'Streamed' Voices – Facebook posts and related thoughts on mainstreaming and inclusion

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Abstract: Several studies conducted in the recent past reveal that a large number of Hungarian mainstream teachers say they are unable and unprepared to deal with disabled students in the classroom. This paper aims to examine what the reasons for the above situation might be. In order to gain deeper insight into teachers' uncertainty, we listen to students' voices. As insider researchers, having visual impairments ourselves, we also take a look into the present outcomes of an ongoing research where we examine visually impaired secondary school and university students' narratives, Facebook posts and interviews, so that we can understand how students experience mainstreaming and inclusion. As opposed to the Facebook group, where students actively discuss their problems, in the research secondary school students were silent. Only university students' voices could be heard. This passive attitude provokes numerous questions: What makes them silent? Is it the loneliness of mainstreaming? Are they too often misunderstood? Are they treated according to stereotypes? Students' voices imply that teacher education needs reconsideration, and that, except for the cultural model of disability, each model fails to paint a holistic picture of disabled people's lives. Listening to students' voices is not only an important part of the cultural context but also a basic need whithout which both mainstream and inclusive education remains pure theory.

We sit in the front row of every classroom. We are extremely alert and attentive. While our peers in the rows behind us slump in their chairs, pass notes to each other, or doze behind their textbooks, we are completely focused on the teacher. We hang on every word, follow every move. We are aware of the connotations of our position at the head of the class, and we live up to it.

(Brenda Jo Brueggemann and Georgina Kleege)

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Introduction

This paper places mainstream education under a critical lens. There are several reasons for the critical discourse. Firstly, mainstream teachers say they are unprepared to receive disabled students at any level of education (Cassady, 2011; IDDC, 2013). Secondly, in order to improve the current situation, researchers seldom ask the students concerned to talk about how they feel at school. Thirdly, successful disabled persons' ways to success is hardly ever investigated from a pedagogical point of view.

Disabled persons are a diverse community. Consequently, there is not a single way to assist mainstream teachers to be prepared for involving students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom activities. Each disability carries special attributes and each disabled person is different. One way to understand the problems of mainstreaming is to get acquainted with the diverse nature of disability and that of disabled persons. Therefore, we have chosen one segment to listen to Hungarian blind university students and their voices. The reason why we are focusing on this group is to demonstrate the hidden values of blind persons and also to emphasize the significance of trust in persons with disabilities in general, and the importance of disabled students' voices in teacher education in particular.

In this paper, we suggest reconsidering the advantages and disadvantages of mainstream and inclusive education. On the basis of students' voices and our experiences of the recent past, together with the still determinative paradigm of special education, we imply to re-think current paradigms regarding education in the contexts of social, human rights-based, diversity and, first of all, cultural models of disability. Finally, we propose to consider cultural disability studies as an indispensable resource for improving future teacher competencies.

Frames and positions

In Hungary, mainstreaming together with inclusive education pays little attention to the significance of disabled communities (Hoffmann & Flamich, 2015). Students with various disabilities are expected to act as independent individuals, though, due to several disability-related factors, independence is much too hard to be acquired on one's own in mainstream circumstances. As a result of this attitude and practice, most of them are isolated in the classroom and even within the family. Consequently, as we insider researchers experience, persons with disabilities wish to find their disabled peers with the help of the social media. The role of social media in disabled students' lives can best be proven by reflecting on their Facebook posts. While listening to their voices, we intend to understand why they feel it is indispensable to create closed groups in order to discuss their disability-

related experiences. Is it a critical message about their mainstreamed lives? Is it a wish to belong somewhere? And what can we learn while listening to them?

Provoking voices

'Do not think that you can do anything, because you are disabled!' (Hoffmann & Flamich, 2015, p. 93). No one would ever suppose that this sentence was uttered by a professor at a doctoral school at one of Hungary's most prestigious and acknowledged universities. Yes, it was. Indeed. It dates back to 2003.

