EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH PROFOUND AND MULTIPLE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND THE REQUIREMENTS TOWARDS SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN POLAND

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Abstract
Until 1997 children with profound and multiple intellectual disabilities were exempt from compulsory schooling. They stayed at their homes or in care and medical institutions. As late as in 1997 Poland has adopted the Regulation on the Principles of Organisation of Revalidation and Educational Activities which has extended compulsory schooling to the children and youth with profound intellectual disability from 3 to 25 years of age. However, profound intellectual disability confronts a special education teacher with a range of challenges in educational and therapeutic activities on a daily basis. The purpose of this article is to study the requirements and challenges to be met by a special education teacher working with the children with profound intellectual disability. The methodology applied in this paper incorporates a number of different and complementary methods, such as an analysis of legislative documents, analysis of government papers.

The following areas have been analysed;

- workspace and competences of a special education teacher relating to: awareness of the needs and capabilities of a child with profound and multiple intellectual disabilities (diagnostic sensitivity), work planning to create optimal development conditions for every child (planning sensitivity); conducting educational and therapeutic activities through communication with every child (performance and communication sensitivity);
- personality of a special education teacher in the changing reality: character features, exhibited values, capability of deepened ethical and moral reflection, sense of professional fulfilment, self-criticism.

This article is analytical in its nature and shows the complexity of educational and therapeutic process involving children with profound and multiple intellectual disabilities. The analyses have shown that, in the evolving reality, the special education teachers are faced with the need for harmonizing the above-mentioned areas which, in my opinion, are the building blocks of professional success of a special education teacher and educational and therapeutic success of a child with profound and multiple intellectual disabilities. The study has shown that it is important to reflect on the profession of a special education teacher working with a child who need support in every area of his or her life. Every day the teachers are faced the difficulties which result from the children’s disability, legal, moral and ethical requirements.

Keywords: education, teacher, profound intellectual disability.

1 INTRODUCTION

The population of people with profound multiple intellectual disabilities is the least numerous comparing to other disabilities. In the article I will use the notion 'deep intellectual disability' and will try to base it on the specificity of this degree of intellectual disability. Considering the classification of profound intellectual disability in the psychological dimension, it is one of the most severe types of intellectual disability. According to the ICD 10 International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, this is an intellectual disability connected with an IQ of less than 20 points and mental development of adult person under the age of 3 years. It manifests itself to a greater or lesser extent in disorders in all spheres of individual functioning, particularly in communication, self-service and mobility of a person[1].

However, it should be noted in the introduction that very often we are dealing with multiple, complex intellectual disabilities in practice. This type of disability is not a simple sum of its components, but is a very specific and separate, complex entity[2]. In my opinion, a distinction should be made, because of its particular importance in the diagnosis, planning of work and treatment of the child:
- combined multiple disability (disability is caused by one and the same factor);
- complex disability (disability is caused by many factors, in different or the same periods of a child's life) [3]. As Barbara Marcinkowska notes, it requires a special distinction from the teacher, because the work with a child experiencing disability since birth is different than the work with a child with disability acquired at adolescent age [4].

When considering the complexity of the role of teachers working with children with profound intellectual disabilities, two concepts come to mind: teacher (pedagogue) and teacher (special educator). My considerations are particularly relevant for special education teachers. I note that the main skills of the pedagogue and special educator should be similar, sometimes the same. However, special educator struggles with other problems, which requires many additional skills in his everyday work, especially work with children with profound intellectual disabilities. It is not always possible to acquire these skills during higher education process. I have in mind here: certain personality traits, approach, attitude to the problems of a child "deeply socially misunderstood ". Daily work with a child with profound intellectual disability requires from the teacher to undertake many roles, tasks and competences - which is also the result of constantly and dynamically changing reality. It should be mentioned that until 1997 in Poland people with profound intellectual disabilities were excluded from compulsory education, there were no such people in the education system. Therefore the specificity of this disability had no voice in the requirements, roles and tasks undertaken by a special education teachers. Finally in 1997, with a later amendment in 2013, the Regulation of the Minister of National Education on the conditions and methods of organising remedial classes for children and young people with profound intellectual disabilities entered into force[5]. Thanks to this regulation, children with profound intellectual disabilities have been included in the system of education and fulfil their compulsory education through participation in remedial classes.

