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INTEGRATION DISABLED CHILD IN A SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The concept of **integration** is a key category of modern European thinking about people with disabilities. The very term, however, is not clear semantically. In a narrow sense, integration comes to guaranteeing people with disabilities the right to learn, if possible, together with other, healthy people. Simultaneously in a broader sense, integration means preparing people with disabilities to live in a society of people without disabilities and, at the same time, teaching healthy people to accept the disabled. According to K. Barłóg¹ "integration expresses itself in such a mutual relationship of the fully able people with the disabled in which everyone has the same rights, everyone shares the same values, and this provides the two groups with identical conditions for a maximal, comprehensive development."

Notion of integration is also a legal category. In the Polish Act on Social Welfare², it is stated that "disabled people who have limited mobility or limited communication skills are to be offered assistance in the framework of social welfare to enable them to perform socially active role and integrate with the environment."

The main objective of social integration of the disabled, in particular via special inclusive schools, is to create a natural environment and good conditions for the disabled and their development, learning, work and leisure. A. Hulek³ recognizes this goal as enabling the disabled to lead a normal life: to participate in educational process at all its levels, to draw from cultural achievements and widely available forms of active free time spending.

W. Dykcik⁴ treats social integration as "a social and educational movement" and attributes it quite grandiloquent goals such as:

- ✓ combating segregation,
- ✓ counteracting isolation,
- ✓ fighting stigmatization,
- ✓ overcoming intolerance, and
- ✓ liquidation of discrimination against people with disabilities.

Social integration of persons with disabilities constitutes a basis for normalization of their status in the natural social environment. As M. Adamczyk and A. Ładyżyński⁵ assert, this state of normalization can be achieved only when all the factors in the setting of everyday life of the disabled are put in such interrelations which allow for perceiving disability as a natural phenomenon (simply a difference) and for believing that we all have the right to be different. So, for instance the teacher should create such conditions in the classroom which include all the students in functioning of the group so that equal rights are respected and nobody has a sense of isolation.

The social integration of people with disabilities is a humanistic trend that opposes isolation and discrimination. This tradition was born, and was already popular, in the sixties in Denmark and Scandinavia, and came to Poland in the early seventies. A leading proponent of this thought was Alexander Hulek.

¹ Barłóg: Zintegrowana edukacja w szkole, Edukacja i dialog, 1996, p.39-43

² A.Nowak: Wybrane edukacyjne i prawne aspekty niepełnosprawności, Kraków, Impuls, 1999, p.5

³ A. Hulek: Pedagogika rewalidacyjna, Warszawa, PWN, 1980, p.493

⁴ W. Dykcik (ed.): Pedagogika Specjalna, Poznań, 2001, Wyd. Nauk. Uniwersytetu im. A. Mickiewicza,

⁵ M.Adamczyk, A. Ładyżyński; Edukacja w krajach rozwiniętych, Stalowa Wola, Ofic. Wyd. Fundacji Uniwersyteckiej, 1999

The idea of integration, despite various barriers it faced, gained wide acceptance and has produced many positive changes in the lives of people with disabilities. These changes concern, especially, children with disabilities, bringing them special forms of assistance from the very first days of life, allowing for their growing up in their families, and creating appropriate conditions for their development and education.

In today's world we seek to join education and upbringing of children physically and intellectually fit and variously disabled children. This phenomenon takes the name of **inclusive education**.⁶ Already in the seventies A. Hulek spread the notion of "an inclusive educational system", which consists in maximal integration of all children and teenagers (healthy ones and those with health problems) in ordinary schools and other educational institutions in order to enable the disadvantaged (to every possible extent) to grow up in a peer group.

In Silesian regions of Poland (where I work) we can also see the development of inclusive education. In public schools, integration groups are being created. Such classes are composed of both healthy pupils and pupils with disabilities of varying degrees.

According to M. Zaorska and A. Pasymowski⁷ inclusive education better prepares for a normal life within the society. Through contacts with non-disabled peers, by playing together, by same recreation, hobbies and through other joint activities it better stimulates growth, activates and strengthens compensatory mechanisms and, consequently, improves the quality of life of the disabled.

Based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and on the World Declaration on Education For All (1990) we have an obligation to ensure that every child in Poland has access to education at an appropriate level. In this context, educational needs of disabled children require special care and attention. This is due to deficits that can be noticed in the process of their development in various areas, namely: physical, motor, mental, motivational and numerous aspects of the area of social adaptability.

According to the decree of the Minister of National Education in Poland (1993), today, we have three organizational forms of education for children with disabilities:

- ✓ full and natural integration - segmental integration in mainstream schools or inclusive school integration, in which all classes are integral,
- ✓ partial integration - pre-school special classes, special school classes, and
- ✓ educational streaming in special schools.

