occur exclusively in regard to the relationship between the self-reported noncreative (reconstructive) attitudes and perceived professional competences (5 negative and 7 positive correlations, in total). However, taking into account the relationship between the self-reported creative attitudes and those competences just positive correlations were found (see Table 3).

Table 3.

*Rank order Spearman's correlation coefficients between teachers' creative/noncreative attitudes and teachers' perceptions of professional competences in teaching students with and without disabilities*

Categories of professional competences	Teaching students without disabilities (SND)		Teaching students with disabilities (SD)	
	Creative attitude (CA)	Noncreative attitude (NCA)	Creative attitude (CA)	Noncreative attitude (NCA)
Evaluative competence (EC)	0.39*	.17	.09	.02
Psychological competence (PC)	0.15	-.02	.25*	-.04
Innovative competence (IC)	0.09	.00	.18	.05
Communicative competence (CC)	0.43*	.04	.11	-.10
Substantive-methodic competence (SMC)	0.16	-.06	.11	-.07
Total score (TS)	0.35*	.02	.22	.00

\* $p < 0.05$

Source: Author's own study.



## DISCUSSION

To accomplish the research purpose, the levels of secondary school teachers' perceived professional competences in teaching students with and without disabilities were compared as well as the relationship between creative attitudes and those competences was analyzed in the sample.

In response to the first research problem, it was found that teachers' ratings of professional competences in teaching students with disabilities and without special needs are not the same. Considering the educational work with students with disabilities, teachers judge evaluative and innovative competence as more valuable. With respect to teaching students without disabilities, they emphasize the importance of psychological and communicative competence. The obtained results are in line with the research findings by Żyta and Kazanowski (2023) which concern the perceptions of teachers' evaluative and innovative competence in working with students with disabilities in a sample of university students, preschool and special education majors. Considering education of students with intellectual disabilities, those two aforementioned dimensions of teacher competence were also rated higher than other teacher competences in the comparison study of the two different aspects of teaching students with and without intellectual disabilities (Żyta and Kazanowski, 2023). In the present study utilizing the sample of teachers completing a postgraduate special education course at university, the same regularity with respect to the estimated levels of these two perceived competences in working with students with disabilities was found.

Responding to the second research problem, it turned out that there was a relationship between self-reported teachers' creative attitudes and the self-assessments of professional competence in working with students with disabilities (1 weak, but statistically significant correlation;  $\rho = .25$ ) and without special needs (3 statistically significant correlations, their strength ranged from weak to moderate interdependencies (between  $\rho = .35$  and  $\rho = .43$ ). All correlations are positive. The respective correlations with regard to teaching students without disabilities are stronger compared to teaching students with special needs.

The results lent partial support to the hypothesis on a relationship (positive correlations) between teachers' creative attitudes and teachers' perceived competences in working with students with and without disabilities, but the connection pertains to the selected competences and it is particularly evident as long as the teachers rate their professional competence in relation to teaching nondisabled students. Nevertheless, a link between teachers' self-reported reconstructive (non-creative) attitudes and the perceptions of these competences is very weak (all the rank order Spearman's correlation coefficients  $\rho$  values are below a threshold of .22). Some correlations are negative.

A variability of teachers' perceptions about the professional competence in teaching students with and without disabilities as well as a non identical picture

of a correlation matrix concerning the associations between these self-reported creative attitudes and teachers' self-assessments of the competence in regard to both of the above-mentioned aspects of teaching is a fact that makes us reflect on the meaning of the perceived professional competences as well as on the potential barriers to developing teacher creativity. The first obstacle is student diversity which makes different sense in special and regular (mainstream, inclusive) teacher education. From a special education perspective, we may refer to a traditional attitude which is still part of some special educators' awareness, which complies with a medical model of disability, and breeds a negative perception of individual differences about student behavior, learning, ability and achievement. It relies on highlighting developmental deficits, deviations from the normality standards, psychological and social adjustment problems, academic failure of students with special needs. Nonetheless, their actual capacity, talent, creative potential or strengths are frequently underestimated. From a general education teacher's point of view, an important asset is social justice, hence anthropology, sociology, cultural psychology and sociolinguistics may appear on the horizon instead of behavioral psychology, medical science, psychometrics (Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling, 2012). An issue which may unite general and special education teachers who value social justice is believed to be universal design for learning and educational equity by ensuring all students an equal access to general education curriculum irrespective of dysfunctions (weaknesses) and other facets of student diversity. Equity in education is also a vital topic in the pedagogical debates on inclusion.

Another barrier to nurturing a teacher's creative potential may be the work habitat. Because of an unconventional approach to teaching and learning, a creative teacher is sometimes disliked and disrespected by colleagues. However, contemporary school rather favors cliches and conformity (Kozuh, 2016).

