

## INCLUSION IN EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION AS A STRATEGY FOR WORKING WITH DIFFERENTNESS

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Submitted in August, 2006

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This paper focuses on the concept of differentness and the unique needs of persons with disabilities and the ways how this concept can be used in the educational environment. At first we focus on the general concepts of differentness and equal opportunities from the perspectives of the Olympic ideals of amateurism and from the point of view of the International classification of functioning and disability of WHO (2001). Later we discuss the meaning of the term inclusion from the historical perspective and from the point of view of the theoretical approach of two central/eastern European authors (Jesenský, 1998; Vítková, 1999). Finally we explore the potential of experiential education programs in understanding differentness and enhancing full inclusion. We provide specific examples of programs and activities which can help to enhance the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the educational environment.

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*Keywords: Differentness, integration, inclusion, disability, experiential education.*

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENTNESS AND TRANSCENDENCE

Differentness was not always a controversial topic. The problem of the one and the many, identical and different, appears to be a fundamental problem in the history of thought. Differentness of beings can be seen not only through their shapes, but also in their backgrounds. Contexts allow us to gain deeper levels of understanding of beings and phenomena. On the other hand, to what point can we talk about unique identity, or about differences? About what differences are we talking? Do we mean differences in shapes, sizes, or differentness in transcending the actual world?

How can we look at disability from the perspective of difference, especially in the area of physical activities and sports? Certainly we could think of differentness in sport in simplistic terms – using scales such as: better–worse, slower–faster, lower–higher, etc. There are different modes of differences and how we use them in this postmodern time is truly essential. Are differences of shapes, sizes, or abilities really something so important? Human life cannot be averaged or generalized. The way of being is always the unique being of a given person, not general animal being. From this perspective, we should not look at disability as something escaping the norm or average (Titzl, 2000). Disability is only one of many types of differentness. Every human is in a way different, specific, and unique. Do all people, regardless of their (dis)abilities have equal opportunities for their own authentic existence?

### EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES IN SPORT

The idea of fairness and equal opportunities, construed literally, would be extremely idealistic and even utopian. Equal opportunities would be possible only if all people were born to be identical. Every human being is different from biological, psychological, social and spiritual perspectives. Inequalities exist, differences are natural, and not all inequalities are morally problematic. The principle of equal opportunities could therefore only require eliminating those inequalities which could in turn unfairly advantage those whose physical and psychological dispositions are comparable. Inequality is a typical characteristic of competitive sport, where the principle of difference is used to compare individuals and their differences. The purpose of competition is to find and show differences (inequalities) among athletes or teams. There are winners and losers; we must ask important questions about what justifies the differences (Földesi & Földesi, 1990). It is relatively easy to provide formal access to sport to athletes regardless of their nationality, traditions, or cultural conditions or to eliminate the effects of their personal characteristics (gender, weight, or different kinds of disability). In disability sport, athletes compete in groups (classes) according to their functional abilities. In team sports, athletes have been assigned specific points so that athletes with more severe disabilities would have access to these team sports (i.e. basketball, rugby, volleyball, amputee hockey). What is much more difficult is to change inequalities in material resources (unequal economic conditions

affecting access to equipment and facilities). This is even more evident in disabled sport, where advances in technology allow athletes to take part in a variety of sport activities, but this special equipment (prosthetics, wheelchairs, tricycles) is very expensive and inequality in necessary equipment means unfair disadvantages to some athletes. Only if all athletes have comparable material conditions, would competition be solely affected by differences among athletes (talent, abilities, skills and training).

The solution to inequality of opportunity in sport was meant to be the ideal of aristocratic principles and elitism expressed as conditions for total amateurism. A precondition of amateurism (equal opportunities with the assumption of mutual respect characterized as *fair play*) is a certain kind of stratification, specifically material stratification. Only athletes with a sufficient amount of financial resources and available leisure time (in other words: aristocracy practicing sport for its own values) had the opportunity to take part in amateur sports. Purely amateur sports have become far less viable, and the difficulties of defining differences between amateur and professional have become more acute. Therefore the requirement of amateur status was removed from the Olympic games and became history as of 1981. Certainly this situation is very undemocratic as the winner can only be the one, who is professionally paid for the whole time of preparation. The issue of equal opportunities thus no longer is the real value to be fulfilled. Inequalities in access to resources, rehabilitation, finances (including equipment) are undoubtedly examples of sport inequalities, which can also be called “sport apartheid” (Lipiec, 1988). We can today, similarly to the time calling for the values of amateur sports, think about equalities more on a formal level, but most likely not in actual real practice.

