

Summary

Preschool support for the development of psychosocial competencies in children with impaired hearing

Efforts undertaken in recent years in our country to integrate as many children with developmental difficulties as possible into inclusive education have not always been successful. Failures in this area can probably be attributed to the disconnect between the special needs of this group of people and the conditions of inclusive education. One group of children who face this reality, which is not entirely adequate to meet their needs, are those with hearing impairments. Their disability affects not only their cognitive functioning, but also, and perhaps most significantly, their emotional and social functioning. Hearing impairment determines the quality of relationships between people with hearing disabilities and hearing people, including members of their hearing families, educators, teachers and peers. Interactions with these individuals may be incomplete due to a lack of effective communication. Although children with hearing impairments usually attend preschools equipped with hearing aids or cochlear implants and FM systems, it is not hearing loss or prosthetics alone that determine the quality of their functioning in these institutions. Typically, due to the lack of full access to spoken language in the family environment, children with hearing impairments do not understand the meaning of what they hear. As a result, they tend to demonstrate lower levels of group interaction and a higher level of social withdrawal than their hearing peers. These behavioural characteristics are a secondary consequence of the lack of understanding of such children's needs in a hearing environment, including the need for adequate development of their psychosocial skills. Therefore, in this monograph, we seek to draw attention to the conditions of education in preschool in terms of the possibilities for developing psychosocial skills among young children with hearing impairments and their hear-

ing peers. Preschool education, which emphasises the development of children's independence and enabling bilingual education, uses teaching activities to stimulate children's emotional and social development. In our view, such education can contribute to making the general education system more friendly to deaf and hard-of-hearing children. Currently, the significant participation of people with hearing impairments in mainstream preschools is by no means solely due to the prevalence of screening tests for hearing defects or the consequence of this fact, i.e. that an increasing number of children are receiving early auditory-linguistic rehabilitation, which contributes to the development of spoken language. This frequently results from the inspiration of hearing caregivers, who recognise certain shortcomings in the special education system. Moreover, the desire to keep their child in the local community prompts them to choose a mainstream education path for their child, which does not necessarily mean that they consider integration defined in its broadest sense to be the form currently most appropriate for their child's needs. What, then, can be done to make mainstream preschool education a more optimal platform for fostering the development of children with hearing impairments?

The possibility for people with hearing impairments to pursue their education at any institution, especially one located near their place of residence, should prompt us, as teacher educators, to reflect on the need to equip preschool education students with knowledge on early childhood development support and deaf education. Ultimately, as J. Bąbka and R. Korzeniowska (2020) emphasise, it is practitioners who bring the idea of inclusion to life and whose experiences determine the balance of gains and losses. Therefore, the actual picture of inclusive education for young children depends on the professional preparation and sensitivity of these educators.

Due to their qualitative nature, the research results presented in this monograph represent only a very narrow slice of the problem and do not allow for far-reaching conclusions. Nevertheless, they do illustrate the difficulties in identifying the needs of children with hearing impairments in inclusive settings as well as the challenges in properly stimulating the development of their psychosocial competences. We therefore believe that blurring the boundaries between special education and inclusive education through the widespread implementation of early childhood development support activities may foster good practices in preschool education. It is this potential that we wish to draw the attention of the readers of this monograph.

Translated by Rob Pagett