Selecting forms of training and education should be based on the psychophysical abilities of the child, on the results of the analysis of diagnostic tests, and on pedagogical, psychological, social and medical findings. Such thorough research, as R. Kościelak⁸ mentions, is necessary to decide which form of education creates favourable conditions for the adequate development of a disabled child.

The Education Act in Poland creates the possibility for children with disabilities to participate in public education and inclusive educational settings. Under that law the admission of a child to an inclusive class is based on the opinion of Guidance and Counseling Centre, which determines the abilities of the child and points out the ways and methods for its further development. Additional basis for admission to the inclusive class is the finding of disability of qualified specialists in the field of special education.

A. Florek⁹ presents three models of integration:

• **MODEL 1: Creating of integrative-inclusive groups through:**

⁶ A Hulek, as before, p.439

⁷ M.Zaorska, A.Pasymoski: Integracyjny system kształcenia i wychowania „za” i „przeciw” integracji. In: W. Dykcik(ed.) Społeczeństwo wobec autonomii osób niepełnosprawnych, Poznań 1996, ERUDITUS

⁸ R.Kościelak: Funkcjonowanie psychospołeczne osób niepełnosprawnych umysłowo, Warszawa, 1996, WSiP

⁹ A.Florek: Różne modele integracji, Dyrektor szkoły 2, 1999, p.12-13

- reduction of the number of non-disabled children in the group,
- increasing of the number of teachers,
- including in so formed group of several children with disabilities.

According to these assumptions the class should have between 15 and 20 children, among whom 25-35% of children are the ones with disabilities. The didactic process is then entrusted to two teachers: general (subject) teacher and assisting teacher. Integration facilities are converted from regular units or from the beginning created as inclusive.

• **MODEL 2: Teaching children with disabilities in the inclusive class:**

A student in the classroom is supported by the assisting teachers. The integrative class has two assisting teachers: one for humanities and one for sciences. The student also receives advice from the school psychologist and specialists in the specific type of disability. If there is such need, additional revalidation classes are assigned to a student, where (s)he has a chance to compensate for deficiencies and learning difficulties. This task is completed by a teacher specializing in the education of children with a specific type of disability.

• **MODEL 3: Integration of the disabled child to the class (group) in the regular school.**

In the model discussed earlier, the environment adapts to the needs of the child. In this case the child has to cope with demands of the environment, such demands often being the same for regular and disabled children. Usually within this model only children with minor disabilities (who have good intellectual capabilities, mobility and sufficiently well developed senses) may be educated. While in the previous models the success of integration lies primarily with the institutions, here the child is fully responsible for successful integration.

The range of different forms of inclusive education increases every year. In the last decade, inclusive institutions provide new learning opportunities for children with disabilities. J. Bogucka¹⁰ reports: "According to data compiled by the Methodological Centre for Psychological and Pedagogical Assistance (MEN) - number of such institutions is growing. Their most dynamic development occurred between 1994 and 1997, when local governments were taking over educational institutions, showing a great concern for their proper development." The changes mentioned in the quotation above, J. Bogucka presents in the following table:

Type of institution	Number of institutions with inclusive classes					
	1989-1990	1999-1991	1993-1994	1996-1997	1998-1999	2000-2002
Kindergartens	1	12	58	105	160	196
Schools	-	2	26	162	295	368

Bogucka draws attention to the fact that most of these establishments are institutions of the inclusive type.

Inclusive schools which opt for full integration attempt to include children with various disabilities in all classes. According to a study by J. Popławska and B. Sierpińska¹¹ the largest group of integrated children are pupils disabled intellectually. Great majority among them are children with borderline impairment, mildly disabled and moderately disabled. Second group, as far as the size is concerned, are children with physical disabilities. The final group consists of children with reduced sensory performance or senses impairments and children with chronic illnesses. Integrating of children with so many types of disability

¹⁰ J. Bogucka: *Szkoła dla wszystkich. X lecie integracji w Polsce*, Warszawa, CMPP-P MEN, 2000, p. 38

¹¹ J. Popławska, B. Sierpińska: *Zacznijmy razem. Dzieci specjalnej troski w szkole podstawowej*, Warszawa, WSiP, 2001,

can be seen as a evidence for "changes in the social attitudes towards the disabled and the transition to a higher stage of understanding their needs in everyday life."¹²

While working as a teacher in an inclusive class I dealt with many disabilities, most of them of the intellectual kind (rather mild) and physical kind (various movement impairments). The classes created for integration are structured in such a way that the curriculum involves education without any tasks possibly antagonizing relations between children, e.g. there is no competition for grades. This way, children may, quoting after J. Bogucka¹³: grow in an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance. Grow in humanity with the motivation to enhance knowledge and improve their personal skills, all according to the old principle of Pestalozzi according to which they have to overcome their personal weaknesses.

