

Inclusive Education of Pupils in the Czech Republic

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Abstract This paper is devoted to the current issue of inclusive education in the Czech regional educational system. With regard to some initial research data, it brings to light the complex problems of inclusion perceived as making a positive contribution to the pupils, by both headmasters and teachers alike, and at the same time as obstacle that brings harm to those who are educated by means of this inclusion method.

Key words Inclusion, its obstacles and barriers, contributions of inclusive education, factors of successful inclusive education

1. INTRODUCTION

In general, the establishment of the concepts of inclusion and inclusive education can be dated back to the year 1994, when, at the Salamanca Conference the conditions for the pedagogical education of pupils and students with special needs were examined (Průcha, 1995, p. 713). Within the Czech environment, inclusion can be understood as a form of continuation of the Komenský's concept of school as a workshop for humanity, as well as the continuation of Příhoda's concept of a unified school, however the school is conceived in a differentiated manner (Vomáčková, Cihlár, 2012, p. 24). Equally, inclusion can be perceived as a natural continuation of Tolstoy's approach to upbringing and education, when a pupil is both a starting point and a target for the educational process (Vomáčková, 1993, p. 113). Essentially, thus it is not a completely new theme, but a theme newly discovered, which is, under the current conditions of the Czech Republic newly grasped one legislatively (section 16 of School Act No. 561/1994 Coll.), which raises considerable disputes and tensions in the Czech pedagogical, psychological and parental public.

The answer to the question as to why this is so or why this happens is connected with a few facts in reality. One of the main reasons lies, for instance, in the significantly diversified educational system, which was formed in the Czech Republic during the previous quarter of a century and was accepted by the wider general public in the country (which means, in general, that this system is perceived as correct). This system for example enables, as early as 2nd stage of primary school (i.e. after finishing the fifth form, at the pupil's average age of 11 years) to move away from the main educational stream and change the course of study by entering an 8-year grammar school (the official Czech term "gymnázium"). In

principle, it means the departure of the most successful pupils from the second stage of elementary schools and their separation from their peers who were average students or from those who had a lower than average educational potential and who still remain in primary schools. Likewise, the so-called "free choice" from primary schools on the part of parents has an effect on the spirit of segregation or diversification, this time of a spatial character. From primary in which a higher percentage of pupils comes from the so called socially unadaptable families, it happens quite often that the parents of ordinary pupils deregister their children (or give the school notice of their departure) and take them frequently to even "more distant", but "better" schools. Ordinary primary schools in the falling gradient areas, those with prevailing numbers of these socially handicapped pupils and thus they gradually become schools educating only this category of pupils. With this character, these schools come closer to practical schools for handicapped pupils. The possibility of the free choice of school on the part of parents is extended by the possibility of selecting other types of education for children, for instance private schools, selective schools, specialized and professional schools, which strengthen the acceptance of diversification and segregation as normality (an everyday occurrence). Another cause of the segregation configuration of our educational system can be also seen in insufficient professionalism or a checking control system of decisions concerning the pupils or their future career, e.g. a lack of pedagogical and psychological counselling centres (hereinafter PPCC). Based on the pupils' decisions (of course, with the parents' consent and sometimes also after the parents' pressure) the pupils' inclusion occurs a priori, i.e. at the very beginning of the children's educational path. Some pupils start to be excluded from the main educational stream and are placed into special schools for handicapped pupils without being diagnosed as having any mental handicaps (although our legislature forbids this exclusion by means of two amended directives, Directive No. 72/2005 Coll. and Directive No. 147/2011 Coll.). It is the case of gross failure in practice, which, takes "the path of least resistance", suits both the parents who have no interest in their children's education and all ordinary primary schools that do not have to "waste their time" with an insufficient educational level of attainment on the part of their pupils, caused usually by the family conditions in which they live, rather than their level of mental retardation.