Those days the idea that disabled persons' lived experience-based knowledge could be added to the world of academia was almost unimaginable and totally unknown in Hungary, although equal opportunities were guaranteed by Act No. 26 of 1998 on assuring equal opportunity for persons with disabilities (ILO, n.d.). Utterances, similar to the one quoted above, however, were usual at mainly secondary and higher education. Students talked about their feelings and what comments their teachers had made to them at various forums:

> At one of my exams on law a professor said to me that as long as he was at the university, I wouldn't be a lawyer. And added the blind were not suitable for the job. He just hated the blind. (Bánfalvy, 2014, p. 259)

In the first quarter of the 21st century, when disability awareness is of major importance owing to the concepts put forward through disability models, blind students still complain, and try to find advice and sympathy as members of closed groups on Facebook. At the same time, teachers keep emphasizing that they are unable to manage a blind student in the class, which means that teachers either have unrealistic or no expectations regarding blind students' performance, and, as our blind students and their parents sadly tell us, secondary schools tend to reject blind students' applications. In the meantime, blind students are dreaming of becoming lawyers, interpreters, teachers, psychologists, musicians and work hard to achieve their goals. Our attempt is to find answers by calling attention to two very significant pillars of inclusive education. One is trust, and the other is the knowledge that generations of blind people developed in special schools to make life easier. These two pillars may provide possible alternatives in improving inclusive teachers' competencies. The very first pillar, the concept of trust immediately suggests two significant questions:

1. Whose role is it to assist teachers if not that of the disabled community?
2. Who trusts the knowledge generated by people with disabilities?

The latter question is hard to answer. In fact, in several cultures it is distrust, rather than trust, in persons with disability that has always been present (Pelka, 2012). It is so in spite of the fact that the concept of disability is relatively young, as it dates back to the 19th century (SEP, 2016). Very intelligent, or highly educated people have always lived among those 'who could not see, walk or hear; who had limited mobility, comprehension, or longevity, or chronic illnesses of various sorts' (SEP, 2016). Therefore, the question of education is not about managing disability or not, but about accepting and respecting persons who do their utmost to live with it.

Acceptance and respect are two components of trust and confidence. Supposedly, in order to gain trust and confidence in persons with disabilities, persons without disabilities need knowledge on disability-related issues that could best be obtained through disabled peoples' voices. In numerous cases these voices talk about lived experiences. However, although disabled persons' lived experiences play a significant role in making awareness and promoting trust, there are mental images deep in our minds that we can hardly eliminate.

There are situations in life when persons without disability accept disabled persons, as the mental image and the situation are in accordance. Owing to the mental image there are traditionally accepted 'roles" for blind people, for example:

> When I was growing up in London in the 1930s, I especially enjoyed the visits of Enrico, the piano tuner, who would come every few months to tune our pianos. We had an upright and a grand, and since everyone in the family played, they were always getting out of tune. Once when Enrico was ill, a substitute tuner came – a tuner who, to my amazement, got around without a white stick and could apparently see normally. Up to that point, I had assumed that, like Enrico, all piano tuners were blind (Sacks, 2007, p. 160).

Consequently, disabled persons in non-traditional, unusual roles, such as that of a professor at a university, greatly influence acceptance and raise awareness, as Georgina Klege claims:

> Part of what our body teaches in the classroom has to do with role modeling. Both students with disabilities and students without disabilities see a person with a disability in a position of authority and, without having to say anything about it, it's a way of demonstrating that one can have authority and an intellectual life and a career and all these things. Over time the novelty of otherness can disappear.
> (Brueggeman, Garland-Thomson & Kleege, 2005, p. 5)

These fragments illustrate how trust might develop. It is a general human characteristic that people trust what they know. That is why people trust more disabled persons in traditional roles. The second quotation shows that disabled persons in unusual roles working or performing at the same high level as non-disabled people are at first seen as surprising. It usually takes a certain amount time for trust and confidence to be established and developed.

Why listen?

When we decided to get involved in disability studies, we had already had at least twenty years of experience in teaching English as a foreign language. We teach all kinds of students, primary school children, young adults, non-disabled and disabled adults, sighted and blind persons. Consequently, when we started teaching, we learned to listen to them. Firstly, because we believe that teaching a foreign language means giving our students keys to various cultures as well as to open up the world and enable them to find their places in it. And secondly, because being visually impaired ourselves, we have always felt it our duty to listen to how our visually impaired students get along in the world we have helped them discover. Needless to say, their stories have inspired us to turn our attention to mainstream education and disability studies. For we know that disabled people are seldom taken seriously, disabled students are hardly ever listened to – even if they have a lot to say.

