

Introduction

The presented issue is devoted to psychological problems of disability in the context of school as well as cultural inclusion. The papers are based on different international experiences, which should be very interesting for Readers and can enable a comparison of both similarities and differences in the political and cultural backgrounds. Authors from different European as well as Asian and American Universities were invited to present their research results and theoretical outcomes. These are professionals working in the field of exceptional persons psychology and education from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, Sichuan Normal University, Palacký University of Olomouc, University Hradec Králové, University of Birmingham, the Autism Research Centre of the Autism Society of Washington in the USA and ELTE University in Budapest.

The education of children and pupils with disabilities increasingly approaches the boundaries of the fields of special education and psychology. This situation is caused by the current level of knowledge in these fields. Special Education, as the original and scientifically equipped area, is gradually orienting away from a solely medically-oriented cooperation toward psychology as another scientific partner. The authors of the contributions included in this volume show very close proximity to both special education and exceptional psychology. It is not only a reflection of the situation in Europe, as some authors present work that is carried out outside of Europe. Diagnosis, treatment, education – these are key words that are common to the contributions. On the one hand, there is an apparent high degree of specialization of individual authors, and on the other hand, it is this specialization that calls for an inclusion of psychology with a special focus on working with people with disabilities. The authors' contributions represent the current state of knowledge in their respective fields. The aim of publishing all contributions is not only to make the professional public familiar with the latest research results, but also to provoke discussion and offer topics for further research activities, thereby pushing the boundaries of knowledge.

The issue is composed of three main parts. The first part describes **the psychological aspects of sensory and motor impairments**. Most of the papers

are related to hearing impairments, however, there are also articles in the field of cerebral palsy as well as blindness.

The first paper by Joanna Kossewska discusses “Theory of Mind in deaf children in the context of inclusive education”. The paper concentrates on a comparison of the educational environment. Findings show that education in a Total Communication classroom, where sign is used along with speech, neither enhance nor detract from ToM development, relative to mainstream schooling. Deaf studies consistently suggest that deaf children from hearing families, educated in either oral or sign language, are delayed in developing mentalizing skills compared to their native-signing and hearing age-matched peers. The results of some studies point to the importance of participation in everyday conversations with family members and friends, which in one way or another facilitate the understanding of others as mental agents. Consequently, if language and early family conversation are critical factors for ToM development, orally educated deaf children with hearing aids are expected to be delayed in mastering concepts of false belief.

Kika Hadjikakou presents “Deaf identity construction: a case study”. The paper presents inside information on different routes to identity construction within the deaf population. The exemplification of identity construction is a case study carried out with a Deaf Cypriot adult whose family and educational background does not match those of the general deaf population. The findings indicate that his family experiences, initial contacts with the Deaf and the Cypriot Sign Language (CSL), as well as the academic and social experiences shared at school between the participant and his classmates and teachers played a crucial role in his identity development. The findings of this study entail implications for the provision of effective support services and deaf awareness courses within general schools, as well as for oral deaf children’s contacts with Deaf adults in order to develop ‘healthy’ identities.

Liu Shenglin and Miloň Potměšil present the paper “Chinese families’ adaptation to childhood deafness: implications for psychoeducational support for families with deaf children in China” which presents mixed approaches of quantitative and qualitative research to examine how Chinese families adapt to the challenge of having a deaf child in the family. The results showed that in general Chinese families adapt positively to childhood deafness while experiencing strong and long-term grief. The positive adaptation can be contributed to the characteristics of the Chinese family, positive changes in family beliefs, and concrete steps toward the child’s future, etc. The sorrowful experience is due to lack of adequate social support and an array of difficulties related to childhood deafness itself. Finally, implications for psychoeducational support for families with deaf children in China are discussed.

