L. Stárek

Special education teachers as a profession mirror the helping professions

Introduction. The scientific major, special pedagogy, is a relatively new field in the Czech Republic. It started growing in the second half of the 20th century. Therefore, it is still evolving its assumptions for personal and professional aspects that a special pedagogue should have. The influence and evolution of society should be reflected not only in the scientific field but in the profession as well. The aims of this paper are to describe the personality of a special pedagogue, to reflect one's personality as a special pedagogue, and to highlight the importance of an individual who is transferred to a pedagogical-inclusive process which is initiated by a special pedagogue.

Study participants and methods. The main of this research was to collect reflections on the profession of a special pedagogue in the working environment. This research was focused on special pedagogues in the first stage of primary schools. The target group was not eliminated by age, gender, colour, religion, education, or the length of working experience in the position of the special pedagogue. With regard to the established research goal, we chose qualitative research – specifically, the interview method. We conducted in total five semi-structured interviews with which the respondents agreed to be shared for purposes of the research. All interviews were recorded, and respondents knew about that and agreed with it.

Results. The profession of the special pedagogue, similarly to any other profession which fits in the category of so-called ‘helping professions’ requires a higher level of responsibility, which for workers could be a bit of a burden. Furthermore, special pedagogues who do diagnoses are responsible for correct diagnosis which determinates further work with a child. Thus, a mistake in diagnosis could be fatal and could be discovered a few years later. All participants talked about some level of stress. However, all of them have defined it differently. On the other hand, all participants agreed on another stressful part which is to follow the pace of a child with a health handicap. Mainly they mentioned their ability to keep themselves in the background, calm themselves down, and be very patient sometimes. Sometimes it happens that it is hard for a special pedagogue to see a sense and future in their work. About this situation, four participants talked. The profession could lose its sense, or it could be seen as stereotypical. All of this is mostly because of low feedback from a student or a student's family. This fact was reflected by all respondents. In relation to the data that we collected all respondents see limitations within the administrative part of their profession which keeps others from “important” activities. Further, all respondents mentioned the problem of limit right during their work, and problematic of raise of modern technologies and cooperation with modern technologies during teaching. Cooperation with modern technologies was mentioned in the context of insufficient education and non-reflection of own abilities and skills.

Practical significance. In respondents’ answers, diverse topics were detected which often correlate with each other, but the individual topics were detected as well. These individual topics might be interesting for further research. However, the purposes of this research were irrelevant. With regard to inclusive tendencies, it is necessary to reflect the individuality of pupils and still maintain an approach that stems from the essence of special pedagogy.

Keywords: assumptions, profession, special pedagogue, reflection, employs

Note: The term special pedagogue is used in this text without gender correlation. Although we know that this profession is significantly feminized.

For Reference:
The nature of special education as a helping profession is primarily determined by the professional concern of this educational-scientific field for individuals with disadvantages or disabilities where the humanist orientation is based on the need to help others, with an emphasis on respecting the individual needs of a given person. The field of special education is relatively young. It was recognised as a field back at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. This field then started in the mid-20th century to take the form of a field known to us today. Therefore, new questions are constantly being raised, and new findings crucial to better understanding and helping children and all people with disabilities or with special educational needs are coming to light.

Special education is a discipline focused on the education, training and complete personality development of disadvantaged people, aiming to achieve the greatest degree of social integration possible, including job and social opportunities, employment and relationships [26].

The concern of this field is focused above all on the person whose living situation is influenced by a disadvantage and who needs professional intervention and appropriate support in his/her social existence [32]. A special education teacher works not only with a disabled person but also with his/her family because a functioning family environment is extraordinarily important for a person with a disability and is never completely replaceable [21].

The terms education and upbringing are often connected to children and teenagers. However, the current special education attempts to intensively pay attention to adults of working age and old age too. Special andragogy and gerontology are then mentioned in this context [26].

Let us keep in mind that the indicated and addressed issue, i.e. care – support – practice and theory (special education as a scientific field) may seem somewhat vague from a practical point of view. It must be emphasised that the issue of special care (which should have a system and goals) is quite naturally – historically – related to the question of a comprehensive understanding of normalcy in society, which was, is and will be derived from socio-ethical breadth of the learning process and the logically entailed care in a particular society and time, i.e. a historical time. In this context, it is worth pointing out that the current understanding of special pedagogical issues is principally oriented towards the creation of a kind of a “supernorm”, i.e. the creation and practice of the so-called trends of uniform normality [12].

