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Forms of Interaction Between a Primary School and the Family of a Student with a Statement of Special Educational Needs in Inclusive Education

Abstract

Inclusive education, along with integrated and special education, is one of the forms of education for students with statements of special educational needs, which in Poland can be issued due to certain types of developmental dysfunctions. It presupposes that students are educated in mainstream schools, with the smallest possible repertoire of special interventions. In the educational and therapeutic process of this group of students, parents play an important role, so the interaction between the school and the student's family is essential. The present study addresses the issue of the primary school's interaction with the family of a student with a statement of special educational needs. The focus of the research was on forms of collective interaction. The results of the survey indicated that parents of students with statements of special educational needs had little involvement in collective forms of interaction with the school. One of the main issues exposed in the study is parental education as one form of interaction.

Keywords: inclusive education, student with disabilities, parents and teachers, interaction.

Introduction

The process of upbringing takes place in several environments that shape the human being. The two most important are, invariably, the family and the school, each with its own characteristics and specific functions. Some of them

are shared, while their overall goal of the best possible development of the child requires interaction in terms of educational interventions. It is desirable to adopt the principle that teachers and parents who want to cooperate should adhere to the view that their competence is a product of cooperation (Segiet, 1999). Despite experiencing many difficulties, the family is still the greatest ally in the implementation of the modern school. Cooperation is based on the principle of voluntariness and mutual support, which is the basis for creating a common line of action between the coordinating actors.

The obstacle to the main functions of the school, i.e. teaching, education, and care, is the lack of interaction with parents. It is believed that the level of parental education determines both the content and the extent of the interaction process (Cudak, 2004).

The literature on the subject mentions many forms of interaction. The forms of cooperation can be individual, taking in a teacher-parent dyad, or collective, which involve the participation of at least several parents in a given activity. One of the challenges of a modern Polish school is considered to be the level of parents' pedagogical culture, which determines the subject of cooperation, its scope, and its effectiveness. This level has a significant impact on the relationship between the family and the school, which in turn has an impact on improving the teaching and education process and higher student achievement.

Parent education is considered to be a form of cooperation between the school and the student's family, a real participation of parents in the life of the school, and a component of a broadly understood human pedagogical culture. Since the family environment is responsible for the development and education of the human being, the school should support parents in their tasks. The educational function of the school is implemented primarily through pedagogical activities, expanding parents' knowledge of care, upbringing, prevention, and education. These activities are also aimed at continuously increasing the level of reflexivity of parents in relation to the educational process in the broad sense (Bartkowiak, Famuła, 2002).

The praxeological approach to this collaborative process is valid for all students and requires special attention when it comes to the development of a child with special educational needs (SEN). The joint assessment of the student's current functioning, the definition of courses of action, and the adaptation of common working methods to achieve development according to the possibilities and needs of the SEN student are indispensable.

Parents of a student with a statement of special educational needs in inclusive education

A student with a statement of special educational needs in Poland is a child or adult learner who has a document issued by a psychological and pedagogical

counselling centre called a statement of special educational needs. Underage students can only be diagnosed at the request of their parents or legal guardians. The assessment committee consists of the head of the counselling centre, a special educator, a psychologist, a doctor, and other specialists included in the team based on the child's individual deficits, e.g. a specialist working with students with visual impairments, a specialist working with students with hearing impairments and deaf students, a speech therapist, a speech therapist working with neurological patients, and others (Regulation of the Ministry of Education of 7 September 2017 on statements and opinions issued by multidisciplinary decision boards operating in public psychological and pedagogical counselling centres).

A statement of special educational needs is the basic document of a student with a disorder used in education. It mainly contains a diagnosis, and recommendations (e.g. forms of psychological and pedagogical support to be provided to the student). On its basis, methods and forms of education are adapted at school according to individual recommendations from the psychological and pedagogical counselling centre. It is based on this document that a support teacher can be employed at the school (if such a recommendation has been made), and extracurricular classes are allocated at the school, e.g. revalidation classes, speech therapy, sensory integration classes, which are also linked to an increase in the educational subsidy per student. The statement also justifies the recommendations and an indication of the optimal form of education for the educational stage.

A statement of the special educational needs can be issued by psychological and pedagogical counselling centres for: students with disabilities (deaf, with hearing impairments, blind, with visual impairments); with motor disabilities, including aphasia; with mild, moderate, or severe intellectual disabilities; with autism, including Asperger's syndrome; with multiple disabilities; and for socially maladjusted and those at risk of social maladjustment (Regulation of the Ministry of Education of 9 August 2017 on the conditions for organizing education, upbringing and care for children and youth with disabilities, social maladjustment, and those at risk of social maladjustment).

