

SCHOOLS WITH AN INCLUSIVE CLIMATE

Summary

The current condition of school inclusion in Slovakia – despite pedagogy experts' theoretical definitions over the years (abroad and in our country), is at a primary stage of public education and creation of conditions. Implementation of all inclusion principles into common practice of nursery schools is unique. It is rather due to the personal engagement of some head teachers and nursery / primary school teachers, who are interested in inclusion and take initiatives. However, inclusive principles and rules (not all at once) are realized without connecting them to the term 'inclusion'.



The presented monograph entitled 'Škola s inkluzívnou klímou' originated on the basis of the nationwide research in Slovakia carried out in 2014 within the project KEGA no. 035UK-4/2013. The aim of this project was to map factors influencing successful inclusion in nursery schools.

317 nursery schools were involved in the qualitative and quantitative research – 54 of them gave input on the state of inclusion in their schools with their own observations. Head teachers, teachers, assistants and other employees were supposed to state the objections or suggestions which would lead to the increase of success of the inclusive practices from the point of view of their own professional experience. Our goal was to get a deeper understanding of aspects of inclusive socio-educational activities, from the point of view of informants and qualitative analysis of their comments in the description of main factors, which are crucial for



implementation and subsequently support the inclusive process in nursery schools in Slovakia.

Research findings pointed out seven important factors which are prerequisites for successful inclusion in nursery schools in Slovakia and which, according to the opinion of research informants, support effective therapeutic and socio-educational activities in the school environment oriented to establishing principles of inclusion.

These are:

1. Nursery school climate – active creation of positive atmosphere and environment (educational, social, cultural) rich in incentives.
2. Professional employees (medical educator, social educator, special educator) in nursery schools – comprehensive pedagogical care for all children placed in nursery schools.
3. Assistant teachers – help and support for individual integration of a ‘different’ child placed in nursery school (child with health problems, physically or mentally disabled child, child with specific educational needs, etc.).
4. Public education on inclusion – education of parents, including the subject of inclusive education into all education faculty programmes, practical courses on inclusive procedures, continuous and special supervisions for nursery school employees, guidebooks for teachers, lifelong learning of teachers in nursery schools, promotion of inclusion and making the information clearer and available, for example in the media.
5. Social network in the catchment area – initiative involvement of representatives of local governments and specialized and voluntary institutions on common activities in rural and urban areas, etc.
6. Increase in state budget – financial security for ‘inclusive nursery school’ (higher salaries for employees, technical equipment, aids, etc.) which are necessary for increasing quality of education of children towards an active lifestyle when they become adults.
7. Participative awareness of the community and society – within broader surroundings, in the catchment area of nursery schools, representatives of local governments, police, church, schools, civil associations and



entrepreneurs should create a social environment which makes growth in potential criminality of children and youth impossible, tries to establish morally and spiritually valuable environment where, as one of the research informants said: *'Love, understanding, respect, patience, encouraging children, partner relationship, ... child = person'* comes first.

Final recommendations of the research and the implementation of inclusive practices in schools

The terms 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education' are becoming gradually familiar in the practice of nursery and primary schools, but the prerequisite for further developments in this field is deeper and more specific explanation of the goals and components of inclusive education and their purpose while creating an inclusive climate in schools.

To a great extent the success of the educational process depends of head teachers and their managing (planning and logistic) activities. It is necessary to train them on inclusive education issues and their implementation (for example by means of special methodical courses for management).

One of the demanding tasks of head teachers is creating work teams which cover the educational needs of all pupils sufficiently. If we want inclusion to work, the need for a higher number of relevant professional employees is inevitable, as well as the choice of pro-inclusive courses and educational offers within their qualification. As higher and higher demands are placed on teachers and professional employees nowadays, we consider it to be important to arrange supervision as means of their professional growth and at the same time as prevention of the 'burnout' syndrome.

To support managing activities of head teachers we suggest authorizing one of the professional employees to take expert patronage and instruct the process of inclusive education. His or her role might consist in gradual training of other colleagues and supporting their professional competences in relevant fields, as well as introducing new employees into the work process and inclusive environment of the school. In the future we suggest creating broader professional and supervision teams, which will have mutually complementing competences and will cooperate in an interdisciplinary way.



To successfully start the inclusion it is necessary to accept inclusion as a strategic vision of the school. We believe that if inclusion becomes a value for a school and all employees identify with it, and it is a commitment which they all have and work towards collaboratively, it is a realistic objective. However, this effort must be explicitly included not only into the most essential strategic document of the school – the school's work plan, but also into all documents (for example internal order of school for pupils and employees, thematic plans, school educational rules, etc.).

Part of the analytical activity of the school while creating inclusive plan is the evaluation of its strong and weak points and creating proposals to strengthen these weak points. A significant help in this process is a quality project management, who map current possibilities and offers in the field of grants and subsidies within individual state and non-state institutions.

If a school wants to be called inclusive, it should be opened to accepting all pupils from the catchment area. We recommend mapping the local environment as a prerequisite for planning the creation of maximally appropriate conditions for all children's successful education.

Creating inclusive climate in schools is a prerequisite for the success of inclusive education. We believe that by facilitating the employees' personal and professional growth, by creating collaborative teams made up of teachers and professional employees (characterized by joint planning and decision making), by supporting their effective communication, establishing more open partnership with the children's families and more active work with the group of children within individual classes, it is possible to gradually create such a climate.

Communication and cooperation between school and other school institutions, exchange of experiences (best practices), organizing cultural and social events (under the idea of inclusion) are significant in the success of this process.

We must expect that inclusion will not work effectively right away. It is a demanding continuous process in which it is important that schools continuously auto evaluate the process and determine new goals and tasks. We are convinced that the results of their fulfillment will contribute to the success of all pupils.

Responsibility for a child in the inclusive process refers to each individual child. All adults without exception who come into contact with children, who live close to



their families, schools and playgrounds, bear full responsibility. Inclusion as a new philosophy of education will perhaps not live up immediately to expectations of teachers, parents and all members of the society in the catchment area of nursery schools, but it is a suitable inspiration and innovation which has been missing for a long time in the school system of our country.