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Cooperation of teacher aides, families and teachers in the process of school integration

ABSTRACT: Turzák Tomáš, *Cooperation of teacher aides, families and teachers in the process of school integration* [Współpraca nauczycieli wspomagających, rodzin i nauczycieli w procesie integracji w szkole]. Interdyscyplinarne Konteksty Pedagogiki Specjalnej, nr 7, Poznań 2014. Pp. 75–82. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISBN 978-83-232-2901-8. ISSN 2300-391X.

This article deals with the issue of tasks that teacher aide faces by education of children with special educational needs who are integrated in common classes in Slovak republic. Author concerns with theoretical issues of cooperation of teacher aide and parents of child with special educational needs. Author deals with the field of special competence of teacher aides in details.

KEYWORDS: integration, teacher aides, familie, special educational needs.

If optimal personal, cognitive and social-emotional development of children with special educational needs should be ensured, one of the basic conditions is appropriate cooperation of teachers with another professionals who should participate in this process (Kmeť 2002).

Introduction

Optimal development of a healthy child needs a lot of effort of parents, school and the whole environment. Situation is much more

complicated when raising a child with special educational needs. The family of the child with special educational needs should always feel help and support. Support of professionals is important especially in various key phases of family life.

One of the most important phases of family life is when the child starts to attend school. This step means crucial change in the life of the whole family. The family is ending one important phase and starting another one. Now, the school should try to enter into effective communication with the family. When diagnosing special needs of the child is finished, parent, teacher and another professionals should try to create partnership. They should have one common aim – the highest grade of child's development.

Cooperation with parents and support of parent's participating by realizing educational program should be one of the basic tasks of professionals who participate in the process of integrated education of the child.

Teacher aide – basic tasks and duties

Every child with disabilities has right on being provided with the same opportunities and stimulation for his growth and development like his or her healthy contemporaries. Of course, on the condition that the child is able to take advantage of these opportunities.

„Of course, not every pupil with special educational needs should be educated in integrated classes and not every pupil should be necessarily educated in segregated classes” (Gatál & Rořková 2004, p. 110).

Author agrees with M. Vítková (2004) who doesn't consider important to differentiate children in groups of healthy children and children with disabilities. The starting point is accepting the child in consideration of his unique personality and social relationships and not only label him or her by social or health handicap.

One of the authors dealing with issue of integrated education and it's conditions is P. Seidler (2005). He defines integration as teaching of

healthy children and children with special educational needs together in standard schools when specific methods and forms are respected.

The integration itself is influenced by creating a set of necessary conditions. There are three types of these conditions: conditions focused on family, conditions of cooperation of school and counselor centers and pedagogical conditions of integration.

One of the pedagogical conditions of integration is the role of the teacher aide in the educational process. Teacher aides are only slowly becoming a common part of schools. The profession of teacher aide is closely connected with start of integrated education in our country (Teplá 2007). The role of school aide was at first performed by recruits instead of standard military training. After this regulation is no more in force schools have to look for the teacher aides on their own. The schools win teacher aides from office of labor, social and family issues or civil associations.

Nowadays the teacher aides are operate in schools for education of children with special educational needs in pre-school institutions, primary schools and special schools in Slovak republic. Their basic tasks and duties are defined in following fields:

- a) field of educational process,
- b) field of leisure time activities organized by school,
- c) field of cooperation with family,
- d) field of educational activities.

According to mentioned ordinance the teacher aide participates in creating conditions necessary for managing health and social barriers of one or more children with special educational needs when ensuring effective educational process.

The basic task of teacher aide in everyday reality is:

- a) systematic assistance to teacher by education in the field of social behavior and basic work, hygiene and another habits,
- b) intentional practicing of social behavior of children,
- c) teaching children to be independent,
- d) helping children when moving in school,
- e) helping children when tidying school aids and toys,
- f) individual work with children.

When defining terms connected with this topic author considers important to deal with the term “paraprofessionals.” This term is widely used especially in the USA. Author works with the book of G. Ghere and J.Y. Barr (2013). They define paraprofessionals as teacher aides and counselors. They should be responsible for contribution to individual or group education. They help teacher with implementing all aspects of individual educational program. The duty of teacher and teacher aide is to provide counseling to parents of the child with special educational needs and to contribute to his or her socialization.

Teacher aides have crucial role not only by cooperation with teacher but especially by working with the child and the family. The topic of teacher aide’s competence is very broad and comprehensive and this article focuses only on basic terminology. Now we pay more attention to the topic of cooperation of teacher aide and family of the child with special educational needs.

