



Mini Review

ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

Subject of this article are the three main forms of education of children with special educational needs – the individual, differentiated and integrated forms. Focusing on the most important positive and negative characteristics of these forms, the idea is being defended that they are interrelated, complementary and should be used in combination but not opposed.

Key words: individual education, differentiated education, integration in the natural environment

Historically, we can outline three alternative forms of education of children with special educational needs - individual education, differentiated education (education in special educational institutions) and integration in the natural environment.

Unfortunately, nowadays these forms are still opposed. This is particularly noticeable in the integrated and differentiated education. The objective of this article is to shortly present the general characteristics of the three forms of special needs education and to prove the interdependence between them and the necessity to use them in compliance with the specific needs of children with special educational needs. Even if one of the three forms is dominating, elements of the other two forms are also used in practice.

Individual education for deaf, blind or other children with special educational needs, also called "crippled" or "ailing" or other unacceptable by today's standards bynames appeared much later than the education for other citizens in different societies. The earlier

beginning of education for persons without disabilities is indirectly linked to the later appearance of individual education for persons with particularities in the development.

It was not before the 15th-16th century that individual education started appearing as a term. Initially this mainly referred to deaf and blind people.

The attitude towards blind people before and during the above-stated centuries was to a certain extent more favorable than the attitude to deaf people. This was probably due to the fact they learned the language and could speak, so communication with them was possible. Without setting ourselves the task of tracking the chronological order of the described individual experiments of training and methods used (presented herein as examples), we will try to globally describe the general characteristics of individual training.

V. Ivanov notes: "It is accepted that the real start of the training of deaf-and-dumb people was in Spain and was made by Pedro Ponce de León (1508-1584)" (1). J. Wallis (1616-1703) successfully provided individual training to deaf children in England. At the time later on, experiments of individual training of blind persons were described in different countries. R.

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A. Cicare in France, Gerolamo Cardano in Italy (1501-1576), Lana Terzi (1631- 687), Helmont (1614-1699) in the Netherlands and many others also gave their own contribution to the practical implementation of the idea of individual training.

Some of the teachers, who conduct individual training, have described the training process as a whole and, in particular, the methods used by them. Part of the trainees also have also described some moments of their individual training. The books by Helen Keller and Olga Skorohodova are an outstanding example.

This way, thanks to the written information provided by teachers and their students, as well as some contemporaries of the first attempts of individual training, it can be studied and analyzed. Although it has been modified and improved, individual training has not completely lost its significance today. Despite the cultural, historical and economic differences, as well as the different approaches and methods used when working with persons with different impairments, here are the most important positive characteristics of individual training: It directs the attention to the "persons with disabilities". Some medieval beliefs about disabled people, e.g. that their disability is "punishment of God" or that they are "children of the Devil" or "useless" etc., become inconsistent. Their particularities and training abilities become the subject of studies; The teacher's activity is entirely focused on the individual student and is free to decide on the type of training - its organization, subjects, contents and teaching methods; The individual approach is applied in its maximum; The teacher can respond flexibly to sudden changes; The teacher, the student and his parents are in a continuous interaction; The training process takes place in a natural and stress-free environment. The teaching materials are specifically developed for the needs of the particular student.

Along with the positive features of individual training, some negative characteristics also exist. The following ones can be referred to as negative: the students are in a relatively limited social environment; they cannot observe the behaviour of other pupils and modify their own behaviour; they cannot communicate with and learn from other students, who are more

advanced, or take the role of a "teacher of other students"; the students feel constantly "assisted", but they also feel they are constantly "under control"; an individual student cannot get feedback from other students regarding the applicability of learned material. The individual student is not enriched with learning strategies shared by other students. The student cannot understand in a practical way, during the process of training, the importance of mutual support and assistance between classmates, the sharing of successes and failures, the attitude of other student towards his achievements and difficulties.

The above-mentioned characteristics, both positive and negative, are not insignificant and should not be underestimated. That is why the combination of individual and group training, or with the class lesson system of teaching, is not only justified, but necessary. Nowadays, such a combination can be found in individual and lesson classes in special schools, individual classes with rehabilitators, logopedists and resource teachers with children integrated in mainstream schools etc.

Differentiated education of disabled persons also has a rich history. Today it is implemented in different forms - centers, special rooms, and special schools. Differentiated rehabilitation and particularly differentiated training is mainly associated with special schools.

Quite a long time has passed since the creation of the first special schools (in Europe in the 18th century, in Bulgaria several decades later) to nowadays. This gives ground for sharing some thoughts about their role for the persons with special educational needs.

The first organized institutions for persons with sensory disabilities were by their nature educational institutions, and the institutions for persons with mental retardation were mostly medical. In fact, there are three main types of institutions: **Medico-pedagogical, Pedagogical and Christian** - philanthropic (homes at churches, monasteries, etc.).

In this article we will pay special attention to the second type, implemented by creating special classes and special schools. Since the creation of the first classes and special schools to present

days, extensive experience has been gained, which has always been used by specialists to modify some parameters of differentiated education so that it better suits the needs of the children, their parents and the society as a whole. Among some of the most significant positive characteristics, we can mention the following: Realization of the highly humane idea that in a well-organized training process these children are able to master the knowledge and skills acquired by humanity just as any other children; Special schools provide education to a large number of children, and when the education is "mandatory" - to all children. In a school, in contrast to the individual training, students have the opportunity to be taught by many teachers instead of one, which is an indisputable advantage. Academic records, didactic materials and technical resources generally follow the trend of maximum compliance with the characteristics of the students; unfortunately, in recent years this trend has been abandoned and standard programs and textbooks are being introduced through administrative measures. This renders impracticable to a large extent the objectives of the special schools in our country; Students find social support from other children with problems similar to theirs; The relatively small size of the groups (8-12 students on average) allows for a better use of the individual approach in the class-lesson work; The small classes and the conditions in the special schools generally do not create unnecessary stress to students; In some special schools students can also receive vocational training; Parents of the students in special schools also receive such social support from one another; Teachers get to know faster and more efficiently both the individual characteristics of students and the typical features of their disability; They have a better opportunity to exchange experience. The conditions of training, re-training and improvement of students' preparation are created and used more easily; The experience collected in different special schools or by individual teachers can be better promoted among others; There are also some social benefits, such as free food, clothing, accommodation etc.

