

PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL PROFILE OF A SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATOR IN THE CONDITIONS OF A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

PERFIL PROFISSIONAL E PESSOAL DE UM EDUCADOR ESPECIAL ESCOLAR NAS CONDIÇÕES DE UMA ESCOLA PRIMÁRIA NA REPÚBLICA TCHECA

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Abstract. The article deals with the professional image of the school special educator in the environment of primary schools in the Czech Republic. It focuses on his/her role, workload, cooperation with other institutions and importance in the context of inclusive education. The text describes historical changes in the perception and inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, including current legislative and practical approaches in the field of education. The aim of the article is to provide insight into the day-to-day challenges, workload management strategies and perceptions of the professional role of the school special educator within the educational process.

Keywords: Czech Republic, education, Inclusion, Primary schools, Professional role, School special educator.

Resumo. O artigo trata da imagem profissional do educador especial escolar no ambiente das escolas primárias na República Tcheca. Ele se concentra em seu papel, carga de trabalho, cooperação com outras instituições e importância no contexto da educação inclusiva. O texto descreve mudanças históricas na percepção e inclusão de alunos com necessidades educacionais especiais, incluindo abordagens legislativas e práticas atuais no campo da educação. O objetivo do artigo é fornecer insights sobre os desafios do dia a dia, estratégias de gerenciamento de carga de trabalho e percepções do papel profissional do educador especial escolar dentro do processo educacional.

Palavras-chave: República Tcheca, educação, inclusão, escolas primárias, papel profissional, educador especial escolar.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there have been significant changes in the education of pupils with special educational needs. Today, the school special educator is an important actor not only in the process of inclusion, but also in the field of school counselling and support for pupils. This profession, whose tasks and status are constantly evolving, is particularly crucial in relation to the adaptation, inclusion and development of pupils with special needs in the mainstream school environment.

Inclusive pedagogy most often appears in a special education context, with the main component of special education being education-based intervention. The main goal of special pedagogy can be considered as: removing or overcoming obstacles and barriers that make it difficult or impossible for a person with a disability or disadvantage to learn, educate and actively participate in society and school (Zilcher, Svoboda, 2019).

Inclusive education is one of the most current trends that cuts across the entire educational spectrum and moves educational "stones" at all levels of education. There are many different



definitions of what inclusion means, but a large number of authors define the basic trichotomy of the concept of inclusive education:

1. Integration and inclusion are virtually identical concepts;
2. Inclusion is a kind of improved, better integration; and
3. Inclusion is a completely different approach that assumes all children are included in mainstream school. It is the unconditional acceptance of the special needs of all pupils (Zilcher, Svoboda, 2019).

Inclusive education can be divided into two models that are considered to be in conflict. The first model is the psycho-medical model, which focuses mainly on pupils with special educational needs. In contrast, the second model, psycho-social, considers the reconstruction of values, environment, culture, climate in schools as communities as the basis of inclusive education. The second model understands inclusive education more broadly (Lazarová, 2015). Although, we can support Daněk and Klugerová (2023) thought who recognizes inclusive education as a tool of social exclusion.

Historical approaches to inclusion have gone through a number of stages, from the period of segregation to the current concept of inclusion, where the emphasis is on supporting all pupils in one educational stream (Vomáčková, 2015). This development has been accompanied by changes in the legislative environment, which provides school special educators with tools and support to ensure adequate care for pupils with special educational needs.

The political events of 1989 had a major impact on inclusive education. Before that year, it was virtually impossible to meet people with disabilities - whether physical or mental - on the street. These people were completely excluded from society and lived in social care institutions, educated in special education - so they did not come into contact with "normal" non-disabled people. In 1989 big changes happened - we wanted to belong to Europe and share its values and openness. So people with disabilities started to be talked about more and they themselves started to claim their rights (Povolný, 2020).

Inclusion, as a modern approach to education, has its roots in a long-term development that has gradually overcome traditional models of segregation of people with special needs. The first steps towards the integration of persons with disabilities were motivated by the desire to ensure equal access to basic rights, including the right to education. These developments led to the formulation of inclusion, which is now considered one of the pillars of modern pedagogy.

