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From Special Education to Inclusive Education: Changes in the Learning Process of Deaf Pupils

Od edukacji specjalnej do edukacji inkluzyjnej przemiany w procesie kształcenia uczniów niesłyszacych

KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

deaf pupil, special education, integrated education, inclusive education The paper deals with problems in the process of educating deaf pupils. In the face of systemic changes and discussions among representatives of the scientific community and practitioners in the social sciences about an education model for deaf pupils, a system-based triad was established: special education-integrated education-inclusive education, within which attempts are made to reach solutions that would be beneficial to all of the actors involved in these processes. The analysis presents an evaluation of each of the educational systems, not only of experts from among hearing people, but also of hearing parents and those most concerned with their education, i.e., deaf people. The changes presented in this paper and related to the process of educating deaf pupils indicate a broad context of determinants in the implementation of the triad system.

SŁOWA KLUCZE

ABSTRAKT

uczeń niesłyszący, kształcenie specjalne, kształcenie integracyjne, edukacja inkluzyjna Artykuł porusza problematykę procesu kształcenia uczniów niesłyszących. W obliczu systemowych zmian i dyskusji przedstawicieli świata nauki oraz praktyków z obszaru nauk społecznych na temat modelu edukacji uczniów niesłyszących doszło do utworzenia systemowej triady: kształcenie specjalne – kształcenie integracyjne – edukacja włączająca, w obrębie której próbuje się uzyskać korzystne rozwiązania dla wszystkich podmiotów niniejszych procesów. W podjętej analizie zaprezentowano ocenę każdego z systemów kształcenia nie tylko ze strony ekspertów ze środowiska osób słyszących, ale również opinie rodziców słyszących i samych zainteresowanych swoim kształceniem, czyli osób niesłyszących. Zaprezentowane w artykule przemiany dotyczące procesu kształcenia uczniów niesłyszących wskazują na szeroki kontekst uwarunkowań związanych z wdrażaniem systemowej triady.

Introduction

Over the past twenty years, the education policy in Poland and debates of scientists and practitioners of the social sciences about designing the model of education for and supporting the development of deaf students¹ have led to the formation of a systemic triad: special education—integrated education—inclusive education. As there are many dillemas surrounding the search for optimal conditions for such education, the goal of this model is beneficial solutions for all actors in these processes. It is equally important that a genuinely modern model of education should propose alternatives for deaf students, not force them only to passively adapt, but also enable them to participate in such auxiliary activities that they choose and expect.

From Popularizing Access to Education to Being Yourself Among Other People Like You

The dissemination and systematization of access to education for deaf students date back to the 18th century. During this period, in 1770 in Paris, Father Charles Michel de l'Epée (1712–1789) founded the first school for deaf children. In Poland in 1817, Jakub Falkowski opened the Institute of the Deaf, recognized as the first school to educate deaf students, and from 1842 blind students as well. From the beginning of this educational system, labelled special (or segregated) education, its originators tried to guarantee compulsory education for deaf children in special schools and educational

¹ In Polish, the term *uczeń niesłyszący* is used in the social sciences literature and encompasses students with varying degrees of hearing loss. This term is used in accordance with the Ordinance of the Ministry of National Education of August 28, 2017 amending the Ordinance on the Conditions for Organizing Education, Upbringing, and Care for Children and Adolescents with Disabilities and Socially Maladjusted Children in Kindergartens, Schools, and Public or Integrated Facilities (Journal Of Laws 2017, item 1652), based on which the officially accepted term is *gluchy*. This term [meaning deaf] can be used synonymously: it has historical significance in pedagogy and refers to medical issues. It is also worth noting that the word *Gluchy* (spelled with a capital letter) refers to cultural issues and signifies identification with the deaf community, who recognize themselves as culturally and linguistically different.

centers (with or without lodging) by adapting the methods and forms of work to their needs. The emerging network of special schools became a kind of enclave for equalizing educational opportunities. Deaf students were gradually included in the learning process. It was special education that first guaranteed access to education for deaf children by recognizing their right to complete the compulsory education and to ensure a dignified place in society for themselves. Special schools employed qualified specialists. As a reflective practitioner, the teacher of the deaf had to go beyond their substantive and methodological knowledge to meet the challenges of segregated education and the educational needs of the hearing-impaired. They adjusted the requirements to the psychophysical abilities of deaf students, including those with additional developmental disorders/multiple disabilities.

