

A review of lights and shadows of Polish educational integration

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Abstract

Integration (inclusion) is the important issue and demand for any education system world wide. It assumes inclusion of children and youth with various disabilities to the education system. Polish system of inclusive education is supported by bright theoretical ideas of inclusive teaching and shadows during implementations within educational settings. This paper is a review of light and shadows of Polish contemporary educational integration (inclusion) system.

The contents are arranged chronologically, illustrating the evolution of Polish definitions and concepts of integration in education, since Aleksander Hulek, the creator of Polish concept in 70's.

Keywords: Educational integration, inclusive education, inclusion, system of education, disabilities, children, adolescents.

Introduction

Although the Anglo-Saxon world is dominated by the concept of inclusion, this paper uses the concept of integration and inclusion interchangeably. The term of integration was primarily used by the author of Polish inclusion concept – Professor Aleksander Hulek¹⁰⁻¹³ in 70's. The term of integration is still much more widespread in Poland and constantly present in the Polish reality of the legal, theoretical and practice areas.

Concepts of the educational integration of pupils with disabilities in Poland: The concept of integration is not semantically unambiguous, it is sometimes interpreted differently. Polish scholars at times understood it as a merge, creating entirely of parts, harmonizing social collectivity¹⁵.

The first Polish definition, created by Hulek¹¹ emphasized the significant axiological dimension of integration, however, referred to the medical model of conceptualizing disability. According to Hulek¹¹, integration is accepting and creating conditions for the persons with disabilities to participate in a supportive, motivating and stimulating possibilities environment which contributes to their active participation in various areas of life. According to the author¹¹, "integration is respect for human values and it expresses itself in the failure of distinction between able and those with disabilities and is implemented in mutual

contacts. It is assumed condoning human with disability values, regardless of his/her achievements and current standards".

Special educator Sękowska³³ drew attention to the availability of the educational environment for people with disabilities as an aspect of integration.

Kościełska¹⁹ defined the integration as the process of assembling a completion but also taking into account the natural environment as a site of integration. The natural environment, according to the author's opinion, allows for the formation of correct behavior and interactions occurring between children who have disabilities cause at the same time with those without disabilities.

According to a special educator Dykcik⁵, an important aspect of integration is to highlight the presence of people with disabilities in the non-segregated areas. In 2001, the author⁵ wrote: "Integration is an expression of way of the democratization of social life, the direction of change in which at every stage of life of the individual, regardless of the type and degree of occurring developmental disability constraints, the natural environment is guaranteed as non-segregated setting. Integration expresses desire to create such persons may be fully or partially integrate into mainstream life, access to all the institutions and services that benefit persons without disabilities".

Kossewska¹⁸ pointed out the integration and its broad and pragmatic dimension, as the ability to live together in harmony and interaction of people with disabilities on the set of social life. In the narrow dimension the author embedded its foundation in educational integration. The author¹⁸ wrote, "In a broad sense [integration] expresses the ability to live together in harmony and interaction of people with disabilities in all forms and situations of social life - at school, home, work, leisure time, which boils down to social inclusion. In contrast is the narrow meaning of the term of school integration, which enables students with disabilities to study in public schools and mass education along with able students and allows them to use aids according to individual abilities".

Maciarz²³ defined the concept of social integration of people with disabilities in Poland. The author believed that this concept is "the idea, the direction of social change that is reflected in the pursuit of such a normalization of living conditions, development, rehabilitation, education and activities of persons with disabilities of all ages to have had the possibility of subjective and unrestricted participation

in natural social environment and to be available to them all the institutions that are accessible to persons without disabilities.”

Chodkowska³ focused on the aspect of teleological concept of integration. According to the author, a human from an early age feels the need to integrate. In the early stages of life provides us with our family, but in the later stages of their lives looking for contacts with other people, going beyond the family. With age, relationships and contacts are more in-depth and stable. Security, recognition and social ties are necessary, contained in need of integration. Not all children are able to independently handle relationships with their peers. Children with different types of difficulties have a problem in establishing contacts with peers.

