

WHAT DO TEACHERS THINK ABOUT SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF THEIR PUPILS?

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Podpora terciárního vzdělávání studentů se specifickými vzdělávacími potřebami na Ostravské univerzitě v Ostravě, reg. č.: OP VK CZ.1.07/2.2.00/29.0006

Abstract: This paper deals with partial research study discussing about the opinions and attitudes of teachers of Roma pupils in primary schools and his/her competences. It presents some educational context of social exclusion of Roma pupils in the Czech Republic. The questions of social disadvantage and of educational requirements are also mentioned.

Keywords: education, Roma pupil, competence of teacher, social exclusion, disadvantage, opinion, attitudes.

1 Introduction

Many authors focus on the issue of the personality of teachers or his/her pedagogical competences (such as e.g. Seberová 2006, Švec 1998, Vančová, Harčariková 2013, and many others). An attention is paid to pedagogical competences, to communication with pupils and also to pre-graduate preparation of teachers etc. We do not address the psychological issues of the personality of a teacher (see Kaleja 2011), nor general competences of teachers. On the contrary, we want to focus on specific competences of teachers dealing with Roma pupils, who are socially excluded from primary school system. While doing so, we base our efforts on existing long-term educational experiences with Roma pupils, with teachers (teachers and assistants of teachers), and also with Roma' parents. Our experiences are further enhanced by already performed research projects dealing with a wide spectrum of educational problems of this target group. Specific skills and competences of a teacher dealing with Roma pupils represent a set of attributes and characteristics that the teacher applies during his teaching work with the intention to make the educational process as effective as possible in relation to the target group. Attention is mostly paid to special educational needs of these pupils.

Akimjaková (2009) states that in terms of motivation of socially disadvantaged Roma children and in order for Roma pupils to actually attend school, the decisive factor is the actual personality of the teacher. She says that if pupils feel a positive personality from their teacher, they are able to achieve surprising and successful results. On the other hand, if the positive personality of the teacher is missing, not even the best teaching method will help the teacher to achieve results. Often we do not realize that the relationship of pupils who come from socially disadvantaged (and only from disadvantaged) environments, is formed at an early age. It is very difficult to persuade them to replace their behavioural patterns that they accepted from their parents with behavioural patterns presented by their teacher. Therefore, it is desirable according to Krupová (2009) to create for these pupils highly motivational and stimulative environment in school, so they have a chance to experience the joy of new knowledge and success. Roma ethnic groups view the education process in terms of axiological aspect completely differently when compared with the majority of the society. Education is usually given lower importance (see more in Kaleja 2011). However, we cannot say that educated Romas' view education as unimportant. If we say something like that, it would be an incorrect interpretation taken out of a broader context. Krajčiriková and Oravcová (2010) state that pupils lack positive role models in their parents, who would explain to them the importance and need for education and also parents do not encourage their children to go to school so the child does not feel the need to be in school, and to belong there. Often parents urge their children to go school only to receive social benefits, etc., and ignore the need for actual self-realization of the pupils.

Therefore, it is desirable that teachers of Roma pupils (and also others - such as social workers, and adults) are aware of these facts and that they take these facts into consideration during their pedagogical work.

2 Research study

In the years 2010 – 11 we implemented a research, whose aim was to focus on finding the impacts of social exclusion on the sociological level and in the level of social disadvantage of pupils seen by the pedagogical workers of selected primary schools in Ostrava. Within the researched issue the quantitative method was applied. Into the empirical survey there were deliberately chosen 6 primary schools that educate in almost absolute majority pupils from Roma minority from socially excluded localities in Ostrava. At the time of the data collection (spring 2011) 142 pedagogical workers (including the *teacher's assistants*) were employed there. In the investigation 110 of them (77,5 %) actively participated, which can be considered a relatively representative number with respect to the research set.