As evident from the text above, special education is itself characterised by a nature that places it among the helping professions. This fact is essentially linked to it being concerned with helping individuals with various disabilities, supporting their personality development and optimal socialisation under difficult conditions among other matters. Help or support in this context is not tied to the individual as such, but also to his/her surroundings or environment.

Similarly as at the everyday level for the helping professions, so for the level of special education or simply education, various requirements and certainly expected prerequisites are demanded as part of the profession. So that a person is able to do his/her job as a special education teacher, a specific qualified level is expected of them, along with defined
qualities, skills and abilities that the person should possess and are completely bound or connected to his/her personality.

1. Professional prerequisites

In terms of professional requirements, let us start with the legislation, especially Act No. 563/2004 Coll., the Act on Teaching Staff, (the Teaching Act) [1], which defines who a teacher is – stating it is one who is engaged in direct teaching and direct educational, direct special educational or direct pedagogical-psychological activity by direct action on the educated person with whom he/she is engaged in educating and training. The direct teaching activity according to the legislation above is also done, apart from the special education teacher, by the teacher, after-school instructor, psychologist, educator in a facility for the further education of teaching professionals, free-time educator, assistant teacher, trainer, methodologist for prevention in pedagogical-psychological counselling and those in school management. The social prerequisites for all teachers are to be of sound mind and legal age. An additional, and no less important prerequisite is the professional qualification for the direct pedagogical activity that the teacher is responsible for. Furthermore, good moral character and good health are requirements. In the Czech Republic, demonstrable fluency of Czech is required of teachers, unless stated otherwise.

In order for the special education teacher to be able to provide assistance and support for children or individuals with special education needs as effectively as possible, their professional education is required. As already mentioned, the Teaching Act also requires a professional qualification obtained at a university level of the teachers. A primary school first-grade or special needs teacher who performs direct pedagogical activities in the class or the school established for pupils with special educational needs acquires a professional qualification:

a) a university education gained by studying in an accredited master’s course in the field of pedagogy focused on special education for teachers,

b) a university education gained by studying in an accredited master’s course in the field of pedagogy focused on special education, in a course specialised in special education and education in a lifelong education programme offered by a university and focused on the preparation of teachers in the first stage of primary school, or

c) education intended for teachers of the first stage of primary school under paragraph 1 and university education obtained by studying in an accredited course in the field of pedagogical science intended for special education or education in a programme of lifelong education offered by a university and focused on special education (Act No. 563/2004, Coll. on Teaching Staff, Sec. 7 and 8b) [1].

The completion of university education for special education teachers does not end their studies by a long shot. Even in this field, lifelong learning is necessary, if not essential.

Pedagogical-psychological component of the profile of a special education teacher represents an amalgam of knowledge from general pedagogical and psychological disciplines that forms the basis for the ability to diagnose and correctly observe each pupil and his/her educational environment, to know the educational aims and the content of education, analyse the course of the educational process and to know how to organise it, select the right resources, methods and forms of education and know how to creatively apply them in practice. The special education teacher has a wide perspective on the whole field and the methodology of special education in the segment of specialised expertise [31].
At present, the field of study of special education is still more often sought out by newcomers interested in tertiary study. We can consider the fact whether, it is with regard to the inclusivity trend or awareness of the nature of human disabilities or limitations in their immediate area, or it is a field that offers the possibility of qualification for some form of help or support. Special education departments mostly have their place in the pedagogical faculties of Charles University in Prague, Masaryk University in Brno, Palacký University in Olomouc, the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Hradec Králové University, Ostrava University, the University of Jan Evangelista Purkyně in Ústí nad Labem and also the Technical University in Liberec. The appeal of the field is evident in the special education course at private universities – e.g. the University of Jan Amos Komenský, Prague s.r.o. Smaller units are very often found in the departments of pedagogy or even outside pedagogical faculties.