The education offered by special schools practically locked deaf students within the boundaries of the system. Additionally, their autonomy became a point of debate, as they were referred to as the Oralistic Coercion Generation (Podgórska-Jachnik 2013: 113–114).² The teaching methodology was a serious topic of contention.³ It turned out that one of the most difficult, yet responsible choices that a teacher had to make was the decision to use an effective teaching method, i.e., one that allowed them to maintain not only the quality of education, but also to meet the educational needs of deaf students, to prepare them for effective linguistic communication with hearing society.

Since the 1990s, a progressive restructuring of the special education network has been noticeable. Gradually, criticism about the high cost of maintaining special schools intensified. Opponents spoke of problems related to the implementation of the adaptive function of school, according to which deaf students should be equipped with the proper resources of knowledge and skills in order to undertake and carry out various tasks to function successfully in society. Subsequently, another function—that of socialization—was neglected, because deaf students, with various limitations in linguistic communication, were not prepared to perform appropriate

² The "ORA" generation—Oralistic (Coercion) Generation—is an original and conventional term proposed by Dorota Podgórska-Jachnik. It was a generation of late-diagnosed, prosthetized, orally rehabilitated youths deprived of access to the natural sign language.

This problem is discussed in more detail in numerous publications (Dziemidowicz 1996; Kurkowski 1996; Szczepankowski 1999; Cieszyńska 2001; Korzon 2001; Podgórska-Jachnik 2004). In a special way—from the perspective of a legal guardian—Czesław Dziemidowicz (1996: 192–194) questioned the scientific methodology of teaching deaf students. In light of the theory of the mechanism of linguistic cognition, he considers the educational strategy of teaching language to deaf children as a priority to be a mistake, "an incorrect/insane fixation of deaf pedagogy," and describes in the metaphor of seven myths: of work, oral speech, remnants hearing, play, sign language, early rehabilitation, and cooperation.

Statistical data on changes in the number of deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstream and special schools over the period 1997–2010 were presented by Mariusz Sak (2011).



roles in society. The responsibility for the upbringing process and the risk of behavioral problems fell mostly on teachers at school and the tutors from boarding schools (Korzon 2004). Limited interpersonal relationships with the parents impaired the quality of their contact, loosened their emotional ties, or broke down other family relationships. Further restrictions on contact with peers or with other hearing people reduced the societal impacts on their development and led them to question many social principles, e.g., normalization or social integration (Dryżałowska 2007). Quoting economic reasons, officials started to point out the complex infrastructure of special schools, which is expensive to maintain, the higher costs of education than in general schools, the declining popularity of this form of education, and the overly narrow range of specialized assistance determined by the financial resources of the institution in charge.

Dissatisfaction with the existing form of special education was also expressed by the parents of deaf children themselves, mainly hearing parents. In their opinion, a special school does not provide optimal learning conditions for deaf students, because it bears the hallmarks of "otherness" and "specialization," which suggests the stereotype of a worse school, with "weaker" students, where getting an education is dubious success because its graduates do not have any educational or professional prospects. Similar mechanisms of prejudice were caused by the stereotype of sign language, which hearing parents of deaf children generally do not accept, because it is associated with treating hearing impairment as a stigma of disability (Sak 2011: 73–74). Additionally, the collective actions of parents found fertile ground in the emerging model of the state. During the political transformation in Poland, the democratizing and liberalizing processes favored the associations or foundations that supported the development of deaf people and provided easier access to specialized knowledge. Hearing parents could learn about the idea of inclusive education spreading in other countries and hope that their deaf child would receive the same level of general education as most hearing children. Thus, integrated schools, to which deaf students could be admitted, became the hearing parents' go-to choice.

