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## Education of pupils with multiple disabilities in the Czech Republic

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Currently, recognition of the right of all people to education is considered completely natural. Since the mid-1990s, in the Czech Republic, the issue of educating people with multiple disabilities has been increasingly addressed. The main purpose of this study is to characterise the approach to education of persons with multiple disabilities in the Czech Republic. The article contains interpretations of the concept of multiple disabilities, both in the Czech literature and in international literature, with particular emphasis on the Czech approach.

**KEY WORDS:** multiple disabilities. The Czech Republic, early intervention, education system

### Foreword

Education of pupils with multiple disabilities both in Poland and in the Czech Republic has undergone major changes in the last 20 years. Czech special needs educators, reforming the Czech education system, have been exploring the problem of educating pupils with disabilities since the early 1990s. Before that, disabled pupils were educated in general schools, however, as Zenon Gajdzica claims, it was natural and often implicit integration. It was not

accompanied by institutional support, mainly because in many places, there were no special needs institutions nearby<sup>1</sup>. When discussing the education of students with multiple disabilities, we should first define what kind of disability it actually is and what major educational and support needs are associated with it<sup>2</sup>. Multiple disabilities are the object of interest of medical and health sciences, social sciences (psychology, special needs education, sociology) and legal sciences (law)<sup>3</sup>.

Both the Polish and the Czech literature have different names and definitions for multiple disabilities. There are terms like: conjugate disability (cz. "víceásobné postižení") or coupled disability (cz. "kombinované postižení"). According to Marzenna Zaorska<sup>4</sup>, when analysing the dilemma of multiple disabilities, the following issues should be considered: "the qualitatively different character of multiple disabilities, which, if specific disabilities are combined, causes a condition whose quality is different than the condition caused by only one of the multiple disabilities<sup>5</sup>". The author defines multiple disabilities as "[...] a condition, excluding intellectual disability, that is characterised by at least two serious defects in the construction of human body"<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Z. Gajdzica, *Opinie polskich i czeskich nauczycieli na temat przemian kształcenia uczniów niepełnosprawnych intelektualnie*, „Człowiek – Niepełnosprawność – Społeczeństwo” 2012, no. 15.

<sup>2</sup> M. Zaorska, *Aktualne problemy edukacji i rehabilitacji osób z niepełnosprawnością sprzężoną*. „Niepełnosprawność. Tyflosurdopedagogiczne konteksty edukacji i rehabilitacji” 2012, no. 7, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> B. Marcinkowska, *Sprzężona niepełnosprawność – próba analizy fenomenu*, „Niepełnosprawność. Dyskursy pedagogiki specjalnej” 2016, no. 21, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> M. Zaorska, *Aktualne problemy edukacji i rehabilitacji osób z niepełnosprawnością sprzężoną*. „Niepełnosprawność. Tyflosurdopedagogiczne konteksty edukacji i rehabilitacji” 2012, no. 7, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> M. Zaorska, *Psychopedagogiczne uwarunkowania specjalnej edukacji i terapii osób z niepełnosprawnością sprzężoną*, „Człowiek – Niepełnosprawność – Społeczeństwo” 2013, no. 1, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> M. Zaorska, *Psychopedagogiczne uwarunkowania specjalnej edukacji i terapii osób z niepełnosprawnością sprzężoną*, „Człowiek – Niepełnosprawność – Społeczeństwo” 2013, no. 1, p. 64.

The difficulties underlying multiple disabilities are due to the fact “that [...] it is not a simple sum of the component disabilities, but rather a separate and complex construct<sup>7</sup>...”. The population of persons with multiple disabilities is very diversified, due to its various components and their intensities, and it is not possible to develop a single characteristic model of a persons with multiple disabilities<sup>8</sup>.

Over the last few years, multiple disabilities have been frequently discussed in the Czech literature on the subject. Theoretical deliberations and studies focus mainly on deaf-blind pupils. The problem of the education of pupils with multiple disabilities is discussed by Czech educators and psychologists (Ludiková 2001, 2001; Souralová 2000; Hlaváčová 2003; Vítková 2004; Opatřilová 2005). The Czech literature defines multiple disabilities, for example as a condition in which “a person who suffers from two or more impairments at the same time”<sup>9</sup>. Maria Vítková believes multiple disabilities to be the total of human limitations in all the spheres of experience and means of expression. Emotional, cognitive, physical as well as social and communicational skills are significantly reduced and altered<sup>10</sup>.