Thinking about the teaching profession can be emphasized by several researches. Reinius et al. [23] – “social sharing of expertise both among expert teacher network and with teacher colleagues was considered a central factor in enabling development and innovation work. The interviewees considered the sharing of practice-laden knowledge and competencies with fellow expert teachers as being critical and significant; this was enabled by mutual trust and support between the interviewees. This knowledge sharing helped them further develop and cultivate their innovation work and share their emerging know-how with colleagues. The interviewees felt that the mutual exchange of thoughts assisted their professional development, resulting in the cultivation of novel productive practices of digital and other pedagogies. The interviewees considered that their diverse backgrounds, here in terms of grade level, subjects taught, and school cultures, enriched their professional development.”

The authors [29] analyzed the data generated during the Oral Inquiry Process workshops to identify common challenges shared by the novice teachers who participated in this study and the nuances within them. Findings pointed to two common categories of struggle: reconciling theory and practice in standardized schools and managing relationships with veteran teachers. Nuances within these challenges included tension flowing from standardization, pacing constraints, and navigating complex relationships with veteran teachers. The authors argue that developing a nuanced understanding of the challenges novice teachers encounter is a vital first step in structuring teacher induction programs to respond to the needs of the teachers they serve.

They draw attention to the necessary challenge of professional development Evert and Stein [9] … “Teacher professional learning is essential if teachers are to change their practice to align with the increased expectations of career-and-college ready standards. Networked professional learning communities (NLCs) provide a promising structure to increase teacher knowledge and foster collaboration across schools. This study suggests that while NLCs can be beneficial, PD providers and school leaders should find ways to promote collective participation in NLCs. However, our results show that collective participation can take many forms. Overall, collaboration and a form of collective participation provide an essential support for implementing NLC concepts in classrooms.”

It is also necessary to mention the professional crisis, as stated by the authors Towers, Gewirtz, Maguire, Neumann [30] who did research among educators in England “... many of the participants expressed concerns about the reforms and raised questions about themselves staying in teaching as well detailing pressures that they thought could lead others to leave the profession. The paper also explored a counter-narrative that highlighted
teachers’ satisfaction with teaching and their desire to remain in the profession. In this section we want to consider some of the implications of these findings, for, as we have argued earlier, there may be a danger if educational researchers, policy-makers and other stakeholders reproduce and reinforce a ‘profession in crisis’ narrative without considering some alternative discourses.”

He draws attention not to a crisis, but to social pitfalls Oddone [19] which deals with “ongoing professional development (PD) enables school teachers to manage rapidly changing social and educational conditions, especially the isolating impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, research shows that commonly provided one-size-fits-all models of PD are often ineffective and leave teachers feeling frustrated. Formally structured approaches often overlook self-directed digitally mediated learning, and the innovative practices that some teachers already engage in.”

2. Personal Prerequisites

Finding and defining all the abilities, skills and knowledge that are needed to do the job of a special education teacher is, even after the text on the nature of the special education teacher given above, rather onerous. In the literature, we come across a large number of lists of competencies that are essential for the profession of the teacher, special education teacher or after-school instructor. In many ways, these views agree. The list of competencies of a special education teacher listed below shows the helping nature of this profession.

Lazarová [15], lists the necessary professional competencies of a teacher. The competencies that she discusses are as follows:

• for teaching and education – we include here, psycho-pedagogical competencies, which are focused on designing procedures that stimulate student learning and on the implementation of these approaches and educational activities (ability to analyse, formulate and design the curriculum). Communicative competencies enable effective communication with pupils, parents and other educators or specialists (the skill to motivate, establish and maintain contact with pupils, and the skill to regulate, organise and manage). The following are diagnostic competencies, which are based on the teacher’s ability to diagnose knowledge, learning styles, potential problems and other possibilities, relations among pupils and the classroom environment. We can also include the ability to identify the personal qualities of the child in this group, his/her dynamic and changes in the education process.

• personal competencies are another component that encourages the precise educational impact. Whether it concerns the skills of empathic, assertive or authentic behaviour, flexibility, the skill of acceptance of oneself and others, for example, the pupils, parents and colleagues.

