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Equality in Educational System as a Challenge for Future Teachers

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Abstract

The contribution summarises theoretical data for requirement of justice on the Czech educational system. Many experts suppose that justice is the necessary condition of the quality of education. There can not be effectiveness without justice. What led to the greater emphasis on integration and inclusive education was the emphasis of individual differences and individual needs of pupils.

Keywords: Justice, fair opportunity, right for education, quality of education, integration, inclusion

1. Introduction

One of the basic human rights is the right to education. This inalienable fundamental right, to which everyone is entitled, is valid for both healthy persons, with a good social background, and for persons with disabilities, disadvantaged and from a worse socio-economic background. The government is obliged to provide such education which allows every person to maximize their potential and thus helping find the best possible place in a society. This fact is declared in legal documents to which the Czech Republic is legally bound. They include mainly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Education Act and also the Anti-discrimination Act. Everyone in the Czech Republic is entitled to such approach of individual branches of the educational system which will fully maximize his or her potential. A person should then be guaranteed equal and high-quality education. It may be deduced that this right requires our educational system to be just.

2. Inclusion/integration as a fulfillment of justice in education

The way we understand justice varies locally, in time, based on our profession and also from person to person. We understand justice based on two principles. The first principle claims that *each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others*. The second states that *social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that (a) they are to be of the greatest benefit to the least-advantaged members of society and (b) offices and positions must be open to everyone under conditions of fair equality of opportunity* (Rawls, 1995). The justice discourse is very complex, mainly in morality and politics. For our purposes, however, these global theoretical discussions which stem from Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* and deal with philosophical aspects of justice, are not relevant as we will focus on justice in education.

The concept of justice in education has, in recent years, profiled into a concept of equal opportunities which may be understood in their individual aspects as equality in access, conditions or as an equality of results. PISA studies have confirmed that some of the countries which achieve excellent results in education also know how to decrease educational inequalities. Additionally, the TIMSS 1995 results show possibilities for a high-quality education

functioning in a just system (Vanderberghe, 2001). This is what leads many experts to claim that *justice is a necessary condition for a high-quality education*, and that *it cannot be effective without being just* (Greber, 2006).

The Czech educational system nowadays is characterized as segregate, separate, or, if you like, rather selective, which might be summed up simply as follows: this system simply excludes certain individuals and does not approach them thus righteously because it does not grant the possibility to fulfill the basic human right to education without exception. Not only for those reasons it is that many experts appeal for transformation of the educational system in the Czech Republic “in a pro-inclusive direction”, which seems to be more righteous in its foundations than the current one.

2.1. Inclusion

Inclusion in education belongs in the Czech Republic in the past decade to a much mentioned topic not only in expert public, but also at the political scene. For certain representatives of political parties, this topic became a tool to visualize oneself, eventually to create attractive gestures and namely because of that is inclusion public-wide approached more emotionally than constructively. The whole dilemma is being paralyzed by this process and it is not even thriving to introduce an expert discussion for its further development for the benefit of the whole society, but namely to the benefit of making the education system of the Czech Republic more effective.

Understanding the inclusion and connected concepts is various. The most common is the antagonism at interpretation of the essence of the inclusive education and following also the varying perception of target groups, which should be affected by inclusive education. In these points we get simplifying formulations and biased images of inclusion being focused mainly on minority groups, which are thus being a target of an affirmative action or, in other words, the state tries to enforce so called affirmative action in here. Inclusion in education is nowadays mostly accepted as a school service above standard which is connected with a huge effort on the part of the pedagogical staff, who do not perceive it as a natural part of their workload but more as an extra task. Only the fact that some individuals were successfully placed within a common school and an adequate schooling was thus granted to them, is perceived positive. I have outlined only some of simplifying and often frequented viewpoints, which I will be trying to explain in this paper so that a reader could create a clearer and more complex image of the inclusion/exclusion topic in education.

Inclusion is a concept which in general represents closure, ending, and involvement into something (Petráčkova a Kraus, 1995). Inclusive education can be subordinated to a social inclusion, which affects all of the aspects of human life and where also, apart from education, belongs the area of work, leisure time activities, housing, etc. Inclusive education significantly supports social inclusion which tries to prevent, or remove existing social exclusion, in other words exclusion from society, isolation. (Pančocha, 2008)

The essence of an inclusive education is a change in viewing a child which fails within the educational system. In such a failure of a child, it is necessary to seek barriers in the system which is not sufficiently open to the needs of an individual and not to seek those in an individual and thus stigmatize him. Every child has a unique characteristics, interests, competences, and educational needs. Not only thanks to a change in atmosphere of a school, the inclusive education allows to place children with specific needs to a mainstream, including heavily handicapped ones (Průcha, Mareš a Walterová, 2008).