The above-mentioned group of students can learn in inclusion education, which is one of the three types of education in Poland, along with segregated (special) and integrative education. Inclusive education involves the joint education of students without disabilities and those with special educational needs and is carried out with the least amount of special educational intervention in regular schools and departments, also known as mass schools or, as it is proposed, inclusion schools (Chrzanowska, 2019).

Inclusive education grows out of anti-discrimination trends, focused on the call for 'Education for All', a UNESCO initiative that is reflected in the education policies of many countries around the world, which involve a shift from integra-

tion to inclusive education (Chambers, Forlin, 2021). Inclusion in education is one of the links to social inclusion in the broadest sense.

Parents of students with statements of special educational needs are given particular attention, both in academic reflection and in educational practice, and are most often considered to be parents of a child with a disability. The school's cooperation with this group of parents includes not only educational, caring, and teaching interactions, but also therapeutic ones.

The tasks of the parents of students with SEN and the forms of their interaction with the school depend on the type of institution the child attends, the location of the school, the facilities and resources, the possibilities for assistance and support from various institutions, school staff, especially teaching staff, and also depend on the type of disability. The different stages of education determine the characteristic actions of parents in the education of their children. The first stage concerns the decision to choose the right school for the child, and the type of school (special education, integrative education, inclusive education), which is the right of parents in a Polish school. The second stage of parental actions is related to the student's education at school. The third stage takes place during the acquisition of knowledge and experience of the school's work, during the process of interaction for the benefit of the school, the class, and, above all, the student (Apanel, 2014).

Regardless of the forms, it seems reasonable to adopt the principle that "the family and aligning the behaviour of parents and teachers are one of the best educational methods to learn about the child's needs and capabilities to ultimately create conditions conducive to optimal development" (Plichta et al., 2017). Cooperation between parents and teachers of a child with a disability is one of the factors that can accelerate the holistic development of a young person (Reczek-Zymróż, 2009). Improving this process is a challenge for contemporary Polish and European education. The school's wide range of resources, including highly qualified teaching staff, seem to be of help here (Linder, Schwab, 2020).

Research on inclusive education has been carried out in Poland but refers only to some and few aspects. Research in this field concerning the education of students with mild intellectual disabilities has been conducted by: B. Cytowska (2002) and G. Szumski, in collaboration with A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz (2010), A. Zamkowska (2009). Teachers' views on inclusive education were studied by Z. Gajdzica (2011), I. Chrzanowska (2019), enriched by research on the effectiveness of education of students with SEN (Chrzanowska, 2010). It is also worth citing the explorations of Z. Palak (2000) on students with visual impairments and research conducted in several voivodeships as part of the 'School for All' project (Al-Khamisy, Bogucka, 2002). The results of a study covering rural schools in Bydgoszcz, Poland, were presented by B. Skotnicka (2019). A review

of research in the field of inclusive education in Poland was presented by B. Cy-towska (2016). Despite the successive extension of the pedagogical literature on inclusive education in recent years, a fragmentary approach to the issue of interaction between the school and the family of a student with a disability is evident. The need to explore this area of research was therefore recognized.

Methodology

The aim of the study was to examine the course of the interaction between a primary school and the parents of a student with special educational needs in inclusive education in Częstochowa, Poland. Specific problems concerning the forms of interaction and the expectations of the actors of interaction were also identified. The results presented in this paper address one of the research areas identified and answer the following questions: What forms of collective interaction for the benefit of the school and the integrative class occur between the school and the parents of students? What forms of collective interaction on behalf of the school and the integrative class do teachers and parents of students with special educational needs expect?

Due to its framework, the present paper discusses only a part of the findings. The research was conducted in 2020 in 24 public primary schools in the city of Częstochowa, Poland, providing inclusive education to students with statements of special educational needs. The diagnostic research was adopted, based on the use of the method of diagnostic survey and the questionnaire technique. In the course of the exploration, four research tools were used, which were survey questionnaires that were used to survey parents, form teachers, support teachers of this group of students, and school counsellors. These above-mentioned groups of teachers were found to be most often involved in interaction with the parents. Teachers completed the survey questionnaires multiple times, individualizing their experiences and the knowledge they gained about the parents of each student.