At the same time, some substantial negative characteristics can be outlined: Even now, despite the efforts of scientists and teachers, the system of special schools remains a relatively

closed system. There is still a lot to be desired with regard to the interpenetration with the mainstream educational system; the students are quite limited in terms of the diversity of models of behavior that they can observe. Students are cut off from family environment, which has a negative impact on their overall development. Additional restrictions appear in special board schools.

Part of the negative characteristics are reduced or softened in the conditions of special classes in mainstream schools, despite the differentiated education. This is particularly true with regard to social contacts, which tend to increase in number and improve in quality.

Integrated training is the third alternative form of education. It can be described as **joint training of children with and without special educational needs, assisted by additionally formed teams of specialists if needed.**

Literary sources more often highlight the activity of these teams with regard to children with special educational needs, but it should be noted that this activity is not of less importance for the other children in the class.

Integrated training is basically a **new educational policy** in many developed countries. The development of our educational policy leads to the acceptance of the idea of integrated education. The practical implementation of this idea is not going fast, but the trend is more and more clearly visible (VI. Radulov (2), P. Korikova – Strezova (3), Kl. D.Grobe (4), M. Schmidtova (5), P. Terziyska(6), Sv. Saeva (7), D. Georgieva (8), etc).

The idea of integrated training goes back to early times - almost to the very beginning of training of children with differences, but its practical implementation as a result-oriented training process started much later. The changed philosophical understanding of society in general, of persons with special needs in particular, the failure to achieve expected results through differentiated training and exercises leading on the other hand to pressure by non-governmental organizations, are among the most important reasons for the creation of a international and national legal frameworks for

integrated training. It should be immediately noted that the latter is being constantly enriched and refined.

Integrated training, as known, is based on modified philosophical concepts. The members of modern societies are divided by the early idea of the society as unitarian. Nowadays, this idea is being replaced by the idea of the macrosocium composed of separate equal microsociums, which are interacting. Microsociums may differ among themselves in ethnic, religious, linguistic or other aspects. A tolerant society perceives all its members as having equal rights and importance.

Iv. Karagiaozov has a wider interpretation of the idea of integration (9). As presumed by the fact that the subjective environment (the child itself) and the objective environment - nature and the social environment are featured by dynamic processes, the author emphasizes the necessity of integration of these processes. This integration, according to the author, can be carried out **in the conditions of both special and mass schools**.

Such views may also be found in some Russian literary sources. Pointing out that the purpose of training deaf children and children with hearing impairment is focused on their development, better education and social adaptation, E. G. Rechitskaya says: "What is more, the system of special training may fully implement the main principles of integration"(10). The specified literary source considers the integration as *external* (integrated training in the natural environment) and *internal* (e.g. joint training of blind children and children with hearing impairment).

A number of American specialists have different points of view. The term "special education" is defined by R. Slavin as follows: "each program, provided to disabled children with as a replacement or supplement of mainstream education in a mainstream class"(11). This definition clearly outlines the idea of the author that differentiated and integrated training should not be opposed but combined when necessary.

The concepts of most American specialists as well as some Western European ones on the integrated and special training differ from the "either-or" concept, i.e. either training in the

natural environment or training in a special school. Both environments are regarded as interrelated and important for the child at least until the time of his full integration in the natural environment. An integrated child may, if necessary, master part of the programs in the natural environment, and another part - in a special school or through additional support. Each integrated student with special needs has an individual program prepared by a team of specialists. Its implementation and any variation thereto shall be approved in writing by the parent. An important component of its structure is reflecting the child's strong points.

The created experience in the field allows American specialists to focus their attention on the following: Careful selection of the model of child integration; Adaptation of educational documentation; Adaptation of communication strategies; Teaching of learning strategies. Widespread use of audio-visual means and appropriate didactic materials; Applying the team principle in working with children; Applying tutoring (support of a child from other children); Creation of a supporting environment.

Updating of the teaching approaches and methods in the context of constructivist theories, whose nature implies that students themselves should reveal and transform the complex information coming from different sources and which attribute an active role to the child. The following aspects are a part of similar approaches: **Learning through discovery** - students are encouraged to discover the meaning of concepts, the principles and methods of solving educational tasks. **Self-regulated learning** - students are encouraged in their attempts to master effective learning strategies. **Provision of a "scaffolding"** - wider support for the child at the beginning followed by gradual restriction of the support and encouraging his initiative.

Integrated education of persons with special educational needs should be viewed in new conceptual frameworks - those of the Social model.

The analysis of the three different forms of education of children with special educational needs leads to the following important

CONCLUSIONS

The three forms have positive and some negative characteristics.

Overcoming the negative aspects could be achieved by combining the three forms and eliminating outdated approaches of the type "either-or". There is sufficient experience to step on.

Universities as institutions, which not only prepare professionals for an active practice, but are scientific centers as well, in which scientific approaches are being developed for integration and intercultural cooperation, must have greater contribution for the implementation of interrelated forms of education, which could provide a better education and supporting environment to children with special educational needs.

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