Kościelska¹⁹ sees in the integration chances of education and training a new generation in a different way. These key content and values of inclusive education will be acceptance, dignity and tolerance. Kościelska¹⁹ believes that the process of integration indicated that values become easier to raise awareness and understanding of, inter alia, through daily contact with another human being, who has to overcome many barriers, unknown to us. The mere creation of an inclusive classroom according to the author, however, does not benefit to healthy children. Possession of the proper knowledge about pupils with disabilities, also appropriate to their age, proper preparation of teachers to work in an inclusive classrooms or pro-integration education of parents is also required¹⁹.

Theoretical assumptions and implementation

Reaching the beginnings of the Polish concept of integration, some of its correctness was the assumption of mutual relations between persons with disabilities and able peers implemented on an equal basis. Analyzing the contemporary Polish scientific literature, specialist can meet many classifications types and forms of integration (inclusion), postulated or implemented in practice.

Dykcik⁵ pointed out three of its dimensions:

1) Physical: When the persons without disabilities and with disabilities are next to each other, but not with each other, there occurs the actual reduction in the distance, but there is no interaction.

2) Functional: Functional integration of lower level is where the person concerned shall undertake joint actions on different materials and by other program activities. A higher degree is when the person is interested in pursuing the same activity in the same program.

3) Inclusion: The third dimension as indicated by Dykcik⁵ is inclusion. It is the highest form of spontaneous participation in any social group, on the basis of full participation, requiring psychological and educational preparation of both parties.

Hulek¹² believed that "functional integration lies in the fact that people with disabilities live, work and spend their free time in the same conditions as non-disabled people". He stressed that it is not possible, if they are not used to this process right tools to help disabled people to function in their natural environment.

We can distinguish two other concepts of integration: complete and incomplete. The full integration allows the disabled to lead a normal life, providing them with all the institutions of education, work, culture and recreation, enjoyed by people without disabilities. Integration is incomplete while it is the complement of the society for people with disabilities.

With regards to educational integration, Hulek¹¹ distinguished the following forms of training and education: enabling participation for children and young people with disabilities in regular classes in mainstream schools. Within this form author distinguished two forms of integration: - functional integration, where in addition to the physical inclusion of the child to class, it must be given adequate assistance and the conditions conducive to the orderly functioning in the role of a student and a member of the peer group and the inclusion consisting of local integration, as turn the child to class and leave it "himself." Hulek¹¹ also pointed out a form of social integration, manifested in organizing classes or special classes in mainstream school. Among further distinguished forms of integration were special schools (segregated) daily, for children living in family homes and special schools (segregated) boarding, designed for children who live in it Monday to Friday and Saturdays and Sundays spending at home.

Another organizational form of inclusive (integrated) education was for Hulek³⁵ teaching student at his/her home by teachers from local mainstream schools and special schools.

Maciarz²⁴ analyzing the educational process in terms of integration, singled out two main planes of integration: an individual, when children with disabilities are treated equally with others, is taught in the classroom or daycare group inclusion and integration within groups, when the children with disabilities form a distinct special classes in a mainstream school. The author also pointed out the formal integration, when children with disabilities residing in a group of able peers, but this is the only community of common temporary residence, without establishing closer contacts social and emotional ties.

Maciarz²⁵ distinguished in addition, partial integration in mainstream school, where next to the groups and classes of children with disabilities are a groups or classes of children of the same type of disorder or disability. Pupils with disabilities have their own, separate places and teachers prepared in the field of special education. In these forms of

integration, children with disabilities and without disabilities visit each other and take part in joint ceremonies, games and trips. Another form of integration is the most desirable integration true and complete, that is when there is full connectivity of all children, regardless of their degree of disability and development opportunities.

The concept of integration by Hulek was in my opinion, akin to the Scandinavian and American demands of normalization principle. The conclusive assumptions of integration concept by Hulek¹⁰ noted more existing similarities than differences between able and people with disabilities in general and believed that the diagnosis of dysfunction and its extent are not always identical with the actual level of the functioning of a person with a disability, which would create the right conditions for development.

Polish Special educator Doroszevska⁴ wrote in 1981 that the study of life can only be stuck in the mainstream and not in isolation from it, which is also the correct observation of status and place in a public space of people with disabilities in Poland. This statement also is close to Scandinavian and American normalization principles, which however also means existing trends insulation against disabled people in Poland in the late 70's and 80's.