• developing competencies – we place here the adaptive competency that is grounded in the teacher being able to navigate through social changes and to help the children with this. The skill to handle stress is included here too. Information competencies are important from the perspective of keeping up with the modern era. These are the skills to handle the literature, structure and make use of technology, even with the help of modern information technology. Research competencies and self-reflexive competencies should not be neglected by this group. They are important for a teacher so that he/she is able to consider his/her teaching activities and plan for changes in these activities. Last but not least, the autoregulative competencies allowing the perfection of pedagogical activities, teaching style and pedagogical skills are included here.
According to Sekera [25], an additional list of personality traits are important for staff in the field of special education. It includes flexibility – not sticking rigidly to the rules; maturity – controlling one’s needs and recognising the needs of others well; integrity and honesty; sound judgement; reliance on healthy common sense; identification with values that comply with the programme and the aim of the institution or individual; responsibility – reasonably confident and responsibly prudent – respecting the limits of his/her bestowed authority – communicative, predictable and cooperative; stable – tolerant of frustration; openness and authenticity – accepting justifiable criticism; firmly supporting individuals/clients; maintaining clear borders between their problems and those of the clients; supporting the independence of the individual; setting a good example.

The range of personal prerequisites is very wide. According to Kucharská et al. [14], it includes:

- communication abilities,
- problem-solving abilities,
- pedagogical tact,
- a sense of fairness,
- relation to children,
- ability to improvise,
- organisational abilities,
- presentable appearance and dress sense,
- skill to cooperate and negotiate,
- ability to flexibly react to changes.

The special education teacher must master the art of participatory listening and empathy, and not only when working with the family and children. They do not benefit the client if their empathy remains unexpressed, trapped in the mind of the teacher. The special education teacher must be able to see things as though they “were in the client’s shoes”, i.e. through the eyes of the client, find out how this world looks and how the client perceives it [17]. A genuine special educator, an expert in possession of a higher level of empathy, can uncover meaning from the client’s deep feelings that the client himself is not aware of (the ability to listen and perceive non-verbal communication).

A study was done in 2016 on the positive character traits of special education teachers. ... The main aim of the questioning was to understand which selected positive quality the participants use the most in practice. Kindness, which the staff made use of most often for encouragement and positive feedback, came in first. Next came integrity, humour, honesty and affection. The following traits such as fairness, forgiveness, teamwork, humility, persistence and last of all enthusiasm came in next [13].

The list of competencies for the profession of special education teacher is therefore varied. Undoubtedly, the traditional abilities include the ability to intervene in individual ways for the benefit of a disadvantaged individual, to lead and motivate individuals in the educational process and beyond, to retrain and offset specific shortcomings, etc. However, the options for special educators are not exhausted in this way. At present, in the Czech Republic, when we consider global trends, there is a kind of interdisciplinary breakdown of borders and expansion of the range of potential competencies of special educators, for example, the possibility of using various therapeutic approaches enriching existing concepts [18].

The terms multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, together with other terms such as multi organisational or interprofessional, are deemed to be very similar, if not identical,
in meaning by Kaňák [10]. Whatever you call this collaboration, it is essential that all professionals participate in decision-making processes, communicate together and aim for the most comprehensive care of the individual. For users of services, support consisting primarily of the cooperation of experts plays an important role. They can combine their knowledge, skills and experience and provide just as comprehensive help as the user of the service needs and requires. The concept of multidisciplinary teamwork was created in the 1970–80s by professionals who worked in services for people with mental disabilities and workers providing care for diabetic patients. The growing interest in this approach has led to the emergence of many definitions dealing with cooperation at the interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary levels [16].

Interprofessional education is uniquely challenging for helping professions programs because it involves coordination and collaboration with students from different helping professions, and often with large numbers of such students. Interprofessional education also represents a critical component of training for preparing practice-ready collaborative professionals [3].

While blended learning in higher education is valued for various reasons such as addressing students' needs for flexibility, blended learning implementation remains a challenging process. Because the teacher lies at the heart of any educational change process, the current qualitative study investigates crucial teacher attributes for blended learning implementation from the perspective of experts. Experts can analyze deep structures of complex organizational problems and hold process knowledge that can generate practical effect [4].

