

PUPILS WITH MENTAL HANDICAP IN PEDAGOGICAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Article deals with the context of special educational needs defined by currently valid legislative and other methodical or curricular documents with respect to the socially excluded Romani pupils and pupils with mild mental disability. It defines basic key factors which affect the process of education and the quality of pedagogical communication. The space is given to the personality of teacher, their competences and qualities. Partial empirical investigations which are the result of research aims carried out at the Pedagogical Faculty of the University of Ostrava are presented in the individual chapters.

Keywords: a pupil with mild mental disability, language and communicative competence, speech education, methods of speech education, pedagogical communication

1 Education of Pupils with Mental Handicap

The speech development of pupils with mental handicap is mainly due to unfavourable inner conditions disrupted to the extent that it does not reach the standard even at optimal stimulation by stimuli from external environment. (cf. Sovák, M. 1965, Lechta, V. 2002) The support of speech development is thus an uneasy task, although from the perspective of achievement of appropriate level of socialization it is also necessary. With the beginning of school attendance child's way of life changes and the basic kind of activity becomes systematic learning. Communication through speech is basic means of learning and our whole school system is based on appropriately developed speech abilities and skills – spoken and written language, on basic level of language and communicative competences that is acquired by the child in pre-school age. The teacher gives pupils information, they process the knowledge, they reproduce it, read and write. Therefore it is a complex mental function. (Zelinková, O. 2003) A new psychological profile of the child is formed in the process of learning. All the aspects of child's psyche – memory, attention, thinking – develop and change. Abilities and qualities of personality necessary for transition to working process are formed. From that moment the child uses the communication more effectively in the contact with other people – they enter *social interaction*. Intentional and purposeful effect on development of partial abilities of language and communicative competence in pupils with mental handicap have to be at the forefront of interest of teachers involved in their education. Pupils with mental handicap very often receive inappropriate verbal instructions, they are difficult for them to orientate in, they do not understand their content. These very often lead to frequent school failure and pupils' demotivation to learning. We suppose that by the application of positive speech model¹ and by systematic stimulation of partial abilities of language and communicative competence the acquisition of elements of spoken and written form of language can be influenced positively. At the same time by those optimize the conditions of the learning process in pupils with mental retardation. The speech education has to penetrate the entire educational process, while it can be done in shorter time sequences within the lesson or as a separate subject matter.

The speech education is an important part of pedagogical rehabilitation of children with mental handicap and its focus lies both in stimulations of undeveloped or delayed functions and in re-education of defective speech functions. Deficiencies in content and formal part very often result from incorrect understanding of the meaning of the word, in this area we thus primarily focus on the development of content feature of the speech which we sensitively complement by modification of

pronunciation. (Lechta, 2002) The speech education at primary school has to penetrate the entire educational activity as intentional, directed and controlled. The necessity of complex care for speech education of pupils with mental handicap arises from recognition that the more some feature as a secondary product (symptomatic speech defects) is distant from the basic core features of the disability, the more it becomes the subject of educational influence.² Children with mental handicap can learn to generalize but the process is slower and it is necessary to use different means of education than with healthy children. Mentioned psychological point of view is a starting point of pedagogical practice and also a challenge to seek new methods and use specific principles in the education of pupils with mental handicap in order to lower secondary consequences arising from the presence of health disability and in order to prevent possible social isolation. The necessity of systematic professional care arises due to the high occurrence of speech defect in pupils with mental handicap not only in younger, but also in older – school age. Some of the experts consider intentional acquisition of partial abilities of language and communicative competence as effective up to the puberty age. (Lechta, V. 2002)

Foundations of pedagogical intervention (not only) in the development of language and communicative competence result from the following areas:

- determination of preconditions of a pupil to succeed in planned education
- creation of sufficient motivation for education (which is formed mainly by mastering the learning method and also positive expectations of the teacher)
- removing of demotivating factors and influences of the learning process, accommodation of the environment and speed of learning to individual abilities and qualities of the pupil
- application of pedagogical methods, approaches and devices in the learning process corresponding to specific needs of pupils with mild mental disability.