Teachers	
PhD degree	2
M.A./M.Ed. degree	67
B.A. degree	15
No university degree	26
Practise more than 20 years	35
Practice less than 20 years	23
Practice to 10 years	19
Practice to 5 years	33

Tab 1: *The basic characteristic of respondents*

The research instrument was a newly created questionnaire of its own structure. It consists of 13 research areas (see RA1-13) and a few categorical areas (e.g. level of achieved education, length of teaching experience, gender, school, etc.). For the purposes of interpretation of the research findings we present all data generalized, not separately according to particular subcategories. In the research field the pedagogical workers had were allowed to choose more than one answer, thus the sum of the quantitative expression in the given subcategories (RA1-13) does not have to be 100 %.

The main research question was: *What aspects of social exclusion and disadvantage of Roma pupils have an influence on the process of education seen by the eyes of pedagogical workers?* and it was divided into the following research areas / sub-questions (RA1-13):

- the reasons of insufficient pre-school education (RA1),
- the conditions under which the parents choose the preparatory class of primary school (RA2),
- what differences can be seen in children who attended pre-school or the preparatory class of the primary school and those who did not attend pre-school or preparatory class of the primary school (RA3),
- the conditions under which the preparatory class of primary school would be considered beneficial (RA4),
- the reasons of language barrier in children / pupils (RA5),
- factors which can have a positive influence on overcoming the language barriers (RA6),
- teaching Roma pupils Romany language in primary school (RA7),
- the possibilities of help in overcoming the language barrier in the classroom (RA8),
- reasons for increased absence of pupils (RA9),
- causes of insufficient motivation of pupils for school work (RA10),
- the possibilities of taking into account pupils' hobbies in the classroom (RA11),
- conditions to improve the school success (RA12),
- knowledge of socially excluded areas / environments (RA13).

The orientation was directed to identify the opinions of pedagogical workers, who come into a daily contact with

socially excluded / disadvantaged pupils. By the empirical investigation we want to show **how these pedagogical workers of the schools**, who are in a daily contact with pupils, **perceive the context of social exclusion**, actually the social disadvantage of their pupils. On the basis of the findings we can be further work with the pieces of knowledge and direct them to a deeper inductive (*qualitatively oriented*) analysis. After the execution of the content analysis of relevant legislative documents, specialized sources, strategic or inspection reports etc. we place the obtained knowledge into wider social, and also educational context.

Clarification of terminology

- **Social exclusion** is rising from the concept of analysis of social exclusion, it has sociological connotations, with dual interpretation:
 - 1) There are defined persons with appropriate characteristic, that are socially excluded or there exists a risk towards this phenomenon. There especially belong: persons with any kind of disability, addicted people, elderly people living alone, people with low qualification, unemployed people or people employable with difficulties, etc.
 - 2) In the conditions of the Czech Republic mainly people living in ghettos (in socially excluded localities) are considered excluded persons. In this context those are mainly Roma people (almost 90 %).

In our text we hold the point no. 2.

- **Social disadvantage** is legislatively defined in the law and regulations dealing with education. By the concept they belong to the **category of special educational needs** (*health disability, health disadvantage and social disadvantage*). Social disadvantage involves:
 - children living in institutional and protective education,
 - children of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees,
 - children from families with low socio-economic status,
 - children whose mother tongue is different from the language of the teacher,
 - children whose parents (guardians) do not cooperate with the school.

3 Interpretation of research findings

- **RA1: What are the reasons for insufficient pre-school preparation of socially excluded Roma pupils?**

The Roma parents come from socially excluded areas and they are significantly determined by the environment, its perspective resulting from negative deviations (*social-pathological phenomena*), which immediately accompany the social exclusion. The manifestations of social exclusion relate mainly to the low level of education, unemployment, dependence on state social support, social-pathological phenomena etc. Social exclusion is manifested in socio-economic, cultural and political dimensions. Thus the pedagogical workers suggest that the problem is in **insufficient family support of pupil's educational career** (95 %), as well as in ascribed **importance and low rating of pre-school education** of their children in the system of education (90 %). This only confirms the empirical findings related to the preparatory classes of the primary school (see Kaleja 2013, and also Analysis by company GAC).