With regard to the diversity of the specialisation of a special education teacher, his/her work is still very diverse in connection with his/her professional specialisation or the selected target group of individuals/clients. These may specifically be:

- performance of the teaching profession in regular primary schools, special primary schools, primary schools for gifted children, and practical schools, but rarely in lifelong learning programmes;
- in the methodical guidance of teachers at primary schools and the registration of pupils, the provision of counselling to families in the field of education and training;
- with regards to counselling, methodological and diagnostic activities as well as special pedagogical care, it appears in pedagogical-psychological counselling centres, special pedagogical centres, centres of educational care;
- additionally in social services – residential (e.g. homes for the elderly, homes for the disabled, homes with special regimes), outpatient (e.g. daycare centres, day hospitals, low-threshold facilities for children and youth) and field services (e.g. personal assistance, care service, support of independent living, early care), in social care institutions,
- educational activities, e.g. in children’s homes, children’s homes with a school, diagnostic institutes;
- non-governmental non-profit organisations focus on a given target group of people in connection with special education or social work.

Last but not least, a special education teacher, especially in primary schools, helps his/her colleagues to cope with the educational and training difficulties of pupils.

Special educators are employed mainly in schools and schooling facilities intended for individuals with special educational needs. Recently, special educators have also found employment in mainstream schools. Furthermore, they can work in medical facilities
and also in welfare. Their scope of work is therefore very diverse according to where the profession is practised.

The important thought, support of children’s the development should be crucial for each teacher and teacher assistant. The idea that the development of each child is important for future career and building the basic for future educational process, cannot be taken away from children due to non-activity of their parents or social disadvantages. The limits in family’s cooperation and communication cannot stop the pedagogical work and its influence on children’s development. Therefore, the pedagogical workers should offer friendly and partner’s attitude and work, which could change life of many children [28].

The special education teacher should learn as much as possible about the “inner world” of the given person and choose the most appropriate methods to help, support or motivate them. These methods will lead to harmonisation of personality, to knowing how to live with disabilities and to the greatest possible socialisation and education. It is therefore essential that the help of a special education teacher also stands on social and emotional pillars.

Teacher innovation is becoming increasingly important. School support for innovation (SSI) offers critical work resources and forms professional capital that facilitates teacher innovation. However, the concrete mechanisms that determine how SSI affects innovation remain unclear. Using survey data from 1,123 teachers in China, this study explored the relationship between different sources of SSI (i.e., supervisor, colleagues, and students) and teacher innovation, the mediating effects of teacher self-efficacy, and the moderating effects of teachers’ trust in their supervisors, colleagues, and students. Results showed that colleagues’ and students’ support was positively correlated with teacher innovation and that this relationship was mediated by teacher self-efficacy. Supervisor support neither predicted teacher innovation nor had a significant relationship with teacher self-efficacy. Teachers’ trust moderated the relationship to varying degrees. Teachers’ trust in their students positively moderated the effect of student support on teacher innovation, while the other two types of trust did not affect the relationships between supervisor or colleague support and teacher innovation to a large degree [5].

Reflective and critical thinking and self-reflection are important factors in maintaining competitiveness in the international labor market, which is associated with the increasing complexity and accumulation of knowledge. Requirements for teacher training are increasing; both teachers and students need good reflective thinking and learning skills. The method of reflective dialogue can effectively solve a number of pedagogical problems of both practical training and the formation of an effective and full-fledged personality [11].

**Methods**

The main of this research was to collect reflections on the profession of a special pedagogue in the working environment. This research was focused on special pedagogues in the first stage of primary schools.

This research involved several sub-aims which are:
- What abilities, skills, and attributes are from a special pedagogue’s point of view the most important for this profession?
- What strategies do special pedagogues use during stressful situations?
- Are there any possible mistakes which should be sorted in order to improve the special pedagogue profession?
Based on the problem which we decided to investigate there are two types of research which we could use qualitative or quantitative research or their combination. Eriksen [8] described the difference between these two types like this: In social science, there are two types of research specifically quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research finds out a little about many things, whereas qualitative research finds out a lot about a little group of subjects. Akker van der [2] claims that qualitative research is a detailed understanding of meaning, while quantitative research provides some generalization of data. In the context of our research, we decided to use the qualitative research method specifically we decide to carry out some interviews.

In nowadays rapidly evolving society new research topics occur on daily bases. For some of these topics, qualitative research is suitable due to its flexibility. We are convinced that qualitative research has its own place in pedagogical science, mainly in special pedagogy [7].

