

Integrated Education of Children with Special Educational Needs

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Abstract:

During the past two decades there were considerable changes in public education in Hungary concerning the joint education (inclusion) of healthy children and children with SEN. The public education law of 1993 has contributed to the integrated education, the approach and requirements of which have helped the reorganization of institutions of public education. Nowadays in Hungary the nursery school teaching of children with SEN takes place both in segregated and in integrated form. However, the statistics show that more and more children with SEN have been integrated into the mainstream nurseries. While in the school year 2005–2006 73% of nursery age children with SEN were participating in the integrated nursery education, in the school year of 2010–2011 77% of nursery age children with SEN were there. This has influenced the demands for the education and work of nursery teachers.

However, the progress towards the open schools has been a slow process, which needs the establishment of socially receptive institutions, development of the needed conditions, cooperation of different institutions and a partner oriented approach. In the interest of efficient nursery education the nursery teachers must have knowledge on integrated/inclusive education and of children with children, and must be prepared for the educational tasks based on the individual differences.

Keywords: disability, special educational needs, integration, inclusion

Integration efforts in Europe

As a result of efforts of the European Union the integration has been granted with bigger and bigger emphasis in the recent years, the aim of which is to decrease the discrimination of Children with SEN in the society and their exclusion. Consequently, the international efforts to integrate the disabled children and children with SEN in the mainstream education have speeded up.

The school integration does not have a long history, as the integration tendencies started to develop only in the 1960s. The reasons for integration were different, and it was realized in different ways in

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different countries of the world. In the Scandinavian countries the so-called “normalization principle” started in the 1950s and is considered the forerunner of integration. The comprehensive theoretical concept has been developed from the movement for changing the thinking about disabled people, recognition of their right to dignified life and the normalization of their life conditions. According to the normalization principle there are no two types of people, namely disabled and healthy people, but there are only people with diversified properties. Thus there are not two types of treatment, there is only one, namely the humanly treatment (Pedagogical Lexicon, 1997). This principle has stated that the disabled people have the right to be accepted by the society as they are. A fundamental aspect of the social model concerns equality for them in the society. This means that all disabled people should be able to get such life models and everyday life conditions, which are identical with those of healthy people of the average society.

In *Sweden* due to the normalization principle, the school integration of impaired children was started at the beginning of 1950s. In *Denmark* the first official decision on school integration was made in 1969. In Denmark in the seventies and eighties more and more attention was paid to the students having learning problems, and about 12–13% of them were integrated into the mainstream schools. Then this ratio has changed, and a significant part of children who had gone to special schools earlier, decreased considerably. In 1991 a Danish Ministry decree ordered that the education of children with SEN had to be carried out in the mainstream schools if their parents agreed and could take care of these children at home, and if they did not need special training in a specialized institution. In the *United States* the rights of disabled people and abolition of segregation were fought for within the frames of the civil rights movements. In the public education law of the USA issued in 1975 the education of all handicapped children was emphasized. They had to be ensured such conditions at schools, which offered the best possible opportunities for their development. However, this law did not describe clearly the integration, but gave way for it. It prescribed that handicapped children have to be educated among their contemporaries, it introduced individual development plans, emphasized the rights of parents in decision about schools of their children as well as pointed to the necessity of revision of experts’ reports. In *Italy* the struggles for the rights of patients undergoing psychiatric treatment and the discrimination of disadvantaged minorities had a serious role in the termination of segregation. The Public Education Act issued in 1977 closed all the special schools, and all the children had to go to the mainstream schools at their place of residence. The Law decreased the

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number of children integrated into a class as well as the number of students in each school class. In Great Britain the Government ordered the revision of special education schools and their efficiency in the end of 1970s. For this purpose a new committee, the so-called Warnock Committee was created. After many years of long work, in its report, the Committee emphasized that the needs of the many handicapped children can be satisfied by the mainstream schools. In the report the children were characterized as “special educational need children” instead of using adjectives like “handicapped” or “mentally challenged”. The expression children with was used in the law of public education issued in 1981 as well. Since then the several times modified British law of public education has supported the integrated education on the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, but has not closed the specialized institutions. These institutions still exist, although both the number of these schools and the number of students in them have decreased. In *Germany* and *The Netherlands* the idea of integration has spread more slowly, as these countries developed a wide range and well-differentiated network of special schools after the Second World War. In these two countries and in Austria the changes towards the integration have been started mainly at the request of parents and rather late, in the middle or end of 1980s (Csányi, 2007).

