Educational practices and strategies that promote inclusion: Examples from the U.S.

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Abstract: In this article, the authors review promising practices and strategies that have been demonstrated to support and promote inclusive education in the U.S. at school, in classrooms, in small groups, and at individual levels. Selected strategies that promote instructional, social, and psychological inclusion (e.g., response to intervention, inclusive service learning, guided reading, and incremental rehearsal) are discussed in detail. Potential adaptions and adoption of these strategies are suggested in order to assist in promoting inclusion within the Czech education system.

Keywords: strategies for inclusive education; instructional, social and psychological inclusion; Czech Republic

Postupy a strategie inckluzivního vzdělávání: příklady z USA

Abstrakt: V tomto článku autoři uvádí příklady dobré praxe a příklady strategií, které podporují inkluzivní vzdělávání v USA, a to na úrovni škol, tříd, skupin a jednotlivců. Blíže jsou představeny vybrané strategie podporující inkluzi v oblasti výukové, sociální a psychologické (jde např. o response to intervention, inclusive, service learning, guided reading and incremental rehearsal). Jsou zde navrženy možnosti adaptace a použití těchto strategií, a to s ohledem na inkluzivní vzdělávání v České republice.

Klíčová slova: strategie pro inkluzivní vzdělávání; instrukční, sociální a psychologická inkluze; Česká republika

1   Introduction

Across the U.S. and Europe, schools and teachers currently experience a wide variety of diversity in their classrooms, including children with different language skills, disabilities, and social backgrounds as well as some who are gifted and talented. In recent years, educators and policymakers in the Czech Republic (CR) have recognized that new educational strategies are needed for the educational system of the country to be responsive to the democratic principles of a European society that include reducing educational inequality ("Strategy for education policy," 2018). Even though the Czech Republic is a relatively homogeneous society, it cannot ignore the needs of its ethnic and cultural minorities, including people of Slovak, Polish, German, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, etc. descent, and the Roma population.

Since the ratification of the U.N. Conference for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Czech society has initiated moving forward on a path for the educational inclusion of its approximately 71,879 children in compulsory education with special educational needs (SEN), which represent 8.6% of the school-age population ("Education and disability/special needs," 2018). Among students with SEN, there are also those with disabilities. The most common disabilities in the CR, as noted by Felcmanová, Klusáček, and Hrstka (2015), are specific learning disabilities, mild intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, and behavior disorders. In the country there are also children with SEN because of their socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Approximately 100,000 or 9% of primary-school children in the CR come from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes families who cannot afford to heat their homes where 3-4 persons live together in one room, as well as those receiving governmental living subsidies for other reasons. According to Felcmanová et al. (2015), there are also approximately 11,000 or 1.3% of primary-school children in the country who are traumatized and 2,000 or .3% who are neglected. Another aspect/factor of diversity in the current population is nationality (and therefore one's primary language) with approximately 16,400 or 2% of primary-school children (mainly living in Prague) who are not ethnically Czech and, among them, children from families with refugee status constitute a very small part.

In order to effectively address the varied learning and social needs of students from diverse backgrounds, it is necessary to implement teaching strategies designed to differentiate instruction. Instructional differentiation can have many forms. It typically starts through an examination of instruction and an adjustment of its intensity. Such adjustments include the size of the instructional group (whole group, small group, individualized instruction), as well as the frequency and duration of the intervention. Moreover, it entails decisions about using a direct or a constructivist pedagogical approach, and the frequency with which progress monitoring will be utilized (Vaugh & Wanzek, 2014). Once decisions are made with respect to these issues, specific instructional strategies can be implemented to address the needs of the whole class, small group, or an individual student who is struggling with the goal of promoting learning within an inclusive rather than segregated setting.

The Czech action plan for inclusive education 2016-18, aligned with Strategy 2020, addresses five critical elements that are necessary for an effective implementation: (1) the proposition that the sooner an inclusive approach is implemented, the better it will be for students, (2) the idea that inclusive educational benefits students both with and without special educational needs, (3) the need for highly qualified specialists, (4) the creation of support systems and mechanisms for financing, and (5) the need for reliable data ("Akční plán," 2018). One could argue that a key component is missing from the Czech inclusive education action plan, namely an instructional approach supporting inclusive education. Having highly qualified specialists is an important goal. However, being able to access and implement effective methodologies to create instructionally, socially, and psychologically inclusive environments is of equal importance.

The following sections of this article focus on systems, classroom, small group, and individualized instructional strategies developed and implemented in the U.S. that promote different aspects of inclusion. The reader is advised to review the U.S.-based strategies and to consider how they can be adapted for potential use in the Czech educational context to facilitate inclusion.

2   Promising strategies that promote educational inclusion

Since the passage of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (now referred to as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* – IDEA) in 1975 (Lechtenberger, 2010), programs and strategies have been developed and implemented in the U.S. that have been demonstrated to bring academic and/or social benefits to students with and without special educational needs who are educated in inclusive environments. The history of researching evidence for the benefits of inclusive education in the US with potential implications for the Czech Republic and other Central and Eastern European countries is discussed by Abery, Tichá, and Kincade (2017). Programs and strategies developed in this area have

focused on a variety of outcomes associated with inclusive education with the common goal of enhancing the quality of instruction, academic outcomes, and/or social opportunities provided to children with SEN.

Instructional inclusion. Despite the number of years during which children with SEN have been included in general education classrooms in the U.S., many teachers still struggle to create educational environments that meet the needs of all students. Instructional inclusion is a key component of an effective inclusive education implementation framework, along with physical, social, and psychological inclusion. Effective instructional inclusion has been demonstrated to be supported through a variety of strategies including the following: response to intervention (RTI), differentiated instruction, effective utilization of teaching assistants, and integrated learning (Hattie, 2009, 2015; Lawrence-Brown, 2004).