In the Czech Republic, inclusive approaches to education emerged only after 1989, when fundamental changes in the political system took place. The introduction of Decree 291/1991 Coll. and other legislative measures enabled the gradual inclusion of children with special educational needs into the mainstream. Education Act No. 561/2004, which identified the education of children with special educational needs as a priority, marked a major step in this area. Further legislation, such as the amendment to Decree No. 27/2016, brought in a system of support measures and tools for working with pupils who require special care.

2. THE ROLE AND SPECIFICS OF THE SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATOR NOT ONLY IN THE CONTEXT OF INCLUSION

The school's Special Educator is responsible for supporting pupils who require a specific approach. His/her role is to work with teachers, school administrators, students and their families to create an environment in which each student can reach his/her potential. This role includes diagnosing pupils' specific needs, providing individual support, consulting teachers and developing learning plans (Basler, Michalik, Feleman et al., 2023).

The work of a school special educator includes not only counselling and direct work with pupils, but also orientation in legislative requirements and their application in practice. The special educator often finds himself or herself in the role of mediator between the pupil, his or

her family and the school environment, which can be both beneficial and challenging in terms of communication and reconciling different expectations (Čech, Hormandlová, 2020).

The school special educator occupies a unique position in the educational process, where his or her role goes beyond teaching to include counselling. This role relies on the ability to understand the psychological and social needs of pupils while ensuring that their educational journey meets the legal requirements and ethical standards of inclusive education.

The special educator is responsible for designing and implementing individual education plans that include special supports and strategies tailored to the specific needs of each pupil. His/her role in creating an inclusive school climate is particularly important in this area.

Through the guidance and methodological support he provides to teachers and school management, the teacher can positively influence the way the school promotes diversity. Inclusion is not only about physical inclusion, but also about supporting the social and emotional development of pupils, which requires specific skills and attitudes from teaching staff.

The work of a school special educator requires a high level of training and the ability to work with different groups of pupils who have specific educational needs. A school special educator focuses on diagnosing, planning and implementing support measures to help pupils better manage their school duties and integrate into the community. This professional also plays an important role in prevention and intervention, not only for learning difficulties but also for problem behaviours that may be associated with pupils' special needs.

The profession of school special educator covers a wide range of activities, from working with teachers and parents to providing methodological support for working with pupils with special educational needs. This professional faces difficult challenges within the school counselling system and must be able to deal effectively with various situations that arise during the educational process.

One of the key functions of a school special educator is the role of a consultant and methodological expert who provides teachers and other educational staff with support when working with pupils with special educational needs. This role also includes coordinating and implementing support measures and ensuring that statutory norms and standards relating to inclusive education are met. The school-based special educator not only coordinates support for pupils, but also ensures that the pedagogical approach and methodology are in line with current developments in the field of special education and inclusion (Růžičková, 2018).

An essential task of the school special educator is also to intervene in the emergence of problematic situations that may result from the specific needs of pupils. These professionals are involved in solving problems related to pupils' adaptation to the school environment, providing psychological support and helping teachers to find appropriate approaches to work with the diverse needs of their pupils. The school special educator therefore has an important role in creating a supportive environment that promotes the successful integration and development of pupils with special needs.

The acquisition of professional qualifications for teaching staff is dealt with in Part 2 of Act No. 563/2004 Coll. The school special educator is covered by Section 18 of this part of the Act, according to which in order to obtain a professional qualification he or she must successfully complete a university degree from an accredited master's degree programme in the field of educational sciences.

Learning must come from:

- focus on special pedagogy - these are mainly fields of study of the special pedagogy programme (e.g. The study programme Special Pedagogy - special education andragogy, special education and rehabilitation activities and management of special facilities), the field of teaching for schools for young people requiring special care, education for schools for young people requiring special care, education for special

facilities, teaching for special schools (single-subject study), integrated study of special pedagogy - teaching in special schools (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, 2022);

- focusing on early childhood education, or on the preparation of primary school teachers, or on the preparation of teachers of general education subjects in secondary school, or on the preparation of educators, or from studies to extend professional qualifications focused on the preparation of special educators;
- studies in the field of pedagogy and studies to expand professional qualifications focused on the preparation of special educators;
- focus on special education and the preparation of primary school teachers or teachers of general education subjects in secondary school.