Due to the fact that the article is only an attempt to determine the complexity of the work of a special educator, I had to take a certain direction and areas of reflection. It was decided to discuss this specificity of work in practical terms on the basis of a study of Polish scientists dealing with the area of scientific issues and practical solutions for the education of students with special educational needs. The work is entitled, "Improving the effectiveness of education of students with special educational needs. Training materials, Part II". (2010). The study presents models of working with students with various disabilities and developmental disorders. Each model has been developed on the basis of three main pillars: diagnostic, programmatic and practical. Taking into account the pillars mentioned by the authors, I will try to look at it from the perspective of a special educator working with a child with profound intellectual disabilities.

2 METHODOLOGY

The article is analytical, showing the complexity of educational and therapeutic work with children with profoundly coupled / complex intellectual disabilities.

The purpose of this article is to analyze:

- requirements, challenges that a special educator working with children with profound intellectual disabilities must meet;
- desirable competencies of a special pedagogue in the following areas:
  1. diagnostic - carrying out and planning the diagnosis of a child with profound intellectual disability;
  2. planning - design of the program, in particular detailed objectives and their operationalization;
  3. practical - education, therapy and rehabilitation of a child with profound intellectual disability.

The question was asked about the risk factors for the educational success of a child with profound intellectual disability and for the professional success of the teacher in his everyday work.

In the methodology of this article many different complementary methods of analysis were used. Legislative documents, governmental documents and literature in the context of studies on the personality of a special educator were analysed. It was also completed by the author's practical experience.
3 RESULTS

Before I discuss the skills and competences of a special educator, let us explain what definition is adopted in reflections. It should be noted that in everyday speech very often the terms of competence and skills are used interchangeably. However, I assume that there are many different definitions of the concept of competence. It is a term derived from the Latin language word *competere* - which means to be suitable. In other words, it means the level and scope of knowledge and skills [6]. Mentioning the special educator role, it is a person who is competent to perform the tasks entrusted to him/her such as education and rehabilitation of a child with profound intellectual disabilities. As an example, I can cite another definition of competence, which the author Robert Kwaśnica proposes to divide into two groups:

- **methodical** - the ability to act according to specific rules, which determine the order of pedagogical activities;
- **implementation** - the ability to choose the means, create conditions that allow to achieve the assumed pedagogical goals.

In the opinion of the author, due to the multitude of competences that a teacher must have, a hierarchy should be made. The first place in the teacher's work must be devoted to practical and moral nature (how the teacher should act, which ethical principles should follow, if he or she has the ability to conduct a dialogue with oneself, the ability of being sympathetic and self-critical)[7].

3.1 Diagnosis - work planning - implementation of the programme with a child - challenges for a special educator

Special educator should be sensitive in many ways starting to work with a child with profound intellectual disabilities. Diagnostic sensitivity is particularly important. So what is the sensitivity? Regardless of the documentation (a decision of the need for remedial classes, which in Poland is issued by psychological-educational clinics for up to 5 years or a specific diagnosis of other co-occurring diseases - which is a medical diagnosis), this puts the teacher in need of a thorough analysis of the information contained therein. This type of diagnosis is called "a multi-specialist assessment of the child's functioning". That allows to:

- make recognition of the child's functioning in various developmental spheres - the sphere of current and closest future development of the child;
- take into consideration and sometimes to find out why this is the case, and not the other way around;
- look at the child in a holistic way (it allows to get to know the mechanisms of mutually conditioned disorders);
- plan the therapeutic program, establishing specific goals and detailed methods of their implementation [8].