The precondition to form positive conditions for education of pupils with mental handicap is professional qualification of the teacher in the didactic, diagnostic and communicative sphere with focus on specific peculiarities of development and formation of personality of those pupils. To the mentioned aspects the teacher has to adapt not only conditions but also means and methods used to reach the aim of primary education stated in curriculum documents. They cannot rely on primary use of some commonly used methods and form of education successful with intact pupils.

2 Methods of Speech Education

Intensive stimulation of speech development at the beginning of compulsory school attendance should be done by means of natural game activities with the use of appropriate methods³:

- **By the method of the support of speech need** we arouse pupil's interest to acquire language means of expression. Examples:
 - With appropriate phrase we comment on current situation, our action, imagination about the specific activity, towards what aim we are leading, what means we will use, what we are going to praise, etc. We lead the pupils to careful listening⁴, at the same time we check the understanding of expressed, on which basis we plan the content and length of thematic units.
 - We verbalize present action or feelings of pupils: *You didn't understand it, did you? Do you like it? You*

² Vygotskij, L. S. (in Lechta, 2002) suggests to distinguish basic (core) features of mental retardation from secondary of tertiary layers.

³ cf. Lechta, V., Matuska, O. 1995, Belz, H., Siegrist, M. 2001, Janoušek, J. 2007, Rádlová, E. et al., 2004, Svobodová, J. et al., 2003, etc.

⁴ at the same time the verbal memory is trained

¹ with respect to specific peculiarities of pupils with mental handicap

can't remember, can you? Did you think of something else? Did you forget it? Do you want to try again?

- **The method of corrective feedback** we use in the way that we repeat pupil's incorrect expression in the correct form. Example: "Které zvíře vidíš na obrázku?" [What animal can you see in the picture?"] The pupil answers: "Leva (Iva)" [lion mispronounced]. Teacher: "Vidíme lva, jak odpočívá" [We can see a lion resting.]
- **By the method of broadened imitation** we repeat the statement of the pupil and appropriately extend it: An example can be the dialogue according to the picture: *What can we do outside during the winter?* The pupil answer: *We can sledge.* Teacher: *If there is a lots of snow, do we sledge, ski or slide the ice?*
- **By the method of alternative questions** ("Is it x or y...") we activate the vocabulary. E.g. How is the dog – big or small? Good or bad?
- **By the method of completion of the sentences** we encourage the pupil to finish the sentence we start. E.g. Who fishes? The (fisherman) fishes. What fishes can the fisherman fish? Fisherman can fish (carp, pike, catfish ...).
- **By the method of model situations** we prefer social aspects of speech education. During them the pupils memorize the necessary speech stereotypes applicable in everyday situations. We model e.g. the situation in the shop, at the doctor, ...
- **Method of homonymy, synonymy and antonymy** is based on the use of word with certain lexical meaning towards meaning of different words (e.g. towards words of the same meaning or similar meaning, to words of opposite meaning, to words from the perspective of meaning superior or subordinate, etc.). Example: The meaning of the word *tough* the pupil understand in case he knows the synonym *rough*, and the antonym *soft*. Similarly the voice can be *rough*, the antonym in this case can be *low, kind*, etc.
- **By the dialogical method** we fill the request for the largest space for verbal expression of pupil, that is supported by verbal activity of the teacher⁵.
- **The method of repetition** we use in order to fix newly deducted speech connector. The pupil has to have the possibility to practice them under the professional supervision of the teacher repeatedly and very often.

3 Pupils with Mental Handicap in Pedagogical Communication

Methodological research questions

The main aim of the research was to find out proportional representation of communicative activities of teacher, teacher's assistant and pupils with mild mental disability during the Czech language lesson. The following partial research questions were determined to fulfil the aim:

- 1) *What is the frequency of the observed communicative activities of the teacher during the Czech language lessons?*
- 2) *What is the frequency of the observed communicative activities of the teacher's assistant during the Czech language lessons?*
- 3) *Which communicative activities predominate in individual pupils of selective set L during the Czech language lesson?*
- 4) *Which communicative activities predominate in the selective set L as a unit during the Czech language lesson?*
- 5) *In what frequency were communicative activities of the teacher towards individual pupils of selective set L observed?*
- 6) *In what frequency were communicative activities of the teacher's assistant towards individual pupils of selective set L observed?*

⁵ At the same time we minimize in time some of the frequent teaching methods in progress with the exclusion of speech activity of pupils.

