

**Implementation of the Standard:
Creating Conditions that Enable Development of
Children with a Diagnosed Need for Special Education
according to Their Developmental and Educational
Needs and Predispositions in Public School**

Abstract

Inclusive education is a concept and a new vision of integrating disabled people in a school environment within the Polish education system. It is crucial to answer the question if it is possible and what values are necessary to enable the concept to take place. The most important questions to be answered are whether contemporary schools are ready to meet all the necessary conditions to educate children with special educational needs; whether schools are able to create the chance to succeed and whether Inclusive Pedagogy is a real alternative to special schools.

Disabled people increasingly often appear in the social and public space. Unfortunately, it is still common to perceive them, their disabilities and competences through harming stereotypes.

According to Andrzej Sękowski (2001) the reasons for the negative attitudes are interpreted by psychologists in various ways. While considering the phenomena connected with attitudes towards the disabled, researchers use, inter alia, the cognitive dissonance theory, attribution theory, modeling concept, the concept of social roles or altruism. In recent years, the attribution theory has become the most popular. It concerns the cause-and-effect relationships of people's behaviour. There are at least two ways. First, internal (also called dispositional) attribution assigns

causality to factors within the person and their or others' personal features. Second, external (situational) attribution assigns causality to an outside factor¹. The most common mistakes come from the tendency to seek reasons for certain behaviour within personality, dismissing or underestimating situational and external factors. Hidden personality theories have been created within the process of socialization and are of great value in reasoning. One dominating feature often decides on the perception of people's actions. In psychology it is called the Halo Effect. It also happens quite often that evaluation of one's actions is made through the perspective of the person evaluating – it is called False Unanimity (it is an assumption that other people are similar to us, they think similarly and are driven by similar values). Fritz Heider (1958) stated that it is impossible to understand and explain people's behaviour without reference to so-called naive psychology, amateur psychology practiced by people every day (I. Chrzanowska, 2010, p. 41).

Similar causes stand behind the process of shaping attitudes towards the disabled. A. Sękowski states that the process of shaping attitudes towards the disabled is connected to three elements: features of disabled people, personality of healthy people and conditions in which the interaction takes place. Hence, the conditions of shaping attitudes within segregationist and integrative environments differ. However, regardless of environment, the attitudes are connected with the type of disability in the first place. According to A. Sękowski, the most negative attitudes are to be noticed towards people with mental disability, compressed disability, facial or torso deformations or with deformations of those parts of torso which are especially visible during the very first contact. Nonetheless, the limitations in social functioning, especially connected with communication and movement, have a decisive meaning in shaping the attitudes. Based on the research results of Moore and Fine (1978), A. Sękowski points out that teachers in such situations are more willing to accept children with learning problems rather than mentally disabled. On the other hand, the attitudes towards the physically attractive disabled are more positive than towards those less attractive (R.E. Kleck, W. DeJong, 1983, as cited in: A. Sękowski, 2001). According to Sepowski, in the context of a disabled person's personality and shaping of attitudes towards it, the type of disability is of great importance. Authoritarian and egalitarian personalities could be predictors of negative attitudes towards disability. Dissimilarity, otherness and, in this case, imperfection of subjects of such attitudes may result in lack of enthusiasm,

¹ There are also other types: egocentric attribution – success is only my contribution and all failures are other people's fault; global – when people believe that factors are similar in different situations; and stable – causes are permanent and do not change

expecting the impossibility to meet social demands, to play the roles necessary in shaping positive or at least satisfactory evaluation. Additionally, dogmatism, cognitive rigidity and cognitive simplicity favour negative attitudes. Cognitive simplicity is a synonym of reconstructive or uncritical evaluation and a lack of cognitive complexity. A creative element in the perception of behaviours of others allows for noticing positive features in various (often other than disrupted) areas of social functioning that compensate deficits. It allows for formulating positive evaluation. Sekowski (1998) states that such factors like high intelligence, high level of creative skills, independent field of perception, high self-evaluation and moral and social values' preferences favour shaping of positive attitudes.

Factor analysis of research results has allowed to define factors that can be perceived as predictive to negative and positive attitudes. The features that can be perceived as predictive to positive attitudes were called as follows: social values factor, creative factor, economic reflection factor, knowledge and systematization factor and self-evaluation factor. The features that can be perceived as predictive to negative attitudes were called: reconstructive knowledge factor, own intellectual abilities evaluation factor, consumer factor, appearances creating factor and exaggerated glorification of values factor (A. Sękowski, 2001, s. 141).

The results of the research by A. Sękowski are inherently concurrent with a common idea of conditions of shaping social attitudes. Nevertheless, they are often involuntary. It is possible that the awareness of oneself as a person expressing a negative attitude towards the disabled is the reason for controlling our reactions and thinking about our judgements and reasons for them.

Social attitudes towards the disabled are not the only obstruction in the process of normalization of their situation. Development conditions created through social agreement are another problem.

