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ABSTRACT

The paper presents possibilities of comprehensive use of support tools for pupils at risk of school failure in the Czech primary schools practice in order to support the implementation of inclusive education. The research data obtained during the project implemented in the Pilsen region in period of 2016–2019 brought the results of assessment of new support tools that are not yet systemically introduced in the Czech educational system and commonly available for all schools, although these instruments seem to be very effective or even necessary for quality inclusive education. The most important new tools include the position of inclusion coordinator in schools, strengthening the counselling services available directly in schools, as well as new strategies for promotion of cooperation between the schools, families, and social services – including some specific techniques, such as parenting workshops on child support in education, case conferences with child's participation or seminars for parents and teachers on collaboration with social services. However, the exploitation of the results of this research and assessment will depend largely on political decisions at both local and governmental levels.

Introduction

Although inclusive education is a strongly accented topic in European and even global education nowadays, it is not easy to clearly define it. There are many views and opinions on defining this phenomenon which agree at a few elementary points (e.g. Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2010; Brown 2016). It is even more difficult to define who is a 'pupil at risk of school failure'; again, there is no clear general criterion on how to define school failure. Therefore, we rely on definitions published by various authors (Artiles, Kozleski, and Waitoller 2011; Brown 2016; Lechta et al. 2016; etc.), which we try to synthesize through understanding these terms primarily in the context of

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current legislation, educational theory, and school practice in the Czech Republic, as this is the basic area of our research and evaluation of the issues examined.

Our research data were obtained primarily during the implementation of the project 'Pathways to Inclusion' (CZ.02.3.61/0.0/0.0/15_007/0000166), supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds (operational program Research, Development, and Education) and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic. This project was implemented by the Faculty of Education of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen together with eight partners (seven primary schools and one NGO) in the Pilsen region in the period of 2016–2019. The main objective of the project was to support a pro-inclusive approach to pupils with special educational needs (SEN), including respect for pupils' differences, their right to be educated in mainstream schools, prevention of their school failure, and strengthening of cooperation between schools, families, and NGOs. The project enabled us to verify in practice the theoretical prerequisites of effective support for pupils at risk of school failure, but it also brought some new questions that arose from school practice itself and are waiting for subsequent reflection.

1. Inclusive education of pupils at risk of school failure

As Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou (2010) point out, the term 'inclusion' may have different meanings for different people. This is one of the reasons why it is difficult to find a single and unambiguous definition that everyone would agree on without reservation. Some definitions of *inclusive education* reflect a narrower view, focusing on individuals and groups with different kinds of disadvantage or at risk of social exclusion, while others are broadly conceived, focusing on the adaptation of mainstream school to all pupils without exception. Most authors mention particularly the implementation of inclusive values, such as fair access to all, participation of all in community formation, or respect for individual differences as the main features of an inclusive education model (Armstrong, Armstrong, and Spandagou 2010; Ekins 2015). It is inappropriate to connect inclusive education, primarily or exclusively, with pupils with special educational needs (or with 'disabilities'), or with pupils at risk of school failure. Inclusion must involve all pupils of the school – and not just the pupils. It is necessary to respect a broader concept of inclusion (Brown 2016). In this study, we, therefore, see inclusive education as 'an approach that develops school culture towards social coherence and respects the right to adequate education for all' (Hájková and Strnadová 2010, 13).

It is not a question of mere 'common learning' (learning together) which can put a one-way pressure on inclusive school design and

> sometimes results in mere 'physical inclusion' promoting the participation of various minorities in mainstream schools, while pupils from these minorities are not well received either by their classmates or by their teachers; then, emotional and social inclusion does not actually occur. (Hájková and Strnadová 2010, 10)

Inclusion in education is seen as a voluntarily accepted and meaningful model of education, which, according to some authors, must necessarily be associated with some internal enthusiasm of those who implement it (Dinh and Thu 2010; Forlin 2010). According to Brown (2016), it is typical for inclusive education that pupils receive adequate support, where teachers and other staff not only help them but also stimulate them to learn new things and be prepared for failure.