It is also possible to obtain the professional qualification of a special educator by additional studies to extend the professional qualification pursuant to Section 6a(1)(b) of Decree No 317/2005 Coll., which is the only study in the lifelong learning programme carried out by a university.

The minimum duration of this study is 350 hours. The start of this study dates back to 2014, with the first successful students graduating three years later. This study takes place at Charles University, the University of Pardubice and Masaryk University (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, 2022).

As further pointed out by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic (2022), the professional qualification of a school special educator, on the other hand, does not result from a graduate study in a lifelong learning programme implemented by a university and focused on special education under the provisions of Section 2 of Decree No 317/2005 Coll.

Professional challenges and workload of a special educator

The work of a school special educator is demanding not only professionally, but also in terms of coping with a heavy workload. One of the most common sources of stress is the administrative work associated with legislative requirements and documentation duties. Working with pupils with challenging behaviour or needs is also a significant source of workload, which requires a high level of emotional intelligence and psycho-hygiene skills on the part of the school special educator. Therefore, it is essential that these professionals have access to supportive and relaxation strategies to help them manage the workload and maintain a high level of professional competence.

School special educator is a demanding profession that is particularly vulnerable to burnout. Working with children with special educational needs is all the more difficult because it requires constant intensive contact, individual attention, commitment and maximum involvement. But very often the right feedback, in the form of learning outcomes, is not forthcoming, and efforts to impart knowledge, skills and values are not met with the kind of response that would be needed.

This is one of the main reasons why burnout occurs more often in special educators than in other jobs. More than fifty years have passed since the term burnout was introduced and it is increasing every year. It has to do with the ability to cope with stressful situations, the demands we place on ourselves, but most importantly, the excessive workload. It is logical, the times full of modern technology demand it and it is up to us whether we can withstand this pressure and obligations or whether we succumb to them. (Stárek, Klugerová, 2025).

The work of a school special educator is demanding not only in terms of professional knowledge, but also emotional and psychological burden. Various research suggests that special educators face high levels of stress, mainly due to administrative duties, difficult

communication between parents and school, and the need to manage conflict situations in the classroom team. According to studies, it is crucial that special educators have effective stress management strategies to help them maintain professional integrity and prevent burnout syndrome (Stárek, Klugerová, 2025).

There are countless different answers to the question of what a school-based special educator should be, and it almost seems as if the experts are racing to come up with a better, more concise, broader, or more comprehensive characterization. What they unanimously agree on, on the other hand, is the considerable complexity of the profession.

Čech and Hormanlová (2020) describe the teaching profession as very demanding and stressful. It is subject to the prerequisites for the performance of the activity of a pedagogical worker in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of Act No. 563/2004 Coll., according to which the following prerequisites are necessary for the performance of the activity of a pedagogical worker: full legal capacity, professional qualification for the direct pedagogical activity performed, a clean criminal record, medical fitness and demonstrable knowledge of the Czech language. Medical fitness is assessed in accordance with a specific legal regulation, which is a directive of the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic.

Pedeutology is a pedagogical discipline dealing with the issue of personality typology of pedagogical workers. On its basis, educators are categorized according to various aspects, such as socio-professional groups, gender, level of education, age, subject area, personal interest in the teaching profession, social profile, burnout syndrome, workload. It also looks at the work of the teacher from internal and external conditions.

The internal ones refer to one's own work and the school environment, such as the number of students and their quality, school facilities, the qualifications of the teaching staff and their relationships with each other, relations with legal representatives and the public, the level of school management, the school climate, etc. The external ones are those that operate from the outside, such as legislation, social prestige, the system of continuing education, career advancement, degree of authority, the benefits of the profession, school funding, salary, etc. (Kaleja, 2014).

According to Knotová (2014), the choice of study, the formative effect of professional information from the implementation of this study and the influence of university teachers contribute to the development of personal qualities important for the position of school special educator.