3. Respondents’ characteristic
What type of respondents we have chosen and why? The logic of our choice corresponds with the focus of this paper and with research questions. The respondents’ choice should be done in order to maximise the variability of transfiguration, which raises the chance for us to observe the relations between conditional and unconditional transfiguration [22]. The target group was not eliminated by age, gender, colour, religion, education, or the length of working experience in the position of the special pedagogue. To be able to answer the research questions we collected data from a specific group of respondents. The participants are workers in the position of “special pedagogue”. Thus, they have done pedagogical practice in the first stage of primary school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Did they achieve the minimum qualification for this profession?</th>
<th>The length of pedagogical practice</th>
<th>Organizer of the school</th>
<th>The school’s location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R n. 1</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>University – master’s degree</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Nation - region</td>
<td>Capital city – Prague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R n. 2</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>University – master’s degree</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Nation - region</td>
<td>Central Bohemia – Kladno city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R n. 3</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>University – bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Nation - region</td>
<td>Capital city - Prague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R n. 4</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>University – master’s degree</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Nation - region</td>
<td>Capital city - Prague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R n. 5</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>University – master’s degree</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Central Bohemia – Kolin city</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The interviews
We conducted in total five semi-structured interviews with which the respondents agreed to be shared for purposes of the research. All interviews were recorded, and respondents knew about that and agreed with it. In case some of the respondents would not agree, the researcher was prepared to make written notes of the respondents’ answers. The interviews were conducted in the working environment of each respondent, so it was
a familiar environment for all respondents. To all respondents, we offered to conduct the interview in a coffee shop or somewhere else where they might find it comfortable. None of the respondents used this option. All interviews were conducted without the presence of someone else. To build an open and friendly relationship between the research and participants general questions were asked at the beginning. The researcher used the general questions to build trust and a friendly atmosphere. All these aspects helped to achieve a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

The research aimed to ask all questions similarly without any change of intonation and accent with the purpose to show interest in all participants’ answers. We did not forget to analyse all respondents’ reactions, behaviour, and non-verbal communication such as movements, gestures, mimics, smiles, laughter, and eye movement. All interviews were conducted without any embarrassment which would ruin the trusting atmosphere between the researcher and participants. All respondents proved their interest in the topic of special pedagogy.

Every research which is conducted with people brings diverse risks for participants and researchers. The main duty of a researcher is to eliminate risks and provide the maximum possible protection and security for all participants and collected data. To achieve this a researcher should follow ethical codices and own conscience [20].

The main purpose of research’s ethical principles is to avoid any conflicts between researchers and participants and between possible donators as well.

Results

As mentioned above the research involved several aims and was focused on several questions such as:

What abilities and skills are from a special pedagogue’s point of view the most important for this profession?

What strategies do special pedagogues use during stressful situations?

Are there any possible mistakes which should be sorted in order to improve the special pedagogue profession?

Therefore, this part will be divided into three parts and each part will focus on these questions.

What abilities, skills, and attributes are from a special pedagogue’s point of view the most important for this profession?

All participants mentioned the ability to diagnose which is reasonable in the context of special pedagogy. Second, the most mentioned was didactic competency, which mentioned four of five participants. It is obvious that these two abilities cooperate specially in the context of special pedagogy where after diagnosing a special pedagogue must apply the correct didactic approach which should originate from a student’s needs. As another important skill participants mentioned communication and characteristic personal abilities. The next presented abilities were mentioned individually but it needs to be presented, so we can highlight the individuality of each special pedagogue. For one participant is important to orient in the support system and to have a driving licence, whereas another participant does not mention any of these and prioritises rase tolerance and ability to cope with stress. Special pedagogues consider more important attributes than abilities and skills. Further, often participants mentioned patience or creativity. One
participant also mentioned the need for self-educating and its connection with abilities. It is obvious from the collected data that participants of this research apply diverse abilities, skills, and attributes in diverse order. From participants’ point of view the abilities, skills, and attributes are diverse and need to be personalized for the needs of each working environment. For the personal attributes, all respondents mentioned empathy. This answer could be supported by another research which we conducted [27]. The research was conducted with students of special pedagogy majors, and they were choosing their personal qualities for this profession. „Another question which was in the questionnaire was a student’s evaluation of personal assumptions. Almost half of the students identified empathy as the most important personal quality (47% = 236 interviewers). Evaluation of student’s personal assumptions at these majors” shows not any other personal quality was identified as often as empathy. The second most important was social awareness which was identified by 24% (120 interviewers) of respondents. The third was the ability to solve problematic situations and conflicts (24% = 120 interviewers). Nevertheless, responsibility, communication, consistency, and teamwork are important as well [27].