Actually, students think and talk critically. They talk in classes, at breaks, at parties, on public transport, wherever they are. Being information and communication technology (ICT) fans or even addicts, and moreover, most of them being equipped with some kind of assistive and enabling technology devices, they conquer the worldwide web, they chat on various forums of the social media. Thus, if we teachers really want to know what they think, we can get in touch with them – listen and be ready to assist. In most cases, blind students seem happy to welcome us teachers to their closed Facebook groups. Supposedly, this is how they want to let us know how they feel in the wider world. And if we listen carefully, it turns out that we can understand that the current practice of mainstream education must be changed, at least in Hungary. Consequently, the question is not whether there is a need for a change, but rather what needs to change in mainstream education and how to do that.

Before discussing what and how to change, we need to take a close look into the current situation of mainstream education. And it will turn out that this time the changes should be based after considering the students' aspects, the ones that have often been neglected so far.

Who to listen to? – The issue of impersonality, invisibility, voicelessness, avoidance

Our immediate answer is that we should listen to everyone who is concerned although it is obviously impossible. Teachers, parents, classmates, and of course, students could talk for hours about what it means to have or to be a disabled student in the classroom. Actually, as far as mainstream education is concerned, in Hungary teachers and parents are relatively frequently asked the first question, whereas classmates and students are almost never asked the second. Moreover, when mainstream education is in focus, disability is mentioned as one big grey umbrella under which the crowd is invisible. Disability and disabled persons are impersonal. This impersonalized view may be very harmful.

Although we are aware that 'disability affects us all, transcending class, nation and wealth' (Goodley, 2011, p. 1), and the largest minority in the world is that of disabled people (Riley, 2005, p. 1), the general attitude of avoidance strongly influences our everyday lives in the streets as well as in the world of academia (Bolt and Penketh, 2016). On the basis of our actual and factual presence, the disabled persons' international community should have a much stronger role in policymaking, including the policy of education. One factor that may weaken our influential role is the words that are used to describe us, or we use to describe ourselves: the question of political correctness.

Being politically correct does not mean that the applied term is inoffensive (Umstead, 2012, p. 8). Let us first take into consideration the most widespread words: disability, disabled. According to Dan Goodley, 'disability' with which that minority group is labeled, 'is an expression of wider socio-economic, political and cultural formations of a very specific though complex form of exclusion: the exclusion of people with impairments' (Goodley, 2007, p. 5). This statement implies that, those who are excluded' cannot be diverse, therefore they are uniform. Goodley (2007) also suggests that disabled students are not only labeled but also put under the colourless umbrella of disability, and remain invisible and unseen. More importantly, they remain voiceless. This invisibility and voicelessness promotes the lack of knowledge about the diverse nature of human beings resulting in a 'deconstruction of disabling pedagogies or pedagogies of disablement' (Goodley, 2007, p. 5; see also Oliver, 1990).

We are convinced that doing research on disability in general in the context of mainstream education fails to prove applicable to improve the quality of mainstream education practice, simply because students are considered disabled with uniform attributes. Invisibility and voicelessness are both dangerous – they break lives into pieces. One of the worst ever outcomes of invisibility, lack of knowledge and avoidance is that societies deprive

themselves of numerous values of the colourful groups of impaired persons. Needless to say, we regard the large minority of disabled people a diverse community. We believe that focusing on one 'colour' of the thousands will deepen our understanding of disability without which inclusive education remains a utopia. Therefore, in this paper we are highlighting the thoughts of Hungarian blind university students. Before we present the reasons why we have chosen this target group, let us explain what the words disability and people with disability mean in Hungarian, as its connotations may help you getting a picture of the significance of different cultures and their relations to persons with disability.

The Hungarian word for disability (*fogyatékosság*), instead of containing the word 'ability' contains the word 'lacking something'. Consequently, a person with disability means a person who lacks something. Words and language can be as dangerous as invisibility and voicelessness.

> It is in the context of a particular culture and language that our created identity is validated by the recognition best owed by others. So any lack of respect for our culture and language in turn devalues our personal self-respect. In recent times, awareness of the centrality of this has increasingly shaped the way people show respect for the dignity of others. (Glover, 2003, p. iii)

All the invisibility, voicelessness, avoidance may well be attributed to the stereotypical images of the past. It is much better to be invisible than evil or any other of the most frequent stereotypes Biklen and Bogdan (1977) identified, though remaining invisible or voiceless never results in either acceptance or respect.