The introduction of integrated education is supported not only by regulations, but by several international organizations as well. The UN and other international organizations have dealt with the rights of disabled people for a long time. The international bodies of UN have made several declarations on handicapped children. The most important result of the International Year of People with Disabilities organized in 1981 was the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1982. The International Year of Disabled People and the World Programme of Action emphasized the right of disabled people for opportunities identical with those of any other people.

The UN General Assembly issued The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in 1993, which had been elaborated on the experiences gained during the Decade of Disabled People (1983–1992). The 2003 version of the Rules prescribes that the state has to acknowledge the opportunities of equal, integrated education of children with disabilities. According to this document the public educational authorities are responsible for the integrated education of disabled people, and the education of disabled people must be the part of the national curriculum, the curriculum development and the school system. It points out that the compulsory

education must be ensured for children of any type and level of disability. However, the basic rules are not mandatory; they emphasize the basic principles of responsibility, activity and cooperation as well as refer to those vital areas which serve the life quality, the total involvement and equality. The aim of basic rules is to ensure opportunities for disabled people, same rights and responsibilities that the healthy people have (The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities of UN, 2003).

The 2nd paragraph of 23rd Article of Convention on the Rights of the Child of UN issued in 1989 reads that the countries which have signed the convention acknowledge the right of disabled children for the special care. In Hungary the convention was ratified on 14 March 1990, thus the right to special care was incorporated into the Hungarian legal system, which was issued in the Act LXIV of 1991. The Council of Ministers emphasized the priority of integrated education in its 1990 decree. In this decree it was declared that other educational forms may function besides it, but they can only have a secondary role. At the same time the knowledge gained in the special care must be utilized in the integrated education (Halász, 2004).

The *UNESCO* organized several world conferences on schooling and integrated education of disabled children. The inclusion was the main topic of world conferences organized in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. The final declaration of the conference turned to all governments of the world and requested them to make an act on the principles of inclusive education, teaching all children in the mainstream schools except for compelling reasons which demand other measures. The training and advanced training packages for teachers were initiated by the *UNESCO*, and translated into more than 40 languages. In Hungarian it was titled “Special needs in the classrooms” (Csányi, 2007).

According to the *European Informational Network of Education* the strategy of inclusive education can be described by three basic categories: (1) the institutionalized special, separated form of education (segregation) practically ceased (e.g. Sweden, Italy, Spain and Greece), and disabled children are taught only in mainstream schools. There are lots of possibilities for individual development depending on the severity of disability. (2) The inclusion and integration is interpreted in different ways in the educational system of several countries e.g. Denmark, France, Austria and Poland with functioning of well-structured assisting systems. Hungary is also in this category. (3) There is a parallel, separated educational system for the training of students demanding special education in special schools or special classes (Belgium, Switzerland).

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The special schools have become rather service centres. However, the inclusive education can be efficient only if there is a strong support system.

Integrated education in Hungary

In Hungary several professional debates have occurred concerning the integrated education among the experts since the beginning of 1980s. Several experts questioned its viability. At the beginning there were only experimental trials for joint education of disabled and healthy children. In the end of the 1970s the school of blind and poor eyesight children started helping with travelling teachers for those disabled children who were in the mainstream schools. The formal research on integrated education was started at the Department of Impaired Hearing of Bárczi Gusztáv College of Special Education and Teacher Training in 1981. In Budapest and some rural educational institutions some teachers took disabled children with serious hearing impairment in their school classes. The experiences of these teachers have been collected, and based on these experiences the necessary conditions of inclusive education have been drafted. In a few years the departments dealing with physically disabled, impaired eyesight and mildly mentally retarded children also started the research (Csányi, 2007). The spreading of integrated education has been started based on the instructions of the Act of Public Education of 1993. This trend has been supported by the Act XXVI of 1998 about the rights and equal opportunities of people with disabilities. This Act prescribes that any member of the society must be ensured such conditions which assist their social integration. Every child must have the equal opportunities to participate in the institutional education independently from his disabilities. According to Article 13, paragraph 2 “in the case if it is beneficial for the development of abilities of the disabled person, based on the opinion of a committee of rehabilitation experts, the disabled person has to participate in the education of nursery or primary schools together with other children in the same nursery groups or school classes”. In the Constitution of Hungary issued on 25th April 2011 it is clearly stated that every Hungarian citizen has the right to education, and that every child has the right to protection and care needed for their adequate physical, mental and ethical development”. Based on the above mentioned it is clear that the long term plans of the Hungarian educational policy and the Disability Conception of the EU are in accordance.

