

# Selected Aspects of Inclusion in the Environment of Kindergartens

[Anna Šafránková, Vladimíra Kocourková, Jana Kantorová]

**Abstract**— The paper focuses on the issue of inclusion and its importance in the environment of kindergartens. The issue is presented both from the viewpoint of theoretical starting points and the perspective of selected research findings focused especially on perception of inclusion by teachers. We believe that inclusive environment is strongly related to the character of kindergarten climate and the area of respect for a child's needs and the level of primary prevention of risk behaviour in children at the same time. The contribution is one of the outputs of the project IGA\_PdF\_2014018 "Climate of Kindergarten Respecting the Child's Needs as a Factor of Primary Prevention of Risk Behaviour".

**Keywords**— inclusion, diversity, kindergarten, teacher, teacher's concept of a pupil, school climate, prevention of risk behaviour, child's needs

## I. Introduction

Recently, it is possible to notice a number of expert discussions focused on the issue of inclusive education, frequently mentioned in the context of not only ensuring social justice but also as philosophy and principle that can be a basis for practice. (Rombo, 2006) It is possible to identify in this sense a shift from the original concept of inclusive education related mainly to marginalization of a particular group of children (especially children of special educational needs) to a new paradigm accenting inclusive education based on every individual's fundamental right of education.

Several objectives including mainly the intention to ensure the legal right of preschool education for children of preschool age in the sense of support of motivation, talent and maximum development of diverse abilities in all children during the entire course of their education were postulated by the National Programme of Development of Education in the Czech Republic (MŠMT, 2001), one of the significant and indispensable strategic documents of the Czech educational policy that was created as a result of cooperation of a number of subjects and broad society-wide reflection defining the common basis and principles of educational policy at the turn of the century and providing a just access to educational opportunities according to their abilities, requirements and needs, in relation to preschool education from the legislative and concept perspective.

The second and equally significant objective of this document was improvement of quality of preschool education in a way corresponding with its crucial significance in the development of every child. It is possible to talk about significant objectives of preschool education that include, among others, accentuation of human and social potential in the sense of elimination of exclusion of children due to any reasons and improvement of quality in preschool education (Kotátková, 2008, p. 84)

Despite the fact that many ideas and the trend set by the National Programme of Development of Education in the Czech Republic can be regarded topical even today, the Strategy of Educational Policy to 2020 was created in connection and reflection of the fulfilled objectives of this document; similarly to the above mentioned strategic document, it is designed as a general basis of the Czech educational policy. Three main cross-sectional priorities, significant in the context of this contribution, include reduction of inequalities in education and support of quality education and teachers as its key precondition. The Strategy of Educational Policy to 2020 strives for factors such as gender, family's socioeconomic status, region in which an individual lives, his/her membership of an ethnic or national minority etc., not to affect the development of his/her educational potential in a negative way so that every individual has a chance to get education corresponding with his/her abilities. (MŠMT, 2014) It is the context of equal opportunities in which this strategic document speaks of the need to support all children of early age what could lead to elimination or prevention of their disadvantaging in subsequent education. (MŠMT, 2014)

Preschool education fulfils a determining and irreplaceable role in development of an individual and also in preventing unsuccessfulness of children from socially disadvantaged family background.

The realized research project titled "Kindergarten school climate respecting the needs of a child as a protective factor of primary prevention of risk behavior" is based especially on the presumption that positive kindergarten climate (it is possible to speak, among others, of inclusive environment perceiving and enhancing diversity in children in this context) is related to respect for a child's needs and is one of the protective factors in realization of primary prevention of risk behaviour at kindergarten at the same time.

The presented article is focused on inclusion at kindergartens as a basis of subsequent education of all children. Outcomes of surveys documenting the need to create inclusive environment and implementation of inclusive ideas

into the educational process on all the levels of educational institutions are presented.

## II. INCLUSIVE CONCEPTION OF KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION

The main emphasis is put on providing the respectful approach, accentuating human dignity and independence, fairness in relation to sharing accessible educational resources. The fundamental principle of inclusive education in this context is recognition of diversity and the art of reacting to it, including adjusting teaching styles and methods within the curriculum, organization of kindergartens, use of resources and partnerships with other subjects.

Many researches prove the existence of non-homogeneity in the definition of inclusion. (Booth, 1996; Booth, Ainscow, 1998; Dyson & Millward, 2000).