There are several ways of showing and requiring respect for people whose attributes are strongly associated with stereotypes and prejudice. One of them is to ask those who are concerned to tell us their stories and listen to their narratives and learn from them, in our case blind university students' narratives. The reason why we have asked this small community to talk is so that they can be considered successful subjects of mainstream education. They are supposed to be good at ICT competences, and some of them may have experiences in both special and mainstream school education. Consequently, this small group of people are not supposed to face numerous difficulties in the classroom.

But before we unveil what they think, we should explain why we consistently use the expression 'mainstream education' instead of 'inclusion'. This phase of the paper gives us the possibility to introduce the present and the past paradigms and practice of educating blind students in Hungary.

Competing paradigms

In Hungary, there is a long tradition of special education. 'The unified Special Education College for Primary Teachers was established in Budapest in 1904' (ELTE, Special Education, 2013). Therefore, the presence of the special education-oriented paradigm is extremely significant. It can best be proven by the fact that there is the Faculty of Special Education of Eötvös Loránd University of Science (ELTE Special Education, 2013), one of the most recognized universities in Hungary, where both BA and MA degrees can be earned (Flamich & Hoffmann, 2013).

Hungary has a 'traditionally separated schooling system for mainstream and disabled children' based strongly upon the diagnose-centered model of pedagogy (Tóth Németh, 2014). As Tóth Németh (2014) describes, the current structure of education has not changed significantly since 1989, the year when it is considered that the Iron Curtain was ripped apart. Changes in ways of thinking concerning disability though had somewhat preceded the political changes; the main goals and issues of the notion of empowering disabled people, the social model, the human rights-based model and independent living movement reached (most of all young) Hungarian disabled people and challenged the country several years before the significant year of 1989.

Although these new models and concepts implied new perspectives, the culturally inherited ways of thinking of persons with various disabilities remained strongly influential. Still, there were attempts and initiatives to change disability-related attitudes and beliefs. Let us mention the outstanding fact that it was legislation to react first to the new constructs. As a consequence, legislators and disability policy-makers introduced a revolutionary act, Act LXXIX of 1993 on Public Education, to open up and provide new opportunities for disabled students, their parents and teachers in both mainstream and special education. Since the Act came into effect, these perspectives have constantly meant new challenges for all the parties concerned. Owing to the very fact that the topic of this paper is students' voices, we will leave detailed descriptions of the legal changes out of focus. Efforts and various modifications to the Act have been made to clarify the existing uncertainty regarding what disabled students are able and unable to do in mainstream education. Significantly, listening to the students' voices was hardly ever used as a resource when attempts were made to change.

The long tradition-based, powerful presence of special education implies that special needs teachers and special-needs oriented paradigms still play a crucial role in mainstream education in spite of the fact that disability should no longer be restricted or limited to special education (Flamich & Hoffmann, 2013), since it affects all aspects of life (Bolt, 2015). Representatives of the pedagogical paradigm of mainstreaming, the traditional paradigm of special

education, as well as the medical, social and the human rights-based models compete, while hundreds of teachers say they are unaware of 'how to treat disabled students' (Hoffmann & Flamich, 2015, p. 94). They argue they are simply unprepared. The gap between unprepared teachers and unprepared disabled students seems to slow down the appearance of positive outcomes mainstreaming in primary, secondary and higher education. Despite the confusion and uncertainty, mainstream education of students with various disabilities has been popular with their parents recently regardless of readiness of schools, families, teachers and students (Flamich & Hoffmann, 2013). Numerous people tend to believe that the earlier mainstreaming starts the more effective it is concerning the acceptance of persons with disabilities (Nagy F-né, n.d.; Fischer, 2009). In order to explore this issue, it is mostly the attitudes of teachers, special needs teachers and parents that are surveyed. Fischer's (2009) results reveal that while parents generally show positive attitude towards mainstreaming disabled students, teachers are rather sceptical about it. According to Tóth Németh (2014), however, plenty of surveys show that teachers' attitudes are rather more uncertain than positive.

