

Benefits and difficulties in educating of pupils with severe multiple disability and possibilities of professional support of their teachers

(scientific study)

Jiří Kantor

Abstract: *Educating of pupils with severe multiple disability brings specific benefits as well as difficulties for the teachers. These pupils are educated mainly in special schools in the Czech Republic and the classes often consist of several pupils with severe functional disability at once. The paper presents the outcomes of a qualitative study of this issue in Czech schools. The qualitative design was chosen because of the lack of theoretical background in this area of education. The sample consisted of 45 teachers and 4 students with severe physical, intellectual and communication disability. The main method of data collection included semi-structured interviews with teachers and observations of the educational process. Open coding and categorisation were used for data analysis. The outcomes of the study are discussed in the context of professional support provided to teachers. Various models of teacher support are discussed. Moreover, an association with the burnout syndrome is outlined. A scheme for further research is based on quantitative methodology.*

Keywords: *Multiple disability, education, supervision, Balint groups, burnout*

1 Introduction

The pressure exerted on teachers who educate pupils with severe multiple disability is determined by a number of specific factors. Teachers who educate intact pupils do not encounter these factors at all or to a limited extent. This situation is caused by the specifics of the educational process, personality characteristics of pupils with severe multiple disability as well as the educators. Up to date, professional literature has paid minimum attention to this issue and there are no available domestic studies. Similarly, contemporary foreign literature lacks conclusions that could be transferable

to the Czech educational environment. One of the reasons is the difference between the educational systems in the Czech Republic and in other countries (particularly those in Western Europe). The popular inclusion trend allows more and more pupils to study in mainstream education, while special schools have fewer pupils with special educational needs. This also applies to pupils with severe multiple disability (Downing, 2008). Research in the area of special schools is of marginal importance as a result of the social situation in these countries, while considerable attention is paid to inclusive education.

On the other hand, the Czech Republic is one of the countries with a significant proportion of special education, as documented by current statistical data (Michalík, 2015). For pupils with severe multiple disability, attending a special school during compulsory school attendance is virtually the only educational opportunity. Some classes that follow an educational programme of a special primary school have most, or all, pupils with severe multiple disability. If these pupils enrol in school, the staff educating these pupils should be stable from a long-term perspective, so that the pupils need not repeatedly undergo the difficult adaptation to new teachers after a short period of time, etc. For the headteachers this is a challenging task, which requires the development of appropriate conditions for the teachers and teacher assistants, so that the factors supporting excessive staff fluctuation in these classes can be minimized. What are some of the difficulties that teachers encounter in educating of pupils with severe multiple disability and which strategies effectively help them overcome these difficulties?

This paper presents selected conclusions of a domestic quality-based study, which mapped the education of pupils with severe multiple disability. The paper will consider conclusions that have not been published so far and that relate to personal teachers' benefits, difficulties and coping with these difficulties in the education of pupils with multiple disability. The conclusions of this study will be also related to the issue of the burnout syndrome and professional teacher support because these topics provide enough material for the development of the required theoretical background and theoretical framework for discussion.

2 Overview of significant studies and conclusions in professional literature

The overview of research studies and conclusions in professional literature, which will be further used for the development of theoretical background, is divided into the areas of pressure exerted on teachers and the burnout syndrome, and possibilities of professional support of teachers.

2.1 Pressure in educational practices

To describe the effect of pressure on teachers it would be very helpful to develop a multidimensional model describing the three aspects of burnout as suggested by Maslach and Jackson (Maslach, Goldberg, 1998). This model was widely used in researching the burnout syndrome in teachers, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory is still the most used and reliable diagnostic instrument. Another diagnostic tool of the Burnout Measure was developed by Pines, Aronson and Kafry. These and other diagnostic tools played a significant role in a number of research studies of pressure exerted on teachers because they are suitable for identifying a number of factors related to the burnout syndrome.

Kallwass (2007, pp. 9) defines burnout as a “state of extreme exhaustion, internal distance, considerable performance drop and various psychosomatic difficulties”. Research of teachers revealed a number of stressful aspects of this profession. An important fact is that teachers most endangered by the development of the burnout syndrome are those who have done their work with vigour, enthusiasm and for a long time. *“Stress factors in the life of a teacher include the atmosphere in the teaching staff, competence of leading employees, insufficient rest time, relaxation value of breaks, isolation, missing supervision”* (Hagemann, 2012, pp. 11).