The purposive selection was used in the study. The study participants were 126 parents of students with SEN, form teachers of 127 students, school counsellors working with 148 students with SEN, and 78 support teachers.

Analysis of present research

In the course of the research exploration, parents of students with statements of special educational needs were asked to indicate the forms of collective interaction with the school, both undertaken and expected.

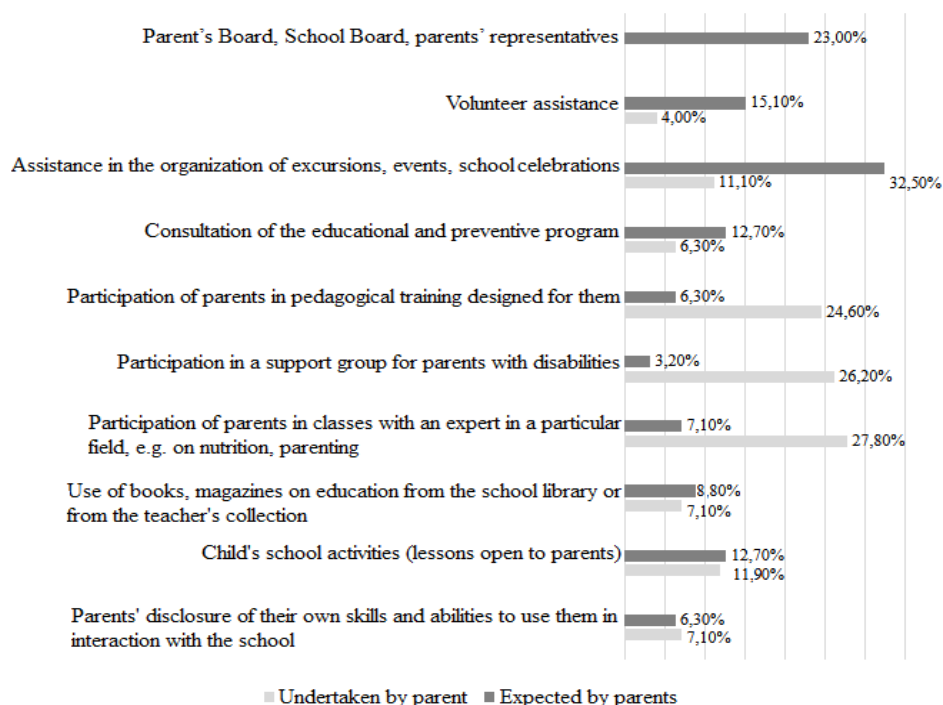


Diagram 1

Collective interaction taken and expected by parents

Source: author's own elaboration.

An analysis of the survey results revealed that the predominant trend among parents of students with statements of special educational needs is that they do not have any interaction with the school in the categories indicated. The form of interaction that occurs most frequently is assistance in organizing excursions and school and class events and celebrations, accounting for about one-third of the respondents. This is the highest score achieved among the categories indicated. The other most common forms are participation in the parents' board and the class board. Among the least frequent are a support group for parents, participation in pedagogical training for parents, and parents' disclosure of their skills and abilities to use them in cooperation with the school.

The compilation of the data revealed the significant disparities that exist between the forms of interaction undertaken by parents and those expected. At the forefront is the need to participate in parent education activities such as participation in training, support groups, and classes with experts in various fields.

In view of the above, it was considered valuable in the course of the empirical research to identify the forms of educational activities used in regular primary schools that implement inclusive education in Częstochowa, Poland. In the

survey questionnaire, teachers were asked about the use of forms of parent education in the previous year.

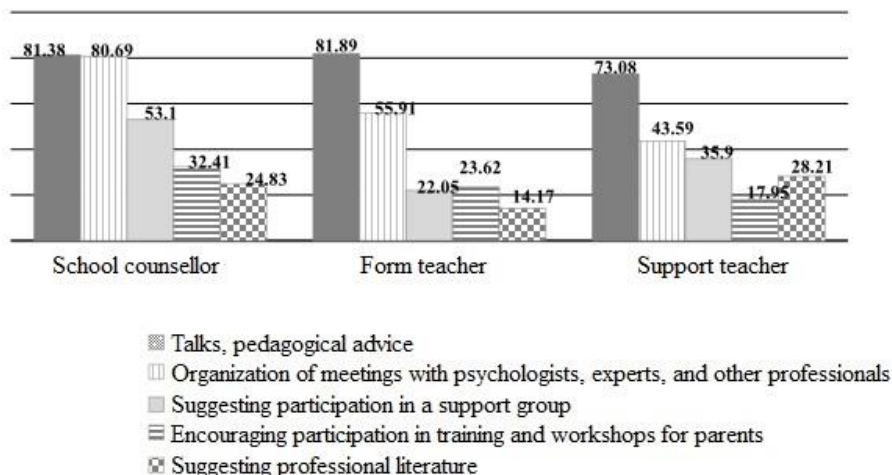


Diagram 2

Forms of parent education used by teachers

Source: author's own elaboration.