Mariana Fuentes describes “Equal opportunities in mathematics: what does research on how young deaf children learn teaches us?” The Author reviews research on teaching/learning mathematics in young deaf children. Research proves that deaf children show a delay in learning mathematics but reveals that the developmental process is probably very similar in deaf and hearing children. Difficulties in learning mathematics are linked to difficulties in obtaining information in an incidental way from the environment in young children that are both deaf and hearing. Deafness is not a causal factor but a risk factor for difficulties in learning mathematics. The paper discusses adapting teaching strategies to deaf children’s learning features based on spatial processing, which is better in deaf children.

Petra Bendová presents the paper titled “Socio-psychological aspects of the application of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) in pupils with cerebral palsy”. The text draws on the use of partial aspects of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) in children/pupils with a cerebral palsy diagnosis, acquaints with the practical experiences of the author as well as the outcomes of research investigations carried out in the given area. It also defines the means most often used and specifies view points which lead to the choice of these systems. The developmental effect of the AAC system on expressive speech, cognitive ability, and social competences of patients is described. Finally, the practical significance of AAC exploitation from a psychological and socialization point of view (especially concerning educational and integration) is outlined.

Kamila Růžičková and Ivan Růžička in the paper “Development of social competences in youths with a visual impairment” analyze the transition to a self-sufficient lifestyle in visually impaired individuals. This process is not always smooth and easy for blind adolescents. The article deals with the role of the family and institutions in the development of social competencies of blind adolescents, which improves the quality of transition to a self-sufficient lifestyle.

The second part is devoted to **disability in the context of inclusion and culture** and is opened by Miloň Potměšil who presents “The sentiments, attitudes and concerns of educators when working under the conditions of inclusion”. The author presents a part of the international research project SACIE (Sentiments, Attitudes & Concerns about Inclusive Education) focused on sentiments, attitudes and concerns of educators working with disabled people. This study aims at discovering whether the above stated parameters change after achieving a qualification in special needs education. The results of the research encompass a period of three years aimed at describing a group of 794 educators from the point of view of the development of their attitudes, opinions and concerns focused on the process of inclusion. The research is divided into two phases – the 1st phase before commencement of a university (Bachelor’s) specialized study of special needs education, and the 2nd phase conducted a month before the termination of this three-year study programme.

Ge Chen presents “Narrative research on the identity of disabled people in Tibetan culture” The paper is based on a long-term anthropological investigation that identifies that disabled people have a very positive identity in Tibetan culture. The article describes the stories of two disabled Tibetan individuals using the narrative method. According to these cases, the religious background is analyzed as one of the important factors that influence the identity of severely disabled Tibetan people.

The problem of “The adaptive behaviour of children with an intellectual disability in China” is presented by Xie Yuhan. The article summarizes existing research on the adaptive behaviour of children with an intellectual disability in China in an effort to assess current research findings. It discusses the concepts, assessment methods, characteristics of development and factors influencing adaptive behaviour in children with an intellectual disability in China. Based on the reviewed literature, the article concludes with a discussion on the topics that need to be addressed in future studies, such as developing assessment instruments fit for Chinese individuals,

exploring more in-depth influential factors and internal mechanisms, strengthening the research on intervention, and integrating different study methods.

Yan Peng presents the topic “The attitudes of mainstream primary school teachers toward inclusive education: A perspective from the People’s Republic of China”. Although the practice of inclusive education in China started in the middle of the 1980s, inclusive education is still facing lots of developmental challenges. The paper presents a study aimed at first identifying the mainstream primary school teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion of students with special educational needs, second, examining the teachers’ perception of their ability to implement inclusive education in their regular classes, and third, identifying the support they need the most to help them carry out inclusive education in practice. The results show that teachers have negative but contractive attitudes toward inclusive education and feel that they are not capable of implementing inclusive education in their regular classrooms. Most of the tested teachers reflected they really needed support from the government, school administrators, and parents of children with SEN, and so on (e.g., financial support and professional training opportunities) to help them carry out practical inclusive education in regular classrooms. The study ended with research-based recommendations for future practice.