She classifies the school special educator as a helping profession. In the course of his/her work, he/she works with both visibly and invisibly disadvantaged pupils. Moreover, many adolescent pupils can hide the problem and do not want help. Working with parents who have not moved past their child's disadvantage is no exception. These are all reasons why a school special educator should be a normal person in the first place.

In addition to the assumption of a normal personality, Knotková (2014) lists other qualities that a school special educator should possess. Among the additional traits, a sense of humour, the ability to be a good listener with a dose of egoism and altruism can be highlighted.

The job of a school special educator is increasingly sought after in the Czech education system. His/her work also includes the implementation of support measures for certain pupils on the recommendation of the school advisory centre through special education classes or pedagogical intervention. It can also serve in the provision of first-level support measures, but at the school's expense.

Kendíková (2020) sees the importance of the special educator's role in schools in improving the quality of counselling services and care for pupils with special educational needs and gifted pupils. It also has a positive effect on the teaching competences of teachers or the cooperation between the school and the family. The scope of his/her work is based on Decree No 72/2005 Coll. or its Annex No 3 Standard Activities of the School. These include depistige or screening

activities, as well as consultation, counselling, diagnostic, methodological and intervention activities.

Jedlička, Kot'a and Slavík (2018) refer to **depistage** as the active search for individuals with special educational needs, who are subsequently included in special education care (Kendíková, 2020). According to Bazalova (2023), she conducts depistage already at the time of pupils' enrolment in Year 1, where she conducts a special education diagnosis of the prerequisites for literacy development (reading, writing and numeracy).

They analyse the data collected and continue to monitor the pupil's progress throughout their schooling. In addition, depistage refers to the active detection of pupils in need of educational support measures or at risk of special educational needs. It includes the design of the diagnostic process. It also determines the type, scope, frequency and duration of intervention activities.

It applies the support measures, monitors their effectiveness, comes up with proposals and implements possible adjustments. Appropriately involves the pupil with support needs among classmates and within the school, ensuring the prevention of bullying. The focus is not only on difficulties but also on strengths that can be used to motivate and develop.

As part of the **diagnostic activities**, the school special educator carries out a diagnosis of the special educational needs of the pupil by collecting information, including personal and family history, and analyses and evaluates the data obtained. She also specifies the pupils' main problems and determines an individual support plan inside and outside the school (Kendíková, 2020).

He/she participates in the development of the individual education plan or educational support plan together with the class teacher. Administers the pupil's portfolio, which is continuously updated, evaluating the progress and effects of the pedagogical action on the pupil (Bazalova, 2023).

During **intervention activities**, the school special educator carries out individual work with the pupil in the short and long term. He also carries out re-education, compensatory, stimulating and special education activities. He/she contributes to the development of an individual educational plan in cooperation with other school staff, specialists and the pupil's legal representatives.

It carries out continuous evaluation of the proposed measures, modifying them as necessary. He also ensures the adaptation of the school environment, provides special aids and didactic materials. Makes regular contact with the pupil's legal representatives. It also provides special education interventions and services for pupils, legal representatives and school staff.

It participates in career counselling and is in contact with experts from other counselling institutions (Kendíková, 2020). In addition, she has a share in the primary prevention programme. At signs of school failure or educational problems, it implements preventive intervention programmes and applies special education approaches.

When educational problems occur, it forms a team with the educational counsellor, prevention methodologist and school psychologist and together initiates special education diagnostics. It also determines a plan for intervention inside and outside the school. According to Bazalova (2023), multicultural issues are currently the most discussed topic in the school environment.

Methodological and coordinating activities - in this area, the school special educator prepares and continuously adjusts the conditions for the education of disabled pupils, coordinating special education counselling services in the school. He/she works closely with school counselling facilities and other institutions and professionals for the benefit of pupils with special educational needs.

He also plays his part in the preparation of school curricula and individual education plans. This both enriches services and improves the quality of care for pupils with special educational

needs. It provides methodological activities for teaching staff. This includes a more detailed characterisation of the teaching of 36 and the possibilities of pupils according to the type and degree of disability, the design of working methods and forms and their implementation in teaching, instructions for the use of special aids and didactic materials.