The results of the survey indicated that the most common forms of parent education used by teachers were talks and providing pedagogical advice. Meetings with psychologists, experts in particular fields, and other professionals, usually organized by a school counsellor, were ranked slightly lower. Approximately half of the school guidance counsellors and form teachers surveyed suggested that parents participated in support groups in or out of school. A small group of teachers admitted that they offered parents to participate in workshops and training addressed to parents to develop pedagogical skills. A small number of them offered professional literature and magazines on parenting and raising children with SEN. Form teachers were the least likely to do so. As can be assumed, school guidance counsellors, especially support teachers with a background in special education, are more likely to have knowledge of professional literature.

The teachers taking part in the survey were also asked to indicate the expected forms of collective interaction by parents. The results are presented in the diagram. 3.

The results of the survey indicated that the expectations most often formulated by teachers converged across all groups of teaching staff surveyed. Form teachers, school counsellors, support teachers expressed the expectation of parents of students with statements of special educational needs to participate in

classes with experts in various fields, pedagogical training for parents, and support groups. It is noteworthy that the above-mentioned forms of interaction are conducive to raising the pedagogical culture of parents.

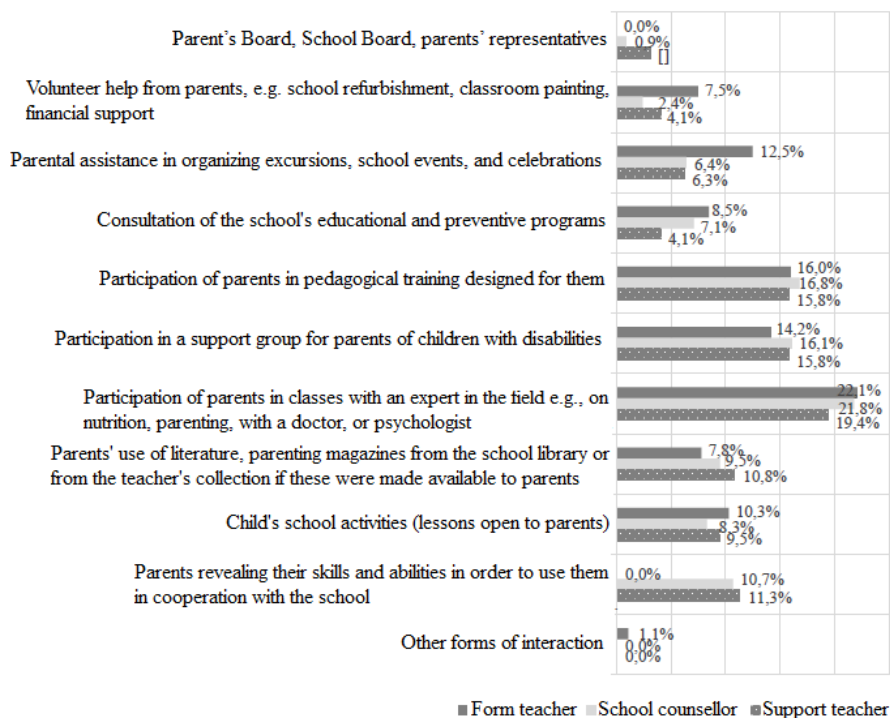


Diagram 3

Teachers' expectations of the forms of collective interaction between parents and the student's school

Source: author's own elaboration.

It should be noted that there are definitely more frequent expectations of form teachers relating to parents' support in organizing events and celebrations for the integrative class and the whole school and volunteering. An interesting phenomenon is no expectations of teachers to get involved in the democratic structures of the school, such as the Parents' Board, the School Board, and parents' representatives. This need was noted by a small percentage of support teachers and a school counsellor. This group of teachers is more likely to expect parents to use the literature provided by school libraries and to reveal their skills in order to interact with the school their children attend.