The causes of pressure exerted on teachers and the burnout syndrome were summarized e.g. by Švingalová (2006), who speaks of institutional causes, wider social causes, psychical and physical causes and about insufficient professional teacher training. The results of a research study performed in 2007 showed that most stressful factors identified by primary and secondary school teachers were fatigue and long-term unbearableness (Hodačová et al., 2007). Another research study focusing on female secondary school teachers conducted in 2005 in the Czech Republic confirmed that the risk of the burnout syndrome increased with age. However, the prevalence of the burnout syndrome does not directly correspond with the length of teaching experience (Mičkerová, Burešová, 2006).

According to Vymětal (2003), the burnout syndrome occurs primarily in professions based on interpersonal communication as this easily causes an imbalance between the emotional sides of receiving and giving, and gradually both psychical and physical reserves might be depleted. Pupils with severe multiple disability are among the groups that strongly predispose teachers to such imbalance because educating of these pupils is strongly associated with providing for their physical, psychical and social needs (Ludíková et al. 2014).

To understand the causes of the development of the burnout syndrome in teachers of pupils with severe multiple disability, one should consider the paradoxes of professional conduct as described by Kopřiva (1997). These are situations in which

teachers place impossible demands on themselves. Specific paradoxes identified by the author include the right to “have understanding for every pupil”, right to “not need the pupil’s positive response” and giving preference to being helpful to the detriment of insufficient evaluation of own work. Especially the first two rights are very important for teachers of pupils with severe multiple disability, while the third right could be reformulated as an ability to recognize own boundaries and possibilities of providing care to pupils.

Kantor (in Kantor, Jurkovičová, 2013) summarizes some issues of working with pupils with severe multiple disability that present certain risk areas in the process of long-term relationship development. These include dedication to the pupils or work, inability to encounter the pupils’ misery on a daily basis, inability to recognize situations of inappropriate saturation of own emotional needs in the teacher-pupil interaction, inability to recognize appropriate boundaries with respect to the pupil and the pupil’s family and particularly power behaviour with the pupil.

Another significant area is the relationship between the burnout syndrome and motivation to select the teaching profession. Research studies revealed two principal reasons for selecting this profession: secure employment and perception of this profession as a mission, which acts as a protective factor against the development of the burnout syndrome (Vercambre, 2009). A Swedish study (Norlund 2010) suggested similar results. It was revealed that the burnout syndrome was associated with insecure employment, risk of losing employment and an insufficient number of employment opportunities. It could be concluded that idealism in teachers might be a protective factor (in teaching pupils with severe multiple disability a degree of idealism is even required). However, it should be noted that an excessive difference between ideals and reality acts rather as a risk factor. In teaching pupils with severe multiple disability this requires e.g. an ability to assess real educational possibilities of a pupil and other practical skills.

The burnout syndrome is traditionally described as a relatively uniform unity in all individuals suffering the burnout syndrome with consistent etiology and symptoms. However, clinical and therapeutic experience does not support this approach, and there is a need to describe in detail various types of the burnout syndrome and then adapt therapeutic interventions to increase their effectiveness. For example Farber suggested a preliminary typology of three syndrome profiles: frenetic, underchallenged and worn-out, where the main classification criterion is the degree of enthusiasm for work. Farber’s theoretical model was developed according to clinical observations of teachers and in-depth interviews with 60 psychotherapists (psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers with various degrees of experience, from the public as well as private sector) (Montero-Marin, 2009).

A French research study investigated personality factors in order to determine why individuals who work in identical working environments and have identical

education and experience react to pressure in various ways. This is surely influenced by neuroticism, which to a large extent affects how an individual reacts to mental distress, and which is associated with a higher degree of emotional exhaustion. Other research studies emphasised the sense of effectiveness, perception of superiority and inability to adapt (Vercambre, 2009).

A significant part of the issue of the burnout syndrome is **prevention and coping with pressure factors** in teachers. An interesting perspective of this area was presented by Hagemann (2012). The author divides prevention into guidance for the teacher, educational system and school management. As far as organizational factors are concerned, recent research studies suggested that conflicts and doubts in competences, imbalance between effort and reward and perception of occupational stress were significant factors of the burnout syndrome in teachers. Specifically, the number of pupils, time limitation, and work-related pressure were associated with a high degree of emotional exhaustion. Disrupting the class climate also influences stress and subsequent burnout; the school climate factor appears crucial in terms of coping with pressure by teachers.