On the other hand, the ability to plan diagnosis and to make a diagnosis in a group of children with profound intellectual disabilities, sets a number of requirements and competences (a set of skills), which must be possessed by a special educator, namely:

- knowledge of methods and research tools designed for children with profound (often coupled, complex intellectual disabilities);
- selection and adaptation of research methods and tools to individual special educational and developmental needs of children with profound intellectual disabilities;
- **Appropriate planning and implementation of a multi-specialist assessment of functioning**;
- recognition of the smallest categories (behaviours, skills, needs) of a child with profound intellectual disabilities;
- knowledge of developmental patterns and analysis of the collected material based on these patterns always in relation to the environmental context [9] in which a specific child function.

The above mentioned few key competences and the set of skills that each special educator must have can be included in the category of diagnostic sensitivity. The lack of this diagnostic sensitivity should
also be mentioned. I assume that this may be a cause of risk to the educational success of a person with profound intellectual disabilities, which is a result of:

- inappropriate way of collecting information about the child's functioning;
- incorrect interpretation of collected data, including, among others, possibilities and limitations of the child;
- incorrect formulation of special educational needs;
- incorrect specification of indications for pupil's education and therapy (including recommendations for procedures to achieve planned goals).

After an in-depth diagnosis, the teacher has to plan an effective therapeutic process for a child with profound intellectual disabilities. This requires planning skills, which should be understood as: formulating individual goals and designing the way to achieve them. A teacher working with a student with profound intellectual disabilities develops an individual programme for him/her, on the basis of which everyday work takes place. According to Barbara Marcinkowska, the programme consists of two main functions: educational and therapeutic ones. It is an important element of interventional work on developmental disorders of students with disabilities[8]. Constructing an effective programme is a particularly important skill in teacher's work, as improperly formulated objectives can cause risk to the educational success of a child with profound intellectual disabilities. The factors of this kind of risk include:

- formulation of goals inadequate to the level of psychophysical abilities and needs of the student (too high or too low level of expectations)[8];
- methods and measures inadequate to the individual needs of the student;
- planning methods which simultaneous use may be harmful to student's development.

The next step is the practical level of implementation, in other words the implementation of a therapeutic programme with a child with profound intellectual disabilities. However, the implementation of the therapeutic programme depends on many other factors, such as the state's policy towards people with disabilities, the dominant model of perceiving and understanding disability, social attitudes towards people with disabilities, the possibility and readiness to implement the therapeutic programme not only by the educational sector, but also in cooperation with the medical and social sectors. In my opinion, the most important risk factors connected with the implementation of the programme should be pointed out:

- reduction of financial resources for tasks necessary to achieve educational success - a teacher working with a child with profound disabilities has at his disposal didactic facilities offered by the institution. It is theoretically possible to purchase materials and didactic aids based on the child's needs. However, in practical terms, the need for most of the children not the specific needs of individual one gains in importance. It is dictated by limited financial resources;
- limited preparation (often also lack of readiness) of integration and mainstream schools for special education of students with profound disabilities. In recent years, inclusive and integrated education has become more and more important in relation to the segregated system of special education. However, children with profound disabilities do not find their place in the inclusion and integration system. This may be dictated by the lack of possibilities to secure the child's emotional, developmental, educational and therapeutic needs, as well as by the difficulties with special therapeutic space arrangement. Therefore, the question about social consent and attitudes towards the education of a child who is "deeply misunderstood" in the conditions of a "normal school" arises;
- lack of understanding of the needs of students with profound intellectual disabilities - by the surrounding environment, but also by all people involved and co-responsible for the educational and therapeutic process.

In the process of education and rehabilitation of a child with profound intellectual disabilities, cooperation between specialists who are co-responsible for the educational, therapeutic and rehabilitation process of a child is of great importance. The ability to cooperate, share knowledge and develop one's own professional workshop is an extremely important skill in the teaching profession and in the therapy of children with complex educational needs. It is also important to point out here the risk factors for the educational success of a child with profound disabilities which the teacher is responsible for:
1 taking actions that are contrary to the established goals - this refers to the situation when the programme for a child is created for the formal needs of the institution, when it becomes only a formal document, and not a "functional", "practical" document;