The aforementioned barriers could have an effect on the outcomes yielding the different perceptions of educators' professional competences in teaching students with disabilities and without special needs. Considering the former, much emphasis is placed on evaluative competence, educational measurement regarding student achievement, innovative competence denoting teachers' readiness for choosing new pedagogical strategies. Considering the latter, teachers' point to the importance of psychological and communicative competence resulting in empathy, sensitiveness to verbal and nonverbal cues. The obstacles may also contribute to a varied combination of the correlations between teachers' self-reported creative attitudes and professional competences regarding both variants of teaching students.

## CONCLUSIONS

It might be expected that the connection between teachers' creative attitudes and the self-assessed professional competences in teaching students with disabilities and without special needs would be stronger, and more significant correlations will be found. However, despite everything, the research results suggest that boosting teachers' creative attitudes may co-occur with higher levels of teachers' perceptions of general professional competence in working with nondisabled students (a weak positive, statistically significant correlation). It is also true taking into account the positive interdependencies between teachers' self-reported creative attitudes and the selected, specific professional competences, i.e. evaluative and communicative with regard to teaching nondisabled students as well as psychological with respect to educating students with disabilities.

Nevertheless, an additional optimistic tone pertains to the fact that the self-reported noncreative attitudes of teachers are not linked to higher ratings of these competences with reference to the two different variants of teaching students. It proves that noncreative (reconstructive) attitudes are not supposed to enhance teachers' perceived professional competence, irrespective of special educational needs of a student. Therefore, in light of the research findings, an assumption stating that teachers' creative attitudes may constitute grounds for developing other pedagogical competences has been confirmed.

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

The study was conducted exclusively on a sample of teachers who enrolled in a special education, postgraduate course at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University. The research lacked the data obtained from the samples of teachers completing postgraduate studies at other Polish universities. Moreover, the studies were not longitudinal. The measurement was made one time, and it was not possible to investigate the changes about teachers' creative attitudes and the perceptions of professional competence that could have occurred in a longer time duration.

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## POSTAWY TWÓRCZE NAUCZYCIELI SZKÓŁ PONADPODSTAWOWYCH A ICH KOMPETENCJE ZAWODOWE DOTYCZĄCE KSZTAŁCENIA UCZNIÓW Z NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCIAMI I BEZ NIEPEŁNOSPRAWNOŚCI

**Wprowadzenie:** Kompetencje zawodowe nauczyciela mogą być wyznacznikiem jakości kształcenia ogólnego, specjalnego i włączającego. Natomiast, postawy twórcze nauczycieli mogą przyczynić się do zwiększenia ich motywacji, samoświadomości i dobrostanu psychicznego. Ponadto, kompetencje zawodowe nauczycieli mogą stanowić podłoże dla rozwoju ich kompetencji twórczych, co pozwala na analizę związku między postawami twórczymi pedagogów

a ich spostrzeganymi umiejętnościami w kształceniu uczniów z niepełnosprawnościami i bez specjalnych potrzeb.

**Cel badań:** W prezentowanych badaniach porównano poziomy spostrzeganych kompetencji zawodowych w zakresie kształcenia uczniów z niepełnosprawnościami i tych pełnosprawnych oraz oszacowano związek między postawami twórczymi a wskazanymi kompetencjami w grupie nauczycieli szkół ponadpodstawowych.

**Metoda badań:** Zastosowano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego oraz narzędzia badań: Kwestionariusz Twórczego Zachowania KANH Popka, Kwestionariusz Kompetencji Zawodowych Dla Nauczycieli Byry i Kazanowskiego, krótki kwestionariusz wywiadu adresowany do nauczycieli.

**Wyniki:** Badani nauczyciele przypisują większe znaczenie kompetencjom ewaluacyjnym i innowacyjnym w kształceniu uczniów z niepełnosprawnościami. Natomiast, mając na uwadze pracę z uczniami bez niepełnosprawności nauczyciele wyżej oceniają kompetencje psychologiczne i komunikacyjne. Istnieje związek między postawami twórczymi nauczycieli a oceną ich własnych kompetencji zawodowych w pracy z uczniami z niepełnosprawnościami i bez specjalnych potrzeb. Zależności te są wyraźniejsze w przypadku kształcenia uczniów pełnosprawnych. W świetle wyników badań własnych, hipoteza robocza została częściowo potwierdzona.

**Wnioski:** Otrzymane wyniki utwierdzają nas w przeświadczeniu, że rozwijanie postaw twórczych nauczycieli może sprzyjać podnoszeniu ich kompetencji zawodowych zarówno w kształceniu specjalnym, jak i ogólnodostępnym lub włączającym. Z pedagogicznego punktu widzenia, istotną kwestią jest nie tylko promowanie twórczości uczniów, ale również nauczycieli.

**Słowa kluczowe:** twórczość nauczyciela, postawy twórcze, kompetencje zawodowe nauczyciela, szkoła ponadpodstawowa, specjalne potrzeby edukacyjne