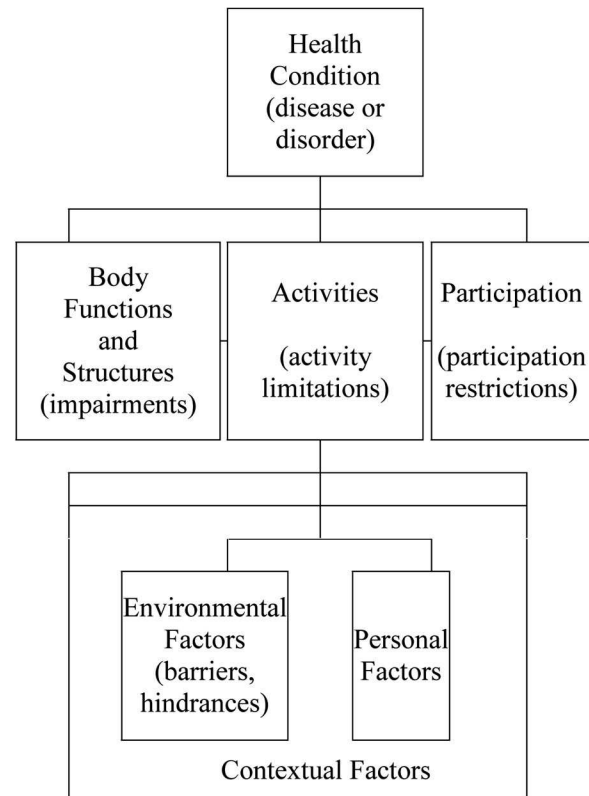
## DIFFERENTNESS AND DISABILITY FROM THE VIEW OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Many people would believe that disability is a limiting factor, which hinders equal opportunities to participation in life activities and self actualization. In this part we will discuss the recent model of the World health organisation and try to explain equal opportunities with the use of this model (Fig. 1).

According to WHO (2001, 12): “*Impairments are problems in body function or structure as a significant deviation or loss.*” According to Sherrill (2004) disabilities are explained by ICF as: “*Activity limitations. These must be severe enough to interfere with activities of daily living*

**Fig. 1**

The ICF model of human functioning and disability – World Health Organization (2001)



(ADL) like eating and dressing, general education, employment, communication, mobility, and the like.”

One of the unique contributions of ICF is that it focuses on the important role of “contextual factors” (personal and environmental, see Fig. 1). Impairments might create some sorts of limitations in activities and restrictions in participation. With modern technological advancements, access to transportation and public buildings is enhanced and restrictions are reduced. Thus greater participation and more equal opportunities are possible. This is true particularly among societies and persons with higher socio-economic status. In turn, greater participation in activities creates greater opportunities for learning social behaviors and interaction among persons with and without disabilities. Personal factors (Fig. 1) are features of the individual that are not part of health conditions or impairment. These might be gender, height, race, fitness, character style, sense of humor, charm, etc. These personal factors can sometimes be more important than the sole fact that one has some kind of impairment. On the other hand many people still hold negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities, but we will discuss this problem later.

## **INCLUSION VERSUS SEGREGATION (FROM ANCIENT GREECE TO MODERN TIMES)**

Inclusion is a relatively modern term meaning different forms of being together, unifying, cohesion or even harmonious connection. Unity created in this way is internally heterogeneous, it is a prerequisite of a truly firm union of different parts in respect to differences, tolerance of uniqueness, and perception of differentness as an opportunity for enrichment.

What could we imagine under this term “inclusion”? Is inclusion identification or becoming the same? Most definitely not. A person who uses a wheelchair is not identical to a person walking on his/her own feet. Is it coequality? From the perspective of the legislature we are all equal, but are civic rights used in the same way by one who is blind and by one who can use sight to his/her advantage? Is inclusion assimilation? If yes, should immigrants assimilate to the culture of their new country or should they try to adjust their new environments and enrich them with new cultural meanings? Is inclusion full inclusion? Could then minorities (a different ethnic, racial, religious, educational or political background, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation or different abilities – unique needs) lose something of their uniqueness? Is such full inclusion really possible? Without clear definition and common understanding, how can we discuss this process of inclusion or integration?

We can not even think about the inclusion of people with disabilities in ancient Greece, where children born with disabilities reportedly were left in the Tayget mountains or killed. Their society, build on fitness as a virtue, did not perceive the personal value of every human and his/her life.