2 lack of systematicity - on the one hand this may be caused by the lack of the teacher's skills, but also by the very high number of absences of children because of frequent hospital stays and/or illnesses;

3 incompatibility of specialists - very often there are actions that are mutually contradictory. It may be manifested not only in inappropriate implementation of the programme, but also in difficult behaviours that may appear in the child's attitude;

4 lack of cooperation between teachers, professionals and parents, including failure in establishing common rules for intervention;

5 overloading of the child's educational and therapeutic activities. This happens at the moment when the child is striving to be taught and equipped with certain skills regardless his or her emotional needs. If the need for safety is not satisfied, the child will not be able to develop those expected skills;

6 failure in following the principles.

The specificity of a profound intellectual disability gives to the special education teacher a task to find a suitable channel and a way of communication with the child. This is usually very difficult because of the complexity of the problem. It is not enough to know specific alternative methods of communication, a combination of many methods of communication tools is needed. The communication tools have to be adapted to the following abilities of a child:

- perceptual - in the case of the discussed disability most of the analyzers are impaired;
- intellectual - low intelligence quotient;
- physical - coexisting paralysis, including decreased or increased muscle tension. This requires from a teacher working with a child with profound intellectual disabilities a great deal of professional preparation (theoretical knowledge), but also practical experience (contact, practical classes). Moreover, the teacher's personality seems to be significant.

My considerations reveal how complicated the work of a special educator is. I have only shown a semblance of competences and skills that he or she should have. Let's move on to the teacher's personality - which is an extremely important factor in the educational success of a child and in the professional success of a teacher.

### 3.2 The teacher's personality

The creator of special pedagogy in Poland, Maria Grzegorzewska, paid special attention to the personality of the teacher. She pointed out that this is a responsible person, who is characterized by goodness and love. The teacher's role is to pass these qualities on to her pupils [10].

Special educator is a person who manages the didactic, but also the therapeutic process. The relationship with the student is particularly important in this process. The signals about the changes that have taken place in many societies, not only in Poland, but also in the world, are alarming. A great civilization progress has been made. It affected many changes in the figure of the teacher. In the past, the profession of a teacher was associated with a sense of mission. The teacher's personality was presented in the light of many sacrifices - he was perceived as an authority. However, it is noted that in current reality, which is changing very rapidly, the role of the teacher is diminishing, and it is reduced to the performance of certain activities [11]. Undoubtedly, the teacher's personality is an extremely important factor influencing the development of the students entrusted to him/her. Literature indicates that "the teacher's behavior, his attitude towards the student, his style of action are largely determined by the characteristics of his personality"[12] Pedagogical literature indicates many desirable characteristics in the personality of the teacher. In the case of a person working or planning to work with a child with profound intellectual disabilities one of the most important in my opinion is the emotional relation with the child.

As Małgorzata Sekułowicz points out, special educator has to present certain traits[11]. Therefore, taking into account the traits distinguished by the author, I will try to relate them to work with a child with profound intellectual disabilities:
• sensitivity in relations with people with disabilities - in the case of children with profound intellectual disabilities, emotional contact between the teacher and the child is particularly important. Establishing this contact is equivalent to the teacher's acceptance by the student. A child with profound intellectual disabilities functions in a very closed inner space, which is difficult to reach. In practice, sometimes the best proven therapeutic methods and psychological approaches fail. Therefore it is necessary to find or work out the way to get closer to the student. In order to establish interaction and build relationship with him/her common trust is needed;

• cognitive insight;

• understanding the individual needs of people with disabilities - as mentioned above, it is difficult to identify the characteristics of a child with profound intellectual disabilities. It leads to difficulties with identification of the various and very specific needs of a child with profound intellectual disabilities. It should also be noted that often in both theoretical considerations and practical actions the child's needs are named and specified without the reflection what they can be dictated and conditioned by. Understanding of the needs is the basis.