From the Vision of Social Integration to the Semblance of Being Oneself Among Others

Criticism of the effectiveness of special education resulted in rising numbers of deaf students being referred to integrated schools. The idea of social integration of people with disabilities dates back to the 1960s. At that time, a movement for non-segregated education for all children began in the United States, Germany, and

some Scandinavian countries.⁵ The dominant standard was the Hamburg model of integration. 6 The integration of non-disabled children and children with disabilities became the educational mission of all European countries. Realizing this goal was not an easy task. In countries with a long tradition of deaf students' education and an extensive infrastructure of special schools, integrated education was treated rather as an additional alternative to compulsory education than a new model which needed to be elaborated and enforced. The gradually forming concept of social integration demanded social changes and legal regulations that sanctioned the right of a hearingimpaired child to fulfill compulsory education in integrated and mainstream schools. The international declarations and conventions, which have been recognized and approved by the Polish government, have led to education being made available to deaf pupils together with their non-disabled peers, the teaching content and methods being adapted to their psychophysical abilities, and education and specialized help being made available to them in all types of schools.⁷ Taking into account the regulations which introduced the reform of the school system, representatives of local education authorities tried to provide deaf and hard-of-hearing children with different forms of education: not only in special schools and special-purpose schools and educational centers, but also in integrated schools/schools with integrated classes or in public schools.

The idea of inclusive education was gradually ushered into our country at the beginning of the 1970s, and it was manifested not only in legal acts, but also in pedagogical practice. The pioneer of social integration for people with various types of disabilities in Poland, Aleksander Hulek, defined the essence of such education as integrated activities that would allow a person with a disability to "be themselves among others" (1992: 13).8 Amadeusz Krause (2010: 68) distinguished three functioning visions of school integration:

⁵ It is worth recalling the establishment of the university National Deaf Mute College in 1857 by Edward Gallaudet. In 1864, the college obtained the status of a university, and it was named the Gallaudet University, after the patron of the school: Thomas Gallaudet (Edward's father). It was the first and still the only university in the world where studies in the field of humanities and the arts are carried out for deaf people. The language of instruction at Gallaudet University is American Sign language.

⁶ The first school in the world to institute an integrated educational system was established in 1890 in Hamburg. It was attended by non-disabled students and students with disabilities, hence the name of the model of inclusive education, later used in many countries (Eberwein, Knauer 2002).

⁷ See Art. 5 § 5 of the Act of September 7, 1991 on the Educational System; Regulation no. 29 of the Minister of National Education of October 4, 1993 on the Principles of Organizing Care for Disabled Students, their Education in Generally Accessible and Integrated Schools and Institutions, and the Organization of Special Education; the Charter of the Rights of Disabled Persons, adopted by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland on August 1, 1997; and the Act of January 8, 1999.

⁸ Aleksander Hulek explained his postulate as follows: "Integration is such a mutual relationship of the non-disabled, in which the same rights are respected ... and identical conditions for the maximum,

- full integration, which is the inclusion of deaf students in mainstream schools;
- incomplete integration, which is the inclusion in mainstream schools of those deaf students who show a high level of revalidation; and
- partial integration, which is sticking to an extensive segregated system on account of the developmental needs of a deaf child.

The humanistic assumptions of social integration were related to the movement of the New Education⁹ and were also reflected in numerous international documents. One of the earliest such documents was the Mary Warnock Report, published in 1978 in London by Her Majesty's Stationery Office. The authors of the report suggested that all children should receive the whole of their compulsory schooling together. This document proposed moving away from medical categorization of deficits towards a social understanding of students' needs. Two categories of children with special educational needs were distinguished. The first group were children whose needs can be met in mainstream schools, and the second group were those whose needs cannot adequately be met there and must therefore be provided with an additional, special educational environment.