Considering the above, this article has two basic goals. The first is an attempt to systematise basic knowledge about the education of children and youth with multiple disabilities and to identify the main directions of its transformation in the Czech Republic. I focus in particular on the legal aspects of the education of pupils with multiple disabilities, especially on the Czech law on special needs

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<sup>7</sup> A. Twardowski, *Pedagogika osób ze sprzężonymi upośledzeniami*, [in:] *Pedagogika specjalna*, ed. W. Dykcik, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2006, p. 290.

<sup>8</sup> B. Marcinkowska, *Wczesne wspomaganie rozwoju dziecka z niepełnosprawnością sprzężoną*, [in:] *Wczesne wspomaganie rozwoju dziecka z uszkodzonym wzrokiem i dodatkowymi niepełnosprawnościami*, ed. G. Walczak, MENiS, Warszawa 2005.

<sup>9</sup> M. Sovák, *Defektologický slovník* (3. vydání), Nakladatelství H&H, Jímočany 2000, p. 158.

<sup>10</sup> M. Vítková, *Integrativní speciální pedagogika: Integrace školní a speciální* (2. rozšířené a přepracované vydání), Paido, Brno 2004, p. 325.

education. I am interested in how the process of educating pupils with multiple disabilities is developed. The second goal of the article is theoretical. The basic objectives and problems associated with the education of those pupils in the Czech educational system are highlighted. There are two reasons behind the choice of the Czech Republic as the country of interest. First of all, the Czech Republic has a two-track system, with two separate tracks for abled and disabled pupils – only 3% of pupils considered to be disabled attend special schools<sup>11</sup>. Secondly, to look back at the history of the Czech State, it has an extensive network of special schools with a long tradition of providing care and education to persons with multiple disabilities.

The article is divided into three main parts. The first part analyses the concept of the education of pupils with multiple disabilities (areas of the educational process / objectives of the education / educational categories of multiple disabilities). The second part discusses the system of education of pupils with multiple disabilities in the Czech Republic, focusing on the Law no. 82/2015 JoL (the School Law). The third part is devoted to early intervention in children with multiple disabilities.

## **Education of pupils with multiple disabilities – basic assumptions**

Education is defined as the total of educational activities, including teaching and raising, and it is a complex process<sup>12</sup>. Persons with multiple disabilities have existed in various societies from the beginning of human history. Nonetheless, for ages, special institutions addressed only the problem of providing care, rehabilitation and education to persons with single disabilities. Not enough attention

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<sup>11</sup> G. Szumski, *Integracyjne kształcenie niepełnosprawnych*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009.

<sup>12</sup> W. Okoń, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, Wydawnictwo Żak, Warszawa 2007, p. 93.

was paid to persons with multiple disabilities, neither in theoretical deliberations, nor in practice<sup>13</sup>. The unique and complex character of multiple disabilities means that such children require unique, usually special and highly specialist, assistance. Marzenna Zaorska<sup>14</sup> stresses the fact that it is not enough to adjust the teaching content and organise education or psychological and pedagogical assistance, but the most important thing is to understand the essence of a given disability and possible expectations as to the effectiveness of a pupil's development, and education focused on a pupil with multiple disabilities. Maria Vítková<sup>15</sup> identifies three areas that need to be taken into consideration when developing an educational process for pupils with multiple disabilities:

- Analysis of the existing situation, which is determined by the parents' influence and the financial condition of the family. It is important to collect information from the persons who have been taking care of a child until now. Attention should be paid to various areas of the child's behaviour (perception, social development, emotionality, sensory-motor integration and basic life situations).
- The goal should be determined – the most important being to provide for the child's basic needs, and then, depending on the circumstances, subsequent requirements should be identified.
- Special educational means should be provided.

The basic goal of the education of pupils with multiple disabilities is to strengthen their ability and capacity to become as self-sufficient and independent in everyday life as possible. Education

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<sup>13</sup> M. Zaorska, *Rehabilitacja i edukacja osób z niepełnosprawnością sprzężoną w kontekście historycznym i stan obecny*, [in:] *Historyczne dyskursy nad pedagogiką specjalną*, ed. J. Błaszczyński, D. Baczała, J. Binnebesela, Wydawnictwo HAMAL, Łódź 2008, p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> M. Zaorska, *Niepełnosprawności sprzężone w obliczu aktualnych przemian w systemowych rozwiązaniach edukacyjnych*, „*Niepełnosprawność. Dyskursy pedagogiki specjalnej*” 2014, no. 14, p. 104.