Organization of inclusive education

In terms of organization, education of children and youth with disabilities in conditions of integration in Poland is carried out in different schools. Maciarz²⁵ in a similar manner indicated major organizational forms of inclusive education in Poland. These are the integration schools for children with developmental disabilities and other disorders. Moreover, there are inclusive classes which implement the complete integration of children with disabilities into mainstream classes schedule.

Another form of organization is called cooperating classes where students with disabilities are subjects of individual teaching, participate in selected classes at school and auxiliary classes which are special groups organizationally embedded in mainstream schools.

The author also points out as one of the forms of teaching, consisting work in the house of the family of a child with dysfunctions, according to educational and therapeutic individual program, but in constant contact with his/her peers.

Turning to the characteristics of an inclusive education system in Poland, I would like to emphasize that special education is a component part of the education system in general. Integration in education (inclusion), representing a significant value of the education system in Poland, is often mistakenly associated only with the process of placing a child with a disability in a mainstream school. In fact, inclusive education is a complex form of training and education of children and young people with special

educational needs, together with peers without disabilities, the aim of which is a creation of optimal conditions for the development of each participant of integration.

According to Serafin³², inclusive education is not only the common physical being in a classroom or a common existence, but it is mainly for mutual learning and fun, overcoming common obstacles, performing the tasks, organization of leisure time. Thanks to the integration that children learn tolerance and acceptance of responsibility.

Reaching the basic assumptions of the system, regarding the formation of an inclusive education system in Poland, Hulek¹¹ saw it as the application of appropriate measures to inclusion of persons with disabilities in the usual forms of individual and collective life and satisfaction of their needs. The integration of education and training by Hulek¹¹ consisted of a maximum inclusion of children and youth with disabilities into mainstream schools and other educational institutions enabling them, where possible, growing up in a group of healthy and able peers.

In my opinion, the assumptions of inclusive education and the concept of Hulek were based on the global deinstitutionalization trends of people with disabilities. The author believed that in the case of persons residing permanently in stationary care centers, the integration will take into consideration the concern about ensuring the most frequent contact with the external social environment.

Hulek¹² stressed that inclusive education system does not exclude segregated educational settings, however, poses some alternative, forcing traditional Polish education to make significant modifications. Inclusive education system, according to Hulek¹³ was based on the following principles, referred to the fundamental human rights. First, children and young people with disabilities have the right to live such as persons without disabilities in general terms, with the same rights and responsibilities should be tailored to their individual capabilities.

Hulek¹³ emphasized that every child with a disability has the right to education and should not be deprived of this right. By providing people with disabilities appropriate to their abilities and needs, living conditions, they are able to operate on an equal level as people without disabilities. Related to the concepts of Hulek were the foundations of the Polish integration system. Maciarz²⁵ considered that the importance of inclusive education system is the creation of schools in which each student would have opportunities for full and undisturbed development.

The school, according to Maciarz²⁵ should be a miniature model of the society. At the core of an inclusive education system, according to this author lie the following assumptions: first, the most favorable for development, education and teaching of children with disabilities is being with family and the community of persons with disabilities,

while ensuring must be relevant health conditions, socio-education and teaching. Secondly, for the preparation of the disabled child to autonomy, to the extent of its capabilities, life in society is preferable to its spontaneous and deliberately organized to participate in this life. Thirdly, the process of education and inclusive education of children with disabilities should take care of their needs and personality dispositions common to them and children without disabilities. Fourth, children and young people with disabilities have the right to use all the degrees and education profiles, the institution of sport, recreation and culture and the fifth, periodic or partial isolation in stationary centers of some special groups of children for reasons of health or education, will not have only negative effects on their development, when they will be allowed various forms of contact with the environment.

Kościelska¹⁹ noted that inclusive education is a new model of education, the opposite of segregation, the alternative for the separation from general education and children with disabilities from healthy pupils. According to the author, inclusive education is a great education opportunity of a new generation in a different way.

According to Kościelska¹⁹, key assumption of inclusive education is to adjust the learning as much as possible to the needs and abilities of children. Therefore, to such kindergartens and schools should have access all children, with the exception of the relatively few, whose current state of mental health prevents the use of a structured curriculum.