Social and Psychological Inclusion. The goal of social inclusion is to promote ongoing, positive and social interactions between students with special educational needs and their peers. Psychological inclusion refers to a person feeling valued and accepted as a member of the group at school and in the community. In addition to physical and instructional inclusion, the opportunity to develop and maintain friendships and to experience a sense of belonging are critical aspects of inclusive education (Giangreco, 2003). In the U.S., numerous strategies have been found to enhance the inclusion of students with SEN (Bond & Castagnera, 2006; Carter & Kennedy, 2006; Fredrickson & Turner, 2003; Martinez & Carspecken, 2008; McDonnel, Mathot-Buckner, Thorson, & Fister, 2001). These include circles of friends, inclusive service learning, and social networking programs both in and outside of classroom.

3   A systems approach to inclusion

Response to intervention (RTI). RTI is a U.S-developed multi-tier approach to the early identification, prevention, and support of students who are academically struggling to bridge the achievement gap of children and youth from different backgrounds. RTI is based on a preventative, tiered system of instruction that provides struggling students with supports *before* a referral for special education evaluation and services. It is an instructional problem-solving model based on an early screening and formative assessment, a data-based instructional decision-making, a tiered approach to targeted intervention, and a high-quality instruction at multiple levels (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Shapiro, Zigmond, Wallace, & Marston, 2011; Grosch & Volpe, 2013). In order to ensure that appropriate supports are present at all school levels, RTI is implemented on a school-wide basis. The purpose of this system-wide approach is to provide educators with the tools to assure that *all* students are learning, to support students falling behind academically with targeted interventions to prevent their identification for special educational services, and to foster collaboration between general and special educators in the development and effective implementation of targeted interventions for students with SEN to ensure that they are making adequate progress. Response to Intervention (RTI) has mostly been implemented in the U.S. at the elementary school level, even though this preventative framework is increasingly being applied for older students in secondary schools (King, Lemons, & Hill, 2012).

Assuming that the instructional resources of a school are conceptualized as a pyramid, support within the context of RTI can be distributed into four quadrants (see Figure 1). The largest quadrant at the bottom of the pyramid represents the general education (core) curriculum delivered within a general education setting by general education teachers (Tier-1). This instruction should be of high quality, evidenced-based, and effective for the majority of students (approximately 80%). Students who do not respond positively to the core curriculum are provided with Tier-2 supports. These typically include small group, targeted instruction focused on the development of basic academic skills (e.g., explicit phonics or reading comprehension instruction). Studies in the U.S. suggest that students who receive Tier-2 supports show significant gains in their academic performance (Gersten et al., 2008). When students do not respond positively, more frequent and intensive instruction with fewer students in the

small group is implemented at Tier-3. At this level, not only is the group smaller, but the frequency or intensity of intervention is increased. Those students who, despite taking part in multiple interventions at Tiers-2 and 3, still do not demonstrate adequate learning as evidenced by progress monitoring data are referred for special education evaluation and services (Tier-4).
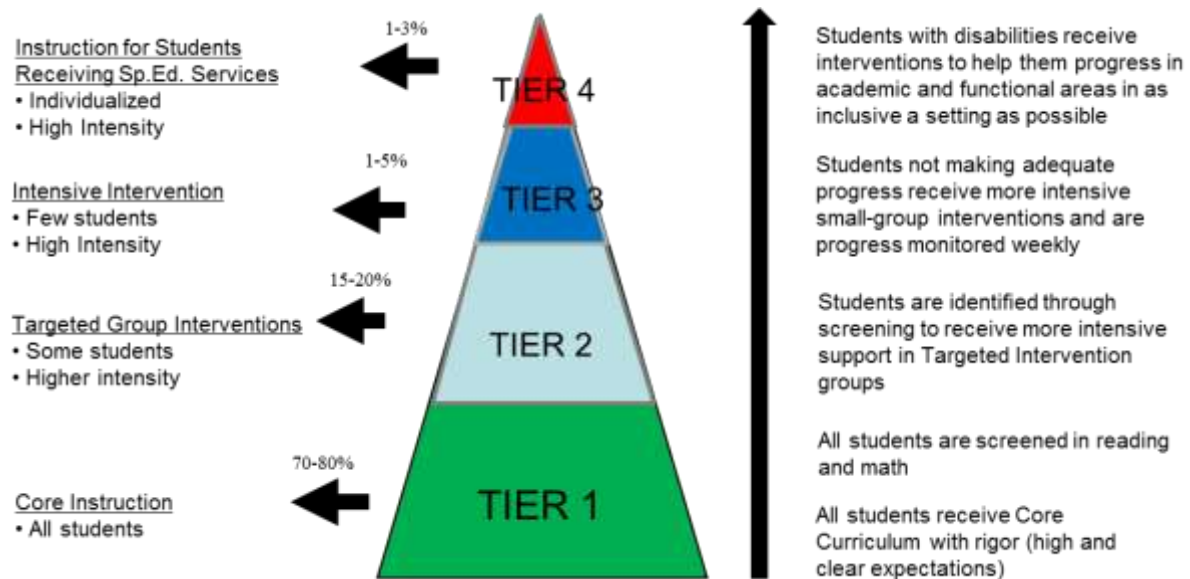

Instruction for Students Receiving Sp.Ed. Services
• Individualized
• High Intensity