Owing to the fact that Hungary is a country with a long and prestigious history of special education (Gordosné, 1981), that attitude determines the dispositions of special needs teachers, mainstream teachers, disabled students – all in all, education at any level.

Conceptions and misconceptions

Similarly to many countries, special schools in Hungary have been considered outdated recently. This attitude can most certainly be explained by the constant change of disability-related paradigms. These changes were rather radical, as in our childhodd special schools were almost sacred places, where skills to establish a dependable, secure future could be learned. When we were primary school students (in the 1970s), we could go to the only special school for the blind in Budapest, Hungary. Our parents could come to see us once or twice a month and we could only go home once a month, for summer, Christmas, and Easter holidays. During the school years, we not only enjoyed but also suffered from the individual differences of our schoolmates, thereby experiencing a degree of diversity (Hoffmann & Flamich, 2016). Doubtlessly, we missed our parents very much, but they told us to learn because knowledge was the only way to equal opportunities – a concept unknown in the early 1970s and 1980s in Hungary (Hoffmann & Flamich, 2016).

In the school for the blind, the standard of education was at a very high level. Therefore, when most of us went to mainstream schools for our secondary education, there were numerous subjects at which we excelled. Obviously, we were able and eager to help our sighted classmates who needed assistance at a school subject we were good at. That was how we managed to mainstream

ourselves. And that was when we experienced the disadvantages of having been segregated earlier (Hoffmann & Flamich, 2016).

Going to special schools has always had a stigmatizing message. Despite the fact that students seem to face more difficulties in an educational utopia called inclusion, the message has had an even more negative overtone these days. It is interesting to note how fast paradigms can change leaving behind practices without considering their advantages in the long run.

Blind but lost

Hungarian blind students, even if they talk, are hardly ever listened to in surveys. Though their narratives initiate and provoke several kinds of thoughts to reconsider and discuss.

Although they are separated from each other, blind students seek and find ways to share their ideas and beliefs. 'I think, because we are really separated, we should create a group so that we could give advice to each other on how to live blind!' (Facebook post, January 14th 2017). As most disabled students are now mainstreamed relatively early, that is, in kindergartens and primary schools, Hungarian blind students can meet in person only in special camps once a year, or virtually. The current method and conditions of mainstreaming seemingly prove dissatisfactory to make students prepared for secondary and higher education. As they very rarely meet blind peers, they may be misled concerning blind identity. Blind students in mainstream schools are deprived of the various kinds of knowledge blind people have worked out, accumulated and shared with their peers and younger schoolmates and, last but not least, their teachers learned from them throughout the years to make life relatively liveable and easier.

While the present practices of mainstream education cause uncertainty in teaching blind students, and that uncertainty oftentimes results in students' solitude, a large amount of knowledge that generations of blind people have developed throughout centuries is about to be lost. This is simply because to go to special schools and belong to a blind community is outdated. But how far can blind children get if they meet an itinerant teacher once or twice a month for some hours? … If they are left behind in foreign language classes? … If they just get a hint of Braille and have no chance to acquire it? Thousands of similar questions are asked and remain unanswered as of today.

Recently, we interviewed the very first itinerant teacher of one of the two special schools for blind students to paint a holistic picture of blind students in mainstream schools. She told us that mainstream teachers frequently refused to cooperate with her, whereas blind students constantly asked her to

forward messages from one blind student to another. Subject-specific topics were hardly ever discussed. As far as learning and teaching foreign languages are concerned, the interview reveals that teachers, parents and even students tend to believe that they are easy to learn, because they are easily accessible everywhere. Moreover, there is a misconception which implies that writing also proves easy, as the Braille writing system can be replaced by computers. Most mainstream teachers feel unable to decide what and how to teach blind students. The recurrent sentence that 'We, mainstream teachers are unable to deal with disabled students in the classroom!' characterises pedagogical discourses.

We always hear vocal groups of professionals saying they possess the 'knowhow'. But blind students are almost never asked or listened to. As if they/we were not protagonists of our lives. The inspiring paradigm of 'Nothing About Us Without Us' (Charlton, 1998) has turned into a formal issue of bureaucracy, strongly related to representatives of various organizations of disabled persons, and of mainstream and special needs teachers. The philosophy of being inclusive is either unknown or misunderstood.