Ainscow and Dyson (2006, p. 15) characterize six concepts of inclusion:

- Inclusion as interest in children with special educational needs;
- Inclusion as a response to exclusion;
- Inclusion in relation to all groups at risk of exclusion;
- Inclusion as development of schools for everybody;
- Inclusion as “Education for all”;
- Inclusion as an approach to education and society.

In an inclusive environment (namely kindergarten environment in relation to this contribution), appreciation of diversity and difference in children and valorization of these characteristics are realized so that full-fledged development of everybody’s potential and also, in the words of Johnson (1999), internalization of pluralist and democratic values including the commitment of equality of all persons and acknowledging the right of freedom and happiness for everybody is carried out.

The kindergarten inclusive environment is based on the idea that all children and teachers are important; an inclusive kindergarten tries to remove any barrier preventing the full-fledged development of all children, acknowledging diversity among individuals and inspired and mutually enriched by it, based on cooperation among all agents. What seems significant from the perspective of inclusive ideas in education and through the paradigm of Rogers (Kirschenbaum, Henderson, 1989, p. 225) is unconditional positive regard of every child from the part of both pedagogues (mainly teachers are emphasized in this case) and children mutually; it means in practice that every teacher should accept differences and specifics of all children and inspire children to respect each other. This is significantly related to respect of a child’s needs, perceived as one of the key determinants of prevention of risk

behaviour in a child and generally a factor participating in creation of positive school (class) climate.

### A. *Diversity as a starting point of inclusion*

What seems significant in relation to the inclusive concept of education is the definition of diversity because inclusion starts with admitting differences among children.

The term diversity originates from the Latin word *diversus* (*diversa, diversum* adj.), meaning various, different, varied. There is a similar definition of this term in as variedness and diversity by *Pedagogický slovník* (Mareš, Gavora, 1999, p. 51).

Despite the fact that the term diversity comes from natural sciences it has gradually been implemented in other areas (including education) too. The word uniformity can be regarded an antonym of diversity. Uniformity does not allow development; it is a closed, static and monologic concept according to Rocen (Pol, 2006, p. 31). On the basis of this concept, diversity is very important for the development of society as well as an individual because we live in a diverse environment and society.

Diversity can be perceived from the perspective of its wider definition including principles according to which people assess themselves or the others in various contexts and situations. (Vertovec, 2009, p. 9) Pupils quite naturally differ from each other in a number of individual characteristics (e.g. gender, nationality, ethnic group, social background, mother tongue, age, religion and other factors) in the kindergarten environment. No individual identifies with only one characteristic; a number of specifics characterizes them. These differences can be categorized on the basis of demographic and personal characteristics and abilities and skills of every individuals in this sense. (Johnson, 1999) Diversity in the kindergarten environment can have a positive impact on the personal level of an individual (a positive impact in the area of learning, creative problem-solving and the development of cognitive and ethical argumentation) as well as the social level (i.e. the development of cooperation among children and the development of positive kindergarten climate). (Kasíková, 2009, p. 11)

## III. SURVEYS REFLECTING THE INCLUSIVE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION BY TEACHERS

Before you begin to format your paper, first write and save On the basis of the above stated theoretical conceptual framework of inclusive environment of kindergartens, the article will further focus on particular findings obtained during surveys parts of which concentrated on aspects of inclusive environment, mainly the personality of a teacher, his/her opinions and attitudes to the researched issue because it was found out on the basis of both Czech and foreign surveys that it is the teacher, next to family variables, who is the second

significant determinant of the development of a child. Thus it is logical that tendencies to accentuate discussions in the field of the teaching profession as one of the main factors that can be influenced are increasing in both the conceptual and research areas now. (Starý, Dvořák, Greger, Duschinská, 2012, p. 9) Although it would undoubtedly be beneficial to study the profession of a teacher in its entire scope, the focus was mainly on their role, opinions and attitudes to partial aspects of the inclusive environment due to multidimensionality of this issue.

One of the significant variables of the researched issue seems to be teachers' attitudes to partial aspects related to inclusive environment. Pelikán and Helus (1984) speak of teachers' preferential attitudes to children who indirectly influence the overall atmosphere in the class. Two loosely interrelated researches were carried out by our team, reflecting teachers' attitudes not only to the concept of inclusive education but also diversity.