The following criteria were determined for the purposes of the observation in the research:

Criteria for the observation of the communicative activities of the teacher and the teacher's assistant (Table no. 1)

Table no. 1: Criteria for the observation of the communicative activities of the teacher and the teacher's assistant

Communicative activity	Description of observed phenomenon
praising and encouraging	evaluating the pupil in a positive way, encouraging them, releasing the tension
asking questions	the questions related to the subject matter, way of working or organizational matters
explaining and presenting of subject matter	introducing facts to pupils, opinions, clarifying and commenting on subject matter, explaining the steps or way of working
giving instructions and orders to one pupil	asking particular pupil or instigating them to an activity
giving instructions and orders to the pupils as a unit	talking to all pupils and requesting collective activity from them
criticising and asserting their own authority	criticising concerns wrong answer or breaking the rules, justifying their steps, or claiming their own authority
answering pupil's questions	pupil's questions can be related to current subject matter, but not necessarily (e.g. request to leave for a toilet, etc.)

Criteria for the observation of the communicative activities of pupils (Table no. 2)

Table no. 2: Criteria for observation communicative activities of pupils

Communicative activity	Description of observed phenomenon
answering the question	answer is induced by the questions or by an instruction of the teacher
spontaneous speaking about the topic	The answer falls outside the scope of teacher's request, the pupil starts to speak themselves, explains their own suggestion or opinion, however, it is always related to the topic.
speaking out of topic	the pupil speaks outside the scope of the topic and speaks without being asked a questions, given instruction or order by the teacher
asking question	it includes both questions related to the topic and unrelated to the topic
being silent	does not cooperate or has a vacant look

To achieve the aims of the research the **qualitative research** was chosen. In it the emphasis is placed mainly on the interpretation of the observed phenomena. The sources of the data are natural environments (e.g. the classroom), the product is often a detailed description of individual cases. (Průcha, J., Walterová, E., Mareš, J. 1995)

The collection of the data was done by the method of **participant observation** in the classroom. Švaříček, R. (2012) defines participant observation as a long-term, systematic and reflexive observation of ongoing activities directly in the observed area in order to discover and represent social life and process. To ensure the validity and reliability of the observation the observation sheet was used. The sheet was created by modification of **Flanders' system of the observation of the communication in classroom** (Gavora, P. 2005, pg. 114). Recording of observed categories was done by natural coding and registration by audio-record. The program Microsoft Excel was used for statistical processing.

The selection of research sample was intentional. The basic set (Z) introduces 32 pupils with mild mental disability on the 1st phase of primary school. The selective set (L) if formed by 6 pupils with mild mental disability in the 2nd year of primary school (4 boys and 2 girls), a special education teacher and teacher's assistant, who guarantee education of chosen pupils.

Pre-research

The research was preceded by pilot testing of the planned strategy both to choose the lesson and to specify chosen partial communicative activities of teachers and pupils (see attachment

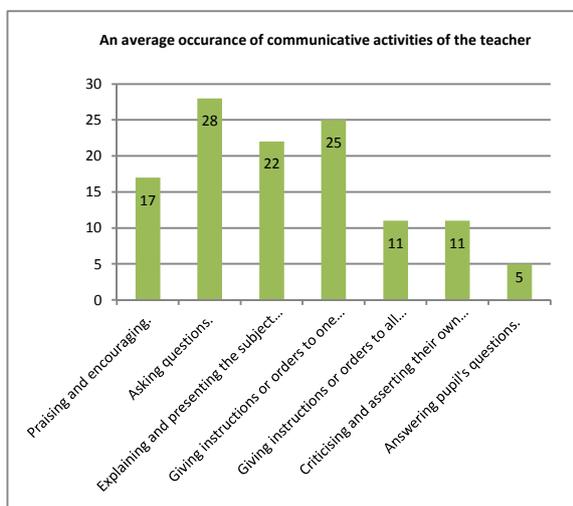
no. 1, 2). On the basis of pre-research results it was necessary to add to the communicative activities of the teacher the criterion – *answering pupil's questions*. Communicative activities of pupils were extended by criterion – *spontaneous speaking about the topic*.