This is also an important idea in defining the characteristics of *pupils at risk of school failure*. Lechta et al. (2016, 26–28) define categories of pupils with disabilities, pupils with psychological problems, and pupils at risk within inclusive education. As pupils at risk are seen those touched by a long-term effect of various adverse factors that can potentially negatively affect the integrity of an individual. This category also includes, for example, gifted and talented children if their educational needs are not adequately met. In addition, the risk may be caused by unrecognised (or incorrectly diagnosed) and educationally unregulated special educational needs of the pupil, as well as by the effects of the social environment – whether at school (bad school climate, insufficient learning support, etc.), in the family (non-stimulating or neglectful upbringing, disadvantaged local community, etc.), or in the wider social community (risk-constructed paradigm and pathologically functioning environment of the majority society). The 'dilemma of inclusion' can be also seen as a threatening factor: by identifying special educational needs and entitlement to the necessary support in mainstream schools, there is often the effect of labelling these pupils, which, of course, involves considerable risks (Artiles, Kozleski, and Waitoller 2011; Brown 2016). The risk of educational failure can also be linked to the ongoing demand of contemporary school and society: those who want to be fully integrated must adapt to everything (i.e. to compete with others, to participate in everything like others) – in short, to be comparable to others. This represents a strong assimilation pressure which contradicts the basic inclusive assumption that pupils may naturally be different in everything, including their performance. Everyone learns differently and can achieve a different level of school results. A school where pupils are educated in heterogeneous groups and this heterogeneity is due, among other things, to the varying degree of need for support of individual pupils in the classroom, can be called an inclusive school (Hájková and Strnadová 2010). Pupils' diversity should stimulate teachers to be creative. The role of parents is also important, where teachers together with parents can look for concrete support to improve the performance of a pupil with special educational needs, because only the parents really know their child (Bartoňová et al. 2016, 47).

Failure in education, so-called school failure, may be related to several areas of risk: namely risks related to biological and psychological parameters (pupil's personality characteristics, school-maturity, and school-readiness, disability or other disorders), social factors (family environment, access to education, social or socio-cultural disadvantage, language barrier, etc.), and educational (pedagogical and psychological diagnostics, availability of educational support for pupils at school and out of school, educational strategies used at school, quality of the school climate, etc.; see Urbanovská and Škobrtal 2012; Vágnerová 2005, etc.).

2. Coordination of comprehensive support for pupils at risk of school failure at mainstream schools

Of course, comprehensive educational support for pupils with SEN must include above all a legally defined system of guaranteed support instruments. Such a system was anchored in Czech legislative documents in 2016.[1] Without appropriate use of these support measures, we could not imagine the inclusive education of some pupils with

specific kinds of SEN in mainstream schools at all. However, we have to mention a number of factors that are also important for successful inclusion, including:

- school environment (barrier-free accessibility, friendly school climate, etc.);
- teachers' attitudes and competencies to educate pupils with special educational needs;
- cooperation between schools and school counselling facilities;
- cooperation between the schools and families;
- acceptance of each pupil by teachers, classmates and their parents;
- an inclusive approach to education within the local community, as well as the pro-inclusive paradigm of the major society in the wider perspective (Slowík 2016, etc.).

The application of necessary support for pupils according to their individual needs is also enshrined in current Czech curriculum documents (General Educational Programs) and school practice (which is based on school educational programes); for some pupils with SEN it is possible (or even necessary) to create individual educational plans, too. All of the support is provided in order to equalise the opportunities of these pupils; however, this does not mean offering all the same opportunities to everyone, but all opportunities appropriate to the individual needs and possibilities of each pupil (Evans 2007).

The definition of special educational needs also differs in the international context. A relatively comprehensive overview is offered by Hornby (2014, 42), defining 15 categories of special educational needs (SEND), taking into account 11 types recognised in England and their extension to some other categories identified in the US. Similarly (with minor differences), special educational needs are reflected in the environment of Czech education.[2] Pupils with special educational needs are entitled to receive all support free of charge in Czech schools. In most cases, schools inevitably cooperate with school counselling facilities when assessing, recommending, and implementing support for these pupils. Cooperation with the pupil's family is also important, and if we want to provide pupil with truly high-quality and comprehensive support, it is often advantageous to include some extracurricular facilities and social services.

The current system of support instruments in the education of pupils with SEN is divided into five levels in the Czech Republic. Their indication and practical use depend mainly on the level and type of SEN of each individual.

3. Tools and strategies to support pupils in mainstream schools

3.1. Counseling support

School practice and counselling systems vary from country to country. In Czech schools, counselling support for pupils is coordinated primarily by *a school educational counsellor*, who communicates with parents, teachers, and other educational staff, as well as with the staff of external school counselling facilities. However, time available for school educational counsellors for coordination of support to pupils with special educational needs is often formal and inadequate, as school educational counsellors are teachers with a very small part-time job in school counselling which includes a wide range of activities (especially career counselling or solving the frequent educational difficulties of pupils).

Counselling within Czech schools does not include coordination of support for pupils provided outside the school itself – that is, support in-home preparation, support in their extracurricular activities provided by social services or support guaranteed by the Ministry of Health (speech therapy, services of clinical psychologists and psychiatrists, etc.), although all agree on the importance and need for such coordination.