Thus the concept of unified education – in the sense of the joint education of all peers of a given age group in one classroom - does not create the current reality in the Czech Republic. Variety,

diversity (heterogeneity) and distinction in school collective teams, in which individuals who have the educative disposition at the super-average level, or average and under-average level, occur only sporadically, and if it happens they appear only in schools with a small number of classes (the so called one-room school). These are in those cases of very small municipalities to which parents have no possibility of taking children in their cars (or who don't enjoy the necessary economic conditions) to a more distant (the so called "better") school, which is not attended by children whose level is insufficient, or children who are neglected or without the basic prerequisites. In 2015, the amended school act (Act No. 561/1994 Coll., 2015) had the ambition to radically change this situation in the name of all pupils' well-being and subsequently also the well-being of the society as a whole.

2. THE ADVANTAGE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION EMANATING FROM THE CONCEPT OF PARETO OPTIMALITY

Inclusive education, as education incorporating all children into ordinary schools, imitates the philosophy of former family communities that strive for the maximum development of children within the framework of availability of their facilities, without "removing children with a certain handicap away" to specialized facilities. This concept focuses on the formation of the concept of creating conditions for managing the "pupils' otherness" by teachers as well as their peers in the standard school classroom. Thus the population of the majority stream is to learn how to accept this 'otherness' of the other pupils and at the same time they should learn how to help their peers who are handicapped in a certain way. On the contrary, these pupils with specific educational needs should have an opportunity "to be witnesses to this type of learning", to participate in the current educational process without being separated and being placed outside the main educational stream; they should learn cooperation, communication and social skills. Primary schools with inclusive orientation are then considered to use the most effective devices for suppression of discriminating attitudes, for the birth of pro-active communities, thus the creation/building of an inclusive society (Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 2013, p. 104). It is possible to agree with the above-mentioned ideas without exception, provided that at least a minimum of two decisive conditions have been fulfilled. We consider the scope of the pupil's handicap and the level of his/her interest in inclusion, along with the family support and family cooperation, to be key factors for the inclusion of a handicapped pupil into the ordinary primary school.

The decisive decision with respect to the first issue, should be objectively provided by a pedagogical and psychological counselling office (or the relevant social and pedagogical centre), the existence of which will be (or will not be) confirmed by the headmaster of the traditional/ordinary school by his consent. The cooperation of the family with the school - as the second necessary condition - should be (in case that parents do not show any interest in their pupils, for instance do not send them to school) shall be ensured by yet another mechanism. An example can be taken from practice on the part of other countries (e.g. Austria and Slovakia, which motivate parents to take part in cooperation by the imposition of the threat of the loss of their social benefits for each day of the pupil's absence in school). Unless both the conditions are ensured in school practice, the situation results in the malfunctioning of the system and the theoretically unambiguous benefit from inclusion, rather transforms into the evil which brings harm to both handicapped children and pupils of the majority educative stream. In addition it also affects negatively even the teachers in ordinary primary schools.

The principle of Pareto optimality (Stiglitz, 1997, p. 126) maintains that advocated and promoted changes are justified by society as a whole only when they change somebody's situation without bringing about any worsening of anybody else's experience. It means that in the case of inclusive education the enforcement of this principle has its limits in practice: the benefits it will bring to pupils must not lower the effect which has been so far available to both pupils of the majority stream in ordinary primary schools and handicapped pupils within the system of special schools. In the case that it is impossible to make a change that would only increase the benefit (of all participating parties and therefore lead to an increase in the benefit to pupils as a whole) without doing any harm to anybody else (which means that the benefit for each pupil would be brought about to the detriment of somebody else, i.e. at the expense of somebody else's deterioration), this change is rated as inefficient and becomes scientifically - and logically as well - unjustifiable.