Research progress

The actual research took place during 12 lesson in the period of 2 weeks. The observation was subordinated to the fixed timetable of the Czech language lesson (1 lesson daily, 2 lessons on Wednesday). The observed phenomena were recorder into prepared observation sheets and on the Dictaphone (with the consent of the teacher and the teacher's assistant). Then it was followed by an analysis of observed criteria, the results are recorded in tables accompanied by graphical representation with verbal interpretation.

Research results and their interpretation

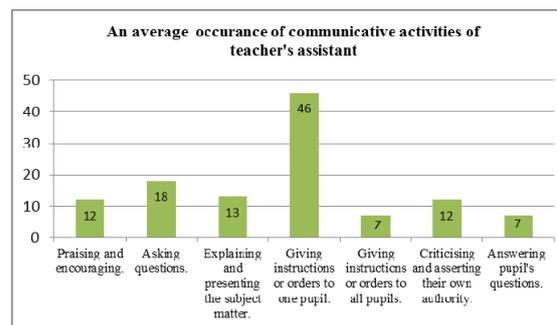
Research question no.1: What is the frequency of the observed communicative activities of teacher during the Czech language lesson?



Graph no. 1: The frequency of communicative activities of the teacher during the Czech language lesson

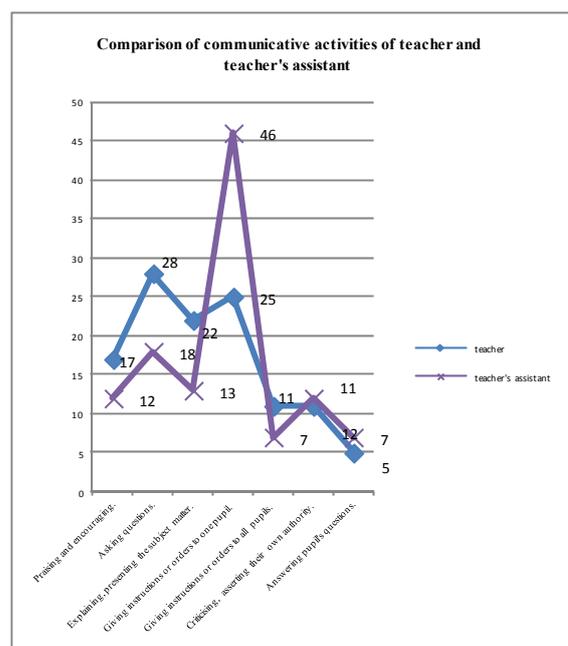
The results of the research (in more details in the attachment no. 3) confirm theoretical backgrounds about specific peculiarities of the psychomotor development of pupils with mild mental disability resulting from lower mobility of cortex processes that are manifested by e.g. undifferentiated perception, short-term attention, limited imagination, limited ability to remember, etc. The most common communicative activities of the teacher during the lesson are: asking questions (28x), giving individual instructions (25x), explanation of subject matter (22x). The teacher continuously motivates the pupils by praise and encouragement (17x). In a lesser extent the teacher gives instructions to pupils, eventually criticize them (11x). The teacher almost does not reply pupils' questions (5x), which emerges among other things from the fact that the questions very often are not connected to the subject matter of the lesson.

Research question no. 2: What is the frequency of the observed communicative activities of teacher's assistant during the Czech language lesson?