On the other hand we can find in Greek mythology the example of coexistence of the major community and someone with a disability, namely with the god Hefaistos (Hephaestus). The Greek god Hefaistos, the god of fire and the blacksmith's craft, and the son of Zeus and Hera, was so ugly and weak that Hera threw him as weakling off the mountain of Olympus. The other goddesses saved him and brought him up. When Hera saw the beautiful jewel which he made for her, she arranged a blacksmith workshop for him right on mount Olympus. Although the gods laughed at him as a limping cripple, it was Hefaistos who build their palaces in Olympus, made the armor for the hero Achilles, and also made Pandora the woman who brings evil to people (as the punishment for Prometheus' gift of fire to people). Hefaistos (Hephaestus) was worshipped as the patron of craftsmen, and up till modern times serves as an example of the value of the life (hopefully also human life), lived not in the view of being different, but from the point of view of activity and work.

Regardless of this unique example of inclusion the ancient era is regarded as an age of repression, when people with disabilities were driven by the existential needs of society. At this time people were either killed or put aside by society. Under the later influence of religion, mostly Christianity, the attitude of society toward basic human values changed. Among the main principles of Christianity were: a) you shall not kill; and b) you shall help others. In medieval times many hospitals and institutions for the disabled were built to provide for their basic needs. Kábele (1992) called this time the “era of charity care” which was followed by the “era of humanistic care”.

The next stage in the development of society in relation to persons with disabilities was the “era of rehabilitative and preventive care” (Kábele, 1992), which can be characterized by long lasting preparation of persons with disabilities for occupation and social inclusion. In the Czech Republic this era is represented by Dr. Rudolf Jedlička, who has created a very precise system of comprehensive rehabilitation (medical, educational, occupational, legislative, economical and social). The goal of this care was to include people with disabilities in society and prepare them for an active and productive life style. The negative aspect of this era was that people with disabilities were being prepared for inclusion outside of mainstream society.

The current phase of care for persons with disabilities is often called the “inclusive era” (Jesenský, 1998; Vitková, 1998, 1999) and is characterized by the effort to include people with disabilities in mainstream society. Jesenský (1998) distinguishes two types of inclusion. These are: a) assimilation and b) coadaptation. Assimilation means acceptance of the identity of mainstream society and rejection of the original identity. An example can be placing children with disabilities in general schools without any support, which may result in potential but many times in false inclusion, unstable in its foundations. On the other hand there is coadaptation, which is based on partner communication and cooperation. An example can be the workplace, where new technologies can allow the same working efficiency of people with disabilities and those without disabilities. This kind of inclusion leads to the creation of a new identity coherent with majority as well as minority status. The result of such inclusion is true and firm inclusion.

## **POTENTIAL OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE COURSES (EXPERIENCES FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC)**

Experiential education as a pedagogical discipline is still searching for its specifications, relationships, and systematic inclusion into the group of pedagogical

disciplines. We use the term “experiential education” as a theoretical and practical discipline that uses initiation and analysis of experiences. These experiences can then be transformed into other parts of life. Goals of such educational processes can be practiced in different environments (school, out of school, natural, urban, cultural) with different groups (age, social status, professional status, and other demographic factors) with the use of different activities (games of all kinds, creative and drama workshops, discussions, physically and psychologically challenging activities, self-exploring and team building activities). For experiential education the experience is the means not the goal. The goal of experiential education is the ancient Greek educational ideal of comprehensive development of personality aiming for harmony (Jirásek, 2004).

In the following text we describe inclusive courses from the environment of Outward bound, specifically from the organization the Vacation school of Lipnice. This vacation school is a Czech member of Outward bound working in the Czech Republic since 1977. The main idea at the beginning was quite simple: instead of organizing special courses only for people with disabilities (segregation), courses were initially based on typical courses for persons without disabilities and adapted so that people with disabilities could take part in them (but were not exclusively designed only for the disabled). They were thus inclusive courses. Krump (2004) claims that there is a great danger of misunderstanding the term “inclusion”. Inclusion could be stated as simply “being together”. Being together is not designed for “them”, those who need our help, care and understanding. Such an approach would be just false social feeling, not respecting the fact that experiencing difference is enriching. It appears that this “being together” can be much more beneficial than expected to people who are young, healthy, self-confident and at the same time without any strong experience acquired by confrontations with a different way of life. We can use differences for the enrichment of all involved participants, but simply putting people who are different in the same circumstances might be sometimes contra productive.

According to Sherrill (2004) and Sherrill and Tripp (1991), in the process of inclusion the key role is played by attitudes, which can be defined as the predisposition or readiness to deal with a certain target group (in this case people with disabilities) or behavior (activity with the given target group). In order to alter attitudes toward individuals with disabling conditions, distorted cognition that is supported by deeply felt emotions must be confronted. The first step in the reeducation process must focus on the individual at an emotional level.