Intensive Intervention
• Few students
• High Intensity

Targeted Group Interventions
• Some students
• Higher intensity

Core Instruction
• All students

1-3%   TIER 4

1-5%   TIER 3

15-20%   TIER 2

70-80%   TIER 1

Students with disabilities receive interventions to help them progress in academic and functional areas in as inclusive a setting as possible

Students not making adequate progress receive more intensive small-group interventions and are progress monitored weekly

Students are identified through screening to receive more intensive support in Targeted Intervention groups

All students are screened in reading and math

All students receive Core Curriculum with rigor (high and clear expectations)

Figure 1. Response to intervention (RTI) framework

The RTI framework differs significantly from the previously used student-deficit models since it focuses on creating an educational environment supportive of all students. Within the framework, screening and progress monitoring assessments are essential. Universal screening ideally occurs three times a year (fall, winter, spring) for all students with the purpose of identifying those who are at risk and of grouping those who are struggling into instructional Tiers. This early prevention strategy ensures that students do not fall through the cracks of the educational system and lag behind their peers. For students who receive supports at Tiers-2 and 3, a variety of short (i.e., 1 to 3 minute) formative, progress monitoring assessments are administered throughout the school year, sometimes on a weekly basis (in Tier 3), to determine if students are profiting from instruction. In most cases, the formative assessments used in RTI are Curriculum-Based Measures (CBM; [Deno, 1992](#), [2003](#)). Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) utilizes classroom and other instructional materials to directly assess student progress. This ensures that interventions being utilized are effective and provides teachers with the opportunity to individualize instruction to meet the needs of each student. Following the RTI framework, students are then placed into tiered instructional groups based on their screening data. This placement takes into consideration both their academic strengths and challenges. Within the context of these relatively homogeneous skills groups, differentiated instruction is then employed.

A key concept to understand at the time of implementing RTI is that the primary aim of the approach is to *improve instruction.* At Tier-1, this entails ensuring that *all* students in the class receive high quality instruction with a research base to support its effectiveness among the children and youth with whom it is being used. In those urban districts in the U.S. with a diversified population, for example, high quality Tier-1 instruction applied to the reading stage should provide evidence not only to support its use with students whose first language at home is English, but also for English Language Learners. At Tiers-2 and 3 the focus is on finding those approaches to instruction that best fit the needs of specific students. This might entail adapting *how* material is presented, how often students are provided with skill acquisition opportunities, as well as how mastery is assessed. The RTI framework is effectively summarized by [McTaggart (2018)](#) who stated, "If they don't learn the way you teach... teach the way they learn" (p. 21).

At some point in their careers, most teachers have implemented some version of differentiated instruction, whether it entailed altering a curriculum, giving some students more time to complete an assignment, or providing supplemental instruction within a small group context. However, there are, more systematic ways of differentiating instruction in order to help ensuring educational success within inclusive classroom settings.

Students who respond well to the general education curriculum continue to receive core instruction. At-risk students who need further support receive differentiated instruction within the general education classroom. Differentiated instruction can be administered by a trained teaching assistant, special educators or a general education teacher. For example, in mathematics, a 6th-grade class might be practicing algebra. The 6th-grade teacher would instruct the majority of the class on algebra, while a small group might be simultaneously attending a class, where a teaching assistant or a special educator is reviewing fundamental, pre-algebraic mathematics skills, answering questions about past instruction, and/or implementing the same lesson, but at a slower pace and with additional supports for students who need to build their basic math skills. This educator may also include pre-teaching (i.e., preparing students for an upcoming lesson) within the small group sessions.

In every school, a relatively small number of students do not progress at an acceptable pace even after receiving multiple types of Tier-2 instruction. These students, often referred to as "non-responders," are not assumed to have disabilities, but rather they are seen as in need of greater differentiation of instruction. Potentially they could respond well to more intense targeted instruction (i.e., a 1:1 to 1:3 teacher-student ratio) or more frequent target instruction at a Tier-3, or to an alternative curriculum. Special educators typically assume responsibility for the implementation of more intensive instruction with these students, but they do so within the context of the general educational setting (sometimes referred to as the push-in model). It is preferred that teachers with more experience serve students with the highest needs (i.e., special educators or instructional specialists).

RTI was initially developed to support K-5 students. The approach, however, has merit at the secondary level (grades 6-12) as well. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton (2010) propose a modified RTI model at the middle and high school level. In their model, the RTI Framework used at the K-5 level is overturned and practitioners are encouraged to place students with severe academic discrepancies immediately in the most intensive level of the RTI framework (Tier-3) even as they continue to participate in general educational classes and receive primary prevention to further acquire content knowledge. In a related way, in terms of accountability for student outcomes, the goal of accountability and intensity within RTI at middle and high school is to ensure that teachers view their mission as reducing and eliminating already existing, sizable academic deficits. Therefore, the focus is on monitoring RTI in order to determine when important academic benchmarks are achieved for the purpose of transitioning students to the lower tiers of the RTI pyramid with less intensive and more standard or normalized levels of the prevention system. Conceptualizing RTI at middle and high school in this way introduces new opportunities to improve outcomes for students in order to overcome sizable academic deficits and restructures existing opportunities.

3.1   Classroom level (Tier 1) approaches to inclusion

A truly inclusive approach to education creates a balance between ensuring that students receive the instruction they need to make progress academically and experiencing a sense of belonging and social acceptance within their schools and classrooms. Therefore the implementation of the RTI framework must address the need to provide students with SENs with the opportunity to develop social networks and build social capital. This can be accomplished at best through assuring that the core curriculum reaches as many students as possible, making learning meaningful to diverse groups of children and youth and ensuring that all members of a class feel socially and psychologically included.