What strategies do special pedagogues use during stressful situations?
To answer this research question, we firstly identified what the most stressful occasion for participants is. The profession of the special pedagogue, similarly to any other profession which fits in the category of so-called ‘helping professions’ requires a higher level of responsibility, which for workers could be a bit of a burden. Furthermore, special pedagogues who do diagnoses are responsible for correct diagnosis which determinates further work with a child. Thus, a mistake in diagnosis could be fatal and could be discovered a few years later. All participants talked about some level of stress. However, all of them have defined it differently. On the other hand, all participants agreed on another stressful part which is to follow the pace of a child with a health handicap. Mainly they mentioned their ability to keep themselves in the background, calm themselves down, and be very patient sometimes. Sometimes it happens that it is hard for a special pedagogue to see a sense and future in their work. About this situation, four participants talked. The profession could lose its sense, or it could be seen as stereotypical. All of this is mostly because of low feedback from a student or a student’s family. This fact was reflected by all respondents.

The most used stress relief technique mentioned by all participants was to calm down their minds and their bodies, right in the working environment. These responses are alarming because this cannot be influenced by schools, length of practice, or by the place where the school is. The next most mentioned tactic by two participants is compensation through leisure time activities and the application of a positive attitude. Both answers are from special pedagogues working in the central Bohemia region. Therefore, we can assume that there are better options for leisure time activities. Non-relevant for this question is the length of the practice as well. Within this research question, we focused on problematic of burnout, which was mentioned by four participants who all are aware of this danger and its consequences. One participant mentioned they observe begging of burnout syndrome in themselves. This was not the participant with the longest practice.

In contrast with what we assumed none of the respondents mentioned ethical problems in the pedagogical profession. However, as Čech and Hormandlová [6] claim a professional should avoid any assumptions, discriminations, and conflicts of interest.
Are there any possible mistakes which should be sorted in order to improve the special pedagogue profession?

In relation to the data that we collected all respondents see limitations within the administrative part of their profession which keeps others from “important” activities. Further, all respondents mentioned the problem of limit right during their work, and problematic of raise of modern technologies and cooperation with modern technologies during teaching. Cooperation with modern technologies was mentioned in the context of insufficient education and non-reflection of own abilities and skills. This fact highlighted all respondents, and they claimed that there is no problem to buy technologies but often it is a less structured purchase and sometimes the technologies do not cooperate. Therefore, often there is a duplicity of technologies which cannot be used to their full extent.

The next issue originating from collected data is that the working load of a special pedagogue is wide. As mentioned by all respondents, always any of them could name diverse professions which they could do with their education, and they would be noticed as full members of education. Specifically, they mentioned positions of pedagogues, tutors, social workers, and activating workers. Charting of attitudes towards self-professional education pointed out the deficiency in offered and realized services. All respondents self-educate themselves and actively work on their progress in the field of special pedagogy. This situation is positively evaluated by us. To be specific we talked more about the improvement of abilities and skills and deepening of existing knowledge. However, all participants evaluate the option of supervision, self-reflection, and self-evaluation as insufficient service.

Discussion

The trend of inclusive education is characteristic of contemporary Czech education. This stage of not excluding people with disabilities from the mainstream is understood as the last approach presented in the development of care for people with disabilities for the time being. There is an obvious effort to create a school environment that will provide all students with the same chances to achieve an adequate level of education and at the same time will respect the right to individual development. Inclusive ideas that being different is normal are being fulfilled. Otherness is no longer perceived as a negative specificity, but is viewed as a common feature, the originality of every being. However, Czech education and special education had to reach this stage after a complex political and social development.