- **RA2: On what preconditions the parents choose the preparatory class of the primary school?**

On the basis of their own experience teachers declare, that parents' decision, whether the child will attend the preparatory class of the primary school, affects the assumption that the child will continue in the compulsory school attendance at this particular primary school (80 %). Therefore if the parents choose pre-school education for their children, **they prefer the preparatory class of the primary school**. With respect to the inclusive conception of school it can be only recommended and highlighted so as the preparatory classes of the primary school

are formed exclusively with schools of the main educational stream. In **Report on the State of the Roma Minority in the Czech Republic in 2010** there is stated that if the preparatory classes of the primary schools are established in primary practical schools, there is an assumption that the child starts his / her educational career immediately outside the main educational stream, which cannot be considered an inclusive educational mechanism.

- **RA3: In what can be seen the differences in children who attended the pre-school or the preparatory class of the primary school and in children who did not attend pre-school or the preparatory class of the primary school?**

The differences are reflected mainly in general unpreparedness for entry to the first grade of primary school of the main educational stream. It considers especially the level of **adaptability to the new environment and new order, the system of requirements, the basic knowledge of space and time** (75 %). **The deficiency can be also seen in the basic academic knowledge and general skills** (90 %), which an ordinary child entering school has already acquired.

- **RA4: On what conditions would be the preparatory class of the primary school considered a benefit?**

Regular attendance has a significant influence on the effectiveness of the educational process. The absence in the lessons in the preparatory classes of the primary school is excusable, because the attendance in the pre-school preparation is not obligatory (*the same as in pre-school*). In relation to the attendance we very often face long weekends, with absence, when the parents do not get up in the morning, do not walk the child to school, or they consider the attendance in the preparatory class a formal matter (25%). **The attendance in preparatory classes of the primary school could be far more effective for the child alone, provided that his / her attendance is highly regular and the parents also work with the child at home** (85 %).

- **RA5: What are the reasons of language barriers in children / pupils?**

The parents of Roma children themselves do not acquire the language of the majority society sufficiently. They speak sc. Roma Czech language (see Kaleja 2011). The parents speak in ethnolect, the vocabulary is poor from the perspective of lexicology. Mother tongue of Roma pupils significantly affects their form of the Czech language, and this is very often the first cause why the majority of Roma pupils, according to the report of the European Roma Rights Centre (1999), was placed into the special education. The report stated: *"The pronunciation of a Roma child is generally different from the one of a non-Roma child and thus psychologists sometimes wrongly concluded that the Roma child is not clever only because of his / her accent."* (ERRC 1999:31) Another factor of language barrier that the pedagogical workers perceive is **unwillingness of parents to participate in learning**. Last year the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) got involved in the issue of social disadvantage through an investigation in primary practical schools. In 2009/2010 the Czech School Inspectorate carried out an inspection of correct placement of pupils into schools out of the main education stream. It was focused on the effectiveness of the usage of diagnostic stays and the possibility of pupils to return into the main education stream. Further the inspection monitored in what way the schools in their own evaluation of Roma pupils observe their language, culture and former experience with learning. During the inspection 171 of 398 primary practical schools were visited. From the results it is obvious that some Roma pupils were unjustifiably determined as pupils with mental disability, that not in all cases the legal requirement for their placement into special classes was fulfilled and that diagnostic stays of pupils were not always determined in accordance with the rules (CSI 2010, on-line).