Graph no. 2: The frequency of communicative activities of the teacher's assistant during the Czech language lesson

On the basis of analysis of collected research data (see attachment 4) during 12 lessons of Czech language we observe that the teacher's assistant uses in the chosen sample of the research **in one lesson the following communicative activities on the average** (from the most frequent to the least one): **46x giving instruction or order to a particular pupil, 18x asking pupils a question, 13x explaining and presenting the subject matter, 12x in a lesson the teacher's assistant praises and encourages the pupils and 12x criticizes and asserts their own authority, 7x gives instructions or orders to all pupils and 7x answers the pupil's question.**



Graph no. 3: Comparison of average frequency of the teacher and the teacher's assistant communicative activities during the Czech language lesson

Table no. 3: Comparison of average frequency of teacher and teacher's assistant communicative activities during the Czech language lesson

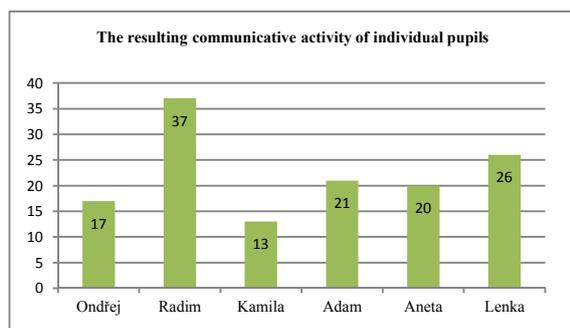
Communicative activity	teacher θ	teacher's assistant θ
praising and encouraging	17	12
asking questions	28	18
explaining, presenting of subject matter	22	13
giving instruction or orders to one pupil	25	46
giving instructions or orders to all pupils	11	7
criticising, asserting their own authority	11	12
answering pupil's questions	5	7

The frequency of observed communicative activities of the teacher and the teacher's assistant differs significantly in the category of *giving instructions and orders to one pupil*, which is in agreement with their professional competences. The teacher leads the educational activity and coordinates the teacher's assistant activity in order to increase the efficiency of education of pupils with special educational needs. The teacher's assistant performs the pedagogical educational activity according to the teacher's instructions with a focus on individual needs of pupils.

Research question no. 3: Which communicative activities predominate in individual pupils of selective set L during the Czech language lesson?

Table no. 4: An average frequency of partial communicative activities of pupils in the Czech language lesson

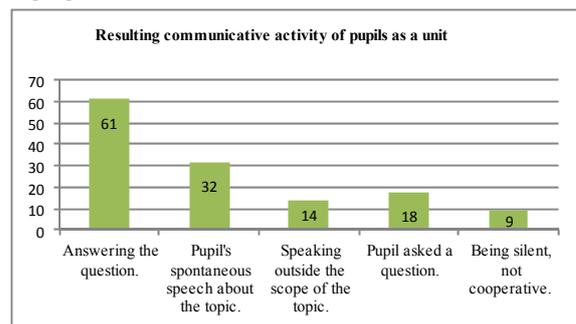
Communicative activity	Ondřej	Radim	Kamila	Adam	Aneta	Lenka	Total
answering the question	5	14	9	8	14	11	61
spontaneous pupil's speech about the topic	7	11	2	4	1	7	32
speaking outside the scope of the topic	2	7	0	2	1	2	14
the pupil asks a question	3	4	1	2	3	5	18
being silent, not cooperative	0	1	1	5	1	1	9
Total	17	37	13	21	20	26	



Graph no. 4: Communicative activities of individual pupils in one lesson of Czech language

The research results confirm individual differences between pupils in observed phenomena, which is also reflected in the overall level of their communicative activities. Disruption of neurological processes negatively influences the creation of differentiation conditioned connection with all analysers (sometimes with greater predominance of one of them). The maturing of partial brain functions proceeds unevenly and also below average. We observe limited development of children with mental handicap because of the extent of anomaly of the central nervous system. Deficit in the maturing of partial function is always evident in acquisition of key competences, especially communicative competence and competence towards learning.

Research question no. 4: Which communicative activities predominate in the selective set L as a unit during the Czech language lesson?