Getting higher – facing the facts

Obviously, blindness is not a discriminatory factor in the Hungarian higher education system, and for the benefit of blind students' undergraduate and post-graduate studies, the criteria of admission have changed lately. As legally guaranteed positive discrimination supports disadvantaged students' university admission, a constantly increasing number of blind students are admitted at various universities. In the academic year of 2014/2015, 318 disabled students took part in higher education. Eight of them received a Ph.D. level education, as a letter from the Ministry of Human Resources, dated on May 5th, 2015 informs us. The statistics of the Ministry fails to differentiate between blind and partially sighted persons. It is also worth mentioning that in Hungary, there is currently no blind or low vision person with a Ph.D. degree. According to the head of ELTE University Service Disabled Students' Centre there were 33 partially sighted and 25 blind students at Eötvös Loránd University. The Hungarian Association of Blind and Partially Sighted has failed to provide us information on the current status of blind students in higher education.

A virtual community

As has already been mentioned, similarly to the diverse group of disabled people, blind students too are oftentimes used to being treated as Pelka (2012, ix) says that '[p]eople with disabilities … have generally been seen as objects

of scorn, or pity, cases to be cured or 'managed', problems to be confronted, or ignored.

That attitude might well be one of the reasons why blind students wish to share each other's company, and have created a closed group in the inclusive world of Facebook. The closed group's name can best be translated as The Group of Recently and Currently Integrated Visually Impaired Persons ("Jelenlegi és egykori integrált látássérültek közössége"). When we started our insider-research two years ago, there were 218 people in the community, at present, on January 28th, the group consists of 238 members. Although it is a closed group, anyone can join who has got something to do with mainstreaming. Most university students are members, although to be blind or to be a university student is not a requirement. Neither is necessary to have a visual impairment. Therefore, special needs teachers are also welcome to the group.

As members, not only do we observe the topics of communication, but also involve the fellow members in our research of students' experiences in the mainstream classroom. Our ongoing research consists of three parts. In the first part we have asked blind and low vision students to describe the characteristic features of the teacher with whom they would like to learn a foreign language. We have received only three emails, out of the approximately three hundred visually impaired university students. Two of the mails were complaining about the present situation concerning foreign language learning, highlighting that teachers should know what blind students are able to do, and what is out of their competence. The third letter is about positive experiences. It is worth mentioning that the person who wrote the letter noted that she had had a blind teacher of English.

In the second part, we asked blind and low vision students to fill out a questionnaire on their lived experiences concerning learning and studying a foreign language at secondary schools and universities. As for the secondary school students, we failed to receive any responses. University students proved slightly more active than blind and low vision secondary school students. Out of the 25 students at ELTE, and the unknown exact number of students at other universities, 16 students answered the closed and open questions of the questionnaire. The statistical data is now being analyzed. When we took a quick look at the open-ended questions, it turned out that visually impaired students meet serious challenges, face severe difficulties in the classroom. As we asked university professors to fill out a corresponding questionnaire, it will be interesting to compare the outcomes. What is worth mentioning here is that forty-six professors and teachers answered our closed and open-ended questions. Although the data is being analyzed, at the preliminary analysis of the open-ended questions shows that teachers miss courses to prepare them for human diversity.

In the third part, we are making interviews with some of the students and professors. We have made only a few interviews in this phase so far. Our aim is to find out what they think teachers should know when working with blind students, what components they all miss from teacher education. Although we are making topic-oriented, semi-structured interviews, our blind respondents turn to narrative, for they believe that in order to understand their viewpoints, we should know its context. We are still in the middle of the interviewing process, but difficulties and challenges of mainstream education are slowly and clearly shaping.

At the very early phase of our research, our aim was to contextualize mainstream education from primary to higher education. Thus, we made interviews with a few itinerant teachers. One of them actually turned her back to mainstream education. We also interviewed the head of the methodological centre responsible for blind students mainstreaming in primary and secondary education, the director of Disabled Students' Centre at ELTE, and the only one blind person, an ICT expert hired at the Disabled Students' Centre. All of them emphasized not only teachers but also students as being unprepared for mainstream education. This fact implies that a profound change should be made. We are convinced that, however favorable or sceptical teachers' attitudes are, without listening to blind students' and successfully mainstreamed blind people's experiences and clarifying one's own relations to human diversity, the visible gap will be even deeper than it is now between the sighted and the blind.