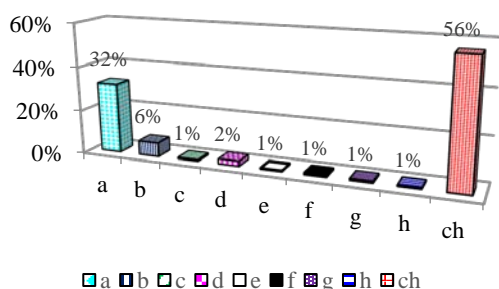
The complexity of this Pareto principle, which was originally an economic principle, results, among other things, also from the fact that Pareto's improvement in the above-mentioned sense, comes with the uncompromising introduction of a whole set of measures (which cause the so called "synergic effect"), while individual measures do not have this effect. In this context, it is possible to fully agree with the authors (Fischer, Škoda, Svoboda, Zilcher, 2014, p. 46) who, referring to the National Action Plan of Inclusive Education, draw notice to the necessity of complexity and adequate preparation on the part of all participants for inclusive education in the educational system in the Czech Republic. Any half measures, imperfection, inconsistency or one-sidedness will not improve the situation. On the contrary, it may even cause deterioration. To make changes and demolish at the same time the already functioning system without paying attention to mutual links and connections and without the setting of some fully-valued compensations is designated by the theory of management as an unprofessional, incompetent or even risky approach (Dědina, Cejthamr, 2005, p. 21). The process management with which the synergic effect is connected, principally focuses on the reasons since it supposes that bad results signal badly developed processes: in our case the question is to ensure that the processes of inclusion within regional education will be leading towards the synergic effect, i.e. that its benefits should be brought to more individuals, which at the same time means that the benefit should not be brought at the expense of somebody else but above the framework of those who have been experiencing it. This is more than a current issue within the framework of the Czech Republic, the political representatives of which has partially changed the legislative adjustment of inclusive education without creating complex and favourable conditions for the implementation thereof for schools from the mainstream educative stream. Therefore, there is a real fear that this partial change will not bring the proclaimed benefit either to the handicapped pupils, or to their peers in the mainstream education.

3. ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS OF HEADMASTERS OF CZECH REGIONAL SCHOOLS

In the year 2015, nearly nine thousand headmasters of regional schools, of whom only 475 joined in the questionnaire survey of the obstacles to inclusion and school needs, were addressed and asked to pay attention to a key question, i.e. to inclusion (at least for a short period of 10 minutes of their working time). We have to admit that within the wide scope of reactions to this call, is hidden the reaction of these schools to this theme as well as to the willingness on their part to work on it. The greatest part of the headmasters' willingness to co-operate (41%) was formed by the headmasters from the schools operating in the municipalities of up to three thousand inhabitants (Vomáčková et al., 2015, p. 140). By means of

research, it was subsequently proved that this very group is most active in the inclusion process in practice and it comes closest to the ideal of creating the conditions for the harmonious inclusion of pupils with special needs (hereinafter "PSN") in class teams of the majority population in ordinary primary schools. Why is that so? It is possible to deduce that such problems relating to the inclusion (incorporation) of pupils into everyday life is, in small municipalities where the people are in closer relationships to one another, is perceived as a current need, or necessity to tackle these pupils' otherness in a human way, and the common commitment and apparent requirement to help them. In this environment, there exists a higher level of solidarity and fellowship and a sharing atmosphere while they try to solve situations which are now very complex or even complicated (it is usually reduced to doing nothing else). Schools in large urban areas, on the contrary, sensitively perceive what is worth the trouble for them – in particular in terms of the economic reward. If they arrive at the conclusion that accepting pupils with special needs (PSN) and taking care of them is not a financially rewarding concern, it is not worth the trouble, which means that they will only mean that they have more work that is not appreciated and paid for in comparison with the schools which reject such pupils (it is a situation when, for instance, the school authority evaluates highly the schools that "do not cause any problems", contrary to the schools that constantly "invent something special"), the schools then prevent themselves from accepting such handicapped pupils. The headmasters who joined in this research project, equally designated social deprivation, (56%) as a kind of handicap with which pupils come to school most frequently (see Graph 1):

- a) with specific defects of learning (32 %),
- b) with specific behavioural defects (6 %),
- c) with mental handicap (1 %),
- d) with defects from the autistic spectrum (2 %),
- e) with audio handicap (1 %),
- f) with visual handicap (1 %),
- g) with physical handicap (1 %),
- h) with combined handicap (1 %),
- i) with social deprivation (56 %).