Based on Article 4, paragraph 23 of Act CXC of 2011 about the public education of children or students with SEN, we state that a child or student needs special treatment, based on an expert opinion given by

a special committee of experts. Children with SEN are considered those suffering from movement, sensory, mental or speech disability, or having multiple disabilities, autism or other psychological developmental disorder (severe learning problems, attention deficit disorder or behavioural issues). Children with SEN have one or some of these disabilities therefore they need special care. Children with SEN have the right to get the necessary pedagogical and conductive pedagogical care within the frames of special treatment based on the level of their disability. The special care must be ensured in the mainstream nurseries based on the opinion of the experts' committee.

Based on the Act on Rights of People with Disabilities of the year 1998 the nursery or school for the education of the disabled child shall be chosen by the parents taking into consideration the advice of the Experts' and Rehabilitation Committee.

However, according to the Act of Public Education only those children with SEN can be educated in the mainstream nurseries, whose satisfactory development can be ensured in the mainstream nursery schools based on the decision of the experts' committee. But there are such cases when the disability is so severe that the development is impossible within the frames of the integrated education. In such a case the disabled child can go exclusively to the special nursery for children with SEN. In the interest of the child the district office may oblige the parents to take the child to the experts' examination and enrol the child to the appropriate educational institution. If the parents fail to meet their obligation in spite of the notice of the district office, the district office shall inform the child welfare office of permanent address or the dwelling place of child if the permanent address is not available. The experts' committee must not designate such a nursery school which could not admit the child due to lack of space.

Types of integrated nursery education

The notion of integration means mergence or assimilation of separate parts into a bigger unit according to the Concise Dictionary of Hungarian Language (Juhász, 1989). In pedagogy the integration means the joint education of disabled and healthy children in the same living and learning space offering optimum opportunities for development of both of them (Réthy, 2002). In public education the integrated education can be interpreted as the tool of creating opportunities and decreasing the inequalities. In pedagogical understanding the integration means the inclusion of disabled, handicapped i.e. children with SEN into the groups of healthy students. The integration makes the mainstream

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nursery schools open for everybody independently from the different capacities.

According to Yvonne Csányi (2007) the integrated education has different levels or types which are the following: (1) local or physical integration, (2) social integration and (3) functional integration (partial or total).

The *local integration* means the simplest version of joint education. In this case children with SEN and the healthy children are in the same building, but practically there is no contact between them. One of the groups is the group of children with SEN, who are dealt with by the special education teacher or the teacher of persons with learning difficulties. However, this is the lowest level of integrated education; the possibility of inclusive education is included in this form, too. The physical proximity makes it possible e.g. joint programs could be organized, but this happens rather rarely.

The *social integration* is the second level of integrated education, which makes the social approach possible. Children with SEN are separated from the healthy ones only for the nursery school lessons, but they are together in their free time (e.g. during playing in the garden). In the mainstream educational institution the group of handicapped children is mixed with the groups of healthy children consciously. The mixing of child groups can be carried out regularly and continuously e.g. free playing, walks, meals and all the afternoon activities. However, the meeting of groups can also be occasional e.g. joint excursions, events, special out-of-school activities.

The *functional integration* is the highest level of inclusive education, when the children are not separated for the nursery school lessons, but they are taught in the same groups. Its simpler version is the *partially functional integration*: in this form the children are in the same groups only in some lessons e.g. in drawing, music and PE lessons. The *total functional integration* is the highest level in which the main aim is the joint education. This means that handicapped children spend all the time among the healthy children in the mainstream institution.