The key factor for successful inclusion seems to be a personal approach to differences and uniqueness and our relationship to differentness. Only if we perceive dif-

ferences as opportunities for enrichment and personal growth, and not as hindrances or threats, can we respect others with their unique needs and succeed in true inclusion. This does not mean that we ignore impairments. This does not mean that we don't take into account differences. This means natural perception of differences. The superficial view that people with disabilities are poor victims of misfortune, who can not do many things, can be changed by experiencing the specific capabilities of these people in areas, where usually people without disabilities are not capable.

Have you ever tried to move using a wheelchair? Well try it – try to sit on the chair and go up the curb, you will see that paraplegics can do much more than you can do. Try to put on blindfolds and you will start to admire blind people who can with little trouble move around the city or in nature. Examples of the efficiency of disability simulation activities can be found in study of Jones et al. (1981). Attitudes of children toward individuals with disabilities changed positively after a 5 hour program that included simulation of disabling conditions. Through the simulation of different disabling conditions, individuals may gain new sensitivity toward individuals with disabilities and what must be faced on a daily basis.

“Simply “being together” is comparable with Plato's words from his seventh letter (focusing also on the meaning of philosophy for human life), where he points out that he will not write anything (about how to teach philosophy) as it can (?) not be taught as other sciences, but can only be learned in life and by being with people, just as the flame is set up from the spark, this learning will be born in the soul and them will grow by itself” (Plato, 1996, 54).

Contact theory posits that contact between individuals with differences tends to produce changes in attitude (Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969; Sherrill, 2004). The direction of change depends largely on the conditions under which contact has taken place; favorable conditions tend to produce positive attitude shifts whereas unfavorable conditions tend to produce negative attitude shifts. According to Amir (1969) some of the favorable conditions that tend to improve social climate promotes contact; (a) the contact is intimate rather than casual; (b) the contact is pleasant or rewarding; (c) the contact situation involves common goals that are higher ranking than individual goals.

Instructors and participants in inclusive courses are certain that this “being together” brings gains to all involved. At the point where rational arguments (about equality, performance, talents, disabilities, strength and weakness) fail, room for experiences, which can be more powerful than a thousand words, arises. There is growing interest in inclusion – there are new inclusive schools, many non-governmental organizations and much profes-

sional and popular literature. Still inclusive principles are not firmly embedded in our society and we need to go much further in order to prepare society for the full inclusion of people who are different. For inclusion in experiential education Deborah Sugerman (2001) suggested two possible approaches: a) a compensatory perspective and b) a transcendental perspective. In using the first approach, instructors try to compensate for missing functions or abilities (often by providing support and special equipment), while in the second approach instructors serve as facilitators of participants in the process of gaining control over their lives and independence from their surroundings.

Below we provide examples of earlier mentioned types of inclusion: a) assimilation and b) coadaptation (Jesenský, 1998) in the area of experiential education. An example of the assimilation approach is: a school group in an outdoor education program, where a student who uses a wheelchair is present at this program, but in most cases does not take part in activities together with the group. He is a spectator or has a supplementary program, because the places are not wheelchair accessible. An example of the coadaptation approach is: adaptation in all activities so that all students (including a student with disabilities) would have equal opportunity to take part or to decide about their participation.

Impairments or disabilities are usually perceived as significant differences, and many people do not know how to be with differences. In the activities of experiential education, their participants can learn not only to be with differences, but to enrich their lives by many differences, impairments being one of these. By learning to open one's mind to differentness each of us can become better prepared to face the challenges of common and not so common days of their lives and be able to accept differences and provide appropriate help if needed. From our experience one of the most appropriate places for such learning can be in the area of experiential education, where there is a place to challenge ones beliefs, try new challenges and receive feedback about who we are and what we do.

The study was realized with the support of Grant MSM 6198959221.

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## INKLUZE V ZÁŽITKOVÉ PEDAGOGICE JAKO STRATEGIE PRO PŘÍSTUP K JINAKOSTI

(Souhrn anglického textu)

Tento příspěvek se zaměřuje na koncept jinakosti, specifické potřeby osob se zdravotním postižením a způsoby práce s jinakostí v oblasti výchovy a vzdělávání. Nejprve se zaměřujeme na koncepty jinakosti a rovných příležitostí z pohledu olympijských ideálů a teoretického modelu klasifikace postižení (International classification of functioning and disability of WHO, 2001). Dále se věnujeme vymezení pojmu inkluze z historického a teoretického pohledu autorů střední Evropy (Jesenský, 1998 a Vítková, 1999). Nakonec uvádíme příklady

využití zážitkové pedagogiky pro pochopení a přijetí jinakosti a facilitaci plného začlenění jedinců se zdravotním postižením do společnosti. Nabízíme specifické příklady programů a aktivit, které mohou podpořit začlenění osob se zdravotním postižením ve vzdělávacím prostředí.

*Klíčová slova: jinakost, integrace, inkluze, postižení, zážitková pedagogika.*

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