Citing the lack of social and psychological inclusion of secondary students with SEN, Abery and Simunds (2006) developed the *Yes I Can Social Inclusion Program (YIC)* for high school and middle school

students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). In this Tier-1 program, peers are trained to serve as *social inclusion bridge-builders*. The primary goal of a bridge-builder is to connect and support the development of social relationships between the students with SEN with whom they work and their fellow students with similar interests and values. More specifically, the aim is to facilitate students with SENs in developing *social capital*. Bourdieu (1986) and others (e.g., Bates & Davis, 2004; Dika & Singh, 2002; Trainor, 2008), who used the construct in their study of young people with disabilities, define it as tangible and symbolic resources that are derived from a person's connectedness to society via their social relationships networks. Social capital, along with capital in other forms (e.g., cultural and economic capital, or currency and monetary resources), contributes to a person's symbolic and material wealth, status, and power. The program was successfully implemented in over 100 schools in the U.S. in three different ways: as an after-school activity, a before school social group, or an integral part of academic classes.

Evaluations of program impact (Abery & Simunds, 2006) suggest positive outcomes for students with SEN as well as peers who serve a bridge-builders. Results indicate that students with IDD who take part in the program make greater numbers of new friends and increase the level of emotional closeness they have with existing friends to a significantly greater extent than young people who are members of comparison groups. In addition, program participants and their families report significant increases in the number of inclusive, community-based recreation and leisure activities in which their sons and daughters with disabilities engage. Over the course of the program, students who serve as bridge-builders have been found to improve their leadership skills considerably than young people in comparison groups and to develop more positive attitudes with respect to people with disabilities.

If full educational inclusion is to be realized, effective strategies are needed to alter both the attitudes of administrators, teachers, and peers toward students with SEN and the overall school culture (Chamberlain, Kasari, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2007; Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; Lohrmann, Boggs, & Bambara, 2006). Students with SEN need to be viewed by members of the community not only as children and youth in need of supports and accommodations, but as individuals who have talents, gifts and abilities as well as the capacity to give something back to their community and make it a better place to live. Inclusive service learning, which is a relatively new approach developed specifically to support social, psychological and instructional inclusion, has the potential to fill that need.

Inclusive service learning (ISL). Service learning is a method of teaching and learning that connects classroom lessons with meaningful service to the community (CNCS, 1999). It involves students in academic skill development while they serve their communities creating a context that addresses genuine needs. Service learning programs include reflection on both service activities and the skills/knowledge acquired during their length. The *inclusive service learning* intentionally brings together students with and without SEN to take part in this way of learning and prepares them to support each other while developing their own academic problem-solving and leadership skills. Because of the emphasis on active learning in real-life settings, ISL has the potential to reach *all* learners due to its explicit academic focus and to the extent to which the philosophy of inclusion is integrated into the program. Researchers at the University of Minnesota and other partners developed ISL curricula both for elementary (Vandercook & Montie, 2010), and secondary levels (Abery, Halpin, Iland, Braun, & Stenhjem, 2011).

High quality ISL features (see Figure 2) are: (a) reflection and integrated learning; (b) problem-based learning focused on significant benefit and genuine need; (c) student voice; (d) collaboration; (e) civic engagement and responsibility; and (f) inclusion (Kaye, 2004). Each of these characteristics contribute to enhanced academic, behavioral, psychological, and social outcomes while challenging current stereotypes about students with SEN (Ainscow, 2005; Polat, 2011).
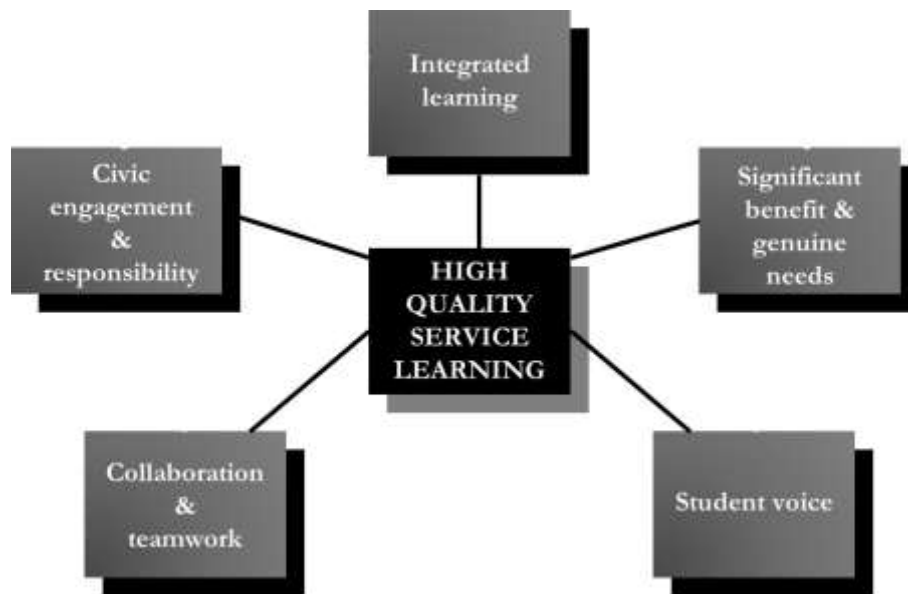
Figure 2. Characteristics of high quality Inclusive Service Learning (ISL)

Integrated learning. A critical component of ISL is that service projects are linked directly to academic learning objectives such that classroom learning contributes to service which, in turn, enhances classroom learning. A key instructional strategy that allows this integrative approach is the reflection process through which students are encouraged to understand their experiences by means of a variety of activities (Eyler, 2002). Reflection can take the form of discussion, journal writing, debate, letter writing, or making informational videos (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2004). Reflecting on the relationship between problem solving and learning is a critical component of ISL and it supports the construction of knowledge (Salomon, 1983). Applying what is learned in the classroom in order to solve community problems makes learning more concrete for those students who are not fully engaged in school.