The profession of special education did not arise by itself or by chance, it arose from the needs of educators and students thanks to the inclusive efforts of society and the support of equal education. More and more demands are placed on educators with the range of needs of children with specific educational needs, which is very broad, and therefore it is not possible for one single person, for example a teacher, to be able to grasp everything and solve it correctly and efficiently. Just as medicine has its experts in certain fields, education also needs its own specific experts who will support the quality of the educational process at school and the development of pupils’ competences, they will support teachers and parents of children.

Professional training itself is taken by the professional public as an already set line. It is necessary for this line to reflect not only professional changes, but also social changes that come with each generation.
The result of this research highlights the fact that the most important species of the special pedagogue profession is understanding of this profession which depends on external needs, the context of society, and understanding between a special pedagogue and a school. The important aspect of the special pedagogue profession is diplomacy. The ability to apply an appropriate communication strategy is influenced by many factors such as the needs of a school, personal characteristics of a personal, influence of stress factors, ability to cope with stress, and experience of an individual. All these and we could definitely name other factors which influence the application of communication strategies. The correct application of the right communication strategies influences the quality and constructivism of cooperation and in the wider context, it could influence the educational process and society’s understanding. No less important is the personal interest and effectiveness of special pedagogues’ work. Further, about this problem writes Růžičková [24].

Legislative delineation can only help to delineate the vocationally oriented requirements that can be obtained through the vocational training of university students. We keep coming across questions of moral values and attitudes that each of us brings from our family, and social thinking also has a great influence. A perfect special pedagogue, just like any other professional, is constantly developing himself during his professional life. Through our interviews, we confirmed the fact that theory and practice must go together, as found in Stewart and Jansky's research [29]. An integral part of the information found is the need for professional development, which can consist not only in learning new methods, techniques or knowledge, so that we strengthen our competences [9], but we must also think about personal growth, which helps us stay in the system of helping professions, so as to avoid a professional crisis [30] that can strengthen us or put us out of business.

In respondents’ answers, diverse topics were detected which often correlate with each other, but the individual topics were detected as well. These individual topics might be interesting for further research. However, the purposes of this research were irrelevant. Based on participants’ answers were assume that it is important to limit administrative work as all our respondents consider the educational part of their work more important. With relief from administrative work, there would be new space for further education of special pedagogues, which would positively influence the effectiveness of their work. Further, there is another research question what type of administrative work is the most time-consuming?

Another interesting fact could be taken from this research, which is that the role of the special pedagogue is expanding into primary schools as well. This finding should be more related to inclusive education, pressures, and innovations. On the other hand, it is obvious that a special pedagogue is a professional who can and should mostly influence pupils’ life. Overall, it is more than a good idea to familiarise parents with the profession of special pedagogues and their professional profile, and their options to use a special pedagogue’s services.

Another conducted step could be deepening other pedagogues’ knowledge about work realized with children with special education needs. The best form would be more education or more frequent consultations with a school’s special pedagogue. The aim of these consolations would be to get more information, general and expertise, what type of help and how it could be delivered to a child with special education needs.

Conclusions

In respondents’ answers, diverse topics were detected which often correlate with each other, but the individual topics were detected as well. These individual topics might be interesting for further research. However, the purposes of this research were irrelevant. Based on participants’ answers were assume that it is important to limit administrative work as all our respondents consider the educational part of their work more important. With relief from administrative work, there would be new space for further education of special pedagogues, which would positively influence the effectiveness of their work. Further, there is another research question what type of administrative work is the most time-consuming?

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Another conducted step could be deepening other pedagogues’ knowledge about work realized with children with special education needs. The best form would be more education or more frequent consultations with a school’s special pedagogue. The aim of these consolations would be to get more information, general and expertise, what type of help and how it could be delivered to a child with special education needs.
In terms of coping with stress for special pedagogues is important to fully understand themselves and to be able to work with themselves. As the best form of support, they mention lifelong learning either through organized education courses or self-education. It is important to be assertive and use supervision whether it is available at their working place. As expected, they mention the need for rest as well. Some is resting actively throughout some sports; someone prefers to charge their psychological energy with proper sleep and relaxing activities. Most of our respondents agree that a very important form of support for them is their family, friends, and sometimes troubles in their own life. Thus, they do not have to think only about their professional life.

REFERENCES

1. Act No. 563/2004, Collection of Law, on Pedagogical Staff and on the Amendment to Some Other Acts.