Last but not least, she manages and methodically guides teaching assistants (Kendíková, 2020). According to Bazalova (2023), the school special educator creates and directs the school's special education advisory services. She conducts individual and group discussions with school management, teachers, teaching assistants and other school staff, pupils, legal guardians, school and other facilities, which she manages methodologically and trains to use special working materials and aids that she procures and borrows.

It also directs and methodically manages teaching assistants. Teaches special education subjects. Implements re-education, compensation and stimulation activities. Arranges therapies, speech therapy intervention, informs the legal representatives on this issue. Participates in career counseling in the selection of an educational path and individually accompanies the pupil.

Part of the work of the school special educator is also communication with the school management, teachers, pupils and legal representatives. He also cooperates with school counselling facilities, health, social and other services. His/her contribution is also reflected in the development of educational and psychological services in the school, including the primary prevention programme.

In the administration of its activities, it is guided by the legislation currently in force. Knotová (2014) sees the school special educator as a specialist providing counselling services concerning pupils with disabilities, health and social disadvantages, gifted pupils with disabilities or disadvantages (twice-exceptional children).

According to Jedlicka, Koti and Slavik (2018), in addition to a psychologist, a school special educator can help with correcting academic failure. He or she also implements inclusive measures and assists both teachers and teaching assistants. His professional services are also available to parents or legal representatives of pupils and students with disabilities or handicaps.

He applies his knowledge and skills mainly in the preparation of school curricula, individual education plans and the implementation of set goals. This does not end the list of activities carried out by the school special educator. It is also used as a teacher, especially in classes with more pupils with special educational needs, or in preparatory classes as pre-school preparation for some types of pupils with special educational needs (Kendíková, 2020).

In addition to teaching, special educators can also focus on teaching life skills such as communication, social skills and self-care. They can tailor teaching methods and materials to fit their students' learning styles and abilities and provide options such as extra time for testing, visual aids, or assistive technology (CareerExplorer, 2023).

According to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic (2022), the scope and extent of the work of the school special educator varies according to the size of the school, or the number of pupils and their composition, or. The composition of the school counselling centre in terms of the division of the roles of school psychologist, school special educator, educational counsellor and prevention methodologist is also crucial; and last but not least, the competences and professional experience of the school special educator.

The scope of the direct pedagogical activity of the school special educator is 20 to 24 hours per week, with the specific scope determined by the school principal or the director of the pedagogical-psychological counselling centre in accordance with the provisions of Section 23(2) of Act No 563/2004 Coll. The scope of study leave for the further education of teaching staff by self-study is based on the provisions of Section 24(7) of Act No 563/2004 Coll. and is identical for all teaching staff at the rate of 12 working days per school year.

Kucharská and Mrázková (2014) devoted an entire methodology to the work of the school special educator, where they detail the individual activities of the school special educator on a total of 226 pages. These include the standard activities of the school special educator in the area of supporting school success and problem behaviour, in the next part the authors deal with the individual education plan and the role of the school special educator, standard activities in the methodological guidance of teachers by the school special educator and documentation and forms for the sub-areas of the work of the school special educator.

An important advantage of the presence of the school special educator in Czech schools is direct cooperation with the school counselling centre. The practice of employing school special educators directly in schools indicates a decreasing burden on pedagogical-psychological counselling centres and special education centres. There is better detection of pupils' difficulties.

A number of parents welcome the provision of special educational care directly in the school environment. Other strengths include close cooperation with teachers and teaching assistants. Last but not least, the employment of a school-based special educator was a great advantage when the amendments to the Education Act were put into practice (Kendíková, 2020).

The occupation of special educator is discussed in detail by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2017), which lists the professional direction and sub-direction, qualification level, salary range, characteristics of the occupation, work activities, qualifications, competency requirements with professional skills and knowledge, general skills, digital and soft skills, as well as burdens and risks, health eligibility, CZ-ISCO classification, and salary and vacancies.

Effective support for pupils with special needs requires close cooperation between the school and the pupils' families, which is a key aspect of the work of the school special educator. Communication and collaboration with parents involves not only passing on information about the pupil's progress, but also working together to find the best ways to support the pupil's development at home.