According to Kazimiera Krakowiak (2017: 12), in this document the special developmental needs and special educational needs of children and adolescents are understood very comprehensively and apply to all people who experience difficulties with natural, satisfactory development in life in their social and school communities. This approach helps us avoid the stigmatizing medical categorization of children/students and their diagnosed deficits. According to this concept, it is deemed inadvisable to create separate categories of children/students with specific deficits and to isolate groups of people with specific disabilities. Krakowiak cites two main arguments against such categorization: the risk of stigmatizing a group of people and the developmental patterns of the child's body—especially the nervous system, which allows for the compensation and improvement of disturbed functions to a large extent. It is also worth considering an additional argument, that the clinical advances in medicine,

comprehensive development are created for both groups. Integration allows a disabled person to be themselves among others. In this sense, integration can apply to all spheres of a disabled person's life—family life, vocational training, work, free time, and social and political activity." Formulating the theory of integrated coexistence, he sought to normalize the environment, which should stimulate people with various types of disabilities to normal development, work, education, and life.

The humanistic vision of achieving full humanity was of particular importance. Representatives of humanistic scientific disciplines put every human being at the center of attention. The vision of a school including all children was proposed by Jan Amos Comenius, the last of the great humanists. Bogdan Suchodolski, a representative of humanistic pedagogy, was the first Polish educator to focus on the challenges of modern civilization, not as a vague demand, but as a subject of methodical reflection. He was also the first to recognize the challenges of the globalizing responsibility for the world, and formulated postulates of education for an alternative humanistic civilization (Ciążela 2018).

diagnostics, prosthetics, and rehabilitation (in particular with regard to damage to the hearing organ) have redefined the understanding of many pathological conditions and has made it necessary to re-evaluate previous diagnoses. When the problems of children/students are prematurely diagnosed and labeled with conventional umbrella terms, it is often difficult to understand the problems themselves, and to continue to investigate them in light of new scientific discoveries. There are also numerous difficulties in the development and functioning of children (in life and in school) who cannot be classified into fixed types of disability. On the other hand, within the traditional categories, there are different degrees of incapacity, to which psychological and educational assistance must be tailored.

The integrated education of deaf students has also become the subject of a critical assessment, supported by research. As early as 1991, at the Integration Committee of the International Bureau for Audiophonology, the members of the committee emphasized the need to isolate a set of factors that may be important for the effectiveness of educating deaf students in the integrated system. These factors concerned the children themselves, the school institution, the specialist team, the parents, and the teachers (Gałkowski 1992). One additional factor that gained significance for the implementation of compulsory education for deaf students in the general educational system—in integrated schools and classes—was the progress of medical sciences, especially in audiology and hearing prosthetics. The new, better-quality hearing aids and hearing implants have contributed to solutions in the rehabilitation of hearing-impaired children that enable or improve the perception of sounds and the development of speech, and have consequently changed the deaf students' quality of life (Czyż, Plutecka 2018).

However, according to research, integrated education negatively influences the emotional adjustment, self-esteem, and sense of identity of deaf students. A school where they learn alongside their hearing classmates is not a place for making new friends, because as the frequency and quality of these interactions is low, they experience discrimination, rejection, and isolation (Stinson, Kluwin 2003; Kluwin, Stinson, Colarossi 2002). Diagnostic studies in Poland have shown that the majority of deaf students participate in extracurricular school activities as part of psychological and educational support, which are not oriented towards school integration, but towards making deaf students "perform better," which additionally puts them in a bad light among their peer group (Gwiazdowska 2004). Similar conclusions were reported in the study done in Poland by Grażyna Dryżałowska (2016). Her analysis of the empirical material shows that the participants of the study, and more precisely the hearing-impaired adults, recall their integrated education as "a time of suffering and hardship, because social isolation and social stigma were common experiences of the respondents" (Dryżałowska 2016: 240). Interestingly, despite the fact that they experienced

negative attitudes of rejection, a lack of acceptance, or a sense of failure at school, some people have found satisfaction in life because they have overcome adversities and are independent to the best of their abilities.