Significant benefit and genuine need. A key feature of ISL is its focus on learning while addressing real community problems. This approach, drawn from Problem-Based Learning (PBL), involves students who will be working in teams and who will learn by solving real problems based upon community needs. Students grapple with issues that offer an engaging context for learning. As they define the scope of a problem, the group identifies and organizes relevant ideas and prior knowledge. Instructors act as guides, asking questions, raising issues, and ensuring full participation (Mayo, Donnelly, & Schwartz, 1995).

Student voice. Student voice, which represents an essential element of ISL based on Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT), is associated with the belief that educational outcomes are optimized when young people exercise self-determination (SD) over components of the learning environment and engage in autonomous, self-regulated learning. SD involves a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that support people in taking desired degrees of control over their lives in important areas (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003). In their systematic review of the impact of SD on academic functioning, Konrad, Fowler, Walker, Test, and Wood (2007) found effect sizes, reported as points of non-overlapping data (PND), of 0-100% with a median of 60%. These findings are supportive of those of Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, and Wood (2001) who found PNDs ranging from 64-100% with a median of 95% and effect sizes ranged from - 2.23 to 26.48 with a median of .60, indicating a moderate effect.

Cooperative learning. Using cooperative learning (CL) strategies is one of the hallmarks of SL. CL involves more than working together on a project, as it requires teachers to *structure* cooperative

interdependence among students. Elements of CL include positive interdependence, equal participation, individual accountability, and simultaneous interaction (Kagan, 1994).

Civic engagement and responsibility. Young people today are less likely than their counterparts in recent history to exhibit the characteristics of citizenship (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Lopez et al., 2006). Engagement in extracurricular activities in high school and feelings of social connectedness to the community are related to engagement in adulthood (McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Civic engagement is a critical aspect of ISL and builds needed social capital (Segura, Pachon, & Woods, 2001). In addition, student involvement in civic affairs is positively related to academic achievement (Davila & Mora, 2007).

The impact of inclusion: A "value added" aspect of service learning. Inclusive service learning (ISL) emphasizes embracing diversity by structuring the SL process for *all* students, including those with SEN and/or disabilities. The intent is to blend academic learning with the building of social capital. Research has found both socially and academically positive effects of inclusion in ISL programs for students with SEN (Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Moore, Gilbreath, & Maiuri, 1998). Importantly, such inclusion also demonstrated positive effects on typically developing peers. By working together to address common problems, students with and without SEN learn about each other, discovering the gifts, capacities, and talents each one possesses as well as their commonalities. Discovering that *we are a lot more alike than different* places social relationships between members of the two groups within a decidedly different context and has the potential to lead to greater mutual understanding and support.

The Together We Make a Difference: Inclusive service learning program (ISL; Abery et al., 2011) closely follows SL Standards for Quality Practice (K-12, 2018), including meaningful service, links to curriculum and standards, reflection, diversity, duration and intensity. The structure and sequence of the lessons of the program are based on the characteristics of high quality SL (Kaye, 2004). An additional strength of the program is its alignment with the *Common Core State Standards* adopted by many states in the U.S. Lessons for the program were written using a direct instruction approach with each lesson following a standard format that consists in different aspects such as purpose, instructor preparation, materials, adaptations for participation, activity steps, and learner and instructor reflection.

The program, which is available in both elementary and secondary school editions, has a structured format (see figure 3) and is intended to be infused into the daily curriculum. Participants learn how to connect with their community, conduct research via PBL, confirm their conclusions, and plan, implement, and evaluate SL projects. The program has 3 phases (see Figure 3) including the following: (1) *Building community*, (2) *Building capacity, planning, & implementing*, and (3) *Communicating & celebrating*. Phases are designed to introduce explicitly ISL and prerequisite skills and do not assume that students already possess the ability to undertake effectively ISL (Neiberger-Miller & Zurcher, 2012; Ragsdale & Saylor, 2012). An additional reason for such structure of the curriculum is to promote implementation with high fidelity such that it can be effectively delivered by any high-quality teacher.
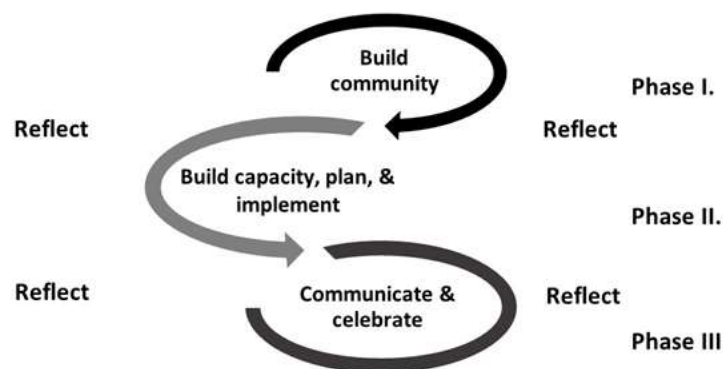

Figure 3. Phases of service learning

Research evidence. Evidence with respect to the effectiveness of the *Together We Make a Difference* program was generated in a quasi-experimental study in 2008-09 with 14 schools in three U.S. States (Minnesota, California, and North Carolina) with over 365 elementary and secondary students taking part in it (Abery & Halpin, 2009). Results indicated significant pre-, post-test differences between treatment and comparison groups with respect to self-determination, social inclusion, and civic responsibility. In addition, although no significant differences in oral reading fluency were reported, both behavioral observation and teacher reports indicated significantly higher student academic engagement among members of the ISL groups both during ISL lessons as well as other academic subjects.