According to the thematic report of the Czech School Inspectorate with the title **Summary of pieces of knowledge from the thematic inspection in former special schools** from the year 2010 there were *"...in school year 2009/2010 in these*

schools reported in statistics 17 455 pupils, the actual number at the time of inspection was 15 894 pupils. 5 052 pupils were placed there without the diagnosis of special educational needs. From the total number of pupils 68,2 % were diagnosed with mild mental disability, out of which according to the directors and school counsellors 35 % are Roma pupils with mild mental disability. The highest occurrence of these diagnoses in Roma children was in the Ústí nad Labem region (53,1 %), Karlovy Vary region (48,5 %) and Liberec region (41,8 %).” (CSI 2010, pg. 5) The report further states: “In accordance with the Education Act in the visited schools insufficient identification and evidence of socially disadvantaged pupils were discovered, there is preserved general focus of evaluation of unsuccessfulness of pupils in ordinary education stream as mild mental disability. There is missing differentiation of needs and specific conditions of support of socially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with mild mental disability and it has a significant impact on the possibilities of Roma pupils to integrate into the main education stream according to the Frame Educational Programme of Special Needs Education.” (pg. 6)

▪ **RA6: Which factors can have positive influence on overcoming the language barrier?**

To apply greater demands on teaching the Czech language in lessons of Roma pupils sounds quite uneven. The Czech language is for majority of those pupils a secondary language, it belongs to a completely different language group, and moreover, the level of the language is affected by many factors, e.g. social environment, socio-economic position of the family (see also Bernstein’s theory of language codes in Kaleja, M. 2011) etc. On the other hand the teachers believe that if the parents talk to their children in standard Czech, they do not use ethnolect, their form of the Czech language would be much better (95 %). It is therefore worth considering, whether with respect to the above mentioned such argument of the teachers is really legitimate. It is not possible to determine what great demands mean and whether it is really justifiable. The presence of the teacher’s assistant (65 %) is considered a huge help by the teachers for communication with Roma pupil and their parents. They also mention relatively large shortage of the teacher’s assistants (50 %).

▪ **RA7: What is the attitude of pedagogical workers towards the teaching of Romany language to Roma pupils in primary schools?**

If it should be chosen whether to introduce Romany language into the curriculum of primary education, and it means into schools where there is a predominance of Roma ethnicity, there are no objections from the teachers. They recommend the teaching of Romany language in the form of an extra-curricular lesson (30 %), not an obligatory or an optional subject (60 %). However, there are also those who argue that the teaching of Romany language is not and could not be a benefit for the educational perspective of Roma pupil (10 %).

▪ **RA8: What are the possibilities of help to overcome the language barriers in the lessons?**

The language barrier can be overcome by the help of the application of an individual approach to the pupils (35 %), through tutoring concentrated on the development of communicative competence (20 %), through a proper model of speech in the person of the teacher (60 %) and through frequent repetition of thematically correct expressions and phrases (70 %).

▪ **RA9: What reasons for the increased absence of the pupils do the pedagogical workers see?**

According to the pedagogical workers the reasons for the increased absence of pupils corresponds to the parents’ lack of interest in children’s education (85 %) and the lack of interest of the pupils in the school work (75 %).

▪ **RA10: What are the reasons for insufficient motivation of pupils for school work?**

The parents instil to their children the insufficient prospect for further education and employment, and success on the labour market (75 %). Already according to the research of M. Kaleja

(2010) it became clear that Roma parents perceive racism in the Czech Republic very intensively and they believe (38 % out of N183¹), that in case of the ethnic Roma person the education does not play any role in order for the Roma person to be successful on the labour market. The colour of the skin is decisive according to them. Only 29 % (out of N183) claim that with the acquired education the Roma person can find the job.

▪ **RA11: What are the possibilities of taking into consideration the hobbies of pupils in the lessons?**

According to some teachers taking the hobbies into account, or using them in the educational process does not take place (40 %). They argue by the fact that the curriculum is quite extensive, that there is no place to add range into the educational process (30 %). The benefit for both the theory and the practice would be to deal with this fact. **Pupil’s potential, its usage can be a great mechanism energising motivation, interest in education.** It is sad that many teachers do not pay enough attention to it. Some of them report that they partially take into account individual abilities of their pupils (35 %).

