

QUALITY OF PEER INTERACTIONS: AN INDICATOR OF INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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The purpose of this study was to examine peer relationships in children with disabilities in the primary school contexts. Namely, this study aimed to: (1) examine the degree of acceptance and quality of interaction between disabled children and their peers; and (2) investigate the degree of social integration of disabled children in two different school systems (i.e., with and without integration programs for children with disabilities).

The sample included 221 students, 14 out of whom were children with disabilities (8 males). The level of acceptance of children with disabilities by their peers was lower than that of children without disabilities. In addition, there were positive relationships between peer acceptance and the quality and quantity of support received by their peers during small group activities. The most accepted disabled children benefited from higher physical or verbal aids from their peers. Finally, those children who engaged in a higher number of interactions received more physical and verbal reinforcements from their peers.

As far as the second objective of our research is concerned, we found that the quality of interactions among children seemed to be affected by the specific integration processes that schools implemented. Considering the primary role played by the environment, these results underline the need for creating proper and facilitating conditions in primary schools to promote the development of educational strategies for children with disabilities.

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