Additional research on ISL demonstrated that it is an intervention that can potentially engage high-risk students, prevent dropout, and facilitate positive attitudes toward academic achievement, the community, future plans, and school socialization. Participation also demonstrated to enhance academic outcomes as well as lead to enhanced *citizenship, civic engagement,* and *social responsibility* (Billig, 2002; Billig, Jesse, & Grimley, 2008; Davila & Mora, 2007; Klute & Billig, 2002; Kraft & Wheeler, 2003; Laird & Black, 2018; Moore & Sandholtz, 1999; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2004; Zoerink, Magafas, & Pawelko, 1997).

3.2   Small group (Tier-2) approach to inclusion

Small-group supplemental instruction is needed for students who lag behind their peers in the core curriculum in order to enhance their ability to process core instruction more effectively. One approach of this kind which is widely used in U.S. schools is the *guided reading* (Fountas & Pinnel, 1996). The guided reading is a small-group teaching strategy used within the general education classroom to enhance student reading skills. It is part of a balanced literacy approach endorsed by the National Reading Panel (2000) and the National Council of Teachers of English (2002). This approach is used primarily at the elementary school level when students are developing their reading skills. Guided reading books are, however, available up to grade 12. The approach is based on the belief that all students can become literate by using the principle of differentiated instruction. Students are divided into groups of 4-8 individuals based on their reading performance, they are given reading material that matches their stage of reading development, and they take part in scaffolded reading lessons. Grouping for guided reading should not be homogeneous, but flexible, varied and temporary to allow students to support one another, feel part of a community of readers and to change when needed (Laquinta, 2006).

Guided reading lessons, including preparation, consist of the following components: (1) Selection of appropriate text, (2) Introduction of the text to students (understanding the problem and plot), (3) Prompting students to interpret illustrations, (4) Reading the text (out loud or silently), (5) Discussion of text, (6) Teaching points - explaining how punctuating conveys meaning, and (7) Word work – providing information about word meaning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Laquinta, 2006). Walking students through these steps provides them with strategies to use while reading that will support their becoming fluent readers who comprehend as much information as possible from the text.

Good pedagogy is critical during the Guided Reading process. Teachers must create appropriate groupings, select materials at the right level of challenge for readers, and use effective prompting strategies when needed to build both reading fluency and comprehension. The prompts teachers are designed to encourage self-monitoring (e.g., Where you right?), self-correcting (e.g., I like how you corrected yourself.), prediction (e.g., What do you think will happen next?), and confirmation (e.g., Where you right?) while students are reading. Similarly, teachers also cue students to understand sound-symbol correspondence, meaning of words, and sentence structure (Laquinta, 2006).

The level of reading material is judged according to several criteria: (a) Book and print features (e.g., length, layout, graphic features), (b) Vocabulary, (c) Sentence complexity, (d) Content, (e) Text structure (e.g., fiction/nonfiction), (f) Language and literacy features (e.g., literary/figurative language,

dialogue), and (g) Themes and ideas (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The books can then be numbered for easy identification and selection. Figure 4 (see below) is an example of a lesson plan form and bookmark with teacher prompts used in guided reading instruction.

Small group guided reading

Book title: _____ Level: ___
Date: _____ Genre: _____
Lesson: _____

| Beginning: |
| Background knowledge: |
| Vocabulary: |
| (Picture walk) |
| Intro. focus of lesson: |
| Middle: |
| End: |

Running Record:

Assessment/Extension:

Figure 4. Guided readi ng sample lesson plan (Guided reading, 2018)

Research evidence. Numerous studies have demonstrated significant, positive results for the use of guided reading within a balanced literacy instruction framework (Kamps et al., 2007; Reutzel, Petscher & Spichtig, 2012; Gaffner, Johnson, Torres-Elias, & Dryden, 2014). Kamps et al. (2007) found that guided reading benefited students who were 1st and 2nd grade English language learners. Reutzel et al. (2012) examined the effectiveness of a guided silent reading program for 3rd graders who were having reading difficulties and demonstrated significant reading gains. Gaffner et al. (2014) found that a guided reading strategy benefited elementary students reading below grade level. Several other studies examined the effectiveness of Guided reading as a strategy to use within inclusive settings and specific target populations and reported promising results. Lyons and Thompson (2012) found that guided reading improved reading of students in an inclusive middle school setting. Schirmer and Schaffer (2010) and Schaffer and Schirmer (2010) reported that the guided reading approach improved the reading results of students who were deaf. Denton, Fletcher, Taylor, Barth, and Vaughn (2014) utilized a randomized experimental design to compare guided reading with explicit instruction and typical school instruction. Results indicated that both guided reading and explicit instruction were more effective than typical school reading pedagogy.

3.3   Individualized intervention (Tier-3) approach to inclusion

In order to succeed academically, students need to be able to process information with speed, accuracy, and without hesitation. This set of skills are referred to as academic fluency. In recent years, most of the research has been devoted to the study of academic fluency in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. In reading, fluency is defined as the ability to read, both silently and aloud, with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. In writing, it refers to the capacity of students to write fluently and smoothly from word to word, phrase to phrase, and sentence to sentence. Math fluency is the ability to recall the answers to basic math facts automatically and without hesitation. In reading, fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension.

