

Respect between Pupils and School Staff – One of the Characteristic Features of Inclusion

Abstract

We perceive communication, cooperation, application of differentiation and individualization, maximum expectation from pupils and respect among participants of education, as characteristic features of inclusive education. In this paper we carry out qualitative and quantitative analyses of data obtained from six selected indicators relating to *respect* in Czech primary schools, which we perceive as a necessary condition for inclusion.

1. Introduction

Education supporting inclusion requires a stimulating and friendly school environment, mainly based on mutual *respect* among staff and pupils and an appropriate method of communication between them. At the same time, it aims at developing the inner potential of each pupil and at supporting integration into the social environment in the classroom and ensuring a safe climate. To the above-mentioned aspects of inclusion we also added a focus on analysing the obtained data through research with the following aims: to determine what conditions teachers create for their pupils in primary education from the point of view of inclusion and how they evaluate these conditions themselves and verbalize them. In order to find the answers to the above, we used both the quantitative and qualitative approach. Given that respect among the participants in the educational process is considered to be one of the prominent features of inclusive education (which cannot be separated from other features characterizing inclusion) at the beginning of this paper we present the overall concept

of research, followed by the findings focused on respect between students and school staff.

2. Theoretical framework

The concept of inclusion is part of a comprehensive reform of the education system of each country and it is related to many factors: political, social, economic, which are rapidly changing and evolving as tradition and culture, whose transformation is long-term. Recently, the concept of inclusive education in our country has been greatly influenced by the common European trends, which are the result of international cooperation, joint research efforts (OECD, 1994, 1999, 2010); European Agency for Development in Special Needs 2003, 2010, 2011a) to search for solutions to aspects beyond the national framework.

Reasons for inclusive education are based on human rights, the demand for quality education, equality, social inclusion and application and are as follows (cf. European Agency for Development in Special Needs 2011a, p 17): human; legal (need to respect the rights of every citizen); economic (pragmatic); social and education: an inclusive environment positively influences the results of all students, not just students with special educational needs, and develops the competence of teachers and their collaboration with others in the school and external environment (Boyle, 2011, p 76).

Many studies that have been carried out (mainly abroad) describe the benefits of inclusive education, but also the difficulties in its implementation (Aboud et al. 2012; Ainscow 2000, Booth 1981, Dyson 1990, Dyson et al. 2004; Fenrick and Petersen, 1981; Koretz and Hamilton 2000; Peters, 2004. Svec, K. 2012 etc.).

We define inclusive education as a *process of integrating all children into regular schools in such a way that school staff create, in collaboration with the community, such conditions that support their development in all areas of the pupil's life quality (physical well-being /somatic health/, psychological, social, spiritual development and self-development) to a maximum extent* (cf. the overview of the definitions of inclusive education by Florian 2005, in Winter, E., O'Raw, 2010, p. 49).

The Czech education system is on its way to inclusion. Some schools, in their school curriculum, define the vision of "School for all". It means taking every pupil and ensuring his/her development in accordance with their characteristics, needs, motives, interests and value orientations. This requires building the teaching and learning process on a necessary condition – mutual respect (interpersonal and intrapersonal) and recognition among the participants in the educational process.

Respect has a special significance in our endeavors because to respect someone means to acknowledge and appreciate his/her difference and to be open to influence from him/her. Hence, it is ultimately interpersonal respect that makes complex systems governable without reducing or suppressing the system-inherent diversity (<http://www.respectresearchgroup.org/>)

The issue of respect is engaged in a lot of research abroad. In 2003, The Respect Research Group was founded as a multidisciplinary research group investigating the essence and functions of different kinds of interpersonal respect in various domains, such as business, education, or society in general. Meyer, Eckloff, & van Quaquebeke, (2009) investigated the specific situations sensitive to respect building or loss of respect and, particularly, which kinds of teacher actions in these situations elicit or diminish the respect students feel for their teachers. The origin of respect in relations between pupils and teachers and the factors and special circumstances that could play a role in its development are examined by Koehler, S. & Eckloff, T.; Chunmei, Zongkui, & Hsueh, (2005).

3. Research methodology

For analysing the above-mentioned aspects we used the quantitative and qualitative approach. In accordance with the typology of different ways of thinking about inclusion (Ainscow, 2006) and the vision of the school “to become a school for all,” when we were considering a research tool for self-inclusion of schools we chose the Czech version of the questionnaire for index inclusion. The survey involved almost 60 teachers from eight schools. After the general quantitative analysis (Kratochvílová, Havel, Filová 2009, 2011, 2012), we set the goal: to further analyse the basic principles of inclusion in schools necessary for an inclusive environment. The principle is understood as a fundamental idea, the rule guiding the idea for the negotiations (Dictionary of Standard Czech, 2005; Dictionary of Foreign Words, 1996). On the basis of the analysis of the theory and practice of inclusion we tried to define the five basic principles of inclusive schools, which could become the leading ideas in their curriculum (formal and real): *communication; cooperation; application of differentiation and individualization in education; maximum expectations from pupils and respect.*

During the next stage of the research we focussed on the description of the five principles of inclusion in the schools. For each category mentioned above, first we chose the criteria (by content analysis) selected from all three parts of

the “*Framework for self-evaluation conditions of education*” questionnaire, which described them (adapted from the Index for inclusion, Booth, Ainscow, 2002).

