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INCLUSIVE AND COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO CHILDREN FROM SOCIALY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUND

TOMÁŠ JABLONSKÝ

Catholic University in Ružomberok (Slovakia)
e-mail: tomas.jablonsky@ku.sk

ZDENKA ZASTKOVÁ

Catholic University in Ružomberok (Slovakia)
e-mail: zdenka.zastkova995@edu.ku.sk

ABSTRACT: *Being able to understand the diversity of pupils in teaching brings many opportunities to establish various innovations in order to achieve more efficient results of education. One of the current trends in education is supportive inclusive education that is based on respecting the diversity of pupils. This contribution understands inclusive education as a way of implementing the educational process that suits the developmental needs of all pupils. Based on this understanding it identifies factors that influence the performance of pupils coming from socially disadvantaged background and it describes implications relating to confidence, attitudes and motivation of these pupils to learn. Within stimulation of the developmental needs of socially disadvantaged pupils we analyse the possibility to create attractive educative environment by the means of cooperative learning.*

KEY WORDS: *Inclusive education. Inclusive environment. Pupils from socially disadvantaged background. Cooperative learning. Principles of cooperative learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Education policy of many countries supports inclusive educational strategies with an overlap to building inclusive society that emphasises the naturalness of coexistence of various individuals. One of the societal challenges stemming from the diversity of human population is to ensure that each pupil has the same chance for education. This would also entail enabling each pupil to develop his/her potential in an optimal way. Inclusion in education starts with understanding and accepting the differences of pupils and it builds education on this heterogeneity and differences (Duchovičová, J. 2013, p. 20). Similar principle of accepting the diversity of a classroom is applied by cooperative learning, on which we will focus in this contribution. We will deal with a group of pupils from socially disadvantaged background, as the number of these pupils in population slightly increases.

INCLUSIVE APPROACH AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PUPILS COMING FROM SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUND

It is a responsibility of school to provide each pupil indiscriminately (of ethnicity, language, religious affiliation, special educational needs, etc.) with high quality education. Pupils with special educational needs and variously disadvantaged pupils used to be mainly integrated into schools. Groups of such pupils were created based on their health disadvantage, gifts, or their coming from socially disadvantaged background. The differences in inclusion and integration were pointed out by V. Klein and V. Šilonová (2016). According to them, integration means physical placement of pupils into common schools while inclusion means “fulfilling the basic right of each pupil to get high quality education that in its contents includes also value aspects and in its approach to groups and persons with special educational needs respects principles of justice and equality of opportunities.” Accepting individual needs of all pupils in the classroom and ensuring development of each pupil in accordance with his/her potential is a big challenge for teachers. In this context, the understanding of inclusive education by Š. Porubský (2014, p. 3) seems very useful. He understands inclusion as “**a means of implementing the educational process** in which the teacher constantly considers how to meet the developmental needs

of the pupils in such way that would prevent failure of pupils and at the same time enable their full-featured development within their individual possibilities that might differ in each pupil.” We can say that inclusive education does not focus only on individual needs of a specific individual, but it covers all pupils that participate on the educational process. According to the above mentioned understanding of education it doesn't matter what kind of pupils attend the school or classroom. What matters is how they are pedagogically treated, how they are approached.

Lately, due to socio-political situation, educational practice of many countries had to deal with increasing number of pupils from socially disadvantaged background. According to international comparative studies (PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS), the performance of pupils from socially disadvantaged background is influenced by social, economic and cultural background of the pupils. It means that factors such as parents' education, material household equipment (availability of learning aids, number of books in the household, place to learn), economic income of the family etc. predict the achievement of results in reading, mathematical and science literacy. The environment in which pupils grow up significantly predetermines their success at school. Pupils from socially disadvantaged background not only usually achieve worse results of education, but also the level of their internal motivation and confidence is lower. They are typically emotionally and socially unstable, they have low load tolerance, they have negative attitude towards authorities, resentment towards school and school duties and weaker adaptation skills to the school environment (Šuhajdová, I., In Lechta, V. 2016, p. 445). These pupils often experience the feeling of inferiority and frustration of failure at school. Some of the barriers in educating socially disadvantaged pupils are insufficient hygiene, irregular school attendance, insufficiently developed communication and expression skills, poor vocabulary, insufficient reading literacy and science literacy.

To support education of socially disadvantaged pupils in accordance with the principles of inclusion means accepting their potential and personal prerequisites, creating attractive educational environment and also creating and implementing educational programmes that respect social, cultural and linguistic specifics of these pupils. In order to saturate pupils from socially disadvantaged background we consider it relevant to innovate the content, forms and methods of education. That's the reason why we will further pay attention

to the specific means of education that has potential to contribute to the establishment of an inclusive classroom culture.

FORMATION OF INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Creating an environment that complies with the principles of inclusion requires establishment of such educational bases that is implemented in the overall context of cooperation and mutual support. We mean not only consistency between educational and professional practices of individual inclusive team members, but more importantly cooperation and mutual support of the pupils in specific social groups. Cooperative learning strategy emphasises the irreplaceability of social interactions for the cognitive and socio-emotional development of a personality. M. Adams and M. Hamm (1994, In Tsay, M. – Brandy, M. 2010, p. 78) perceive cooperative learning as an organisational form based on the persuasion that through it pupils learn by using social context. According to I. Turek (2008, p. 317), in the atmosphere of equality and cooperation pupils have an opportunity to get used to and to acquire skills and attitudes such as planning and organizing of work, mutual help, cooperation, communication, coordination of efforts, dutifulness, responsibility, tolerance, appreciation of provided help, non-violent conflict solving, etc.