The theoretical assumptions of Polish educational integration (inclusion) system indicate that children and young pupils without disabilities and pupils with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities. Among the advantages of inclusive education, Barłóg² pointed out the following: approaching conceptually system of integration to inclusive education. The author wrote that through education in the integration the person learns acceptance, not only the pupil with disabilities, but also teaches tolerance and recognition of other cultures, races and religions. Integration enables to accept and interact with another human being, regardless of his limitations and biases to him. Integration should be taught, not only the pupils with disabilities but also able peers, since both groups depend on their interpersonal relationships.

Legal basis

Among the key Polish documents, posing the legal basis for the education of children and young people with special educational needs are: the Law of September 7, 1991 on the System of Education³⁴. However, as pointed by Firkowska-Mankiewicz⁶, there were created favorable legal provisions for education, which, however, in flagrant contradiction with everyday educational practice, are in relation to the education of children and young people with more serious

disabilities.

In 1999, the Polish education system was reformed and introduced new concept of the first stage of the educational level. The new concept involved division of primary and secondary schools, giving up eight years of education in primary schools and four-year high schools. The document of the Ministry of National Education: "The Reform of the Education of Students with Special Educational Needs"³⁰, described the objectives of the reform of the education system in Poland and attempted to clarify the definition of special developmental needs. In the above-mentioned document were mentioned groups of persons with special educational needs including: people sensory disabilities, motor (orthopedic, progressive muscle disease), intellectual disabilities, language disorders, multiple disabilities, emotional and behavior disorders, childhood autism and related disorders, specific learning disabilities, chronic physical health.

With such legislative options, parents of children and youth with disabilities were included in decisions making process and taking responsibility for the education of their children as well as having influence in issues concerning the physical accessibility of schools. Parents may choose education in schools closest to their residence, mainstream schools, mainstream schools with integrative classes, integrated schools, special classes in mainstream schools, special schools (segregation), specialty centers, educational institutions (segregation). Another key legal document that regulates the rights of the education of children and youth with disabilities in Poland, in terms of integration, was the regulation of the Minister of Education dated November 17, 2010³¹ which entered into force on September 1, 2011 and specify the many areas of the education of children and youth with disabilities. This document takes into account new proposals for education.

On the basis of the Law of September 7, 1991, with the decree of November 11, 2010, were established the conditions the organization of training, education and care for children and youth with following disabilities: deaf, hard hearing, blind, visually impaired, physically disabled including aphasia, with intellectual disabilities, with autism, including Asperger's syndrome and multiple disabilities.

Educational facilities, which were obliged to education of children and youth with disabilities were: kindergartens and mainstream schools, kindergartens and integrative schools. Regulation dated on 17.11. 2010, specifies also the time of study for young pupils with disabilities: up to 18 years of age, in primary school and 21 years of age in middle school and up to 23 years in secondary school. The key objective of so understood inclusive education is, according to the regulation, to prepare students with disability to independence in adulthood.

Critique

Over the last two decades, the integration process has been described as a scientifically tested and evaluated by Polish scholars. Despite the positive aspects, noticing development of the inclusive education system, constantly appear critical assessments of the levels of its implementation, associated with different circumstances, expressed by various entities involved in the process of educational integration in Poland.

Przybylski²⁹ believes that a decisive impact on the success in education of students with disabilities needs different types of support and has special conditions: philosophical, political, legislative, social and psychological as well as physical and technical. The author believes also that the nature of the particular conditions and the relationships between them, determine the current status of detection, defining and meeting the special educational needs of children. Meanwhile, in the case of each child we have to deal with different contexts: individual, institutional and general public.

Olechowska²⁷ clarified the main areas of problems associated with the implementation of inclusive education in Poland. Among them were indicated related directly to: a disability, parents, educational institutions, society (nation and the local community) and the state and the law. In each of the identified areas are manifested difficulties and barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in Poland. The following below examples show some of them. Integration is a concept that is understood by contemporary Poles in different ways, with both supporters and opponents. Supporters, coming from different backgrounds professional or families, opt for promoting integration activities of children and youth with disabilities in Poland, seeing its values. Opponents also professionals or parents, are more skeptical and are struggling to maintain the traditional status of special schools (segregated), claiming that children with multiple disabilities, requiring the support and education of special facilities (segregated), because public schools do not provide them in any way the right conditions for growth.