Facebook posts in the mentioned closed group and several letters on special mailing lists show that blind students create their own world – they need each other's company and support. Currently, mainstreaming blind students means they are separated, and from their posted narratives it turns out, they oftentimes feel lonely. Neither blind students nor mainstream teachers seem to be prepared for working together, i.e. for inclusion. They seem unknown to each other, which means that all kinds of teacher education should be re-considered according to social and human needs.

The cultural model of disability

Our research about blind students' Facebook posts reveals that mainstream educators are often unaware of what kind of abilities or talent their blind students have. But they all think and presuppose something and act according to the picture they have formed in their mind of blind people.

> Student 1:
> In the very first month at the secondary school my chemistry teacher said to me: I don't understand how you got admitted here without anyone consulting me. (Hoffmann, 2017, p. 201)

Student 2:

"Do blind people get any extra time at the final exam? Do we get the material in Braille, electronic format or is there a reader? Please, answer soon, 'cause my literature teacher is a bit lost, and so am I. Thanks." (30. 04. 2017)

Comment 1 (blind student):

"Yes, we get some extra time guaranteed by law. I'll find the link for you."

Comment 2 (blind student):

"I got everything on a thumb drive. I got 33% extra time, I think."

Student 3:

"I want to learn Russian. My teacher told me it might be problematic because of the grammar and the Cyrillic script." (06. 03. 2017)

Comment 1 (blind student):

"I learnt Russian for a long time. Don't worry about the grammar!"

Comment 2 (blind student):

"There are two great screen readers that read Russian. You can download the Russian keyboard layout from: …"

Stereotypes have been with us for too long to eliminate them as a result of disability rights movements. As we have already emphasized, disabled persons have always composed a diverse minority. Accepting as well as respecting diversity can and should be taught and learnt in every culture. Cultural understanding of any lived experiences is a basic particle of culture. Literary and music representations of disability may play a significant role to understand the philosophy behind exclusion as well as inclusion. Especially, if we take into consideration Couser's (2009) statement that 'cultural representations mirror daily life' (p. 17), we may find responses to Bolt's questions on whether the study of culture really deepens our understanding of disability, and if studying disability really enriches our understanding of culture (Bolt, 2012; Hoffmann & Flamich, 2015).

A significant number of disabled people seem to believe in the power of cultural awareness. Ferri (2011) describes that disability studies scholars often depend on fiction, films, popular culture as well as disability memoir and first person narratives, when they teach or give an account on their scientific work. Although Ferri says the value of these works are that they help us 'imagine' disability, this approach can be rather misleading. Fiction and disability memoir have different functions from imagining what it is like to be disabled. They provide some kind of knowledge of ourselves and that of disability. That is one of the reasons why they are suitable to teach diversity. Disability memoir and first person narratives perform a cultural mission. "They frame our understanding of raw, unorganized experience, giving it

coherent meaning, and making it accessible to us through story" (Garland-Thomson, 2007, p. 121; see also Ferri, 2011).

Therefore, disability memoir and first person narratives – even if the value is sometimes questioned – are very important voices and may be supportive in teacher education. Not only should primary education but also secondary and higher education be prepared for a diverse world. Students' Facebook posts and any other kind of disability-related first person narratives reflect how diverse human thinking is, consequently, they may prove helpful resources to improve teachers' readiness to receive and educate disabled students regardless of the form of education. Listening to disabled students and reading disability in fiction, as well as disability memoir are indispensable, so that we will understand that "there is more than one way to move through space, to access a text, to process information, to communicate – more than one way to be a human being" (Kleege, 2011).

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the phenomenon that 'mainstream teachers are unable to "treat" us disabled students in the classroom!' through students voices. We also described the present outcomes of an ongoing research where we examine visually impaired secondary school and university students' narratives, Facebook posts, interviews in order to understand how students' experience mainstreaming and inclusion. Interestingly enough, high school students remained silent and only a few university students' voices could be heard. What we have learned from this research is that teacher education definitely needs reconsideration, and, that without the cultural model of disability, other approaches fail to show a holistic picture. Listening to students' voices is part of the cultural context and a basic need without which both mainstream and inclusive education remains pure theory. But education is about a great deal of practice and listening to students' voices, is it not?

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