The *reversed integration* is a very rare form of inclusive education. In this form the healthy children are integrated in a special institution.

In Hungary *local integration* is achieved mostly based on the demand of segregation. The *social integration* is realized mainly in the nursery school education and with physically handicapped children. In general the children are separated during the lessons, but they spend nearly all their free time together, and do the free time activities together as well. The *partially functional integration*, which is very popular in other countries, is practically missing from the Hungarian education. In

Hungary the inclusive education is achieved mostly in the form of *total integration*. There are more and more disabled children in the mainstream nurseries.

Levels of integrated nursery education

The notions of integration and inclusion can be understood in the course of their theoretical and practical realization. Thus qualitatively, the integration is realized on two different levels: one of them is the *reception* or *simple integration*, the other is the *total integration* i.e. the *inclusion*. According to Sebba (1996) the difference between the integration and inclusion is that in case of integration the handicapped persons or small groups of handicapped persons are tried to be assimilated into the existing structures of nursery or primary schools, while in case of inclusion, the institution identifies with the idea of inclusion and reshapes the structural frames of realization of curriculum and those conditions which ensure the advancement for all the children (Sebba, 1996 cited by Csányi, 2000: 387). The notions of integration and inclusion can be understood in the course of their theoretical and practical realization. While in case of integration we are speaking about integration of some children into the group of healthy children, the inclusion is the total involvement of children.

In case of *reception (simple integration)* a child is admitted in a mainstream institution, but his or her special features are not really known. The exchange of pedagogical strategy is not fulfilled by the school. The child is expected not to need too much extra attention and to perform similarly to other students. This demands the adaptation of the child to the level of the others. The teacher hardly modifies his or her style or methods. The special care remains the task of the special education teacher. The second, much more developed level is the inclusion (Csányi, 2007). The integrated education in the nursery schools means that the nursery schools undertake the education of Children with SEN if these children can be educated in the mainstream nurseries.

If the *inclusion (total integration)* is realized, the integrating nursery or school is fully prepared for the inclusion of children with SEN. Life, values, methods, personnel and material conditions are developed in such a way that they would fulfil the demands of all children and at the same time they would try the social inclusion as well. All teachers try to adapt to the individual needs of children and consider the individual differentiation to be their main mission. The special education teacher is a co-operating and helping partner of the nursery teacher, in optimum cases even within the lessons. The main features of inclusion in the

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nursery school are the following: (1) the overall management and teaching staff identified with the idea of inclusion; (2) the individual methods of differentiation get an emphasis in the education; (3) the lessons are more diversified and more colourful (frontal, team, pair and individual forms of work are applied); (4) the learning requirements are more flexible; (5) variable evaluation methods are applied; (6) the solution of emerging problems is primarily the task of the mainstream teacher; (7) the special education teacher is in close connection with the nursery teachers; (8) the parents are also involved in different processes; (9) all participants consider the role of social inclusion very important (Csányi, 2001).

Based on the research of Yvonne Csányi (2001) the integrated education has spread more widely recently. According to her, its positive consequences and the difficulties pulling back the efficient inclusive education are the following: *Positive consequences*: (1) new legal regulations; (2) spreading of early development; (3) reorganization of special schools into methodological centres; (4) emergence of inclusive mainstream institutions; (5) publication of handbooks and guidelines; (6) organizing special courses for the teachers of mainstream schools. *Difficulties*: (1) traditional approach of mainstream and special education teachers; (2) use of traditional teaching methods; (3) financial problems; (4) lack of registration of special educational needs; (5) deficiencies of changes in thinking of committees responsible for displacement of children.

Conditions of integrated education and tasks of nursery teachers in it

The mainstream nursery schools must fulfil several conditions in the interest of a successful integration. The *necessary material conditions* are among others the therapeutic resorts, special toys and the adequate size groups. Besides these for the physically disabled children the obstacle clearance (lifts, ramps, special restrooms etc.). The foundation document of the nursery school has to contain what type of handicapped children can the nursery educate and what they do for the development of necessary conditions. The pedagogical program of the nursery school has to include the rehabilitation methods specific to the types of disability. The mainstream nursery school has to prepare its pedagogical program based on the National program of nursery school education and the Guidelines for nursery school education of children with SEN. The aim, fundamental principles and tasks of education of Children with SEN have to be included in pedagogical curriculum. The curriculum has to describe the types and forms of evaluation as well.