<sup>15</sup> Vítková M., *Integrativní speciální pedagogika: Integrace školní a speciální* (2. rozšířené a přepracované vydání), Paido, Brno 2004.

should be based on a the limited possibilities of a disabled child, and it should respect its needs and abilities. Dagmara Opatřilová<sup>16</sup> lists the main goals of the education of children with multiple disabilities:

- Optimal development of the child's personality, respecting individual differences in every child;
- Achieving the desired level of education that fulfils a certain level of a child's socialisation.
- Developing and accommodating educational needs to the specific nature of disability.

Štefan Vašek<sup>17</sup> claims that the basic objective of the education of pupils with multiple disabilities is to be particularly careful about an individual approach, special methods and modifying the teaching content as compared to pupils with single disability. Alicia Vančová<sup>18</sup> defines two categories of multiple disabilities, based on the type of disability, the consequences for the development of personality and socialisation, and the need for special educational assistance<sup>19</sup>:

- Mild multiple disabilities: a group of persons capable of achieving such level of education as to be able to be fully professionally active or use supported employment. Education is mainly performed in general primary schools. Persons with such disabilities should be able, with minor or no assistance, to be self-sufficient and live on their own.
- Severe multiple disabilities: such persons who need more specialist support in terms of education and rehabilitation. They mainly attend special schools, and their education is often limited to elementary content, according to the individual needs

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<sup>16</sup> D. Opatřilová, *Metody práce ujedniců s těžkým a více vadami, nakladatelství Masarykova univerzita*, Brno 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Š. Vašek, A. Vančová, G. Hatos, *Pedagogika viacnásobne postihnutých*, Sapientia, Bratislava 1999, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> A. Vančová, *Edukácia viacnásobne postihnutých*, Sapientia, Bratislava 2001.

<sup>19</sup> The author stresses the fact that not all types of multiple disabilities may be classified under the same category.

of a given person. It is necessary to use alternative and assisted means of communication.

In the Czech Republic, strategic measures concerning the education of pupils with multiple disabilities on the respective stages of their learning process promote general and integration education. The current tendency is to integrate disabled persons in education. Segregation is being replaced by integration and inclusion, the main goal being to integrate pupils with multiple disabilities with the school environment, and improve their future prospects.

### **The educational system for pupils with multiple disabilities in the Czech Republic**

Currently, the Czech Republic is undergoing dynamic changes in terms of the practice and theory of special education of persons with multiple disabilities. Activities addressed to the disabled are supported by the national authorities, in close cooperation with non-government organisations. The Czech model of the education of persons with multiple disabilities is quite institutionalised, as a result of the establishment, in the year 1993, of the Government Committee for the Disabled (cz. Vládní výbor pro zdravotně postižené občany), which regularly participates in coordinating initiatives aimed at improving the social, legal and economic situation of the disabled in the Czech Republic. It is also worth noting that, with the Government Committee support, since 1992, the Czech Republic has been regularly developing new assistance plans for the disabled. The latest one – the National Plan for the Creation of Equal Opportunities for the Disabled in 2015–2020 (Národní plán podpory rovných příležitostí pro osoby se zdravotním postižením na období 2015–2020) is supposed to promote and support integration of the disabled and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> T. Kasprzak, *Specyficzny rodzaj niepełnosprawności jako sytuacja trudna w rodzinie. Osoby głuchoniewidome i ich rodziny w Republice Czeskiej*, „Rodzina wieloproblemowa”

In the Czech Republic, the basic document that guarantees the right to care and education is the Constitution. In Article 1 of the Czech Constitution, we can read about the rights and freedoms of a person and citizen, and its Article 10 states that all the international agreements on human rights and basic freedoms that have been ratified and published and are binding on the Czech Republic, are directly effective and have precedence over the national law.

The problem of the education of children with multiple disabilities is particularly important in the contemporary concept of special education in the Czech Republic. In the 1980s, children with multiple disabilities were released from compulsory education and directed to social care institutions. In the early 1990s, the legislation governing the education of pupils with multiple disabilities changed. In the contemporary concept of the access to education of persons with multiple disabilities, the theory of original and secondary impairments of the Czech professor Miloš Sovák is being replaced by the "synergy effect" – a child is assigned to the education and rehabilitation system according to his degree of disability. Also, the type of disability that is the major obstacle to a child's development is taken into consideration.

Multiple disabilities were described in 1997, in the Bulletin of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic. The bulletin says that: "a pupil is considered to have multiple disabilities, if he or she suffers from two or more causative and independent types of disability which, due to their depth and consequences, justify the pupil's inclusion in the special education system"<sup>21</sup>. In the Czech educational system, pupils with multiple disabilities are divided into three groups<sup>22</sup>:

- The first group are pupils with intellectual disability, which is the decisive factor in the choice of the teaching methods for them and determines their level of education.