2.2 Professional support of teachers

The issue of pressure prevention is associated with professional support provided to teachers. In the areas of social care and health care there is an official system of providing support to helping professions. The educational system does not have these possibilities for the time being although it seems that this could be a significant means of improving the quality of education, psychosocial support of teachers and delaying of burnout symptoms.

The support provided to health care professionals is primarily based on a sophisticated and implemented system of employee **supervision**. Fowler (1996, pp. 472) defines supervision as “a formal process of professional support and learning, which allows practising individuals to develop their knowledge and competences, assume responsibility for their practice and promote client protection and safety of care provided in a clinical situation”. The objective of supervision is to ensure that pupil interventions are implemented correctly and that ethical rules are observed. Another aim is to support professional as well as personality development of helping professionals and to prevent the burnout syndrome. In some cases it also fulfils the administrative function – helps professionals meet the expectations of their institutions and their responsibility for quality work.

Clinical supervision can only be performed by persons with supervision training. At present, the term supervision is used in many areas, which do not specify precise

requirements for professional education of the supervisor. This situation is relatively common in the system of education.

Aldridge (in Kantor, Lipský, Weber et al., 2009), Forinash (2004) and other authors provide a broad definition of supervision by means of several models, which differ in functions and role hierarchies between the supervisor and the person supervised. The following concepts can be distinguished: intervision, clinical supervision, mentoring, research supervision, testing for certification claims and counselling. However, these forms significantly differ in terms of roles, responsibilities, relationship hierarchy, etc.

Another form of professional support provided to teachers includes support and Balint groups. The purpose of these groups is to provide psychological support to employees. No scheme is defined for **support groups**. They can be organized by the participants themselves or can have a preselected leader. They can be open or closed (with variable or stable number of participants), short-term or long-term (lasting over several meetings to months, in exceptional cases even years), structured or non-structured (with free course), with a clearly defined objective and purpose of origin or providing general support in a wide context.

The Balint group is a sort of support group, which has several schemes in our conditions. The Balint group is named after M. Balint, a Hungarian physician and psychoanalyst, who started to organize supervision seminars for general practitioners in 1950s in London (Ricaud, 2002). These seminars focused on the psychological and relationship issues of working with a patient in order to help physicians understand the relationships and attitudes to their patients that are considered problematic for some reason. Vymětal (2003) describes the scheme of the Balint group in five stages – exposition, questions, fantasy, practical suggestions and protagonist statement.

Kutter (2002) mentions the following special features of Balint groups: group atmosphere, protagonists' contributions, listening and reactions of group members and mirroring of transmission and counter-transmission relationships of the protagonist in the participants' reactions. The Balint groups are professionally organized by individual national Balint societies. In our country there is no independent association, but several experts of helping professions are members of the International Balint Federation, which groups national associations (Salinsky, 2002).

Supervision, intervision, support groups and Balint groups are strategies that proved to be effective in providing system support to employees in helping professions. Apart from these, there are naturally many other effective strategies, which are used e.g. on a personal level. One of the bases of the study presented below is an assumption that teachers of pupils with severe multiple disability prefer strategies provided on a personal level to strategies of a system-based teacher support.

3 Research methodology

The conclusions presented in this paper are based on an extensive study mapping the education of pupils with severe multiple disability. The study was of a predominantly quality-based type (embedded theory methodology) with a questionnaire survey followed by statistical processing. The methodology of the whole study was described in detail in other texts (Kantor, 2013).

In this study we performed semi-structured interviews with 45 teachers and observation of the educational process of four pupils. The interviews and observations brought data concerning the topic presented in this paper because:

- The semi-structured interviews contained an area in which the teachers reflected on the difficulties that they encounter in educating of pupils with severe multiple disability, coping strategies and possibilities of effective professional support. Moreover, they also commented on personal benefits they gain in educating these pupils.
- Observation of the teacher-pupil interaction during the educational process brought a closer understanding of educational reality and a possibility of comparing the data collected by means of these two data collection methods.