Research proves that one of the most important difficulties in the process of organizing factual participation of the disabled is the lack of specialist support in an open education system. Teresa Oleńska-Pawlak (1992) points out the problem of the lack of specialists who would be present at schools at least as an interim measure to help when teachers have doubts about didactic actions, if not on a regular basis. It is extremely important while working with a disabled student in public schools where, as the quoted research results prove, teachers do not feel ready or competent enough to work with children with special needs. This lack of such specialists was legitimated with a document omitting one of the forms of education in the context of organizing special help to disabled students. The regulation of the Ministry of

Education, passed on 18 January 2005, on the conditions of organizing education makes it obligatory to employ specialists in special and integrating schools, but not in regular public schools. The situation is similar in the context of multi-aspect diagnosis. Is there a real risk that in public schools with a disabled student there is a lack of support and problems with satisfying students' needs? To what extent do schools manage to realize the standards of Creating Conditions that Enable Development of Children with a Diagnosed Need for Special Education According to Their Developmental and Educational Needs and Predispositions?

The realization of the research standard might be conducted through the evaluation of an educational situation in several aspects. These are: the analysis of the needs of disabled students in the context of access to didactic tools and specialist didactic methods; actions leading to satisfy the needs; access in the context of overcoming architectonic burdens; matching education programs with individual abilities and needs of disabled students; diagnosis on individual abilities and needs as well as development and knowledge on the results of using them; actions supporting the development of disabled students and increasing teachers' qualifications to work with a student with special educational needs (I. Chrzanowska, 2009).

Using the report of the Lodz Department of Education on the results of research regarding the problem of creating conditions to enable success in education for disabled students, it is possible to show the range in which the needs of students with disability realizing the school education duty within public schools are satisfied. Analysis of the results should help to realize the realities of implementing the regulations included in the fundamental law after five years from introducing system changes. I also believe that the results may be treated as representative for large agglomerations in Poland. Unfortunately, the situation in rural areas is probably much less positive.

Indicators and factors of the standard of Creating Conditions that Enable Development of Children with a Diagnosed Need for Special Education According to Their Developmental and Educational Needs and Predispositions:

First indicator – Supplying appropriate instrumentation and didactic tools with factors: Analysis of needs; Specialist didactic tools; Modified equipment.

Second indicator- Access to school environment, and the factors: Access to rooms; Modified course books; Free Transport.

Third indicator – Program modification, factors: Individual program; Progress monitoring, Modification of individual programs; Individual programs are created in cooperation with parents.

Fourth indicator – Systematic diagnosis, factor: Diagnosis of progress in acquiring skills and knowledge.

Fifth indicator – Progress supporting classes, factors: The number of hours of individual rehabilitation concurrent with a diagnosis; Control of the realization of recommendations; Analysis of modifying forms and methods of work; Students with individual rehabilitation programs; Teams of teachers to unify educational and rehabilitation actions; Cooperation with parents.

Sixth indicator – Employing special pedagogues, factors: Supportive teachers; Other specialists.

Seventh indicator – Entry in statutes about pedagogical and psychological help, factor: Psychological and pedagogical help for students with special educational needs.

Eighth indicator – Separate systems of grading for students with diagnosed PKS, factors: Requirements modified to students' abilities; Parents are familiar with educational requirements; Information about students' progress; Information included in the internal grading system of a school.

Ninth indicator – Counseling and methodological help for teachers, factors: Diagnosis of teachers' needs; Specialist training offer; Training organization for teachers; Number of training courses for teachers.

Analyses were performed at the level of public primary and secondary school (junior high schools).

While analyzing the data it is important to pay attention to the most important barriers in the process of the realization of education duty by disabled students in public schools.

In public primary schools the least positive is the realization of one of the most important factors in the standard – Creating Conditions (...) Organizing and Conducting Progress Supporting Classes. 55% of public schools with students with special educational needs do not realize individual rehabilitation classes set by official psychological and pedagogical clinics. In the cases where such classes are planned and organized, 44% of schools did not create any individual rehabilitation programs. There is a doubt whether, firstly, teachers in public schools know the aim of rehabilitation classes for disabled children, and, secondly, what kind of work with such children is realized during the classes. The crucial condition for rehabilitation actions to succeed is cooperation of all teachers. Every person working with a student should know the content of the program of rehabilitation classes, be aware of its aims and the way they should be achieved, use certain methods and work with a student using those methods during each class. Meanwhile, in 55% of those schools there are no teams of teachers to unify educational and rehabilitation actions. In 25% of the cases schools do not control the realization of the recommendations of psychological and pedagogical clinics. This should be treated as

neglecting all actions aimed at supporting the progress of disabled students. In 26% of public primary schools there is no analysis of the level of modifying forms and methods to satisfy disabled students' needs. It means that in over a quarter of public schools a student with developmental disorder is treated objectively and their education plays a marginal role.