Unfortunately, the integrated education of deaf students is perceived as an apparent, even illusory vision. This may be because two different pedagogical attitudes, styles, and models clash in integrated schools, where various factors coexist:

- 1. two teachers, often with different experience;
- two students with different cognitive abilities and potential, as well as being officially divided into those with and those without a certificate of need for special education; and
- 3. two cultures embedded in special and mainstream education (Gajdzica 2015: 120).

Achieving full integration is not possible if a deaf student carries out their schooling obligation in isolation from their natural surroundings. ¹⁰ That is why it is so important to create such conditions for them to develop as much as possible among peers who will accept their cultural and linguistic otherness. The purpose is to create such school environments in which students of different levels of ability can learn together and reap the benefits to self-esteem and social adaptation. In addition, it is the changing social conditions (from the micro- to the macrosystemic changes) that decide whether the current circumstances are favorable, unstimulating, or stifling for the development of a deaf child.

From Applying the Principle of Flexibility to Being Yourself Around Others

Since the 2014–15 school year, Poland has been following the educational policy known as "education including disabled students." In effect, an increasing number of deaf students are being educated in public schools, but unfortunately not all schools feel organizationally, substantively, or mentally prepared to accept this group of students with special educational needs. The core idea of inclusive education is the educational process, which is common to all students. This postulate was included in the 1994 Salamanca Declaration, which affirmed not only the right to education for all children, but also that opportunities to achieve and maintain an appropriate level of education should be created for everyone. According to Grzegorz Szumski (2010: 32), proposals for a global education reform should be considered from

¹⁰ One example of such natural surroundings can be a microsystem in which a deaf child is brought up in a Deaf family who communicate in sign language, so for this child sign language is the mother tongue of the family home, since they know it from birth or from early childhood.

a vertical and a horizontal perspective. In light of the former, it will be important to combine the systems of special education and mainstream education into a uniform model that will form a new quality, from administration and financing to practice in educational institutions. In the horizontal perspective, any reform should include legal and organizational changes from the central level to the lowest levels of the educational system. A flexible educational system should ensure the inclusion of students with special educational needs into mainstream and inclusive schools from the lowest stage—kindergarten—to the higher educational stages. In such an educational system, the principle of homogeneity no longer applies: heterogeneity is preferred. Inclusion should not be associated with assimilation, that is, educating all children according to one pattern. It is of fundamental importance to apply the principle of flexibility, i.e., to recognize that each child develops at an individual pace. The role of the teacher should be reduced to providing educational support for the development of the student by accounting for and adapting working methods to their individual needs, and providing psychological and pedagogical aid.

Deaf students constitute an "internally diverse" group, and their individual educational needs should be respected. Podgórska-Jachnik (2011), while searching for the paradigm of a contemporary inclusive school, found a clue in the metaphorical term "embracing school," which is a reference to Zygmunt Bauman's "embracing community," which provides all of its members with a sense of security and a "warm circle" of human togetherness. The author listed a range of tasks that would set the framework of an educational community for deaf students in an inclusive school. Socializing education is important because it creates stronger social cohesion. It is necessary to take a new look at the community potential and the need to build a school educational community. Inclusive education is structuring a diverse classroom environment, which is why education towards equality, and a positive attitude towards understanding the differences between non-disabled students and students with a disability becomes so crucial. The progressive reform of school is possible through thoughtful and responsible

searching for effective teaching practices, verifying the methods used so far, monitoring grades, progress, and results, setting high standards, carefully planned programs in consideration of the needs and possibilities of all students, and effective educational strategies based on the principles of resource management. This should result in the pursuit of multiple, alternative, varied, and attractive educations, conditioned by diversity and the need for efficiency. (Podgórska-Jachnik 2011: 25)