In this paper, we are focusing on the perception of respect by the teachers of a sample of schools. It is therefore a presentation of their views on particular aspects in which respect is shown.

4. Findings

Among pupils and school staff respect is generally the unconditional acceptance of each individual. Acceptance and respect due to the fact that I am, I exist and I exist in society. In an inclusive school respect is required at all possible levels: pupil – pupil, pupil – teacher, teacher – teacher, teacher – non-teacher, head teacher – employee, etc. Respect affects the climate of the class, school climate and contributes to understanding differences between individuals and different groups.

In the concept of curriculum (Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education), the concept of child/pupil has become the basis for new conceptual thinking about the whole educational process. We are increasingly aware of the pupil’s personality; everything in education for the future begins with this. If we look at the child as a person who is creative, curious, with the need to develop, explore and create; a person who is individual and social; a person who is critical, open, active, acting, compact, a person who is responsible and capable of self-regulation, then we have to deal with this person in an appropriate way.

For a detailed analysis of mutual respect we have chosen six criteria. Their concept is closely described by the indicative questions (Kratochvílová, Havel, 2012).

Interpretation of qualitative analysis of individual criteria:

Staff and pupils treat one another with respect

Mutual respect between the participants in education is one of the features of inclusive schools and does not concern only acceptance of diversity, but the generally cultivated and decent conduct of each member of the community. It can be said that the most transparent characteristic of this indicator (the average value of nearly 6.3) is the existence of formal and informal school rules and respect for them by pupils, teachers and the school management. Rules, socially sophisticated behaviour and discipline are not only signs of a good school, but also a condition for good educational results. Many comments on this indicator have the character of general declaration or reference to *mutual respect, respect and esteem of the*

school code (internal school code) in the communication of the schools involved. It can mean that this relationship is an integral part of the school climate, but also *the formal treatment of this requirement is sufficient*. In a similar way some schools declare that their institution is an *environment safe for children*.

Whether someone is truly interested in the problems of pupils and whether their comments are somehow reflected in the real running (life) of a school is less clear. If a reaction to these questions appears in the comments, they are usually reserved references that *individual cases are dealt with according to individual needs and current capacities, most often with classroom teachers*, so nothing that would concern the wider school culture. Only one school states that *class teachers work more systematically with the opinions and needs of pupils, they discuss and create conditions for pupils' reflection on school life*. On the other hand, we can also ask what respect teachers enjoy from pupils, how they resolve conflicts in educational situations and what type of corrective measures they have in a particular school

Students are equally valued

Also in this indicator a relatively solid average, i.e. 6.0, was obtained. However, we are afraid that many schools declare their tolerance towards differences of pupils merely as a formality. Only one school explicitly admits that this issue is related to each member of the community separately. The basic argumentation for equal chances is presented by *the Charter of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, as well as *internal school code*.

In the arguments of other schools, formulations towards pupils also appeared: *All pupils are equally perceived and accepted at school, regardless of their belonging to different cultures, family background and parental status, economic security. The diversity of cultures, language, etc. promotes mutual enrichment of all members of the school community.*

Staff and pupils treat one another as human beings as well as occupants of a "role"

Also from the average value which was obtained in this indicator (nearly 6.3), it can be concluded that our schools are really trying to build a climate of mutual respect between pupils and teachers. The formulation of this item likely resulted in most schools stating just minimum or formal comments. It could be caused by a small drawback of our research tool' *"Framework for Self-evaluation,"* which does not offer the full coverage of the item with a guidance question for rigorous argumentation. Even this may be a reason why the school staff did not comment on it.

If we want to characterize the most significant feature in the building of mutual respect for all the members of the school community, it will probably be *focus on the positive aspects of individuals and the effort to take account of their talents and problems*. One school declares that they help individuals to find *their own strengths* and emphasizes that *everyone in the school community can find a place where he/she feels safe*. A further positive feature can also be derived, namely the individual's personality is more important than his/her actual results.