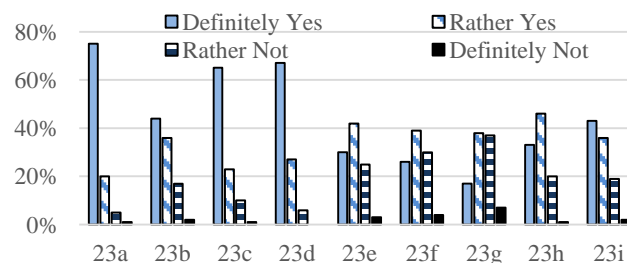


Graph 1: Relative frequency of pupils according to the type of handicap

In the Czech Republic, socially handicapped pupils represent a group that certainly calls for specific attention. On the four-degree scale (definitely yes, rather yes, definitely not, rather not) the headmasters also expressed their scope of awareness of numerous inclusion barriers and their respective level of seriousness. The distribution of the relative frequency of their answers is captured by Graph 2, with the perceived obstacles (a – h) being formed by the following nine categories:

- a) a large number of pupils in the classroom,
- b) insufficient competence on the part of teachers to teach pupils with specific needs,
- c) lack of the teachers' assistants,

- d) school materials and financial inadequacy,
- e) insufficient school counselling,
- f) pro-segregation pressure on the part of the parental public,
- g) teachers' unwillingness to add more duties to their regular work load,
- h) unwillingness on the part of the family to cooperate with the school,
- i) insufficient capability on the part of teachers/headmasters.

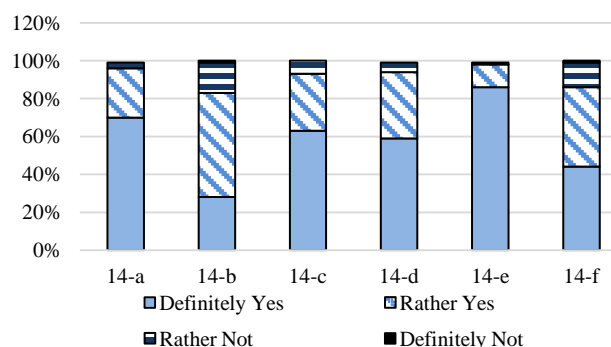


Graph 2: Inclusion barriers according to a given empowerment intensity

This graph demonstrates that the categorical consent (definitely not) dominates in the first four barriers and also in the class which placed as the last one in terms of its order (a: in supernumerary classes 75 %, d: material and financial insufficiency 67 %, e: a lack of assistants 65 %, b: teachers' incompetency to work with SVP pupils 44 %, i: lack of empowerment s on the part of both teachers and headmasters 43 %). On the contrary, disagreement was expressed more frequently (the aggregate of definitely not and rather not) in factor g: the teachers do not wish to add to their work (44 %), f: pro-segregational pressure on the part of the public (34 %), e: insufficient school counselling (28 %), but also in the factor h: unwillingness on the part of the family to cooperate, as well as in the following i: insufficient empowerment on the part of teachers/headmasters.

The prior condition necessary for a successful inclusive education, mentioned before only theoretically – is cooperation of the family and school – and this has been confirmed by headmasters in the following statements. When asked on what the effect of inclusion depends most of all, they assessed the below stated factors on a four-degree scale – see Graph 3:

- a) the quality of teacher preparation,
- b) experience and length of teachers' practice,
- c) material and financial conditions of the school, level of counselling (SPC/Special pedagogical centres, PPCC/Pedagogical and psychological counselling centres, etc.),
- d) family co-operation,
- e) family policy of the state (in socially handicapped pupils).