▪ **RA12: What conditions can help to improve the school success of the pupils?**

Almost all schools are struggling with the lack of material conditions for school work. The pupils go to school without school necessities, in some schools the books and exercise books remain in the classroom. They do not take them home. They do not prepare for the lessons, they do not do their homework. Thus learning is significantly determined by these circumstances. Books and encyclopaedias are available only in school and they are not always optimally used in the education process. Pedagogical workers determine as a condition for the improvement of school success of a pupil parents’ interested in children’s education (90 %), and also better material facilities of the family (65 %) and professional approach of the teachers themselves (30 %).

▪ **RA13: Do the teachers know what the life in socially excluded localities is like?**

Many teachers have no real conception about the issue of social exclusion. They perceive this phenomenon only generally, they are aware of socially pathological phenomena occurring in socially excluded localities (ghettos), however, they do not deal with the scope of impacts and life perspective of children (pupils) growing up in socially excluded families. Some of them are not interested in knowing and they argue by the fact that the family does not cooperate with the school (80 %), their main task is to educate, and only then to raise the children (70 %). They do not solve the consequences of this phenomenon because it is not in the scope of their competences (60 %).

The extent and impacts of social exclusion are immediately reflected in school practice, their influence is very noticeable. Pedagogical workers (*all the pedagogical workers of the school*) should have adequate knowledge relating to this issue. Those would help them better understand the problems connected with the phenomenon of social exclusion, they would in better way help them to see the importance of school success of socially excluded Roma pupils. The teachers have the key role in the process of shaping life perspective of the pupils, they have direct influence on the formation of the personality of the pupil.

The realised research is a kind of a probe that outlines the current situation. It predicts the necessity to further deal with the research area, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

4 Summarily

Pedagogical work with socially excluded Roma pupils is very demanding. It requires high level of resilience on the teacher’s part. Lacková (2009) addresses moral resistance in terms of intercultural context and provides several theoretical models of resilience and also characterizes psychological concept of this

¹ N183 = sample of 183 people

phenomenon. She understands resilience as an activity (performed against all obstacles and unpleasant situations) focusing on achieving a certain goal and that is, that a man should reach a certain quality of life. However, we should remember not to focus only on pedagogical workers but also on students themselves and try to increase their resilience levels. Personality of Roma pupils' teacher should be characterized by intercultural sensitivity, which would be presented by (see Kaleja 2011, 2013):

- willingness to work with the Roma ethnic group,
- the ability to respect the particularities of ethnic pupils
- good social skills,
- knowledge of Roma ethnicity (social differentiation, structure, existential issues, culture, tradition)
- basic knowledge of Roma language,
- willingness to provide primary knowledge about the culture of Roma ethnicity,
- strict justice to all pupils,
- prosocial sense of the solution of educational problems,
- sensitive active / activating communication with parents.

The characteristics of intercultural sensitivity correspond to the concept of teacher oriented to humanistic education (Dargová 2001). Dargová (2001) defines humanistic education as education, when teachers look at physical, mental and moral development of pupils with the accent of self-creation and self-improvement. The main representatives of this concept are Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Gordon Allport. Dargová further emphasizes that the representatives of humanism in education concern every pupil as being free, original, creative and authentic, not only as being reactive.

Teachers of Roma pupils should know the local environment from which the pupils comes from, should be aware of his family environment and should also be oriented in the issues of educating ethnic pupils. Roma children coming from socially excluded environments have completely different educational dispositions, such as for example:

- parents have low education, children have different models, not only within level of education, but generally,
- parents are unemployed or unemployable, they are dependent on social benefits and lead their children to that,
- their needs, values and motivations for schooling are different, they hardly can understand the meaning of level of school education,
- their social, cultural, social-economic and politic positions are different, they are born in this, they are growing up in this, and they hardly get out of this on their own, they need some help,
- they have inconsistent experience with majority, such as prejudice, racism, physical, psychological and social attacks,
- children live two worlds in parallel (Roma people's world and majority people's world), many times they cannot understand the rules, style of communication, they cannot clearly understand the way of behavior of people from majority, etc.

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Primary Paper Section: A

Secondary Paper Section: AM