Incremental rehearsal. Incremental rehearsal (IR) is a fluency intervention designed as an individualized intensive intervention that utilizes flash cards to increase rate (i.e., speed) and accuracy (i.e., correctness) of student responses to academic content. Most of the research for IR has been completed for improving fluency for high-frequency sight words in reading (e.g., Burns, Dean, & Foley, 2004; Joseph, 2006; Nist & Joseph, 2008). There is additional research, however, that also supports this intervention for simple math facts (e.g., Burns, 2005; Codding, Archer, & Connell, 2010), letter sounds (Bunn, Burns, Hoffman, & Newman, 2005; Volpe, Burns, DuBois, & Zaslofsky, 2011), and basic writing (Garcia, 2012). This strategy is typically used at the elementary level at the time of building basic academic skills.

Incremental rehearsal is best conceptualized as a Tier-3 intervention suited for those students for whom formative assessment data indicate past Tier-2 efforts that have not been successful in supporting increased growth in basic academic skills. By working with a single student, instructors can both monitor and maximize academic engaged time, while differentiating instruction to meet the specific needs of each student in the classroom who requires this approach. Although it is labor intensive because it requires a 1-to-1 student-instructor ratio and a good deal of individualized preparation, one of the strengths of the approach is that IR does not necessarily need to be administered by a teacher. Studies have shown that both teaching assistants and well-trained volunteers can implement the approach successfully if provided with proper training and oversight. This strategy is used primarily at the elementary school level, but it has also been used in later grades as a pre-teaching strategy, e.g. for content specific vocabulary.

The IR Process. IR is best suited to support students' developing fundamental skills in basic academic areas (i.e., reading, writing, and math) with a focus on increasing their fluency or ability to process academic stimuli (e.g., text, a math computation) accurately and quickly. Sessions are typically of short duration (5-10 minutes) to maximize engagement, but take place on a frequent basis (i.e., 3-5 times/week). It uses a well-researched, structured process of introducing academic material that has to be mastered yet, interspersed with material for which a student has demonstrated understanding as context for developing a high degree of fluency.

In order to improve student fluency in reading high-frequency words, for example, a teacher might create a deck of flashcards with high-frequency words typed or written on them. The teacher or a teaching assistant would then administer the flashcards to the student to determine the known and unknown words in the stack. Unknown and known words would subsequently be placed in their own piles. The instructor would then select 1 to 3 cards that contain sight words the student did not know (depending on the student's level of attention and ability to learn new unknown words) and 8 to 9 cards on which are written words the student has mastered. The first unknown sight word (U1) is then presented and taught to the student. The student is then immediately asked to repeat the unknown word. If he or she is successful, the instructor then selects a sight word from the pile of sight words the child already knows (K1) and presents it following the presentation of the first unknown card (U1). After the first known card (K1) is presented, the instructor goes back to the first unknown card (U1) presenting it a second time. Instructors continue by presenting the second known card (K2), a third known card (K3) and then repeat their presentation of the card with the first unknown sight word (U1). The instructor continues presenting the unknown sight word, with additional words the child has demonstrated that he or she knows after the unknown word, until all 9 known words are presented:

    Present U1, then K1, then K2, then K3, then K4

    Present U1, then K1, then K2, then K3, then K4, then K5

    Present U1, then K1, then K2, then K3, then K4, then K5

    Present U1, then K1, then K2, then K3, then K4, then K5, then K6

    Present U1, then K1, then K2, then K3, then K4, then K5, then K6, then K7

    Present U1, then K1, then K2, then K3, then K4, then K5, then K6, then K7, then K8

    Present U1, then K1, then K2, then K3, then K4, then K5, then K6, then K7, then K8, then K9

After the first unknown word (U1) is mastered and becomes a known word, one of the other known words is removed and the newly learned sight word now becomes K1. A new unknown sight word is then presented, taught, and placed in the sequence (U2). Students are considered successful at decoding each sight word if they are able to respond within 2 seconds. When a student does not respond successfully to a sight word, the instructor models the correct word and asks the student to repeat it. Intervention continues until there are no errors. For improving simple math facts and letter names or sounds, a similar procedure is followed.

Teacher monitoring and positive reinforcement. Given that IR is implemented on a one-to-one basis, it is critical that instructors monitor and track student's performance as well as provide individualized feedback and reinforcement to students' progress through the intervention. Teachers can support students to chart their own progress with each new set of sight words, letters, or math computations they are attempting to master as well as for appropriate level of engagement and social behavior. Based on the monitoring of student's performance, both length and frequency of the sessions can be adjusted to maximize the progress of the student. As the fluency of students improves, these new skills need to be integrated into other support programs in which a student is taking part.

Research evidence. A recent meta-analysis (Burns, Zaslofsky, Kanive, & Parker, 2012) provides a perspective with respect to evidence supporting the use of IR as an intervention strategy. Burns and colleagues found 19 studies of the effectiveness of IR. Based upon an analysis of effective sizes, the conclusion is that IR is an effective fluency intervention for letter sounds, words, math facts, and vocabulary words for students with a variety of disabilities, including students who are English language learners (ELLs; Matchett & Burns, 2009). Moreover, Burns et al. (2012) noted that IR has been studied as an acceptable fluency intervention for students without disabilities, as well as those with learning disabilities, cognitive impairments, and emotional-behavioral disorders. IR has showed to be effective across a wide age range of students from preschool to high school. Additional studies corroborated these findings through comparing IR with other fluency interventions and finding that gains made through the use of IR typically exceeded those that occurred when other approaches were used (January, Lovelace, Foster, & Ardoin, 2015; Kupzyk, Daly, & Andersen, 2011; Volpe, Mulé, Briesch, Joseph, & Burns, 2011). Overall, the theoretical underpinnings of IR align with the hierarchy of learning academic content: acquisition, fluency, generalization, adaptation (Haring, Lovitt, Eaton, & Hansen, 1978). Once students have fundamental skills and become fluent with basic words, letter sounds, or math facts, they spend less time and effort decoding or using their fingers to count, thus increasing fluency and making it easier to access higher order academic content (e.g., comprehension or math word problems).