A very important social problem concerning nicotine addiction in Chinese teenagers is presented by Lei Yong, and Wu Yuxuan in the article titled “Smoking behaviours in teenagers – companion and relationship influence mediated by the self-control effect”. It discusses the distinct differential influence of companion’s smoking on gender and grade as well as self-control. A positive relation was found between companion’s smoking and the teenager’s smoking behaviour while self-control and smoking behaviour were negatively related. Behavioural self-control is a significant negative predictive factor of smoking behaviour in teenage students. Emotional self-control and mental (cognitive) self-control have a negative mediating effect on the relation between smoking behaviour of the companion and the behaviour of the teenager. Behavioural self-control and mental (cognitive) self-control have a negative mediating effect on the relation between availability of smoking opportunities on the part of the companion and the teenager’s smoking behaviour. The research has very important practical implications for protecting teenagers from a smoking addiction.

The third part is related to **Autism Spectrum Disorder**.

The paper by Miklós Györi is again about Theory of Mind, which seems to be the topic that staples the whole Issue in an appropriate way. The paper presents a study aimed at individual differences and the precise nature of ToM impairment in autism. The author relates to three issues: (1) the relationship between solving Theory of Mind tasks and the real existence of Theory of Mind abilities, (2) the relationship between Theory of Mind abilities and social-communicative symptoms in autism, and (3) the fluctuation vs. stability of Theory of Mind competence. The findings show that Theory of Mind abilities show a striking variation in high functioning autistic individuals, from a deep impairment to a relatively complex understanding of minds, including in some cases compensatory strategies. Language and Theory of Mind have a very specific relationship in autism, and existing Theory of Mind

abilities show remarkable stability in some subjects while others are more unstable in this sense.

Olga Bogdashina analysis “Sensory perceptual issues in autism: why we should listen to those who experience them”. The recognition of sensory perceptual differences (both strengths and weaknesses) is still quite a new field and, unfortunately, many professionals are unaware of these issues, how to recognize them, and what to do about them. The paper presents a detailed description of perceptual impairments which constitute the autistic world and make their experiences very specific. The qualitative nature of sensory experience should be taken into account in terms of therapy as well as education of ASD patients.

Agnieszka Rynkiewicz presents a detailed analysis of “The use of computer technology and the internet in teaching and therapy of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)”. Use of computer programs and software in teaching and therapy of individuals with ASD is a relatively new field of research but shows very promising results. Virtual reality is also gaining traction as a form of psychotherapy at some academic medical centres. Many individuals with ASD have unique talents and are skilled in responding to visual cues, such as pictures and animations. Computers not only unlock many unique talents that individuals with ASD possess, but also facilitate the development of social skills that are crucial to functioning in society. In addition to selected computer programs and software, the article also presents some important facts about the diagnosis and sensory profile in ASD and connects these facts with a discussion about computer-mediated-communication, CMC, which is used by individuals with ASD. The article is primarily focused on individuals with Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism.

David Preece presents “Respite care for families with children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: how services in northamptonshire UK are working to meet the challenge”. This paper identifies the importance of respite care services for many families with children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) but also some of the obstacles that may prevent families from accessing such services. It describes how Northamptonshire County Council, a local authority in the United Kingdom (UK), is working to meet the challenge of providing ‘autism-friendly’ respite services. As well as outlining the major characteristics of these services, and how they seek to meet the needs of families with children with ASD, the paper describes the limitations of these services and the challenges and issues that remain.

Offering the publication to our Readers, the Authors as well as the Editors hope that they will find the presented studies in the field of exceptional psychology and education interesting. We hope that reading these articles enhances their personal reflections, proves helpful in solving various theoretical and practical problems or becomes useful for educators, psychologists, sociologists and students of these disciplines. If our Readers find the issue satisfying their intellectual as well as practical needs related to supporting exceptional persons, the Authors shall feel gratified.

Editors

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