Graph no. 5: Communicative activities of all pupils during one Czech language lesson in total

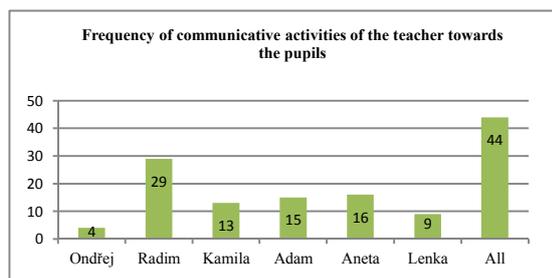
Table no. 5: Summary of communicative activity of all pupils in one lesson of Czech language

Communicative activity	Ondřej	Radim	Kamila	Adam	Aneta	Lenka	All
answering the question	5	14	9	8	14	11	61
spontaneous pupil's speech about the topic	7	11	2	4	1	7	32
speaking outside the scope of the topic	2	7	0	2	1	2	14
the pupil asks a question	3	4	1	2	3	5	18
being silent, not cooperative	0	1	1	5	1	1	9

Hierarchy and interpretation of observed communicative activities of pupils:

- **Answering the question (61 ×)** – pupils have space for individual speech expressions, for acquisition of speech experience.
- **Spontaneous speech of pupil about the topic (32 ×)** – pupils with mental handicap do not communicate appropriately to the situation, they cannot apply communicative patterns to real communicative situation. Due to disrupted dynamics of neurological processes the differentiation conditioned connections form with difficulties, which is reflected in slower understanding (awareness) of given instructions (e.g. the communication rules). Due to the frequency of the criterion it is obvious that the speech need of observed pupils is supported.
- **Pupils asks a question (18 ×)** – The frequency of answers of the teacher (5) and of the teacher's assistant (7) during the lesson is lower than the frequency of pupils' questions. The result illustrates the fact, that the questions of pupils do not always relate to the subject matter, or they are asked spontaneously.
- **Speaking outside the scope of the topic (14 ×)** – the obtained result proves the condition of limited development of higher cognitive processes, weak managing function and inconsistent thinking, significant lack of judgement, etc. The pupil wants to say something, but meanwhile they are attracted by a different thought. Their intention is therefore not finished, but they try to communicate the new thought that is not related to the topic.
- **Being silent and not cooperative (9 ×)** – it can be regarded as an attention deficit disorder, easy exhaustion, lack of will, indecisiveness, etc.

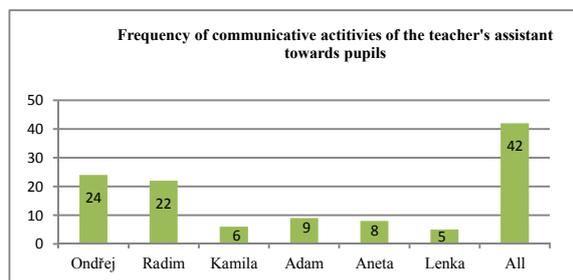
Research question no. 5: In what frequency were communicative activities of the teacher towards individual pupils of selective set L observed?



Graph no. 6: Frequency of communicative activities of the teacher towards pupils

The obtained results show (for more details see the attachment 6) that during one lesson the teacher most frequently addresses all pupils (44 ×). Towards individual pupil the frequency differs, where they most frequently communicate with the pupil who is the most communicative in the class (Radim 37x – see graph no. 4). Low frequency of communicative activity of the teacher was found out towards pupils that communicate the least (Ondřej 17x, Kamila 13x – see graph no. 4). We believe that the cause of the unbalanced frequency of communicative activity of the teacher towards individual students is the organisation of the lesson when the pupils are according to the teacher's instructions divided into two groups, where the teacher is in charge of one of them and the teacher's assistant of the second one.

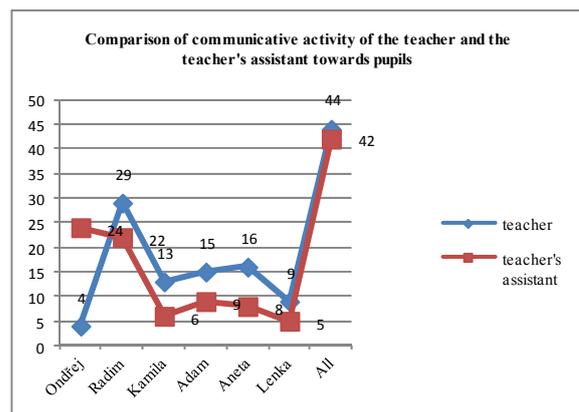
Research question no. 6: In what frequency were communicative activities of the teacher's assistant towards individual pupils of selective set L observed?