4   Conclusions

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (now referred to as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* – IDEA) was first passed by the U.S. Congress in 1975 (Lechtenberger, 2010). In the course of the 40-years that have elapsed since that time, educators in the U.S. have made significant progress towards the creation of a more inclusive educational system in which *all* children, including those with disabilities, are not just physically integrated into general education classrooms, but experience instructional, social and psychological inclusion. Although many students with SEN in the U.S. still do not experience what most would refer to as full inclusion, the large percentage of them (approximately 81%) do spend the majority (more than 80%) of their school time in general education settings.

Movement of students with SEN in the U.S. from segregated to more inclusive settings as well as efforts to address academic, social, and behavioral issues so that at-risk children are not unnecessarily identified as having disabilities, have been supported by the development and use of various strategies and programs. Among the promising practices there are response to intervention, inclusive service learning, guided reading, and incremental rehearsal. In many cases, implementation of these strategies

is accompanied by the use of formative assessment that enables educators to monitor student progress on regular basis and change instructional approaches when current methods are not demonstrating effectiveness.

The goal of this article was to provide readers with concrete examples of strategies and approaches that have been used successfully in the U.S. to promote inclusion. It would be tempting to simply recommend the instructional practices that have been found to have a high degree of utility in the U.S. and whose efficacy is supported by a significant body of research to be adopted in other countries committed to the implementation of inclusive education. We believe that such an approach, however, would be ill advised. As educators have learned in the U.S., implementing educational programs effectively and with high fidelity, is a complex process. Implementers need to take into consideration a number of factors, the majority of which are heavily influenced by the specific socio-economic and educational environment of the region or country where inclusion is being implemented including available resources, the

Successful inclusive education is only possible when teachers and students are provided with effective strategies that address the needs of ALL students, including those who may at some point fall behind.

culture, and characteristics of students and families. Each country, either on its own or with supports, therefore needs to chart its own path toward inclusion based on its societal values, education legislation, and available supports. This article offers possibilities from the U.S. context that should be considered for adaptation and a possible implementation or simply as an inspiration for making *all* children valued members of an inclusive society.

The Czech Republic, located in the heart of Europe, has a different history both politically and educationally than the U.S. Geographically, it is a relatively small country and its population, although diversifying considerably over the past several decades, remains relatively homogeneous. Unlike the U.S., the Czech Republic has an educational system that is less driven by local and state policies than those at the federal level. There is one additional distinction between the countries: unlike the U.S., the Czech Republic has both signed and ratified The United Nations ("Convention on the rights," 2018), decidedly placing it on the path for the enhanced educational inclusion of students with SEN.

Regardless of the existing differences between the U.S. and C.R., the basic principles underlying the practices and strategies described in this article have the potential to address academic and social needs of Czech students with SENs. Response to Intervention (RTI) has the potential to serve as a preventative framework for students who show signs of falling behind academically due to a variety of language-based, socio-economic, or disability-related reasons. Moreover, this approach is an important tool for facilitating enhanced collaboration between general and special educators as well as specialists. Inclusive service learning (ISL) provides a necessary connection between academic content taught in the classroom and real life in the community that results in teaching and learning that is both more explicit and applied, thus making it more understandable, meaningful and relevant to students who are unlikely to benefit from abstract instruction. When service learning is undertaken in an inclusive manner, it changes peer attitudes towards people with disabilities highlighting the fact that although students with disabilities may require some additional resources they can be conceptualized as a resource themselves. Guided reading and incremental rehearsal are strategies that are not culturally specific with both approaches designed to build basic academic skills in reading and math of students who require a more individualized approach.

It is our hope that educators, scholars and policymakers in the Czech Republic and other Central and European countries will find the strategies and approaches presented in this article sufficiently promising to seek additional information about them and their suitability for being implemented in the local context. This will require a considerable degree of work since the approaches highlighted in this article and initially designed to be used in the U.S. educational system will need to be adapted not

only for Czech Republic as a country, but for individual schools which may vary with respect to a wide variety of factors ranging from resources to students with SENs. Such an effort might, at first, appear daunting, but general educators should not feel that they are alone in it. University education faculty in the C.R. must assume the responsibility for adequately preparing both general and special education teachers as well as related service staff to implement inclusive practices. This will need to entail the discussion of inclusive education practices in educational coursework as well as the provision of opportunities to practice their implementation in school settings. Teachers in training will need to have opportunities to learn about how to use the principles of universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, and cross-disciplinary collaboration to adapt teaching strategies to meet the needs of differently-abled students. They will need to acquire data literacy skills so that the progress of students with SENs can be monitored and the success of their educational approaches evaluated. Just as importantly, faculty will need not only to speak about inclusion and inclusiveness, but also about model inclusive behavior in their interactions with students, colleagues, and teachers.

Mutual exchanges of ideas, experiences, and expertise are the hallmark of good scholarships and educational practices. If inclusive education is to move forward, such interactions must occur between education faculty both within and outside of the Czech Republic and must include individuals who are motivated to continue moving forward on the path to inclusion. However, similar exchanges must also take place between education faculty and their students, the latter feeling free to challenge the status quo and the ways in which "things have always been done." Inclusive education in both the U.S. and C.R. requires open inquiry if the field of education is to continue on an evolutionary path that, at some point in the near future, will make it possible for *all* students to receive an equitable education that prepares them for an inclusive life as adults.

The author declares that this is the original study and text in this form has not been submitted for publication nor has it been published otherwise.

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