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*wa. Roczniki Socjologii Rodziny. Studia socjologiczne i interdyscyplinarne*" 2017, vol. XXVI–XXVII, pp. 168–174.

<sup>21</sup> Věstník MSMT ČR č. 8/1997, č.j. 25602/97–22

<sup>22</sup> Vítková M., *Integrativní speciální pedagogika: Integrace školní a speciální* (2. rozšířené a přepracované vydání), Paido, Brno 2004.



- The second group are pupils with a combination of physical, sensory and speech disorders. A certain part of this group are deaf-blind children.
- The third group are pupils diagnosed with autism/autistic symptoms.

In 2011, in special educational institutions, 17,589 pupils were diagnosed with multiple disabilities. The most frequent combinations of disabilities are: intellectual disability + verbal communication disorders (6,173 pupils); intellectual disability + motor disability (5,510 pupils); verbal communication disorders + motor disability (3,316 pupils)<sup>23</sup>. The most important legal acts, apart from the Czech Constitution, that govern the education of children with multiple disabilities are:

- The Act no. 82/2015 JoL on Preschool, Secondary, Higher, Vocational and Other Education – the School Law (o předškolním, základním, středním, vyšším odborném a jiném vzdělávání – školský zákon), and the following regulations:
  - The Decree of 2 June 2016 amending the Ordinance no. 72/2005 Sb. on the provision of school counseling in schools (Výhláška ze dne 2 června 2016 kterou se mění výhláška č. 72/2005 Sb. o poskytování poradenských služeb ve školách a školských poradenských zařízeních);
  - Dekret nr 27/2016 JoL on the education of children, pupils and students with special educational needs, and talented pupils (Výhláška č. 27/2016 Sb. o vzdělávání žáků se speciálními vzdělávacími potřebami a žáků nadáných).

In the Czech Republic, compulsory education starts at the age of 6 years and lasts for nine years (Zákon 561/2004 Sb. o předškolním, základním, středním, vyšším odborném a jiném vzdělávání – školský zákon). The school is divided into two stages: grades I-V and VI-IX (nine years of education). A pupil with multiple disabilities and intellectual disability, at the request of his legal guardian and on a written recommendation from psychological counselling services, attends

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<sup>23</sup> J. Voženílek, J. Michalík, *Atlas činnosti speciálněpedagogických center v ČR*, Vydavatelství Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, Olomouc 2013, p. 103.

a special school. Pupils with multiple disabilities but without intellectual disability attend general schools or special schools that meet their needs associated with their two or more disabilities.

There are also institutions that provide specialist support, mainly to the families of pupils with multiple disabilities. These institutions function within schools, and they are: psychological counseling services (pedagogicko-psychologická poradna) and special education centres (speciálně pedagogické centrum). Their basic function is to provide free-of-charge educational assistance at the request of the parents or legal guardians of a pupil<sup>24</sup>.

The diversity, individual nature and special educational needs of pupils with multiple disabilities require careful planning of their education. It is necessary to develop a detailed individual educational plan (cz. individuální vzdělávací plán) for every pupil. According to the Decree no. 27/2016 JoL on the education of children, pupils and students with special educational needs, and talented pupils, the school principal may, upon a written recommendation from the school counseling centre, approve an individual educational plan for a pupil with multiple disabilities, which is a binding document that provides for:

- Information on the content, scope, process and means of providing special educational care.
- Information of the implementation of the educational goals, content of the curriculum, choice of educational procedures, pupil evaluation methods.
- List of compensation and rehabilitation activities, and teaching aids.
- Assistant teacher who, in particular: helps pupils adapt to the school environment, helps pupils communicate with teachers, helps pupils take care of themselves.
- Assistance in communicating by means of a non-verbal system. The school ensures a communication system that meets the needs of pupils.

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<sup>24</sup> Vyhláška 116/2011 Sb., o poskytování služeb ve školách a školských poradenských zařízeních.

- The Czech sign language translator. The translator assists throughout classes and during school assemblies, trips or extra classes organised by the school.

An individual educational plan should be developed without delay, in any case not later than within a month after submission of a request by the legal guardian of a pupil. An educational plan may be supplemented and adjusted to a pupil's needs at any time during a school year. The school principal is responsible for developing and implementing an individual educational plan. The plan is developed in cooperation with the school counseling centre, the pupil and the legal guardians of a minor pupil. The school counseling centre and teachers evaluate implementation of the educational plan at least once a year. The Decree 27/2016 Dz.U. (vyhláška č. 27/2016 Sb., o vzdělávání žáků se speciálními vzdělávacími potřebami a žáků nadaných) ensures education of pupils with multiple disabilities through:

- integration in primary school classes or in schools for students with various kinds of disabilities, based on an individual educational plan;
- formation of a class for pupils with multiple disabilities in a special school;
- formation of a class for pupils with disabilities in a general school or special school for pupils with other disabilities.