In addition to the school educational counsellor, the position of *methodologist for prevention of social pathology* is obligatory in every Czech school. According to financial and staffing capacities, some (but not all) schools can also have other counselling positions, such as *school psychologist* and *school special educational counsellor*.

However, there is a need to have someone who, on the basis of individual case-work, co-ordinates comprehensive support to pupils with SEN – so that it is sufficient, but not excessive (to avoid 'overcare'). Therefore, a new position of so-called *inclusion coordinator* is currently being piloted in some Czech schools, which is mainly inspired by proven foreign experience (e.g. from the UK and some other European countries, where coordinators known as SENCO – Special Educational Needs Coordinators – have been established in recent years).

In countries where the position of SENCO was established, it became an important support for the education of pupils with SEN, fulfilling a wide and robust portfolio of activities at school affecting, inter alia, the school image in the community, as well as research and projects coordination (Cheminais 2014). Such a coordinator has a key position as a professional manager within the school, overlapping with external experts, and also facilitating intensive contact between the school and families (Ramshaw 2017). Hornby (2014, 85) identifies the activities of the SENCO as essential for the successful implementation of inclusive education. In the Czech environment, the term 'inclusion coordinator' is currently used on the basis of the experience and recommendations of some NGOs that have been involved in promoting inclusive education for a longer time.

3.2. Stimulating effective cooperation between school, family, and social services

Some psychological researches (Požár 2006, etc.) confirmed the importance of developing pro-inclusive attitudes not only to pupils and parents of the majority population, but also to pupils with SEN and their parents, before intensive implementation of inclusive education in Czech schools started (from the late 1990s to 2016). The number of pupils with SEN in Czech mainstream schools has been continuously increasing since 2008; in most schools, however, the prevailing view was that success in education is primarily a matter of the pupil's innate abilities, while the influence of the pupil's efforts as well as social, cultural and educational factors remained more or less underestimated. In this context, Lechta et al. (2016, 47) draw attention to certain risks: 'The heterogeneity of the educational environment, which is the pillar of inclusive education, may also pose a threat to the dissocial reactions of unprepared pupils. Psychological intervention plays an irreplaceable role in preventing this polarization'.

Inappropriate social behaviour may be manifested not only by pupils but also by their parents. The school failure of pupils in primary education is, therefore, a problem whose solution requires systematic and demanding work not only with the pupils, but very often also close cooperation with their families. There can be a number of causes for failure, which need to be well recognised, understood, and responded to appropriately. School

success or failure is most often influenced by the child's personality (educational needs, intellectual level, quality of memory, emotional stability or lability, resistance to stress, and possibly also learning or behavioural disorders and other health issues). The socio-cultural environment and living conditions of the family and community are important, as well. The role of parents and their support for the child, and also the level of family–school cooperation seem to be key influences. Parents often encounter many problems related to their child's disadvantage (lower motivation to learn, bad social relations at school, etc.), which they are not able to cope with. It is therefore necessary to provide them with effective and practical support, while improving their attitudes towards school and the education of their children.

According to Lechta et al. (2016, 49), one of the key conditions for successful implementation of inclusive education is ensuring transdisciplinarity – that is, involving as many relevantly trained persons as possible (not only teachers, but also doctors, social workers, and other professionals). Baison and Claivard (2010) similarly recommend the promotion of the basic requirements of an all-disciplinary approach in direct work with vulnerable children and their families. The benefit of multidisciplinary cooperation is not only the exchange and sharing of information among professionals, but also the interpretation of reality by various experts, which can provide a broader insight into the situation and help in finding effective solutions to problems.

4. Evaluation of the application of new tools to support pupils at risk of school failure at selected schools in the Czech Republic

During the implementation of the project, we tested some new support tools for pupils at risk of school failure in the practice of seven mainstream partner schools in the Pilsen region. Data collected during this three-year project period in a form of regular monthly evaluation reports of inclusion coordinators (filled in MS Excel forms as a quantifiable items of their interventions followed by the text descriptions and detailed commentaries, submitted monthly to the project coordinator), as well as evaluation reports of particular project activities (created by the respective Key Activities Coordinators, summarising each event evaluation overview on a basis of evaluation survey using a short questionnaire or even the interviews with some participants) were used to make a research study based on mixed (quantitative and qualitative) design, with stronger emphasis on its qualitative part. We performed an elementary statistic data processing in MS Excel software reaching just the percentage overview of quantitative items of interventions of inclusion coordinators within the schools. As a qualitative method, the thematic analysis of text descriptions and commentaries, as well as events' evaluation reports were chosen (Boyatzis 1998), using two basic techniques known from the Grounded Theory method (Strauss and Corbin 1998), namely Open Coding and Selective Coding. For qualitative data processing (text coding), MS Word and Atlas.ti software tools were used. All the data were processed and interpreted anonymously, although the participants of each project activity provided their informed consent to the subsequent processing of outputs.