Inclusion principle implies that common schools should educate all children no matter what their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, language, or other conditions are. Common schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means for suppressing discriminative attitudes, for creation of helpful communities, creation of inclusive society. (The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, UNESCO, 1994., Art. 2)

According to Lechta (2010) it is necessary to comprehend that acceptance of heterogeneity in inclusive education contains apart from a humane aspect also a factor simplifying workload of a common school staff, because a need to work with every one of them in a same way and achieve in every one of them the same goals, is no more present.

Inclusion is such an educational system which allows all children to attend common basic schools. Teachers in inclusively oriented schools must treat every pupil individually as a unique personality. Not only classwork, but also the whole organization and philosophy of a school is based on an individualized approach to the children. Every child has its educational strategy which is adjusted to its competences, talents, and handicaps. Classwork in

inclusive schools is focused mainly on making every child exploit fully its potential and at once taught him or her to communicate and cooperate with others. Diversity of children is then perceived as an opportunity to develop respect to themselves and others, not as a problem or a burden. In inclusively oriented school, no children with needs and children without them, no disabled and intact, no handicapped or sound are differentiated. Everyone is comprehended as an individual who show a need to respect his or her personal specifics.

It is important to also realize that inclusion is not a state but a process. There is no moment in which we could state that since this moment a school is entirely inclusive. Inclusion is a way, development, a longitudinal process, in which we try to seek optimal solutions for enforcing the idea of inclusion, and that is *an effective education of all children in a main-common educational stream*.

2.2. Integration

The concept which is usually closely linked to inclusion is integration, which generally means consolidation, reintegration, unification (Petráčková a Kraus, 1995). Often, the concepts of integration and inclusion are being matched or, on the other hand, there are interpretations which put those two concepts to opposition. World Health Organization WHO characterizes integration as a social rehabilitation, an ability of a concrete person to participate in objectively-social relationships. Integration is thus a state in which a disabled person put up with its disability, lives and cooperates with non-disabled people and exhibits achievements and creates values, which a society of intact people admits as equal, socially significant and needed (Pipeková, 1998).

Integrated education is understood as approaches and ways of involving pupils with special educational needs into mainstream education and common schools. The goal is to provide even to pupils with heavy and permanent disabilities a common experience with their sound peers and at once respect their specific needs (Průcha, Mareš a Walterová, 2008).

Lechta (2010) warns that given the contemporary state of disabled children, disturbed children, or endangered children education, or more precisely, an application of inclusion education principled in the Czech and Slovak Republics, it is possible to state that a temporary period between integration and inclusion is under way nowadays, and it is best described by a doublet inclusion/integration. It is nevertheless obvious that if we consider the overall trend, the Czech and Slovak Republics both committed themselves to enforce inclusive education. Integration is being described as a contemporary existence of different subgroups next to each other but children with disabilities may under certain support attend common schools. Principally, it is a dual system where there is in parallel functioning both integrative and segregate education. In case the integration is unsuccessful, the child can get back to a special institution.

Integration is, unlike inclusion, embedded in the law and is thus a term which one may come across most often in schools. In nowadays schooling conditions two main types of integration allowed by law may be found. It is an individual integration and a group integration. Individual integration means an education of a pupil-individual in a common school or his/her placement to a special school intended for pupils with different types of disability. Group integration means that a pupil is taught in class, ward or group established for pupils with disability (or other type of dissimilarity) in a common school or in a special school intended for pupils with different types of disability. If we want to speak about an accord with inclusion at this moment, we, of course, must underline in here that only such an option is acceptable in which an individual or group integration is implemented in common schools.

Integration is according to Hájková and Stmadová (2010) nowadays a wide international movement for enforcement of human right to an equal and just participation on a common, non-excluding and non-separating culture. In education it practically means an inclusion of children with special educational needs into common basic schools and setting conditions for their education in such a fashion so that they could achieve a functional minimum.

2.3. Inclusion vs. integration

We may discover a triple understanding of a relation between integration and inclusion, or, in other words, it is a kind of three-dimensional approach of inclusive education:

1. Inclusion and integration are more or less identical concepts.
2. Inclusion is improvement, “optimized” integration, its better option.

3. Inclusion as an absolutely different (sometimes it is even mentioned “opposite”) approach which presumes a placement of all children into a common school, is also accordingly prepared for it and unconditionally accepts special needs of all children. It principally does not separate children with special educational needs and without them. It works naturally towards a heterogeneous structure of a group and every individual is thus becoming an object of an individualized approach.

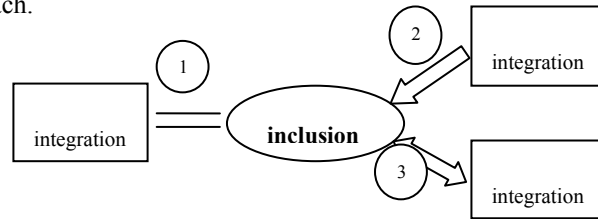


Figure 1. Triple interpretation of a relationship of an inclusion and integration.