Cooperation of teacher aides with families and special competence

Teacher aide works intensively with a child with special educational needs. He or she has many opportunities to notice details in his progress or difficulties. It is impossible for the teacher who works with all the pupils in the class. All this information is very useful for teacher, special education teacher, school psychologist and especially parent. In the process of cooperation with family the task number one is communication of teacher aides and parents (according to ordinance of Department of education of SR n. 184/2003-095).

Teacher aide and parent of child with special educational needs should respect each other. Cooperation is successful only when the fact that parents know their children best is realized and accepted. It is what J. Kysučan (2007) means by the words, that parent is the first teacher of his or her child. Parents offer stimulation, encourage and praise, help the child to learn all the needed skills. Parents know their child better than anyone else and have experience that professional

can never gain and should appreciate. Understanding this fact helps teacher aides learn more about the environment where the child is raised. For the teacher aide is important to have all the possible information – how the health conditions of the child change, how is the atmosphere in the family, etc. This information influences importantly educational process and helps the teacher aide to make the best decisions every day.

Substantial question in this issue is education and special competence of teacher aide. They represent basic condition of effective education of a child with special educational needs. The education of teacher aide in Slovak republic is instituted by ordinance of Government of SR n. 341/2004.

Activities performed by teacher aide are determined by achieving a bachelor degree.

For this purpose especially teacher programs of pre-school and elementary pedagogy focused on pedagogy of socially handicapped groups are appropriate.

The need of special qualification of teacher aides emphasizes M. Teplá (2007), too.

“Teacher aide can achieve special qualification:

- a) university study (study programe of pedagogical sciences),
- b) secondary education focused on pedagogy,
- c) elementary degree (programe for teacher aides realized by centers of next education of teachers)” (Teplá, 2007).

Special competence of teacher aides is substantial issue we should focus on. In foreign countries (especially in the USA) there are many models that enable parents to work as a teacher aide. In our country can these parents work voluntarily with no right for remuneration because their education is usually not sufficient. Parents and other family members of children with special educational needs working at schools with integrated education and various organizations have

useful experience. They are very helpful and their contribution is significant.

One of the alternatives is adaptation of the APEL model (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning). It includes accepting of prior experience of parents of children with special educational needs and it enables these parents to work as a teacher aide or paraprofessionals. We should be motivated by well-working abroad models.

Very inspiring are the models implemented in the USA, where the teacher aide is a common part of educational process, for example the program "No child left behind act." This model deals with all the tasks of teacher aide in the process of cooperation with family of a child with special educational needs. Teacher aide should:

- a) share all the information of the headway of the child with parents,
- b) use strategies that are successful in the classroom and learn about strategies that work at home,
- c) help the parents to identify their concerns,
- d) assist the parents with no sufficient knowledge of the language,
- e) help the parents to communicate effectively with the teacher,
- f) assist the teacher when creating materials for parents including for example tips for effective learning at home,
- g) regularly contact parents and point out successes of a child,
- h) give information about future projects for children and their families,
- i) get feedback from parents (surveys, inquiries).

Many of these tasks implement teacher aides in our schools intuitively. It is needed to legislative define this aspect of the competence of teacher aide in our country.

Conclusion

The topic of cooperation of school and family with the child with special educational needs integrated in the common class has many

aspects. These aspects influence in every field the effectiveness of the educational process. Teacher should understand the pressure parents of children with special education needs feel. Teacher have to identify and respect individual emotional experience of parents, the importance of various aims they have chosen and look for appropriate solution. According to law, common schools do not must educate a child with special educational needs. Integrated education and teacher aide's participation are considered to represent high standard of education and care in our country. Especially parents require the teacher aide for their child. But the problem of finance is more and more urgent and it is causing difficulties by realizing needs. Many parents of child with special educational needs are willing and able to work as teacher aide. Implementing them in the educational system in the roles of teacher aides requires legislative ordinance.

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Współpraca nauczycieli wspomagających, rodzin i nauczycieli w procesie integracji w szkole

Streszczenie

W artykule opisano kwestię zadań, jakim nauczyciel wspomagający stawia czoło w edukacji dzieci ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi, które są integrowane w zwykłej klasie w Republice Słowackiej. Ponadto przedstawiono zagadnienie współpracy nauczyciela wspomagającego i rodziców dziecka ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi i szczegółowo omówiono specjalne kompetencje nauczyciela.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: integracja, nauczyciel wspomagający, rodzina, specjalne potrzeby edukacyjne