Regarding the research sample, seven partner primary schools (three bigger school in a city and four smaller schools in different rural areas of the region) were involved in the project. In total, more than 800 pupils with SEN or other pupils at risk of school failure were supported during the project period.

The research analysis was focused on the main question which the research outputs are related to: How could the innovative instruments implemented within our project be efficiently used in everyday mainstream school practice to improve the support of inclusive education of pupils with SEN and other pupils at risk of school failure? The outcomes are presented and discussed in the following sections.

4.1. Experience with pilot testing of the position of an inclusion coordinator in Czech primary schools

Within the project, this position was occupied in all seven participating schools for a period of 36 months, while the qualification requirements defined by the Czech Ministry of Education were respected.[3] In most schools, the position was shared by more than one person; only one school assigned this position to a new full-time employee. Inclusion coordinators did not undergo any specific qualification training for this position in advance (as the qualification framework is not yet defined and no standardised training courses are available), but as a part of pilot testing, they participated in some educational activities focused on different topics regarding support for pupils at risk of school failure.

In the project, the basic competencies of inclusion coordinators were defined from the beginning in order to describe and adapt a general framework for the systematic introduction of this position into Czech schools. The final recommendations in the project were based on consideration of actual needs and the specific situations of participating schools, as well as a qualitative analysis of the ongoing outputs of the coordinators' activities. Each employee recorded his or her activities in detail during the school year period, describing all individual tasks and contacts with other subjects, including the time spent on each of the activities (what issue they had been working on, with whom they collaborated and what the result was). In the monthly report all coordinators also assessed the risks they encountered during their work and suggested ways to reduce or eliminate them. Finally, the regular monthly evaluation also included an assessment of the current level of basic parameters of inclusive education at the school; thus coordinators evaluated the school culture (pro-inclusive school settings, school policy, and pro-inclusive attitudes of school staff), conditions (material, organisational and personal support for inclusion), practice (inclusive didactics, individualisation in teaching and pupils' assessment), and relations (relationships within the schools and with the surrounding community, communication and cooperation of individual actors in education and support of pupils, etc.).

Inclusion coordinators worked with pupils, teachers, teacher assistants, school assistants, school educational counsellors, school management, pupils' parents, school psychologists, school special needs counsellors, school counselling facilities staff, and other extracurricular institutions (social service workers, paramedics, police, etc.). In addition to intensive contact with the pupils with SEN themselves (up to 35% of total monthly working time, depending on the specific situation and needs of each school), the distribution of other coordinators' contacts in terms of time allocation was approximately as follows:

- cooperation with teachers (23%)
- cooperation with school management (13%)

- cooperation with parents (12%)
- cooperation with other pupils (7%)
- cooperation with school educational counsellors (7%)
- cooperation with teacher assistants (7%)
- cooperation with school counselling facilities staff (7%)
- cooperation with other inclusion coordinators (7%)
- cooperation with the methodologist for prevention of social pathology (7%)
- cooperation with extracurricular institutions (7%)
- cooperation with school assistants (1%)
- cooperation with school psychologist (1%)
- cooperation with a school special education counsellor (<1%).

The risks continually encountered by many coordinators included a high level of administrative duties, to which they had to devote a large part of their working time. But they also met with reluctance to cooperate with some teachers and parents. In particular, they recommended simplifying compulsory administration and stabilising legislation in the area of support for pupils with special educational needs, where significant changes take place at short intervals, and this disrupts the continuous activity of schools in implementing quality inclusive education. In the 'Recommendations' category, the coordinators have also mentioned active support for better awareness of inclusive education not only among teachers, but above all among parents and the wider public. According to their experience, a lack of quality information has a negative impact not only on the quality and level of support provided to pupils in schools, but also on the quality of cooperation among all participants and on the prevailing bed attitudes of many teachers and the local community towards inclusion.

As for the evaluation of a school in terms of inclusion parameters,[4] all coordinators considered the gradual positive changes in all four areas during their pilot work. The culture of schools has improved most of all – especially the approach of teachers, who have started to work more closely together to use inclusive methods and strengthen overall support for pupils with SEN. The availability of special and didactic aids has also significantly improved in these schools, which was partly related to specific project support.