Graph no. 7: Frequency of communicative activities of the teacher's assistant towards pupils

On the basis of the obtained results (for more details see the attachment no. 7) it is obvious that during one lesson the teacher's assistant most frequently addresses selected pupils (Ondřej 24 ×, Radim 22x). Towards other pupils the frequency is significantly lower. An interesting observation is that the teacher's assistant most frequently communicate with the pupil who is the most communicative in the class (Radim 37x – see graph no. 4), and with only one pupil from the group of the least communicative pupils (Ondřej 17x – see graph no. 4).

The comparison of communicative activities of the teacher and the teacher's assistant towards individual pupils in one lesson



Graph no. 8: Comparison of communicative activity of the teacher and the teacher's assistant towards pupils during one lesson

The results of the observation show that the communicative activity of the teacher and the teacher's assistant towards pupils differs significantly only with an individual pupil. The frequency of communicative activity towards the others is comparable.

Research conclusion

The aim of the primary education is to provide pupils with key competences, which are represented as a summary of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values important for personal development and successful participation in the society. The development of children with mild mental disability is delayed from the point of view of social, mental and physical development, school maturity is thus reached in later age than in the other population. And to this situation is adapted also the content of primary education embedded in the *Annex to the Frame Educational Programme which organizes the education of pupils with mild mental disability*. With respect to the special needs of these pupils the emphasis is placed mainly on key competences of working, social, personal and communicative nature. The key competences are not isolated from each other, but they mingle, they have cross-subject nature and they can be acquired only as a result of overall educational process. All educational content and also activities that take place at the school thus has to lead and contribute towards their creation and development. The level of speech is related to the development of cognitive processes, it is a reflection of the knowledge about the world and the precondition of the orientation in the space. The speech education in primary school must penetrate within the whole educational activity as an intentional, directed and controlled process.

Increased attention and space is then paid to the education of partial abilities of language and communicative competences in the subject called Czech language and literature, which is due to the demanding character of the content justifiably given the highest number of lesson in frame educational programme for 1st phase of practical primary school (in the 2nd phase the number of lessons is comparable to the practical education). The content of the subject *Czech language and literature* is divided into three specific parts: *Communicative and essay education*, *Language education and Literature education*. In the education the educational content of individual parts is mingled. *Communicative and essay education* helps pupils to develop their vocabulary, speech abilities and communicative abilities, also it helps them perceive and understand various linguistic expressions. The main goal is to teach pupils correctly and clearly express, acquire the correct writing technique, write short notices and read with understanding. Speech education can be done in smaller time units or as a separate lesson. In the 1st phase the part of communicative and essay education has a separate part *Writing*. *Language education* is focused on the acquisition and usage of mother tongue in its written and spoken form. It is a means of functional communication of pupils. *Literature*

education is concentrated on gradual establishment of basic reader's abilities and habits and on corresponding reproduction of read text. Through reading the pupils meet with the basic literature forms and they learn to distinguish the imagination from the reality.

In the speech education we thus apply educational technologies with respect to special needs of pupils with mild mental disability. Besides the types of learning and valid educational principles the educational technologies include also usage of some specific principle and methods of speech education.

We recommend teachers to plan the content of the speech education:

- for "their" pupils and familiar conditions,
- on the basis of what we manage well,
- in the way that we set ourselves and that we will continue to develop,
- with the knowledge of the preference of content aspect of speech over the formal aspect,
- together with teachers that participate on the education of "our" pupils, and we will connect what we might have done so far separately and with different intentions,
- with the aim to improve not only the communicative competence of pupils, but also the educational activity in general because it is always easier to implement and defend own materials to the "borrowed" ones.

The school success is not only the achievement of the pupil, their abilities, cognitive styles, learning strategies, motivation and diligence, but also the achievement of teaching or educational technology, teaching style and the teacher's personality. It is necessary to remind the crucial importance of family and other participants on the child's upbringing. Improved level of language and communicative competence prevents social isolation of people with mental handicap and it is a significant indicator of the quality of their life.

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