

Education of students with more
severe mental retardation

Historic background of education of children with mental retardation

- Education of people with mental retardation have quite a long tradition in our country.

First facility for then-called weak-minded was established in second half of 19th century. In teaching of challenged children the main focus was on physical education, singing and hand craft.

- Credits for developing of education of mental retardation belongs to Czech scientists K.S.Amerling, K. Herfort and others, who examined this problem from medical, paedagogical and philosophical approaches. They build on ideas of J.A.Comenius who even in 17.th century believed, that every human can be educated, but also on ideas of J.J. Rousseau and J.J.Pestalozzi.

- In the time of the First Republic, which is in 20ties and 30ties, a vast network of special schools was build.

Almost until the end of 20th century only students who were able to learn trivia were assigned to this level, children with lower level of abilities were relieved of mandatory education.

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Further developement of education of students with mental retardation

- After 1989 integration trends started to get into our special education system. Some students, especially those with lighter forms of mental retardation were placed into general elementary schools, some stayed in special schools which were transformed into practical elementary schools.
- Students with more severe forms of mental retardation were educated in than-called auxilliary schools, later renamed to special elementary schools.
- Soon it showed that integration of children with severe forms of mental retardation into general schools is paedagogicaly very challenging and it doesn't bring optimal results.
- At the same time it showed that curent system of education is quite suitable for children with mild mental retardation, but it isn't able to educate children with more severe disabilities or multiple challenges.
- At the time, the aim of special paedagogics was to find ways to integrate children who are unable to absorb trivia, but are able to learn many useful knowledge and practical skills.
- Resources for our research were informations from history of education of people with mental retardation, experiences of our special techers and informations and experiences from abroad.

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Transformation of Special elementary school

- Auxilliary schools were gradually transformed in form and in content of education. Our special techers started to gather experinces from trips abroad, especialy to Denmark, but also to Austria, Germany, France and other countries. They learned many esencial informations especialy concernig education of children with severe forms of mental disabilities.
- New education program called „Preparation level of auxilliary school“ proved to be viable way of engagement of children with severe mental disability.
- Preparation level was created in colaboration with Paedagogical research institute and auxilliary school in Prague 10- Malešice and was created as preparation for education for students, who at their begening of school due to their kognitive abilities are not able to be in systematic education. This preparation can last, according to student's needs, up to 3 years.
- Transformation also required alteration of school and clasroom layout and equipment, extra staff, school bus services etc.

Content and goals of education

- Content of education on special elementary schools is according to education framework divided into five areas of education:
- **People and communication** (cognitive education, speech education)
- **People and their world** (sensory education)
- **Art and culture** (music, art)
- **People and health** (PE, rehabilitation, rehabilitation education program)
- **People and labour** (labour education).
- **Goal of education** is to evolve physical and psychical abilities and talents of students and provide them with competencies, which enable them to participate in social life as much as possible.
- Important function of special elementary school is to prepare students for **further education**.

Rehabilitation education program

- **Rehabilitation education program for auxilliary school** is evidence based education program created for students with most severe forms of mental retardation
- In reahabilitation class there are usualy 4 – 6 students with severe or combined form of mental disability. Education is utilizing **unusual methods** such as alternative comunication techniques, Bliss symbols, Makaton sign language, later in higher grades also social reading, global reading, etc. Education is suplemented with various methods of **rehabilitation**, which are performed by educated paedagogical or rehabilitation workers .
- Generaly, we can't expect students of rehabilitation classes to absorb trivia – that is reading, writing and counting. Main goal of education is developement of **comunication skills, move autonomy, and basic self-reliance** in the most amount possible. Curriculum of 20 lessons per week include cognitive, sensory, aesthetic, labour, speach and rehabitional education.

Further education of students with severe mental retardation

- ❖ After mandatory school, young students with severe mental retardation have opportunity to continue in education on **practical schools**. **Two years practical school** gives to students with mild form of mental retardation opportunity to obtain higher level of education. **One year practical school** is designated for students with severe form of mental disability, combined disabilities or autism.
- ❖ **Goal of education** in practical school is mainly improvement of **quality of life** of absolvents, whom are according to their individual abilities given opportunity to prove successful in sheltered workspaces and assistant positions in various professions.
- ❖ People with mental retardation as well as all other citizens have right to **lifelong education**. Lifelong education system for people with mental disability hasn't been build here yet. Several organizations and social groups in cooperation with special schools create some forms of education like **evening schools and courses for further education**. Also new form of further education is emerging and prove usefull- **activation centers**.

End

At the end let me express my appreciation, admiration and respect towards all teachers, educators, pedagogical and rehabilitational workers, assistants and other professionals of several occupations, who participate on such extraordinary and demanding task as is education of severely disabled people.

They deserve thanks also for the fact, that thanks to their effort we are amongst countries with lowest rate of illiteracy.