In participating schools, almost the whole agenda for pupils with SEN was entrusted to the inclusion coordinators, that is, coordination and evaluation of individual educational plans, selection of special and didactic aids and textbooks, assistance in the application of such support for individual pupils in everyday lessons and, of course, the bulk of the communication between the school and other entities in support of individual pupils (with parents, counselling facilities, social services, etc.). Inclusion coordinators in these schools have thus really become key actors in the process of comprehensive support for pupils with SEN.

4.2. Experience with implementing cooperation strategies between school, family, and social services to support pupils at risk of school failure

4.2.1. Stimulating support for pupils in families

As a part of comprehensive support for pupils at risk of school failure, workshops for parents were also implemented during the project with the aim of improving parents'

attitudes to school and the education of their children. In the project period, nine workshops were held in 6 partner schools, attended by 43 parents of pupils at risk of school failure. The lecturer was a psychologist, who focused not only on the issue of school education, but also on upbringing practices in the family. If parents were to change their attitudes, it was necessary to act simultaneously on all three levels of personality: the cognitive, emotional and behavioural. Consequently, the following topics were discussed:

- Learning problems (e.g. disadvantage, low motivation to learn, etc.);
- The position of the child within a peer group;
- Psychohygiene of learning and its use in practice;
- The meaning and advantages of inclusive education;
- Effective home preparation for school;
- Principles of education of the hyperactive and aggressive child;
- Problems of rewards and punishments in education;
- The importance of a daily routine for the child and adherence to it;
- Educational principles for parents of children in adolescence.

According to the needs of a particular school, the workshops were also attended by teachers (especially class teachers) and inclusion coordinators, in some cases a school psychologist or school special education counsellor. The most common problems and difficulties associated with school failure were demonstrated in model case-studies. In addition, both parents and teachers could take the opportunity to consult about their questions individually after the workshop had finished.

The most frequently discussed topics at the workshops were problems related to the learning process, low motivation to learn and the closely related psychohygiene of learning of children. Parents were also interested in how to avoid mistakes in the home preparation of the child for school and how to help their child practically (for children at risk of school failure it is usually important to follow the principle 'short but more often'). The question of the status of a child within peer-group and problems associated with disturbed peer relationships were also of interest (such children may be at greater risk of bullying in school). Participants' questions were also focused on the meaning of inclusion and the application of inclusive education in the real conditions of Czech schools. Some parents needed to get information on the roles of the teacher assistant and school assistant and the importance of other support tools.

For some participants, it was a surprise that children in the family also need to experience moments when parents do not ask for anything, just play with their children, create something or simply enjoy the time. Therefore, it was often emphasised that for the healthy development of a child's personality, it is necessary for the parents to be more interested in their children and their needs, not only in their school results and achievements (children need to share their emotion, and sufficiently feel love, security, and safety). School failure should never lead to feelings of inferiority of a child and reduce his or her self-esteem and self-confidence. Parents were instructed to be able to praise each child sufficiently and reasonably, even for effort, but not for every little thing, so that no devaluation was praised. During the workshops, parents also received copies of materials with practical recommendations and principles for the upbringing and education of children at risk of school failure. Participants evaluated positively the sharing of

experiences with other parents who have similar challenges, and also the opportunity to subsequently discuss individual problems individually with the lecturer-psychologist.

4.2.2. Instruments to stimulate cooperation between school, family and social services

Together with partner schools, one NGO from the Pilsen region (Diakonie Západ[5]) was involved in the project. This organisation carried out two types of project activities: seminars for biological or surrogate parents, and workshops for school teachers focused on cooperation with social services and multidisciplinary cooperation.

4.3. Seminars for parents

Educational activities for parents were focused primarily on supporting families at risk of social exclusion – to raise or foster parents' awareness of the need and importance of education, to develop their competencies to cope with difficult life situations and problems in raising their children. In the project period, ten seminars were held, attended by a total of 66 parents of children at risk of school failure. Participants were also oriented in the system of social and counselling services, as well as other professional help available in the region.

The two-hour seminars were presented by an NGO expert. All meetings were mainly focused on topics related to home preparation of children for school (parents were recommended effective principles of time and content of regular preparation, the importance of rest activities, selected relaxation techniques, etc.). Special attention was paid to the support of parents' competencies in their educational approach to children. At the seminars, participants had also the opportunity to address the issues of school readiness, problems and needs in the transition of children between school levels, the role of school counselling and specific procedures and principles to help their child in difficult situations. A few workshops were focused on specific tools or methods, such as Pesso-Boyden psychomotor therapy, which works with aspects of self-cognition, coping with personal history, seeking deeper meaning, joy in life, etc.[6] Lecturers also paid attention to the prevention of CAN (Child Abuse and Neglect) syndrome and introduced some ways to identify risk factors on both the children's and parents' sides.

