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Disability In The Context Of Teaching The Hearing Impaired Children In Mainstream Schools In Poland And Worldwide. Tips For Education Practice.

The idea to allow hearing impaired children to attend the mainstream schools was due to Wilhelm Harnisch from Germany at the beginning of the 19th century (Löwe 2000a, p. 14). One of the advantages of such a solution was the high cost of the special schools for the disabled children, which used to require boarding. However, it was normally the case that the disabled children attended only some special classes within the schools which used to be called People's Schools (Volksschulen). First class of this type was established in 1821 in Bayreuth and its founder was Johann Baptista Graser who is considered as a precursor of integrated education of the hearing impaired children. Unfortunately, till the mid 19th century this integrated education in Germany was dropped and the chosen solution was education in special boarding schools which left the children far away from their family homes (Löwe 2000a, p. 14-15). Unsuccessful attempts to include hearing impaired children into the mainstream school process were also taken in England, France and Sweden. In Poland the action towards education of the hearing impaired children in the mainstream schools was carried out since the beginning of the 19th century by Jan Siestrzyński – a precursor of polish surdologopedics. Later this activity was continued by Józef Szczygielski, Aleksander Manczarski (19th century) and Maria Grzegorzewska (Kurkowski 1994, p. 79).

After a long period of stagnation, in the mid of the 20th century, the idea of integrated teaching of hearing impaired children was recovered again. In particular, the „1944 Education Act” (Löwe 2000a, p. 18-19; Lynas 1994) states that a disabled child does not necessarily have to be send to a special school. On the footing of this act already in 1947 the first integrated classes were established. Later on, some of the children from these integrated classes (the so-called “units”) were completely transferred into the regular classes in the mainstream schools. In 1960 in England and Wales there was the same number of the integrated classes (25 classes) and the mainstream classes with hearing impaired pupils. This tendency was continued, so that in 1980 there were 500 classes of both types there (Lynas 1986, Tucker i Powell 1991). The researchers from University of Manchester Alexander and Irene Erwing were the most active persons who introduced the integrated education program in Britain. Nowadays, in Manchester there exists the Center of Interpersonal Communication and Deafness (Watson 1992, Lynas 1994). According to the current data, about 90% of hearing impaired children in Britain attend mainstream schools (Lynas 1999).

First integrated classes in France were established in Lyon in 1960 and in 1980 there were about 300 of them. The appropriate legal acts which allow participation of the hearing impaired children to mainstream schools were declared in 1975 (Act no 75-534). In Germany and Switzerland the 19th century idea was reestablished in the sixties of the 20th century and according to the statistics about 75% of the hearing impaired children was taught in mainstream schools (Löwe 2000a, p. 20). It is interesting to note that as much as 44,8% of these children in Switzerland and 53,1 % of them in Germany used to have a severe and a profound hearing loss.

According to Müller (1997, p. 8), the percentage of the chronically hard of hearing children up to 90 dB who now attend mainstream schools reaches 80-90 %. On the other hand, despite the first chronically hard of hearing pupils appeared in the mainstream schools in Hungary at the beginning of the nineties of the 20th century, nowadays about half of the population is taught in this way. In countries like USA, Canada, France, Denmark, India, Italy, Spain and of course Great Britain, there exist legal acts which oblige educational authorities to send hearing impaired children to the mainstream schools provided the conditions for doing this are fulfilled (Löwe 1992a, p. 69; Orłansky 1977). All this is related to an idea that the disabled individuals should be given the full possibilities of their progress and the realization of their needs in the same way as other people (Löwe 1992a). This idea enlightens humanity since the time of a French precursor of the special pedagogics Jean Marc Itard who used to live in the first half of the 19th century and its merit is the right of a disabled children to a full progress (Gałkowski 1993, p. 145).

Polish Ministry of Education edited a legal act No KS-431320-50/83 on the 14th of October 1983. It allowed hearing impaired children to attend the mainstream schools (often also called just primary schools, bulk schools or public schools).

The basic condition which allows a hearing impaired child to attend the mainstream school is that he is prepared in such a way that he is able to adopt all the curriculum requirements and so he can be promoted to a higher class. It means that the main argument for admittance of a child to a school is not the degree of the hearing loss, but the level of school maturity (Stecewicz 1985, p. 74).

In particular, a child should be of normal intellectual development, he should operate very good verbal speech, he cannot have any problem with the construction of sentences, his speech should be well-understood. A hearing impaired child should be cared of by teachers and the speech and hearing specialists. A permanent cooperation with the parents and the teachers as well as speech and hearing specialists is also appreciated.