The school arranges teaching groups so that all pupils are valued

Also in this indicator, a solid average (i.e. 6.3) was obtained. However, measurements showed that the situation in individual schools is quite different, because this indicator included those with the largest variance. On the other hand, a relatively large number of arguments suggests a very positive sympathetic trend in the current practice of primary education, e.g., *We divide classes in favour of social cohesion, i.e. everyone can learn to cooperate with everyone*. In most schools, pupils with special educational needs are integrated into heterogeneous classes and re-education is realized, e.g., through their concentrated work with special educators or directly differentiated work of these pupils in ordinary classes.

Some arguments in this indicator just follow the guidance questions again; others go completely off the question: *School respects all pupils equally*. Some of them state that school creates classes purely technically, i.e. according to the number of pupils, which is sometimes required by necessity regarding the organization of small schools: *Pupils are divided into classes according to the number of pupils in each grade*.

Lessons develop an understanding of difference

Argumentation regarding this indicator, related to the respect for pupil differences and their opinions, is already more specific and tells us more about activities in school. In schools where there is no ethnic diversity, teachers say that *pupils do not have enough opportunity to meet with different ethnic groups, cultures or religions*. However, we should not be completely satisfied with this response. It is possible that these opportunities are not immediate in school, but they are in everyday life, literature, media, etc. The situation is helped by the fact that when making a professional assessment of new textbooks there are currently opportunities for multicultural education as one of the most important aspects is combating latent xenophobia.

With regard to respecting different opinions among children, schools did not often give their opinion. In more than a half of the schools a claim appeared in

the sense that *children are encouraged towards tolerance and understanding of differences or pupils share experiences with each other*, but specification was only in two schools: *We often use dramatization, brainstorming, discussion in a circle and the aim is understanding the differences in cultures, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, etc. We present one of the three slogans of the school: No one is a person better or worse than I am, we are simply different.*

Discipline in the classroom is based on mutual respect and compliance with rules created together

At the last attribute in this subchapter, a "standard" average, 6.3, was also obtained. The attached arguments showed that teachers usually give their pupils the opportunity to participate in the formation of disciplinary rules and cooperate on the procedure for solving disciplinary problems.

All schools agree that the key to mutual respect *is to create positive and open relationships in the classroom*. The agreement holds true in that *pupils are involved in creating and commenting on rules of action or behaviour at school*. Nearly a half of the schools explicitly stated that their *pupils are encouraged to self-discipline*. Then *there are clear procedures, understandable both for teachers and pupils, regarding how to react to inappropriate behaviour*. One school also adds that *if someone breaks rules, the causes are primarily explored and subsequently the possibility of changes in the action and behaviour*. Problems are solved by the community circle. Another school emphasizes that the *school code of behaviour (rules) is formed with the cooperation of pupils, teachers and parents and every year it is again discussed and updated*.

5. Conclusion

Among the arguments of schools there are substantial differences related to their degree of specificity. Some schools justify evaluation of the criteria with very specific arguments which demonstrate their real life, which is occasionally missing in some schools and criteria. Teams of teachers for their argumentation often used answers too wide, general and unspecified or did not respond to the question suggesting some misunderstanding to the criterion of inclusion. One school was significantly different by its specific and factual argumentation. This school also excelled in the content analysis of the school curriculum (the first phase of the research, Kratochvílová, Havel, Filová, 2011).

Generally we can say, based on the evaluation of the teachers included in our sample, that schools accept differences between pupils and use them for the enrich-

ment of learning. Pupils are involved in the creation of common rules, thus ensuring their safety; fewer are invited to feedback about what is happening at school. The opportunity to give students more space to affect the real life of the school is not completely used. We can say that in these schools, as in the Czech Republic (Lechta, 2010, p. 34), a transition is currently going on between integration and inclusion, which is best described as dimorphic inclusion/integration.

The above examples show how difficult it is to find suitable arguments to the chosen criteria. It requires understanding the whole issue of inclusive schools and very careful consideration of the situation in school. If there is no comparison between schools, their statements are very different in terms of the degree of subjectivity.

At the same time, it is necessary to ask whether the chosen research tool is suitable for our environment. During our research we pointed out the difficulties teachers faced during its implementation into practice. The cardinal problems were particularly time-consuming processing of the questionnaire and the fact that some sub-criteria were less understandable. Based on the research results, we tried to propose a much simpler form of the questionnaire, which would correspond to the Czech environment and consist of criteria for principles of inclusion mentioned above (for detail cf. Kratochvílová, Havel, 2012). If we want to recognize the process of inclusion in the schools, we cannot be satisfied with the statements of teachers and other school staff when examining the principles of inclusion in schools. It is necessary to examine the aspects through other methods. In the next phase of the research, therefore, we proceeded to examining inclusion and its principles in schools by using observation of teaching, interviews with teachers, school staff and pupils. We believe that after analyzing the results we will obtain a more objective view of the application of respect in school practice, and we can provide schools with feedback on their self-evaluation and possible further development of inclusion.

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