This collaboration is essential because the family background greatly influences how the pupil feels at school, their attitude to learning and how well they can adapt to new challenges. Another important aspect of cooperation involves coordination with external institutions such as educational and psychological counselling centres, special education centres and health organisations.

The school special educator ensures that all institutions involved are informed about the needs and progress of the pupil and that professionals from these institutions are involved in the development of the educational strategy.

Recommendations for practice

Developing interpersonal skills

Special educators should develop their communication and interpersonal skills to help them work better with teachers, parents and other students. A course on assertive communication and mediation could improve the effectiveness of communication between school and family.

Regular supervision

Due to the emotionally demanding nature of the work of a special educator, regular supervision is recommended, which offers a space for reflection and sharing difficult situations with other professionals. Supervision is a key tool for preventing burnout syndrome, which we have already mentioned in the text.

Introduce assistive technology



Schools should equip their school special educators with appropriate technology and tools that support inclusive learning. Digital tools that facilitate communication or word processing can support the learning process and increase the motivation of pupils with disabilities.

Flexible approach to inclusion

Every pupil has specific needs and therefore it is necessary that the approach to inclusion is not rigid. It is important to regularly reassess the curriculum and adjust it based on the changing needs of pupils.

Regular professional development is a key aspect of maintaining the high quality of a school special educator's work

Since special education is a dynamic and evolving field, it is essential that educators have access to current research, methods, and techniques. Continuing education not only provides educators with new knowledge, but also improves their ability to respond to the diverse needs of students and contributes to their confidence in their professional role.

Effective in-service training programmes can include training on inclusive educational strategies, methods of working with pupils with special needs and techniques for managing conflict in the school environment.

Another important area is training in communication and intercultural competences, which are increasingly important given the growing diversity in school classrooms.

To think about social values, where ethics is a fundamental element of every school special educator's work

These professionals often find themselves in situations where it is necessary to be sensitive to the privacy of pupils and their families, to decide on appropriate interventions and to take into account both the rights of the child and the requirements of the education system.

The professional ethics of the special educator are based on the principles of trust, respect and responsibility, which are essential to providing a safe and supportive environment for pupils.

This ethic also includes the principles of equity and fairness, whereby all pupils should be able to reach their educational potential regardless of individual difficulties. Therefore, the school special educator must remain impartial and sensitive to the information they obtain about pupils and their families.

3. CONCLUSION

Inclusive education brings many challenges that require special educators to be able to use specific methodological approaches that promote social inclusion and positive development of students with special needs. Inclusion is a concept that goes beyond the presence of pupils in the classroom - it aims to ensure that every pupil is a full member of the school community.

The article analyses the professional image of the school special educator in the environment of primary schools, emphasizing the importance of his/her role in the process of inclusive education.

The introduction describes the historical transformation of the approach to pupils with special educational needs and the development of inclusive legislation in the Czech Republic. The article then examines the key roles of the special educator, including advisory and methodological support to teachers, communication with pupils' families and cooperation with external institutions. This cooperation is essential for the effective adaptation of education to the individual needs of pupils.

A significant portion of the text focuses on the demands of the special education profession, including stressors and coping strategies. Professional development and continuing education

are prerequisites for the quality and effectiveness of the role, while modern technology and innovations in education provide new opportunities to support pupils with special needs. The article also includes practical recommendations for educational practice which include developing communication skills, using supervision and introducing assistive technology into the educational process.

Innovations in technology are playing an increasing role in the educational process, including in the field of special education. Modern digital tools such as educational apps, online platforms and assistive technologies can help special educators better tailor education to the individual needs of students. For example, literacy development programmes or tools to support autistic pupils allow educators to implement effective and targeted interventions that are tailored to the specific needs of pupils.

While technology offers new possibilities, it also requires educators to be skilled in its use and able to adapt it in practice. Therefore, it is imperative that not only school-based special educators are trained in the effective use of technology tools and are able to assess which technologies best meet the individual needs of their students.

The conclusion emphasises the importance of a flexible and individual approach to inclusive education, which enables the full integration of pupils with special needs into the school environment. Thus, this article provides a comprehensive overview of the importance and demands of the work of the school special educator, its professional challenges and its importance for the inclusive educational process.

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