Quantitative data have been extended with qualitative data, allowing for an understanding of the context of the phenomena being explored. One form

teacher pointed out the forms of assistance: "Parents of students with statements of special educational needs should be provided with psychological support. Very often, they find it difficult to come to terms with their child's disability, which affects parents' contact with the school and teachers. Parents conceal a lot of information which prevents the school and teachers from taking appropriate action" (W058).

The need for parent education was also recognized by support teachers: "In my opinion, there is a need for parents also to be included in therapy or, for example, a compulsory number of classes to learn about parenting and methods of working with children with disabilities" (Ws068), "I think it would be good to make parents of grade 4 aware, through education, of the existence of the autism spectrum, so that they are not afraid to send their children for examinations to the psychological and pedagogical counselling centre. Children are often not issued with a statement of special educational needs until grade 7 or 8, and a student could be helped much earlier" (Ws069).

One school counsellor emphasized the need for interaction in the mutual exchange of information, which in turn serves to develop uniform educational interventions applied at home and at school: "It is important to be (mutually) open to cooperation, present a unified approach, and to take into account information collected from each other" (P016).

Support teachers indicated "the teacher's interpersonal skills, listening skills, consistency in action, interaction with parents, and emphasising that cooperation is key to helping the child function" (Ws063).

Conclusions and recommendations for pedagogical practice

The research procedure was aimed to verify the problems formulated. The material collected allowed generalisations to be made, but these were made with caution, as it can be assumed that the issue studied is determined by more factors than just those analysed in the study.

The survey showed that parents of students with statements of special educational needs have little involvement in the collective forms of interaction with the school.

The predominant forms of collective interaction included helping to organize excursions and events, school and class celebrations, participation in the Parents' Board, and voluntary work for the school. The most common parent education activities organized by the school were conventional forms such as talks and pedagogical counselling.

One of the main issues contained in the submitted research results is parent education. Parents expressed the need and expectations to participate in classes

with experts in various fields, pedagogical training designed for them, and to participate in a support group for parents of children with disabilities. Parents also showed a willingness to interact with teachers in organizing events and celebrations for the integrative class or school and participating in activities open to parents.

In terms of forms of collective interaction, the teachers' expectations included the participation of parents in classes with experts, pedagogical training for parents, and participation in a support group for parents of children with disabilities to raise the parents' pedagogical culture.

It is noteworthy that the respondents surveyed expect parents to participate in pedagogical activities. In the area of expectations, teachers presented the view that parents should participate in forms of activities to improve their pedagogical culture. However, they do not have a sufficient range of parent education activities. This is because they are limited to the most basic ones, which are conversations and talks. Parents express a willingness to participate in workshops, and meetings with experts, but in the vast majority, such forms of activities are not offered to them or are not available to them.

It is therefore proposed to increase the range of services in educational centres in order to increase the degree of reflexivity of parents in the child's upbringing, care, education, and therapy. It is proposed that the school provide various forms of support and psychological and pedagogical assistance to the parents of students, primarily by organizing pedagogical training, meetings with experts in various fields, and support groups. It can be assumed that improving the pedagogical competence of parents and surrounding them with emotional support will become a resource for an effective interaction process.

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Formy współdziałania szkoły podstawowej z rodziną ucznia z orzeczeniem o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego w edukacji inkluzyjnej

Streszczenie

Kształcenie inkluzyjne, obok integracyjnego i specjalnego, jest jedną z form kształcenia uczniów z orzeczeniem o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego, które w Polsce może być wydane ze względu na niektóre rodzaje dysfunkcji rozwojowych. Zakłada ono edukację uczniów w szkołach ogólnodostępnych, przy jak najmniejszym repertuarze specjalnych oddziaływań.

W procesie edukacyjno-terapeutycznym tej grupy uczniów istotną rolę odgrywają ich rodzice, dlatego też nieodzowne jest współdziałanie szkoły z rodziną ucznia. W przedłożonym artykule poruszone zostało zagadnienie współdziałania szkoły podstawowej z rodziną ucznia z orzeczeniem o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego. Zaprezentowane badania dotyczyły form współdziałania zbiorowego. Wyniki badań wskazują, że rodzice uczniów z orzeczeniem o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego w sposób mało zaangażowany włączają się we współdziałanie ze szkołą w formach zbiorowych. Jednym z głównych zagadnień eksponujących w prezentowanych wynikach badań jest pedagogizacja rodziców jako jedna z form współdziałania.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja inkluzyjna, uczeń z niepełnosprawnością, rodzice i nauczyciele, współdziałanie.