Assistant teachers (cz. Asistent pedagoga) is an educator who works with children, pupils and students with special educational needs, if they are not able to sufficiently take care of themselves. The basic duties of an assistant teachers are to: (1) work individually with a pupil, (2) create conditions for teamwork, (3) support a pupil who is not able to fully engage in lessons.

## **Early intervention (raná péče) for children with multiple disabilities in the Czech Republic**

The problem of early intervention (cz. raná péče) concerning children with disabilities, as one of the efforts towards normalisation of life and integration, developed globally in the 1970s. In the

Czech Republic, the concept started becoming popular in the 1990s, when, at the initiative of Teresa Hradlikova, Barbara Kašova, Teresa Sklemickova and Jan Vachulov, under the direction of Professor Oldřich Čálek, support for the parents of children with visual impairments was offered. An approach developed that took into consideration both a child and his parents and other family members. The Czech early intervention model is based on the principle of “accompaniment” (cz. provazeni) and it is built on three pillars: (1) supporting the child’s development, (2) supporting the family, (3) supporting the social integration of the child and his family.

Oldřich Matoušek defines early intervention as “a set of combined social, health care and psychological services. It is addressed to children in preschool age whose disability poses a major threat to their development. The intervention covers both children and their parents, and takes place in the child’s natural environment.”<sup>25</sup> In the Czech law, early intervention is understood as social field work, with a social worker going to the field. In legislation, early intervention is considered to be a social service and the entity responsible for its implementation is the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, pursuant to the Law no. 108/2006 JoL on Social Services, as amended (Zákon č. 108/2006 Sb.o sociálních službách). The law defines early intervention as field and/or outpatient care provided to children below 7 years of age and his family.

Early intervention measures are addressed to two groups of children and their families:

- from the moment of detecting a disability (including the prenatal age) to four years of age in the case of children with health disabilities or threatened by disability
- from the moment of detecting a disability (including the prenatal age) to seven years of age in the case of children with multiple sensory, physical and intellectual impairments.

Early intervention focuses mainly on detecting and preventing a disability, and stimulating development. It extends to all kinds of

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<sup>25</sup> O. Matoušek, *Metody a řízení sociální práce (vydanie drugie)*, Portál, Praha 2008, p. 168.

intervention that are needed in the early years of a child's life. It is also important to know how the potential of a child with multiple disabilities may be used not only for his personal development but also for his better involvement in the society. Thus, proper methods of social and educational integration ought to be sought. According to Josef Slowík, early intervention does not evaluate a child's impairments and limitations, to the contrary – it focuses on his positive possibilities. The author claims that a child with disability (also with multiple disabilities) should be treated as if he was healthy – a child should not be regarded as special because of his disability, and sympathy for or frustration about his condition should be avoided<sup>26</sup>. The target of early intervention is the family and parents are team partners. Intervention is mainly provided at the child's home. The family system is treated as a complex and integrated whole. Respect for a child's individuality and his cultural, social and educational uniqueness is the foundation of early intervention in the Czech Republic<sup>27</sup>.

Working with the parents of children with multiple disabilities (consultations, social and educational counselling, developing strategies of alternative and assisting communication, helping to choose the right preschool or special school) is not different than working with other families. Every family has the right to receive the same amount of time or information. Each of the problems of a child with multiple disabilities should be dealt with individually.

## Summary

The existing system of the education of pupils with multiple disabilities was developed in the early 1990s to enable those pupils to attend compulsory education. In the Czech Republic, pupils with

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<sup>26</sup> J. Slowík, *Speciální pedagogika*, Grada Publishing a.s, Praha 2007, p. 151.

<sup>27</sup> T. Hradliková, *Raná péče pro rodiny s dětmi se zrakovým postižením a kombinovaným postižením*, Středisko rené péče, Praha 1998.

multiple disabilities may be educated in a segregation system (historically the oldest), but also they may be provided with individual teaching. The goal of educating pupils with multiple disabilities is to provide them with as many competencies as possible. In the Czech society, the problem of educational activity of pupils with multiple disabilities is the object of interest and concern for researchers. Significant support to pupils with multiple disabilities and their parents is provided by psychological counselling services and special education centres. Pupils with multiple disabilities are a very diversified group, which is why the degree and form of the teaching process must be individual.

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