4.4. Workshops for teachers

The two-hour workshops were also presented by NGO expert, but at the request of some schools, the staff of the social and health departments of local authorities with which the school already cooperates in some specific cases of pupils were also invited. In the project period, 10 workshops were held, attended by a total of 50 teachers from primary schools in the region. The topics of workshops were focused on an overview of the system of social services and organisations supporting parents and teachers in the region, but also on sharing experiences and examples of good practice. A list of concrete steps for effective cooperation of NGOs, schools, and families was presented. Teachers also learned about some special techniques for supporting children at risk of school failure – for example, the *case conference* as one of the tools of multidisciplinary cooperation and support in cases of children at risk and their families.[7] Some difficult situations of

a child and family were presented in the form of case studies, for which the participants sought optimal solutions using the multidisciplinary cooperation principle. The teachers also learned about *the communication box* technique used mainly in the field of social work as a simple and creative tool to help establish contact with a child and to communicate even on difficult topics through the child's favourite activities. Most participants considered the benefits of the workshops not only in terms of opportunity for sharing their experiences, but also facilitating direct contact with social experts.

4.5. The case conference: team-based support of students at risk of school failure

During the project, a number of specific instruments were tested to verify their functioning for the support of individual pupils at risk of school failure. These children struggle at school with problems which often originate in their life circumstances. The intention to apply the specific method of the case conference to support these pupils in their school progress originated from its successful application in social services.

The *case conference* can be described as a model for a planned and coordinated meeting of subjects, in this instance the support network of a specific child and its family. During this meeting, the family, child, and experts involved with the child get together, and their discussion and cooperation is coordinated by a trained facilitator. The goal of this meeting is to exchange information, to evaluate the child's and family's situation, and above all to seek an optimal solution of the entire situation, including the planning of a common approach which leads to the fulfilment of the child's needs in its best interest. The outcome of a case conference in social services is usually an 'individual plan of care', or an 'individual plan for the protection of the child' (Hrdinová et al. 2010).

The form of case conference chosen within the project was adapted to fit the school settings and the specific problems of the supported children. All the basic rules and principles of the concept of the case conference were maintained; however, the goals were modified for the support of the child in a school educational process. The following principles of a case conference are described in the 'Manual for the Case Conference' (MoLSA 2011):

- Equivalence of all participants (mutual respect and esteem);
- Openness to all thoughts and ideas brought forth;
- Comparable opportunity and time for each participant to express themselves;
- Intelligibility for all participants;
- Capturing of each idea expressed (by writing it on a flipchart);
- Focus on the goal of the meeting;
- Attention to the course of the discussion – the main goal is returned to, if the debate strays from it;
- Observance of the agenda and the schedule;
- Attempt to reach agreement with the conclusions reached;
- Respect towards the conclusions reached;
- Creation of an approach (individual plan) based on the case conference;

- Use of the approach (individual plan) from the case conference for further collaboration;
- Continuous monitoring.

In Czech schools, this instrument is not yet commonly used; however, the innovative element of the presence of a child itself during this activity is not common even in the case conferences usually used in social services. The outcome of each case conference within this project was a so-called plan of action – an agreement on the future approaches of all relevant subjects (child, family, school) which enable the child to overcome the obstacles hindering his or her education.

Each of the case conferences was planned out beforehand in great detail. Attempts to implement the instrument in selected schools took place in cooperation with the inclusion coordinators, who were first informed about the goals, possibilities, principles, and conditions of a case conference. Subsequently, they offered this activity to the families of children for whom the application of this instrument appeared useful. Parents were therefore free to choose whether or not they accepted this offer. A key problem turned out to be the great difficulty in motivating the families to participate in the case conference. Especially for families from socially marginalised communities, it is usually difficult to agree on active cooperation support for their children, because it involves a certain confirmation of their divergence. Ekins (2015) similarly claims that 'often, pupils prefer low-key support, which does not make them feel different to their peers'.[8] To be able to implement the activity at all, some families were approached directly by an expert consultant of an NGO, with whom they had already been working for some time within the framework of social services. These families approached the meeting with a different kind of motivation, not purely for their interest in the school success of their child. Nevertheless, the families who decided to participate in these case conferences evaluated the meetings as more fruitful than they had originally expected.