Analyzing the results of a research by A. Firkowa-Mankiewicz¹⁴ on the integration of disabled children we can see that "a need for **inclusive education** is emerging". By "inclusive" we mean such a system of education where students with special needs (arising from their disability) are subjected to education in public schools located near their place of residence together with their healthy peers.

Such education:

- ✓ promotes positive attitudes,
- ✓ deals with the development of both student and teacher, and of their relationship
- ✓ means a commitment to each child
- ✓ benefits the society by creating more flexible schools better equipped to satisfy the needs of all students.

Having analyzed plenty of the applications from parents seeking to enroll a child to the inclusive class, I can say that the choice of the class and the school is never accidental. Primarily, parents are guided in this choice by the location of the school: it must be near their place of residence.

Evolution towards inclusive education in schools must be focused on improvement and development. This applies to improving teachers' skills, making curricula and teaching methods more flexible, in order to stimulate the development of the competence of teachers and disseminate such an atmosphere that will allow for more and more flexibility in responding to the needs of all children of the community.¹⁵

This may be possible only through continuous raising of the qualifications of teachers who are already working and with introduction of new models for training of the new staff. Teachers who are successful in teaching children with disabilities in regular schools emphasize the "importance of sense" - they ensure that what the child has learned has meaning for it. Such teachers also appoint ambitious but feasible goals and ascertain whether students are progressing in their learning. Moreover they give students choices, have high expectations of them, create positive atmosphere, are consistent, encourage students to collaborate. Finally, they, too, monitor pupils' progress and their health, and provide them with feedback on a regular basis.

A well-prepared team of educators and teachers should be able to use in their work multi-media communications, computer technologies, the internet, various picture technologies (videos, DVDs, etc.). K. Ostrowska¹⁶ reminds us that technological developments used in educating and bringing up children with disabilities allow us to

¹² J. Popławska, as before,

¹³ J. Bogucka: *Odpowiedzialna integracja*. Światło i cienie, no1, 1996, p.4

¹⁴ A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz, *Edukacja włączająca – zadaniem na dziś polskiej szkoły*, VII Forum Inicjatyw Oświatowych, 2000

¹⁵ A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz, as before

¹⁶ K. Ostrowska: *Edukacja osób niepełnosprawnych w świetle reform oświaty*, Warszawa: CMPP-P MEN, 2000,

overcome the existing static model of education and progressing towards a more dynamic model - the one that allows to perform the functions of activating children and stimulating their further development.

The study of J. Popławska and B. Sierpińska¹⁷ shows that educating children with disabilities together with children without disabilities is possible, and always brings mutual benefits - both in the spheres of learning and of teaching alike. Thanks to the creation and development of inclusive education, children with disabilities are being prepared for independence, self-determination and effective struggle against the restrictions caused by their disability.

According to Z. Brańka and M. Jachym¹⁸, "healthy children learn from those with disabilities that not everyone has the same abilities and skills, they learn to recognize these differences, but they do not antagonize them. Furthermore, they become aware that their disabled peers are just like them: children who want to learn, play and take part in the same kind of life as anyone their age."

Putting healthy and disabled children in one class makes it necessary for the teacher to have an understanding, empathy and tact in his pedagogical work. At the same time, in such class students learn tolerance and acceptance.

K.J. Zablocki¹⁹ highlights the value of integration with the peer group, which is a necessary condition for the cognitive and social-emotional development of disabled children, which, in turn, also affects their self-esteem. As a teacher in an integrated class, organizing classes and teaching through fun I have the experience that we (teachers) aim at integrating children of different abilities by stimulating their intellectual development and, simultaneously, we teach tolerance and acceptance.

According to R. Koscielak²⁰, in the conditions of integration and inclusiveness students with disabilities acquire the skills necessary for successful social interaction. At the same time, all other students learn tolerance for diversity, free themselves from prejudices towards their disabled peers and get a chance to provide them with assistance. They are often happy to give their support to their disabled classmates: they help them in studying and doing homework, they help at the time of illness and absence from the classroom, e.g. by visiting their friends at home or by discussing school issues by telephone.

Implementation of integration translates into development of individual mental processes, especially processes of cognitive, emotional or motivational nature, and the ones associated with personality and social behaviour. "Upbringing and educating disabled children together with their healthy peers is both rational and useful by all means."²¹

For inclusive education to have a chance to bring tangible benefits to all students, it should become one of the fundamental aspects of the child's development at all its stages, from preschool through elementary school, middle school - to higher education. Therefore, the creation of the proper conditions for the integration requires organizational care and special-educational treatment.