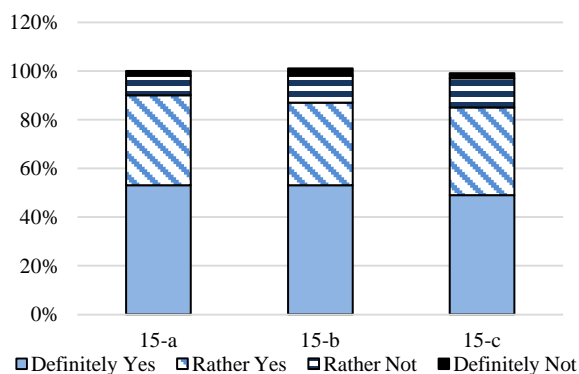


Graph 3: Factors on which the success of inclusive education depends

As it is evident from the above graph, the headmasters have connected inclusive education primarily with the level of cooperation between families and school (categorical assent has been expressed to this cooperation by 86 % of headmasters), secondarily with the quality of professional teacher preparation (categorical assent has been expressed in this issue by 70 % of headmasters), and in the third place with the level of material and financial background (categorical assent has been expressed to this level of preparation by 63 %). All in all, it is possible to summarize that all the given factors have been perceived by headmasters as the factor that cannot be overlooked (non omittable) from the point of view of inclusion. As far as the professional preparation of teachers is concerned, it is only possible to hypothesise with regret that until the present day, the requirements of the Accreditation Board of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Education for the pedagogical and psychological minimum for the graduation from any of the 761 existing teacher-training branches, which can be studied in the Czech Republic (Douřák, Škoda, 2014, pp. 818-837), have not been unified. Along with nine pedagogical faculties, these teacher-training branches are at the same time being offered by 37 other, professional faculties, which underestimate with the consent of the Accreditation Board the pedagogical and psychological competences of their graduates and overestimate their professional competences. Thus it can easily happen in the teaching practice of regional schools that, for instance, a teacher of mathematics masters derivations and integrals in a perfect way, but he cannot cope either with the decreased attention on the part of pupils with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), or possessing defect of the autistic spectrum in his pupils. Unfortunately, the quality of professional preparation of regional school teachers will thus have a system error, which will remain in existence and from the point of view of the efficiency of inclusive education this will not make the situation in our schools easier for headmasters of these regional schools. Another question dealt with by the research survey was looking at the testing of tools supporting the inclusion of pupils with a social handicap. It was investigating with headmasters from regional schools whether and to what extent they consider, in terms of inclusive education of these pupils, the following criteria/items as highly demanding:

- introduction of their compulsory attendance to kindergartens,
- fixation of the payment of social benefits (or contributions for the care of pupils with special needs) to the parents of these children for their school attendance and their educational attainment (i.e. for their overall mark)
- their automatic right to a minimum of one pedagogue's assistant per one class in which these students participate.

The results of the investigation are projected into Graph 4.



Graph 4: Standpoints of headmasters concerning the use of the tools of inclusion in socially handicapped pupils

In the group of socially handicapped pupils, the categorical headmasters' assent to the necessity of the tools referred to above has been significantly balanced and strong. In the case of obligatory attendance of kindergartens and in the case of the connection of allowances for the child's care with the pupil's attendance and their educational attainment the headmasters have expressed the following consents: definitely yes in 53 % and in the case of a minimum number of one pedagogue's assistant per class they expressed their categorical consent in 49% of cases. Across all the regions, the headmasters came from and across individual types of regional schools headmaster expressing their being aware and convinced of the necessity of the above-mentioned tools for the efficiency of inclusion. Unfortunately, there does not exist any immediate co-operation in the Czech Republic between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and thus it will be impossible to expect the coordination of school and family policy in the next period of time, in the interest of creating the above-mentioned real conditions for the development of socially-handicapped pupils within the process of inclusive education.

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the idea of inclusive education into the practice of Czech regional schools, has its obstacles and limitations given not only by objective circumstances, but also by some subjective approaches of individual actors within this complex process. The above-mentioned objective obstacles are connected in particular with legislature and the financial funding necessary for the implementation of this process, while its subjective obstacles result predominantly from imperfections on the part of individual actors stemming from the process of inclusion. It is concerned not only with teachers and pupils, but also the pupils' parents, the whole school management headed by the school headmaster, but it also includes the educational authority that established the school, and includes also the Czech School Inspection, but even the Accreditation Board of the Czech Rep. Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Education. The above-mentioned subjective obstacles depend on the measure of participation with which each of the participants, or proponents of inclusion/ manifests him- or herself in the following four dimensions: "to know- to be able to do – to be allowed to do and to have a desire to do (to want). In particular, each pupil's subjective motivation and interest in positive change in the educative attainment in favour of his or her development can be decisive for inclusive education, within the rigid objective conditions set for this education, from the point of view of its benefit for the majority of the pupils' population and even for those with a handicap.

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