Then it will be possible to transform the inclusive education system towards the model of a "learning organization" (Senge n.d.).¹¹ In the context of Podgórska-Jachnik's analysis (2011), an effective solution may be a bilingual approach, wherein we should strive to organize various forms of permanent contact with the community of hearing-impaired people and to use teaching methods that develop appropriate competences in the mother tongue (phono-gestures are one such alternative with proven effectiveness).

The core of inclusive education is the inclusion of deaf students in the environment of hearing students in such a way that they feel natural, at ease, and have a sense of subjective agency in being and in action. Some authors argue that this educational system should be focused on the didactic process with deaf students who are able to communicate in Polish (Sak 2014: 75). In such a process, however, deaf students who have problems acquiring language skills are subject to social isolation. For a deaf student, studying in an inclusive school should not only be an experience of being forced to conform to the expectations and conditions set by the hearing. That is why a nurturing school culture should offer well-thought-out and well-organized help for a deaf student through different forms of support. On the other hand, in adapting to these new school situations, a deaf student may be forced to communicate verbally, to undertake tasks that will allow them to reveal their individual (much higher) developmental potential.

Considering the determinants of inclusive education, the competences of the teachers of deaf students must not be overlooked. In her study, Gniazdowska (2004) found that not even one teacher in a mainstream school collaborated with specialists from institutions that deal with the rehabilitation of deaf pupils. The new vocational challenges require teachers from mainstream schools to prepare for working with students with any type of disability. It is difficult to deliver such a range of comprehensive and specialized skills pertinent to the needs of a student with any disability through additional teacher training. The teaching staff of mainstream schools should have specialist advisory support from experienced surdo-pedagogues who have perfected their teaching methods in the special education system. This was and is a group of very highly skilled specialists, whose proven methods and forms of work can be used by other teachers in providing psychological and pedagogical help to deaf students within the framework of inclusive education. Didactic cooperation can significantly increase a deaf student's chances of achieving higher learning outcomes.

Learning organization is a term Peter Michael Senge proposed in his book The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, which means an organization capable of learning and adapting to changing conditions.

Conclusion

If the concept of special, integrated, and inclusive education is to deserve the label of an effective educational solution, it requires factual analyses supported by an assessment of the situation—not only of experts from the hearing community, but of the deaf people who are interested in their education. Unfortunately, more formal and legal changes leading to transformations in the school curriculum and organization will not be enough. Certainly, an important step would be to develop positive attitudes of all entities participating in or determining the quality of education. In particular, integrated and inclusive education requires a shift in mentality, mainly about the perception of deaf people, appropriate social attitudes of hearing students towards deaf students, and vice versa, shaping the social attitudes of deaf people towards hearing people.

Changes in the perception of the developmental and educational needs of deaf children/students should take place not only in the system of legislative regulations and the transition from the segregated system to the integrated system, and finally to inclusive education, but also in the foundation of these changes, seen from the perspective of a teacher, student, and parent. It should be emphasized that the effects of education are not achieved by moralizing or debating at every possible opportunity, but by efficiently organizing the work and life of students, providing them with specialized help which is tailored to their actual educational needs. It is worth remembering that the greatest threat to education is still ideocracy, as a result of which the worldview freezes in a rigid ideology that does not make provisions for people's personalities, closing them off from the dynamics of the changing world (Śliwerski 2018: 105). Therefore, the discourse on the validity or invalidity of the selected form of education should explain the essence of the matter in order to understand the scope of support for the educational needs of deaf students, resulting from various reasons—previously unstudied and unexplained, especially new socio-cultural and societal phenomena. In fact, no progress in education can compensate for the consequences of solutions that offend the deaf child's dignity and limit their sense of self.

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