The key point in creating inclusive environment in a classroom is the idea to create cooperative learning community – through application of the following principles:

1. Create positive interdependence

Pupils, in various educational situations, try to achieve their objective and they will succeed only if other pupils that work with them on the task will also achieve their objective. According to T. Jablonský (2006, p. 39) “pupil in the group perceives that he/she is connected with his/her classmates in such way that he/she can't succeed unless his/her classmates succeed as well.” By the means of creating positive interdependence we can positively influence the characteristics of pupils from socially disadvantaged background that are mentioned by I. Šuhajdová (In Lechta, V. 2016, p. 445): poor perseverance in overcoming obstacles, quick abandonment of the objective after failure, impatience, ...

Creation of positive interdependence among pupils depends on the objective and on the character of the task, while educational activity is implemented through interaction of individuals regardless of their social, cultural, ethnical, health or economic background. Cooperative groups enable cooperation of pupils with different level of abilities and with different life experiences. This can be considered as a challenge to “disrupt labelling” of pupils. At the same time, it will enable all pupils to participate on the group work, to cooperate and to benefit from it.

2. Support individual responsibility

Individual responsibility means trying to achieve the group target and to be helpful to others in their efforts. H. Kasíková (2004, p. 85) specifies this principle as “action and performance of each member is evaluated and used for the good of the whole group and all members benefit from the cooperative learning.” Thus we can suppose that supporting individual responsibility of pupils in a group may influence the tendency of pupils from socially disadvantaged background to rely on others.

3. Enable mutual contact and face-to-face communication

In order to initiate feedback among the members of cooperative groups, sharing of learning resources, helping each other, mutual encouragement of group members and support important for the sense of belonging, it is important to ensure eye contact among the group members. According to H. Kasíková (2004, p. 70), interaction in cooperative groups leads to more frequent, more precise, open communication, to clearer understanding of each other's perspective, to differentiated, dynamic and realistic views among pupils, to healthy confidence, to expectation of positive and productive future interaction. With regard to this principle, V. Battistich (In Gillies, R. M., 2003, p. 37) proved that effectivity of cooperative learning does not depend on the frequency of application of cooperative activities, but on the quality of group interaction.

4. Lead pupils to form the desired interpersonal and group skills.

As efficient functioning of cooperative groups can't do without using social skills, it is important to: get to know each other and trust each other;

precisely, intelligibly and unambiguously communicate; listen to each other; accept and support each other and, last but not least, constructively solve conflicts (Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., 1990, p. 30). Pupils need to gradually learn the above mentioned skills. For the category of pupils from socially disadvantaged background the interpersonal and communication competences become a very specific objective. Activities requiring cooperation eliminate individualism and they also contribute to the development of competences necessary for formation of desirable attitudes and values and eventually have strong potential to act as an intervention into the process of socialization.

5. Reflect group activities

Cooperative learning requires discussion on how efficiently the group achieves its objective and which activities and behaviour of its members is useful or useless for the group. The opportunity for self-reflection, but especially an opportunity to look at oneself through the eyes of others, could be a significant factor in formation of pupils' confidence that works as a behaviour regulator. We can state that in cooperative tasks all pupils have a chance to experience success, which we consider to be the potential for rising their positive value and self-confidence.

Combination of the characteristic features of cooperative approach in education (Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T. 2009, 366-369) with the principle of inclusion corresponds with the requirements highlighted in the introduction of this contribution, while we can talk about such means of educational process implementation that is in accordance with humanistic and democratic values of the society. V. Lechta (2016, p. 166), depending on special needs of pupils, defines supporting conditions that relate to the area of education and that can be understood as “de-barrierisation” of activities at school. He recommends:

- to conceive activities so that all pupils can participate on them to the maximum possible extent, even the pupils with special educational needs,
- to set objectives that are achievable for all pupils,
- not to single out specific pupils from the group, but to accept them as full-featured group members,

- do not tolerate inadequate behaviour of pupils,
- to support competitiveness exclusively when achieving such objectives, in which pupils can compete fairly.

We may notice that formation of an inclusive classroom means dealing with formation of relationships based on cooperation. In education it means to approach planning, implementation and evaluation of education in such way that each pupil participates on the activity, has a chance to succeed on his/her own level and thus fully use his/her own potential. Consistent creating and respecting the main features of cooperative learning enables pupils to learn how to communicate efficiently and to cooperate with others. We can state that cooperative learning has a potential to prepare children for acceptance of diversity as a social reality, to develop tolerance and respect for other and to support the desired forms of behaviour. Atmosphere of cooperation, participation, reciprocity and support should be a part of everything that takes place in a classroom.

CONCLUSION

School, as one of the most important institutions participating on the formation of human personality, currently deals with the questions how to face the differences of pupils, how to deal with them and how to use them in education. Significant role in the process belongs to the attitude of the school, which is capable to face the diversity as an invaluable potential to endorse human values. The task of a teacher is thus to structure the educational and social background so that pupils can develop their skills and attitudes necessary for interaction with various pupils. In the contribution we have focused on the specific means of education that (just like inclusion) builds on heterogeneity and helps us not only to perceive the differences positively, but also to build on them and thus create social background in which pupils learn to orientate, establish friendships, cooperate and share their experiences. We believe that work in heterogeneous groups provides pupils with more opportunities to perceive and value diversity that exists in a classroom as well as in society.

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