In case of the first two points, it would be only about doubling or widening of one term, which is not desirable neither vocationally beneficial. Given the fact that inclusion is moreover an independent pedagogical trend or, if you like, a concept, thus we perceive a third point of an aforementioned list as a correct one.

The fact that it is not only an identical or a widening labeling of the same thing (point 1 and 2) can be illustrated by other contemplations as well. Inclusion is perceived as a process, not as a state which we usually point out in integration. Both terms have of course embedded both theoretical and practical aspects. Nevertheless the integration is more of a matter of practice than a philosophically-vocational concept. In integration, it is mostly an actual placement of an individual, in other words an implementation of all necessary measures towards an acceptance of an individual into a group or a society. Integration may thus be perceived as a tool, mechanism, or a measure. On the other hand, the inclusion is seen as a system, trend, or a concept.

We may further contemplate who and to what extent is affected by inclusion and integration. In connection with integration, we always talk about an individual or a group, inclusion is, by contrast, always tries to perceive a society, a school, or a community, as a an entirety and subsequently only individualizes an approach towards an individual. The main contradiction may be seen even in another aspect of both terms, and that is a viewpoint of children with special educational needs. In integration, child has to “deserve” a placement into a common basic school. Child is forced to prove to everybody that it deserves the placement and that it can manage new environment and also demands. By contrast, in inclusion, the child is automatically accepted and there are no conditions of acceptance, it is his natural right and a school is striving to set conditions for specifics of a child. Different is even a perception of a possible failure of an individual. In integration, the failure of an individual is explained using his potential and abilities. In inclusion, the failure implies a failure of a system and not the failure of an individual. Possibilities of reparations are sought in a system and not by “re-setting” the individual.

3. An appeal not only to future teachers

A perception of an inclusion/integration at basic schools have been being monitored for a long time now within the frame of a project “Fair School” (project of League for Human Rights) which is a platform to enforce inclusion in the educational system of the Czech Republic. In the framework of an extension research project provided by an American embassy in the Czech Republic “Inclusive Education Index – SEZ800-11-GR-032”, which is implemented by the League for Human Rights-Fair School altogether with an institute for a Research of Inclusive Education at Masaryk University, we conducted Focus Groups with principals and teachers of basic schools. Results of these qualitative probes cannot be generalized but they helped us to develop a picture concerning opinions on inclusion/integration in a schooling practice.

The Czech teachers perceive inclusion mainly as a work for a teacher, they do not link it as much with philosophical or value categories as the principals do. In a discussion, they were much less united and had much less positive attitudes towards inclusion, they mentioned a number of problems and difficult situations, obstacles to inclusion on a system level (lack of time for an effective communication among the pedagogical staff members, high numbers of pupils in the classrooms), financial (too little finances to both appraise an above-standard work of a

teacher and a purchase of utilities as well), even personal (ambiguity of pedagogical staff members in connection to inclusion, non-acceptance of children by their peers, objections from parents towards certain types of implemented pupils). Many statements and also mentioned examples from the practice show towards a not very strong identification of teachers with inclusion ideas which they perceive more as troublesome. It is obvious that inclusion has on different schools highly various representation and proceeds with a differing efforts of teachers and under different conditions (for instance an existence/nonexistence of a school psychologist or a special pedagogical staff, differing numbers of pupils in the classrooms, various style of communicating with peers or an integrated class, which sometimes works as a “prevention” and in other cases only in case of problems etc.).

When the teachers should mention what they are proud of, their statements mostly considered, as they noted themselves, a little joys, they do not encounter much acclamation or appreciation in their job. They emphasized that they are most pleased by a positive feedback from parents and also an awareness of the fact that children, especially those which were perceived as problem at the beginning, are well accepted by others, that they like attending school and enjoy schooling. The fact that the children look forward to going to school and feel good in there, is particularly important in pupils with complicated social background and family relationships, when they find a helpful and positive place in school. They are also glad for a visible progress of integrated children, which is due to a cooperation of all people involved.

As 3 basic points which are by pedagogical staff members connected to inclusion/integration are thus: inclusion is an extra workload and differs from a work in a “common” classroom; inclusion is a situation which occurs only in a moment when some pupils fail during education; inclusion is not a commonplace part of teachers’ profession but it is something which is based on a willingness of a teacher to work “above a plan”. From the aforementioned may be concluded that a pathway which shall lead us towards a more just-inclusive schooling is still very long. Given the legal framework of the Czech Republic and international engagements from which a strengthening pressure towards implementing an inclusion into practice is obvious, one might presume that the stress is put namely to a future-teacher preparation so that the aforementioned obstacles are removed as soon as possible and teachers perceived inclusion as something natural. Unfortunately, in most institutions dealing with educating of future or current teachers in the Czech Republic there is no classwork under way which would ensure an effective preparation of teachers of an inclusive class/school. How can we count on a change of attitudes of future teachers when we leave them in a belief that a selective schooling is alright and correct?

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