

Inspiration from abroad

AMERICAN INSPIRATION

Everyone is welcome here: Beyond the bounds of inclusive education - Beyond the bounds through inclusive education...

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The foreign excursion that we present here has the objective to obliterate geographical, symbolic and the demarcating boundaries of the existence of man in the 21st century. The character of the text provides us with space only to outline the reflection of the social education is Weber's¹ ideal type. In spite of this, we accept the challenge - with positive connotation - to share the observations raised by studies at American universities in summer 2017, 2018, 2019 and the short-term fellowship in November 2018. This challenge highlights diversity and the opportunities to get enrichment from it not only in educative reality.

If we are to move ahead in inclusive education, then for a while we must abandon our daily truths, which help us in many cases to act more quickly and with greater certainty, but also hem us within the unchanged patterns of the stereotypes. Together with the reference to the discursive approaches in the humanity sciences (cf. Sedláková, 2018; 2014) we refer to the impacts of the language markings. The relationship between the language and social reality is reciprocal. Language has performative character (Austin, 2000). Our identity in the world of permanent fusion become dynamising concept, which is co-determined in interaction with others (Vygotskij, 2004). The development of the individual in a separate discourse is framed by repressive practice. The development of the individual in diverse environment is organised by the practices of variety. Homogeneity does not support creativity. On the contrary, it is in the differences that we perceive space for mutual enrichment.

The University of Central Florida (UCF) has appealed to us with its approach to the education of male and female mentally handicapped students (for instance, with the Down Syndrome). They have the opportunity to study in a university environment away from home, in a campus with the other male and female students, which in the case of the UCF entails more than 66 thousand individuals. The recruitment for such a program also seems inspiring. The male and female applicants are recruited on the basis of individual personal interviews on motivation and their own preferences in the field of education and realisation of individualized educational development. In terms of homogenization, the normative and performance approach, this is clearly a low target. In terms of the individual development of the individual it is on the contrary a huge target. The issue is the perspective that we opt for and the ideology that is naturalized for us.²

We had the opportunity to get acquainted with a similar program also at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston). The university is the initiator of the Think College³ project focused on *higher education* of male and female students with intellectual challenges. UMass Boston is Mecca in this field and it is profiling with its experience in this program in the preparation of academic staff in inclusive education (for instance, the concept of the inclusive curriculum in the faculty and university environment).

¹ Weber perceived social phenomena to be culturally bound to a given situation. The ideal type is the structure of thinking that abstracts the significant characteristics of the phenomenon in a specific context in order to allow its examination (Weber, 1949, pp. 100–101).

² Naturalization is a process of acceptance and comprehension of phenomena as natural and consistent. (Thompson, 1990). We do not subject the naturalized phenomena to further criticism, but internalize, assimilate their action.

³ <https://thinkcollege.net/>

In the context of Czech tertiary education, for the present, this is unimaginable because we still think in the paradigm that excludes the individual with a mental handicap from access to capital (Bourdieu, 1998). The shrine of knowledge (higher institution or other “normal” school) is again just like in the era of traditional society only a matter for the privileged (Keller & Tvrđý, 2008). The preparation of mentally handicapped for higher education is fiction in one country while it is the norm in the another. The norm is social consensus, a social contract that formulated in a language. Thus, change of the normative doctrine in the public discourse does not require lots of money - as the critics of inclusion often proclaim - but rather the obliteration of boundaries, which we build ourselves (change of the *mindsetting*).

If we closely examine the word *norm* - which is discursively codified with inclusion - we shall work our way to the synonyms like *habit, custom, model, standard, order*. We ask the question of how these words resonate with the recently diversified society, which should support the uniqueness of each of us? How education under the dictation of the norm supports the maximisation of the personal development of an individual, who must “fit into” the given norm. Normalization in the Czech historical context refers to the violent suppression of the democratization process in Czechoslovakia. Normalization in the socio-cultural and educational process refers to the violent suppression of the uniqueness of man.

Michel Foucault in his work draws attention to the power institutions that repressively exclude any individual who does not have the opportunity for personal transformation and development. His work is inspiring for us mainly thanks to the historical archaeology of the approach to otherness and the practices leading to suppression of the essence of humanity (cf. Foucault, 2000; 1993).

The schools with inclusive intent, which we had the opportunity to get acquainted with in America (for instance, Unlocking Children’s potential - UCP Charter schools in Florida or Kenny elementary school in Minnesota) are characterised by a high degree of parental participation. The parents and volunteers from the ranks of the public are a natural component of the open ecosystem of the school. Some of them are also school employees. The parents of handicapped children are invited to serve as teacher assistants (for instance, to a class other than attended by their own child). Their established experience as people caring for a child with specific educational needs gives them the credibility to perform such work. To this, the Principal adds: “Have you ever seen a more erudite and empathic teacher than the parent of a child with specific educational needs?” The school becomes a more natural environment and not a closed institution also thanks to their presence.

An important role in this is played by support for the social and emotional skills; the axiological dimension of education, strengthening of relations to self and others and own responsibility in the educational process. The schools clearly manifest the partner approach to the students and female students, which also appears in the missing hierarchy of the school management. The generally positive climate is the leitmotif and premise of the local education. The frontal teaching is replaced by a differentiated and cooperatively project teaching. Based on this experience, we believe that learning cannot take place in an atmosphere of uncertainty, fear of failure or distrust. This is perhaps the reason why it gets big space here for reflection of own educational progress, preference of restorative justice to punishment or maximum support to the individual and his individuality.

We perceive school as a mirror of the society that reflects its value settings, challenges and ideologies, which it believes and follows. The school should also prepare an individual for life in an ever accelerating world. And because we do not know what society will be like in the next decade, let alone the longer term, current pedagogy is under own re-construction pressure. We firmly believe that current pedagogy will find resources to facilitate the maximum development of each individual and subsequently the entire society. These are resources that we need not seek beyond borders, if we abandon the paradigm that formed education in the 19th century. We lock the resources in our country in alternative and special institutions, laboratory schools and non-traditional parental groups. These are opposed to the system and seek other alternatives for the education of their children.

In the American schools visited (from pre-primary to the tertiary level), we can see huge (cultural, racial, religious, gender) diversity. Diversity in our conditions still has untapped potential (for instance, education of socially unprivileged pupils or work with the spiritual dimension of the educational process⁴). We believe that gradual opening up to diversity in the all-society and school reality will bring a lot of enrichment.

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⁴ For the inspiring sensitisation to the topic of religious and spiritual diversity, we thank the long-term cooperation with Austrian colleagues in the Aktion Project. Their sensitive and supportive approach of each individual in the school is a source of hope for us. The hope that opens dialogue on effective and value backed education in our geographical conditions in the post-modern era.