The efficient integration also depends on the personnel conditions. Among the *personnel conditions* there are the following: approach and methods of teachers, professional knowledge of special education teachers, their assistance and sensitivity to the problems, the contacts between the special education teacher and the parents, the positive and assisting approach and activity of parents, the attitude of classmates and the personality features of the handicapped child as well as the level of their ability for integration are essentially important.

The most important part of the complex system of conditions is the personality of *nursery school teachers* participating in the integrated nursery school education. Among others their role, relations, direct and indirect expectations and personality traits are the most significant. Integrated education means new challenges for the nursery teachers which need the transformation of traditional roles of teachers. It is very important that the teacher would accept the individual differences and would organize his or her educational work by flexible use of differentiating pedagogical methods. The nursery teacher has to have the necessary knowledge on special educational needs and possibilities of development of children with SEN in the mainstream nursery school groups. The expectations must be harmonized with development rate of the children and the improvement must be ensured in the fields which are adequate for them. In the course of education the improvement must be carried out in playful form and not to be too exhausting for children with SEN. It is also important that the evaluation of the children would take into account the individual abilities and the improvement would be compared to the individual level of development. Among others their tasks are to improve the life quality of children with SEN, decrease their drawbacks, as well as to teach the healthy children for acceptance of otherness, teach them how to help their disadvantaged classmates and improve their tolerance. The nursery teacher has to keep close contact with the special education teacher and the consultant assisting the integration.

The *special education teacher* has manifold tasks. He or she deals directly with children with SEN and follows the development of the given child as well as keeps contact with the parents, helps the work of the nursery teacher, regularly visits the groups, informs the teachers of the institution and coordinates the work of people dealing with children with SEN. Another important aspect of the integration are the *parents*. They have an extremely important role in the successful integration of their child, as they experience the level of integration in the everyday contact with the child, the rate of success and failures, and by continuous help they can decrease the difficulties of the child in the

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nursery. They have to be extremely patient with their child and pay great attention to him or her. They have to know that their child's advancement is much slower than that of the healthy children, becomes tired easily and loses attention. They have to be in continuous contact with the special education teacher. The group also has significant role in the integration. It is very important that the group would be acquainted with the features of disability, the ways of help and the scale of possible help. By the integration their personality might also be enriched. The younger are the healthy children when they meet handicapped mates, the easier is the acceptance. From the point of view of integrated education the personality as well as the type and severity of disability of the *child* are very important. The younger they are, the easier is the acceptance of children who are different from them, and the adaptation to the new situation as well (Csányi, 2000).

Summary

It is observable that during the recent decades the integrated education of children with SEN and healthy children in the mainstream institutions has been more frequent, which poses challenges for the participants in public education. As special educational needs might be in connection with the socio-cultural background and within this, the family problems, the social intervention has to occur both in the educational institutions and out of them. Besides the traditional education and teaching function, the mainstream nursery schools have to undertake special educational and caring tasks. In the interest of efficient integrated education the mainstream educational institutions cannot neglect the education of children having special educational needs, or coming from disadvantaged social backgrounds i.e. the education of those children who are different from the average ones. The integration of children with SEN might be successful if the personnel and material conditions are on optimum level in the mainstream nursery schools. Nowadays most educational experts think that the cooperation and competence of the helping specialists within the institution are one of the most important parameters of quality of education. The *tasks* of nursery teachers in the integrated education of children with SEN include a special and very complete development work.

According to the specialists dealing with this topic the change of social attitude can be one of the most efficient tools in elimination of such social phenomena like prejudice, incidence, fear, reserve, recklessness and regret, which impede the life conditions of handicapped people. For some disabled children, life quality can be easily improved by changing the environment, which assists the social

inclusion of these people. The integrated education may contribute to the change of social thinking as the healthy children can meet their handicapped mates in the mainstream public education institutions. The inclusive education is part of our everyday life, which may help the creation of equality of chances. In this process, the nursery teachers might have decisive role in development and social integration of children with SEN. Their personality and activity may contribute to the education of people in a tolerant and inclusive approach.

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