On the other hand, opponents tend to be disappointed with the difficult process of implementation of educational integration, they believe that "inclusive system of education and training does not benefit anyone and cause only the problems and disappointment"¹.

Meanwhile, some parents and at the same time recognized in Poland specialists in the areas of disability rights, mothers of children, adolescents or adults with disabilities, among others, Kościelska M., Chodkowska M., support inclusive education as a valuable source of common social life.

Zyta³⁶ investigating the environment of people with Down syndrome, wrote that "for parents of children with special

educational needs is essential, that their children do not live in the sense that they are worse, they have no right to a decent and reasonably normal life".

At the same time, somewhat skeptical towards the integration of people with moderate intellectual disabilities is recognized by Polish sociologist Zakrzewska-Manterys²⁸ who published works in the area of special education.

Educational and social integration of persons with disabilities today raises many different emotions in Poland, delight at the idea and also the criticisms and negation. Reaching early aversion to the idea of integration I want to point out a problem with the inconsistencies and illegibility of the concept, concerning the models of disability and persons with disabilities.

Hulek¹⁰ noted that in the 70's, the principles based on the idea of Polish integration have been lucidly and clearly formulated. The basic premise was understanding and perception of people with disabilities as normal, even in situations where its serious disability, determined by bio-psycho-social, caused different functions. The consequences of such early approach of integration are in my opinion, twofold. First, there is a tendency of denying dysfunction in the image of people with disabilities in order to improve his/her social position or his/her actual denial and non-acceptance. Secondly, the consequence was the negation of human disability in his/her image.

Olechowska²⁷ presented key information that refer to the realities of the education of children and young people with special educational needs. The author stated that "the proportion of children with difficulties in development have a major impact on the learning and social adaptation, up to 20% of the population of school age."

In 2005, the number of students with disabilities in an Polish integrated setting was 21 473²⁰. Number of students with various disabilities who attend institutions of integration depends on the Polish region. In the school year 2004/2005 most students with disabilities in an integrated setting were educated in the provinces of Mazovia, Silesia and Lesser Poland Province, the central and southern Poland. Least of inclusive facilities was in provinces: Świętokrzyskie, Opole and Lubusz. Number of students with disabilities in an integrated setting also differs depending on the level of education. Number of children with special educational needs attending primary schools including special, amounted to a total of 83 542, which represents 3.1% of all primary school pupils (of all types). Number of children with special educational needs who attend integrated schools was 12 504²⁰, with the result that in an integrated setting learned 15% of all Polish pupils with special educational needs ".

Maciarz²⁴ pointed out the difficulties implementing the concept of integration of disabled people in Poland. Author

believed that the implementation of the concept faces a number of obstacles and barriers to physical, social, cultural and educational. The author pointed occurring architectural barriers such as high thresholds, stairs, narrow doors and hallways, too small rooms, lack of handrails and handles, lifts for people with disabilities, air conditioning and poor physical accessibility of cultural institutions. Maciarz noted also in 1999 that very few school facilities were adapted to the needs of children with disabilities, therefore it was necessary to obtain help from the assistants. Bringing down barriers and impediments in the Polish system of inclusive education, the students with disabilities being eight years after the entry into force of the Law of September 7, 1991, the author noted that the barriers are also associated with traditional educational processes and inappropriate organizational and educational activities.

Maciarz²⁴ noted that children with disabilities are often subjected to unhealthy and unfair competition; do not have a chance to experience the solidarity of the community, in addition to their stress level increases. Consequently, children with disabilities, experiencing stress have difficulty in developing pro-social behaviors and build ties between peers.

In the late 90's, as noted by Maciarz²⁴ and Al-Khamisy¹, teachers reluctantly undertook work with children with disabilities. Researchers also observe some paradoxes within the system of educational integration. According to Przybylski²⁹, "It is currently implemented integration model (class / group integration, kindergarten, integrated school) - one-sided and not very flexible - slowly creates a new system of segregation within the system of integration". Further barriers which indicated Maciarz²⁴ are associated with negative attitudes towards pupils with disabilities by pupils without disabilities. The author pointed inappropriate, often unreasonable attitudes and prejudices of us - Poles, limiting persons with disabilities to participate in cultural life, but also limiting social access to education in mainstream schools and offering a narrow range of professions and jobs. According to the author the elimination of prejudices and bad attitudes will be soon, if the public will get along with people with disabilities.