During the case conferences, the parents were first oriented to the entire situation, and practices intended to produce an increase of their children's school success were created together. One extremely important topic for participants was the implementation of effective rules for communication between the parent and the child, agreement on the manner in which free time is spent and agreements relating to the child's preparations for school that take place at home. One mother, for example, appreciated the introduction of a method of communication which was entirely different from what she had been used to.

All the case conferences took place in a similar atmosphere of seeking positive approaches, appreciating effective strategies, and identifying that which was, on the contrary, ineffective. Important outcomes were in all cases concrete *plans of action*, aimed towards change. Each plan was created together by the child and the parent, with the help of a (child's) guide and a facilitator. It was always an outcome on which the participants voluntarily agreed and which they took away as a concrete and clear formulation of steps, of which the fulfillment would support the child in achieving better school results.

The success of the application of the case conference as an instrument supporting a child's education is very dependent on the obtaining of trust in the school and the education, especially from families from a socially and socio-culturally excluded

environment. As explained by Westwood (2013, 17), 'cultural differences may influence the way that some parents regard teachers (e.g. seeing them as authority figures not to be questioned); and this leads to a lack of confidence and avoidance'.

The case conferences implemented can be regarded as being successful overall; nevertheless, a broader application of this instrument of support has distinct limits and specifications. A key component of the case conference is, among other things, the personality and competence of the facilitator (in these meetings he created an opportunity for the parents to name some positive characteristics of their children, or to at least become aware of them when they were named by the child's guide). An important effect of the conference turned out to be the opportunity for a child and a parent to meet together (in some families such meetings do not commonly occur), and in a neutral and safe environment, with guaranteed support for all participants, so that they could take away the positive experience of mutual agreement.

5. Summary and discussion of outputs

Taking together the experience and outcomes of the pilot testing of several described new instruments to support pupils at risk of school failure, we can state that all of them have proved to be meaningful and very effective in participating Czech schools. In all cases, however, these are instruments requiring specific adaptation to the needs of each school and, where appropriate, of individual pupils.

5.1. Inclusion coordinator

It is clear that the position of inclusion coordinator can improve the provision of support to pupils with SEN in Czech mainstream primary schools. However, the question is whether the coordinator should take this agenda entirely into his or her own hands. Our pilot testing has shown that in such cases other teachers can give up their share of participation in seeking appropriate support for pupils, and even the role of coordinator can sometimes be perceived by other teachers as exclusive and separate from the reality of the school teaching staff. This applies in particular to the case of a full-time coordinator who, from the perspective of teachers and perhaps even objectively, lacks the experience of direct teaching practice that he or she should understand well – and is not yet seen as a typical consultant by many teachers at the same time. However, the position of school coordinator is also largely determined by the school management, which defines and maintains the whole inclusive concept.

Certain limits in a work of coordinators lie in the lack of system support for school special education counsellors and school psychologists. Therefore, the coordinator has to work with a limited availability of counselling support for pupils with SEN, and also for himself or herself (possible consultations in psychology and special education according to everyday needs). On the other hand, the position of inclusive coordinator in participating schools has been occupied by experienced teaching staff who, in their opinion, were able to manage a big part of the support for pupils within the schools themselves. The frequency of contacts of inclusive coordinators with other entities was found to be balanced, which shows the complex involvement and wide influence of this position in participating schools.

In the systemic introduction of this position into education, it is necessary to take into account the different parameters of schools – the different need and specific use of coordinators is given by the school's location, its size (number of pupils), the nature of the pupil population, and also the structure and quality of the teaching staff. In any case, all participating schools considered the appropriately established position of the coordinator as extremely beneficial, if not necessary, to ensure quality inclusive education.

5.2. Multidisciplinary cooperation and teamwork instruments

Concerning multidisciplinary and teamwork instruments in support of pupils at risk of school failure, considering the experience of the project we can claim that educational activities (workshops and seminars) for parents and teachers of pupils with SEN in some cases significantly improved the quality of family-school communication, and new contacts between families, schools, and social services were established. Some families subsequently used the offer of support activities of social services and a case conference proved to be a very useful tool for this cooperation. However, this instrument can only be indicated in certain cases and rather as a follow-up to already established ties and the relationship of trust with families.