Many authors²² have mentioned factors constituting to the effectiveness of an inclusive educational system. In my work, I adopted the factors mentioned by A. Nowak:

✓ arousing of public awareness and shaping a positive attitude of society towards persons with disabilities;

¹⁷ J. Popławska, B. Sierpińska, *Zacznijmy razem. Dzieci specjalnej troski w szkole podstawowej*, Warszawa, WSiP, 2001,

¹⁸ Z. Brańka, M. Jachym: *Integracja-optimalny model edukacji*, Auxilium Socjale, p.170-176

¹⁹ K. Zablocki: *Dziecko niepełnosprawne, jego rodzina i edukacja*, Warszawa, Zak, 1999 .,

²⁰ R. Kościelak: *Funkcjonowanie psychospołeczne osób niepełnosprawnych umysłowo*, Warszawa WSiP, 1996,

²¹ E. Minczakiewicz: *Dlaczego szkoły nie lubią integracji?* „Edukacja i Dialog” no 8, 2000, p.35-38

²² E.g. M. Marchwicka: *Razem czy osobno*, Edukacja i Dialog no 6, 1996, p.44-49

- ✓ elimination of architectural barriers and urban planning;
- ✓ preparation of highly specialized teaching staff;
- ✓ preparation of parents for the difficulties in upbringing;
- ✓ preparation of a disabled child for everyday life, a comprehensive improvement and mastery of the child's instrumental skills that help them in interpersonal relationships;
- ✓ preparation of healthy, regular students for acceptance of peers with disabilities in the class, education of all children in the understanding and tolerance for "otherness" of people with disabilities;
- ✓ appropriate choice of the integration groups types and the number of groups;
- ✓ creating friendly atmosphere at school;
- ✓ preparation of relevant teaching aids;
- ✓ co-operation of schools with specialized institutions;
- ✓ repeal of laws restricting the social functioning of persons with disabilities.

E. Minczakiewicz²³ also notes that there is an urgent need to extend the pedagogical study of new directions for preparing special educators and teachers of public institutions operating in the reformed system of education to enable them to undertake the difficult tasks of education and teaching in an inclusive educational system. As K. Barłóg²⁴ reminds us, inclusive education is a fair, forward-looking idea but it requires responsibility, in-depth knowledge of conditions and attitudes existing in the real world.

The analysis of literature and research of inclusive education carried out by A. Maciarz²⁵ makes it clear that social attitudes towards children with disabilities are a very important element of integration. They impact the objectives and organization of the system, rehabilitation of the disabled and direct us in where we place such people in the society, what rights, duties and citizen privileges are granted to those persons in social life.

In the end we need to remember that social attitudes are a significant factor in the process of shaping of the concept of a disabled man in the public consciousness. And without acceptance there can be no real inclusion into the society. A properly organized inclusive education can play a major role in the shaping of right attitudes.

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²³ E.Minczakiewicz: *Dlaczego szkoły nie lubią integracji?* „Edukacja i Dialog no 8, 2000, p.35-38

²⁴ K.Barłóg: *Zintegrowana edukacja w szkole*, Edukacja i Dialog no 6, 1996, p.39-43

²⁵ A.Maciarz: *Z teorii badań społecznej integracji dzieci niepełnosprawnych*, Kraków, Impuls, 1999, p.25

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ІНТЕГРАЦІЯ ДИТИНИ-ІНВАЛІДА В СОЦІАЛЬНЕ СЕРЕДОВИЩЕ

У статті розкрито особливості інтеграції дітей з обмеженими можливостями із суспільством, цілі соціальної інтеграції таких дітей, які включають створення природного середовища для розвитку, освіти, роботи та відпочинку. Автор звертається до гуманістичного підходу, підкреслюючи тим не менш значущість проблеми ізоляції і дискримінації людей-інвалідів сьогодні. Викладено цілі та завдання інклюзивної освіти, зазначено його важливість і необхідність. Наведено конкретні моделі інтеграції дітей-інвалідів у навчальний процес.

Ключові слова: інтеграція, інклюзивна освіта, інтегративна освіта.

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ІНТЕГРАЦІЯ РЕБЕНКА-ІНВАЛІДА В СОЦІАЛЬНУ СРЕДУ

В статье раскрыты особенности интеграции детей с ограниченными возможностями с обществом, цели социальной интеграции таких детей, которые включают создание естественной среды для развития, образования, работы и отдыха. Автор обращается к гуманистическому подходу, подчеркивая тем не менее значимость проблемы изоляции и дискриминации людей-инвалидов сегодня. Изложены цели и задачи инклюзивного образования, указаны его важность и необходимость. Приведены конкретные модели интеграции детей-инвалидов в учебный процесс.

Ключевые слова: интеграция, инклюзивное образование, интегративное образование.

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