Apart from theoretical considerations, this paper is a result of my empirical research related to learning difficulties of the hearing impaired children in the mainstream schools in classes IV-VI. The practical task of these considerations was to formulate the tips for educational practice connected with the proper organization of work with chronically hard of hearing pupils in the mainstream schools in order to gain success in their learning and upbringing these pupils.

My research method was the method of individual cases and I used the technique of a conversation and an interview. An uncategorized questionnaire was applied. The conversation and the interview were open, formal and individual.

The research were carried out in these mainstream schools in Szczecin which were attended by the hearing impaired pupils together with normally hearing children. The research sample was composed of 31 pupils of two-sided and one-sided hearing impairment. Among them there were 10 pupils in a class IV, 10 pupils in a class V, and 11 pupils in a class VI.

As a result of these investigations, I concluded that in order to facilitate the learning process of a chronically hard of hearing pupil in a mainstream school, the teacher should obey the following rules:

5. Show the full acceptance to a pupil - this will allow reaching successes in the learning process.
6. Many-sidedly recognize a hearing impaired pupil. In particular, recognize his weaknesses which are not

related to hearing impairment.

7. Notice and acknowledge pupil's personality (conscientiousness, persistence) and creativity. Pinpoint not only the drawbacks, but also the advantages, positively support and positively think.
8. Apply equal requirements and rules to both hearing impaired and normally hearing pupils.
9. Explain to other pupils in the class what is the merit of the hearing impairment – this may help in understanding and the positive attitude towards the hearing impaired pupils.
10. Keep in touch with the parents of a hearing impaired pupil during the whole stay of their child in a mainstream school. Gradually teach the pupil to be an independent individual. Tell the parents regularly what types of homeworks the child should make on his own and what should be done under their supervision. Tell them what are the tasks and methods of teaching.
11. Closely cooperate with the specialists of speech and hearing therapy in order to help a child in overcoming learning difficulties, if they appear.
12. Do not ever relate the hearing impairment with child's IQ. This does not have to be diminished at all.
13. Give a pupil clear tasks which match his abilities. Suggest the ways of solving them. Show him the methods of solving problems.
14. Work with a hearing impaired pupil individually in the field of speech and language, reading, writing, and the social integration with the classmates.
15. Evaluate pupil's achievements according to individual criteria. Give him clear tasks before you mark his work.
16. Inspect the integration of a pupil within the class and in case of difficulties properly differentiate those which are due to hearing impairment.
17. Allow social activity of a hard of hearing pupil by introducing him as a cooperator in various classroom tasks and the social life.
18. Be kind to him. Support him in overcoming any learning difficulties. Teach him a self-confidence and let him believe that he can be successful.

All the above rules are the generic tips which help to overcome learning difficulties of hearing impaired pupils attending mainstream schools in integration with normally hearing children.

Some of these rules refer to a broader educational context. One may then address the following suggestions to the schoolmasters and the schoolmistresses:

- Instruct the teachers of a hearing impaired class pupil in the mainstream schools how to best organize work with such a pupil. Do this in close collaboration with the speech and hearing therapy institutions.
 - If necessary, include hearing impaired pupils into after-school supporting classes programme.
 - As for the final test at the end of class VI give a pupil an opportunity to use a test sheet designed especially for hearing impaired or deaf pupils.
 - Cooperate with the parents of a child as much as possible.
 - Prepare the classrooms according to the needs of hearing impaired pupils (proper light, protection against internal and external noise etc.).
 - Equipped the classrooms with the helpful for hearing impaired pupils devices (projectors, induction loops etc.).
- Finally, the educational authorities can be addressed the following suggestions:

1. Organize courses for hearing impaired pupils class teachers which could help them to understand the subtlety of work with such pupils. Collaborate with the speech and hearing therapy specialists institution (e.g. Polish Deaf Association).
2. Allow regular exchange of knowledge between the teachers and the specialists of speech and hearing therapy and try to each time arrange a common programme of support for a hearing impaired children in the mainstream schools.
3. Secure hearing impaired children with support outside the school (psychological counselling, speech and hearing institution activity attendance).
4. Improve the work conditions of a hearing impaired child teacher.
5. Regularly evaluate how good is the work of a hearing impaired child teacher in the mainstream school.

In conclusion, I hope that the application of the above rules and suggestions in school practice will reduce learning difficulties and allow learning successes of hearing impaired pupils who attend mainstream schools. Subjectivity in dealing with such pupils will certainly help in gaining successes, learning difficulties will be reduced to a minimum, and the school will become an institution which fully cooperates with hearing impaired pupils and ease them to become successful in learning and school adaptation.

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