Inspiration for further considerations regarding contemporary inclusion in schools should also be found in a question of the extent to which the condition of parental participation in the educational responsibilities of their children is even pro-inclusive. The work with the socio-culturally marginalised families confirms that the opinion is justified that

> while the move towards greater choice and control for parents is indeed a positive step we, however, need to continue to reflect upon how universal and inclusive moves towards greater involvement, information and partnership with parents actually are. While the rhetoric does sound very positive, the reality, unfortunately, still highlights massive divides within parental experiences. (Ekins 2015, 135)

Cooperation between the family and the school is desirable, if the strong emphasis on it does not conversely increase the child's handicap. Involving parents in fulfilling the special educational needs is important, but it is equally important to support the child as an individual with a future, which should not be determined solely by its family environment. It is also important to support schools to make sure that they are able to work with the pupil without the support of the family if needed, and are able to support pupils on the path to education even if they cannot find support elsewhere. The requirements of parental participation may be more likely to increase the disadvantages of some pupils instead of decreasing them, and a great deal of sensitivity is required to ensure that the school can work together with parents (or in some cases even without them) in the best interest of the child – in such a way that an even deeper marginalisation of already marginalised groups and individuals does not occur.

6. Conclusions

Specific project support offered an exceptional opportunity within the Czech educational system to test, evaluate and verify the possibility of effective use of some of the new instruments not yet widely implemented in Czech schools to support pupils at risk of

school failure. By methods of a qualitative analysis of continuously recorded outputs from a few key activities, we were able to identify on the one hand their strong potential and, on the other hand, certain risks and limits associated mostly with a combination of certain demographic, geographical and other factors.

The pilot-tested positions of inclusion coordinators, which are established based on proven similar positions in some European countries, can undoubtedly be recommended for system support in mainstream schools in the Czech Republic. However, it is important to respect the specifics of the national educational system, as well as those of individual schools. The systematic delimitation of these positions (their authority and job description) should therefore be rather a framework, while we leave sufficient room for adjustments in detail to the level of school practice. At the same time, it is highly recommended that, along with the systematic establishment of these positions (or even earlier), school special education counsellors and school psychologists should obviously be available at all schools as a part of the elementary foundation for other support tools.

Similarly, the described multidisciplinary cooperation of all those who are (or might be) involved in the support of pupils with SEN in school education is also necessary. Workshops and seminars for parents and teachers, as well as a special form of case conference on pupil with SEN proved to be effective support instruments in individual cases and situations. In addition to a number of experts, the multidisciplinary support must include also pupils' families (if possible) – although such helpful teamwork cannot always be forced on them. Czech schools have very different experiences in this regard; even if the family fails or if it is difficult to work with it for any reason, the inclusive school cannot fail to maintain its support of the pupil. It is also clear from the outcomes of our project (as well as from the everyday experience of participating schools) that it is possible to use some support instruments even in such cases. However, their availability is not yet guaranteed for all schools and the results of many research surveys still remain only a clear starting point, while meaningful implementation depends primarily on political decisions expected in near future.

Notes

1. Act No. 82/2015 on pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary professional, and other education (Education law), available from https://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/ViewFile.aspx?type=z&id=28806 (in Czech) and Decree No. 27/2016 of on education of pupils with special educational needs and gifted pupils, available from https://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/ViewFile.aspx?type=z&id=39614 (in Czech).
2. The legal definition of children, pupils and students with special educational needs in Czech educational context is anchored in Act No. 82/2015 on pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary professional, and other education (Education law), available from https://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/ViewFile.aspx?type=z&id=28806 (in Czech).
3. The project tested a model very similar to that described in the practice of schools in the UK by Westwood (2013) and others.
4. A mandatory evaluation tool for the school inclusive parameters assessment in this project was prepared by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youths and Sports, and it was based on a work of Tannenbergerová (2016) who adapted the basic ideas and elements of the Index for inclusion (Booth and Ainscow 2002) to Czech school and cultural environment.
5. This organisation provides social, health, educational, and pastoral care to people who have been in an unfavourable life situation due to age, health, illness, loneliness, threats, etc.

Targeted care and support are directed by organisations to improve the unfavourable situation of clients and to help them live a dignified way of life. Social activation services play a key role in working with children and families. These are primarily aimed at supporting parents in the care and upbringing of children, at promoting effective communication in the family, and at supporting families in dealing with difficult life situations (e.g. housing and financial need). Social activation services seek to prevent a child from being exposed to potential risk situations.

6. For further details about the Pesso-Boyden Psychomotor Therapy, visit https://pbsp.com.
7. The case conference represents a professional discussion of all interested experts on the specific case of a child and his/her family. The aim is to exchange information, assess the situation and find the optimal solution, which will lead primarily to meeting the needs of the child and his/her family. At the same time, the case conference represents a chance to create an atmosphere of cooperation and connect the support network for all concerned.
8. Other factors complicating the obtaining of the family's participation could include the greater time consumption of the activity (including the preparation of the child), the taking place of the activity outside the natural environment of the family, the requirement of the active involvement of the parents or even the apprehension of the parents concerning a too personal contact with the school institution.

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Disclosure statement

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