Barriers to inclusive education in the perception of parents of children and adolescents with a disabilities indicated Olechowska²⁷. The author drew attention to the phenomenon of apparent integration, observed by the parents and the lack of understanding of their families. Parents indicate lack of proper cooperation with them in the various ministries, among others, health, education and government organizations. Parents of children, youth with disabilities, although see many opportunities offered by the integration, but 15% of them believe that the integration of people with intellectual disabilities is impossible and unfortunately in Polish society.

Parents of children and adolescents with disabilities pay attention to the inadequate preparation of schools, to educate students with special educational needs, they have a bad experience with mainstream education.

Research undertaken in Poland²⁷ indicates that a high percentage of parents is dissatisfied with the results of inclusive education of their children, directly affected by the following factors. Lack of well-defined criteria that qualifies a child for such a form of education, lack of experienced and factually prepared teaching staff are difficult conditions in schools and incompetent school collaboration with parents.

Another critical remark concerning the integration of the educational system in Poland is the area of contact between the parents of children with disabilities. Konarska¹⁴ pointed out that "parents of children without disabilities very often are opposed to mutual contacts". Zyta³⁶ pointed out in the report of the study's own dramatic statement like the following parents of a child with a disability, to social contacts held within own family "I even avoid contact with close family. They do not approve my child during visits and fear that my daughter does not wet the sofa".

Olechowska²⁷ believes that parents of children with disabilities often indicate feelings of loneliness in coping with their own problems and reduced sense of dignity and self-esteem.

I presented only some of the barriers and obstacles indicated in the areas of inclusive education by its researchers and parents of children and youth with disabilities. Difficult situations in educational integration have devoted a book by Gajdzica⁸: "Difficult situations in the opinion of teachers of integration." Author accurately illustrated the basic categories of difficult situations, conditioned by the following sources: the qualifications and competence of teachers working in integration classes, overloading students in grades of integration, complex, methodical situations in inclusive classrooms in the context of emerging conflicts.

Among the gaps and barriers in the background of difficulties perceived by teachers of inclusive education Gajdzica⁸ pointed out a small number of hours allocated to activities, modest facilities with teaching aids, as well as shortages of cooperation between teachers and parents and in addition, conflicts between teachers and resistance to conflicts resolution and lack of cooperation.

Conclusion

Lights and shadows of educational integration (inclusive education) of children and adolescents with disabilities Poland, presented in this article were concentrated on several pillars. I introduced the definitions of educational integration and the key theoretical assumptions of the Polish concept of integration by Aleksander Hulek and his

followers, which can be seen as green lights towards the development of inclusive education system.

Another optimistic pillar was illustration of the legal basis of the contemporary system of inclusive education in Poland. Lot of gaps still exists as shadows in the implementation area. There are many different opinions about pros and cons of inclusive system. Main problem in my opinion is associated with relatively poor public awareness of the need of inclusive environments in Poland.

What shadows characterize Polish reality of inclusive education for years? In my opinion it involves also contextual dominance of the medical model of disability, which lasts since beginning of 20th century. The social model of disability or bio-psycho-social model of disability, although nowadays accepted, as a viable construct of disability, however, was not passed on to the definitions of disability. In Poland still are present categories in the definitions of disability, locating disability in human, not in his complex situation, constructing a disability, as defined by the ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health) in 2001.

The Polish legislation, scientific publications dominate the expression "children and young people with a disability" or "disabled", which indicates the semantic attachment in Poland to the medical model and a constancy of concepts since the early years of the twentieth century. An undoubted advantage of inclusive education in Poland is that despite the large barriers, institutional or mental, existing in the minds of Poles stereotypes regarding disability, it is a continuous process, implemented and modified.

Inclusive education in Poland constantly arouse various emotions of the participants, which means both the existence of strong resistance among disillusioned by inclusive education professionals or disappointed parents. Besides, inclusive education is at the same time in Poland supported by the scientific communities, NGOs or parents, seeing in it the power of change, to improve the conditions and educational opportunities for Polish children and adolescents with disabilities.

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