The survey carried out in the Czech Republic (the Pardubice and Moravian-Silesian Regions) (n=197) in 2012 used the method of semantic differential. The respondents were teachers working on the ISCED levels 1 and 2. The semantic differential items were originally designed in order to follow all three factors of individual perception of selected conceptual indicators by the respondents – the factors of evaluation, energy and potency. One of the observed conceptual indicators was “inclusion” (the others were: socially disadvantaged pupil, pupil from an ethnic minority, socially disadvantaged family, social disadvantage, Roma, unstimulating family environment, homelessness, unemployment, poverty, culturally different environment, ethnic minority). It was confirmed by an explorative analysis (correspondingly with Chráska, (2007)) that the factor of potency is quite a subtle construct that allows incorrect interpretation. The factor of energy says in this case to what extent the term is related to “strain”, difficulties, changes or activity. The research also showed in relation to the issue of this contribution that the conceptual indicator “inclusion” in the factor of evaluation is perceived (in comparison to the other conceptual indicators) relatively positively. The respondents perceive “inclusion” rather neutrally in comparison of conceptual indicators in the area of the factor of energy. The below stated Fig. 1 shows how the respondents perceive the term “inclusion” in the factor of evaluation and energy in comparison with the other conceptual indicators.

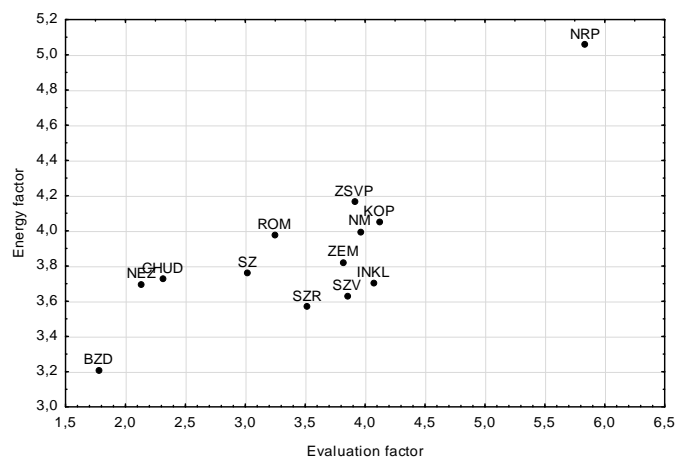


Figure no. 1 Semantic space of selected term indicators

*Explanatory notes: ZSVP – pupil with special educational needs; SZV – socially disadvantaged pupil; ZEM – pupil from an ethnic minority; SZR – socially disadvantaged family; SZ – social disadvantage; ROM – Roma; NRP – unstimulating family environment; BZD – homelessness; NEZ – unemployment; CHUD – poverty; KOP – culturally different environment; NM – ethnic minority; INKL – Inclusion*

Similar outputs were achieved by means of a survey carried out by our team also in the Czech Republic (the Central Bohemian, Moravian-Silesian and Vysočina Regions) in 2014 (n=245). These surveys were also focused on preparing the statistics of significant difference among respondents from particular regions of the Czech Republic. Both the surveys showed that statistically significant differences in perception of particular conceptual indicators depend on sociocultural and economic characteristics of the particular areas.

Despite the fact that the respondents of the above mentioned surveys were teachers working on the ISCED levels 1 and 2, these outputs are perceived as significant in relation to the presented article because it was found out by means of the qualitative research strategy (the method of interviews that were later transcribed and encoded) on the basis of part of the realized research project titled “Kindergarten school climate respecting the needs of the child as a protective factor of primary prevention of risk behavior” that kindergarten teachers perceive the absence of interconnectedness of particular educational levels when inclusive ideas are frequently realized and implemented in education of children, however this tendency is subsequently eliminated on the higher levels.

Similarly, it was found out in the survey carried out by our team in 2013 (n=413) (with the use of the Q-methodology, among others) focused particularly on the environment of kindergartens that teachers working on the ISCED level of education 0 perceive diversity and its enhancement (in the context of inclusion) as an important element of the development of all children. Nevertheless, the teachers on this level of education considered important the ability to respect a child’s individual special features and the ability to respect the need of positive acceptance (the need of love).

It is evident with regard to the above mentioned surveys that inclusion is not a field that would be topical only on one level of education but permeates the system of education; it is necessary to accentuate children's early development at kindergartens in an inclusive environment and search for possibilities of subsequent optimum development at the same time.

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About Author (s):