• the ability to name relationships;

• pedagogical optimism - working with a child with profound intellectual disabilities, who often seems to be a contactless person, requires from the teacher to believe in his or her abilities. Only common understanding and everyday work allows to reach the educational success of the child and professional success of the teacher. A teacher who does not believe in the child's educational success is prone to feel rapid professional burnout.

It is important to point out the risk factors for the educational success of a child with profound intellectual disabilities, which may result from certain characteristics of the teacher's personality such as:

• lack of patience in educational and therapeutic work, being dominant in the relationship - which may lead to the situation when teacher who performs the best diagnosis, plans the therapeutic process, uses the most modern didactic means doesn’t allow the child to achieve success by showing the slightest activity. In practice, it seems like asking a question and immediately without waiting for the child's turn answering it. Teacher's patience is particularly important in the process of equipping a child with profound intellectual disabilities with the simplest skills, e.g. the ability to eat with a spoon. It is a complex activity that requires its division into small activities (operationalization), patience is required in order to teach the child step by step. The teacher's task is to indicate the necessary knowledge and skills, which are necessary to achieve the assumed goal [8] As Małgorzata Sekulowicz notes[11], a special educator can rarely expect quick results of his or her work - because this work is based on patience, constant repetition of the material and awareness that learning new skills or behaviors is very extended in time. Mental resilience and often a very long period of time are needed for a special educator to make him or her realize the sense of this work:

• lack of reflection - I thinking here about the teacher's failure to notice his own mistakes. It is difficult to find a "ready-made prescription" how to work with a student with profound intellectual disabilities, because this requires a high degree of flexibility of the teacher as well as reflection on one's own work;

• lack of sensitivity - the diagnostic sensitivity was mentioned above. However, at this point, in the context of discussing the characteristics of a special educator, I should also talk about sensitivity to the needs of another person and also about a positive attitude towards the child for whose development the teacher is co-responsible.

I propose a catalogue of the following principles in the special educator's daily work that may influence the success of both the child and the teacher, which were elaborated by Barbara Marcinkowska:

1 Accept the student even if you do not accept some of his/her behaviours (e.g. aggressive behaviour, stereotypical behaviour).

2 Get to know the student, his/her knowledge, skills, needs, abilities and limitations.

3 Communicate in an understandable way: correctly formulate messages and instructions (give concrete commands, divide compound commands into simple ones; if the tutee does not speak, teach an unambiguous way of communication).

4 Let your needs and emotions be expressed.
5 Help to meet needs, but do not do it instead of the student. The student should be independent, don’t make him/her dependent on you.

6 Create conditions for taking actions. Adjust goals, methods and forms of education to individual psychophysical abilities of students.

7 Make a rational choice of learning content using mostly the criterion of frequency of occurrence and usefulness in the student’s environment.

8 Adapt teaching aids to the pupils’ psychophysical abilities (preferably specific subjects and real-life situations).

9 Let the student make a choice.

10 Support the development of social competences.

11 Do not limit the places, objects, people, etc.

12 Create opportunities for success.

13 Praise more often, criticise less frequently.

14 Give feedback on activity.

15 Create situations conducive to achieving independence.

16 Be directed to achieve success.

17 Be a rational optimist.

18 Be reflexive.

19 Work with people who are involved in the process of bringing up a child[13].

4 CONCLUSIONS

This article is a reflection on the special educator’s role in a changing reality, in which more and more often we are dealing with a group of children with very difficult complex disabilities. The conclusion of the discussion is that a special educator who decides to work with a child with profound intellectual disabilities must also take individua effort to enrich his or her workshop. The education of a pedagogue is not only a part of the educational success of a child with profound intellectual disabilities, but also the professional success of a special educator. Internal motivation is the key. A special educator working with a child with profound intellectual disabilities is a person aware of the need for continuous improvement of his or her own workshop. He or she is a self-critical person. Trying to achieve the best development of the child he or she also works on the self-development. Being qualified is not enough for special educator to speak about an educational success of a child with profound intellectual disabilities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The article has been written for all special educators who strive for the success of a child with profound intellectual disability and also for those who seek for the problem of people with profound intellectual disabilities in the scientific discourse.

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