Another important problem in the realization of the standard of Creating Conditions (...) is schools' activity to modify education programs to satisfy disabled students' needs and according to their abilities. Only 42% of public primary schools have created individual educational programs for students in situations with some reasonable premises. Nonetheless, while creating such programs schools tend to omit parents whose cooperation is not only helpful but absolutely crucial. Parents have the best knowledge about their children, they know the details of their children's disability and their factual abilities and limitations. They should be helpful especially when teachers say that they feel incompetent in numerous situations. Therefore, it is difficult to explain why schools do not involve parents in those processes. The fact is that 45% of the schools that declared preparing individual educational programs do not initiate such parents-teachers cooperation. The abilities of disabled children, similarly to the abilities of children with some developmental disorder, change. It is obviously connected with the processes of growth, perfecting the organism's functions, but also as a result of the applied therapy, which is supposed to be aimed at actuating growth and overcoming difficulties (e.g. compensative and corrective). There is no doubt that it is necessary to modify individual programs according to the student's needs. There should be various goals of such modifications and, unless some circumstances disturbing development occur, changes should aim at satisfying higher expectations and limiting supportive actions. Unfortunately, there are situations where, because of bad health condition or additional functioning disturbances, the program should be changed by decreasing expectations and initiating new forms of support. The conducted analyses show that 38% of the schools where individual educational programs have been introduced never modify them. If we add a lack of progress monitoring (26% of public schools) it is natural to come to the conclusion that the indicator of modifying programs according to disabled students' needs and abilities within the standard of Creating Conditions (...) is not realized.

In the third place in the ranking of problems regarding creating conditions for educating disabled students in public primary schools one can find access to the school environment. In 23% of the schools disabled students do not have full access to all school rooms, while in 28% accessibility is only partial. Those schools did not eliminate the architectonic barriers. 26% of the public schools also have problems

with modifying equipment (chairs, desks) to meet the disabled student's needs and the fact influences the student's comfort. Regardless of all those problems, disabled students attend public schools. I am aware of the fact that a certain number of schools agree to educate disabled students and they do not secure all the necessary conditions to enable their full participation in community life. It is difficult to judge such an approach because there are only two options: to refuse and to limit the right to choose or to take the risk and try to work in an imperfect reality knowing about all obstructions.

The accessibility of the school environment is not only about the physical conditions of education, but also everything that creates substantial correctness of the process of education. One of its indicators is the material that is the basis for the realization of the educational program, i.e. course books. The analysis shows that in 24% of the public schools course books are not modified to match disabled students' abilities or needs. I would not treat it as an entirely bad situation. It is the teacher who makes the choice of a course book and if there are disabled students in a group the choice becomes even more difficult. When teachers make a decision about a course book they take the risk that it will not be of equal help for all students while realizing the program. It is possible, then, that the teacher will have to prepare additional materials for a particular group of students or that they will have to select the content themselves. On the other hand, differentiating students in terms of that element of the didactic process might result in separation which is an action reverse to the reasons for including a disabled student in a group and to the idea of a joint, collective education.

Similar analysis of the realization of the standard of Creating Conditions (...) in public junior high schools also enables numerous conclusions. Similarly to primary schools, also in junior high schools the biggest problem to cope with is the realization of development supporting classes for the disabled. In 65% of the schools, students do not have any individual rehabilitation programs. 53% of the schools do not follow the recommendations from psychological and pedagogical clinics about the number of hours of individual rehabilitation. In 39% of the cases there are no teams of teachers to unify educational and rehabilitation-oriented actions. 23% of the schools do not control the realization of recommendations from psychological and pedagogical clinics about special needs of disabled students. Hence, the situation in public primary schools and junior high schools is analogous. Junior high schools more often (by over 20%) do not fulfill the duty to prepare an individual rehabilitation program for a disabled student. However, junior high schools initiate teams of teachers to unify educational and rehabilitation-oriented actions more often.

The evaluation of the realization of the standard in the context of modifying education program to satisfy disabled students' needs and abilities would be very similar. In 33% of the public junior high schools, students work according to an individual rehabilitation program. The number of modified programs is also higher. Finally, parents of disabled children are invited to create individual programs more often in comparison to public primary schools.

The most noticeable differences concern the access to the school environment. The number of junior high schools where architectonic barriers have not been eliminated is considerably higher (13% to 23% in primary schools). The problems with modifying school equipment to meets students' needs seem minor; they have not been modified only in 19% of the junior high schools and 26% of the primary schools. Nonetheless, the number of children who do not have modified course books is visibly higher and this problem seems to be more concerning (35% of junior high schools do not create such an option for their students, with 24% of primary schools).

To sum up, the standard of Creating Appropriate Conditions for Students with a Diagnosed Need for Special Education According to their Needs and Predispositions was realized in 67% in public primary schools. Public junior high schools coped with it slightly better and their result is 71%. Integrative schools and special schools were also included in the analysis by the Lodz Department of Education. The results of public schools were the least positive from the perspective of the disabled student. In integrative schools the level of realization of the standard was visibly higher – 86% for primary schools and 87% for junior high schools. The analysis showed special schools achieved the best result and that they are ready to satisfy special needs of disabled students – the result was 93%.

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