The results of this part of the study will be divided and presented in three areas, which also represent the objectives:

- To identify teachers' personal benefits gained through educating pupils with severe multiple disability.
- To identify the difficulties that teachers encounter in educating of these pupils.
- To identify the strategies that help teachers resolve these difficulties, including effective professional support strategies.

The sample of teachers for quality-based interviews was developed by means of purpose selection using the contacts acquired from special education centres. The following criteria were used to develop the sample of teachers:

- The teachers are required to have a degree in special education, Bachelor's degree as a minimum.
- The teachers are required to have at least two-year experience in teaching pupils with severe multiple disability in order to have sufficient experience to be able to identify examples of good practice.
- The teachers need to be willing to give an interview and must be able to reflect on own work (in some cases this requirement was met partially because the ability of self-reflection was very diverse).
- In the selection of schools, well-accessible schools will be preferred (the quality-based part of the above mentioned research study did not include schools from

Western and Northern Bohemia because it was difficult to establish contacts with these schools).

The following criteria were used to select the sample of pupils:

- The pupils have serious limitations in movement, communication and mental functions (at a level of severe or deep mental retardation).
- To achieve data variety, we selected a single pupil from one educational institution.

The final sample included 38 teachers (two interviews were rejected in the process of transcribing data material into written form due to low data efficiency) and 4 pupils.

The interviews were recorded by means of a voice recorder and then transcribed into a written form applying a first order reduction. This data material was prepared for a quality analysis. Pupil observations were recorded by a combination of several methods – video recording of individual pupil education on the one hand and a combination of voice recording and own notes of the researcher on the other hand. These data were also transcribed into a written form, subjected to a first order reduction and prepared for a quality analysis.

Data analysis was performed by means of open coding, during which the basic categories and subcategories were identified. The results of this part of embedded theory methodological procedure will be presented in the following chapter. Throughout the whole research we also performed an axial and selective coding analysis. The discussion section presents some final theory conclusions in order to evaluate the data on the topic of the study in wider theoretical contexts.

4 Data analysis

Data analysis will be divided according to the objectives of the study, i.e. the three areas mapping personal benefits of teachers, difficulties experienced by teachers and relevant coping strategies. The overviews of individual categories relating to each area will include a list of statements in each category corresponding to the number of teachers who gave their response. The quality of the categories in each area will be demonstrated by means of teachers' statements.

The first area mapped the teachers' personal benefits gained through educating pupils with severe multiple disability. The results of the categorization process are shown in Figure 1.

Category:	Presence:
Pupils' reactions	20
The teacher can learn a lot	18
Any progress of the pupil	9
Creativity and playfulness	5
Interest in the pupil's personality	4
Humour in working with the pupils	3
The teacher feels good among the pupils	3
Team cooperation	2
Patience and humility	2
Parents' reactions	1
Others	11

Figure 1. Personal benefits of teachers

The highest number of statements in this area related to *Pupils' reactions* that motivate teachers to work. The statements related to the following pupils' emotional reactions: pupil's joy (16), pupils give the teacher energy (2), pupil's satisfaction (1), positive pupil's reactions in general (1), and naturalness of pupil's reactions (1).

An analysis of observations also revealed that emotional satisfaction of a pupil was the primary objective of the teacher, especially in case of individual teaching. An analysis of two video recordings (music therapy and basal stimulation) showed that in the first place, the teachers tried to achieve positive emotional reactions in their pupils. These reactions could be compared to a certain bridge for initiation of mutual interaction, on which the teachers bases further work with the pupil. However, emotional reactions were very significant during all observations. If a pupil started to react in an unsteady, tearful, or anxious way, etc., first the teachers treated the emotional state of the pupil, only after that they continued teaching.

Inducing a smile of pupils with multiple disability might represent a significant motivating factor for some teachers in the process of selecting this particular job, as illustrated by the following statement: "...there's something about this job that enchanted me, I wouldn't leave now. When I came to look around before started I went down the corridor and one of the girls gave me a smile. She did it in a way that made me want to stay and work here. That was my beginning."

In the category *The teacher can learn a lot* many teachers left this category without specific examples (due to its extent). Specific examples of what teachers can learn

are documented by the following statement: "I like exploring the things that can get us in contact with the children. Finding out about their needs is very interesting in itself... It also makes me think about what I need in the contact and whose needs, the child's or mine, matters."

Visible progress in pupils with severe multiple disability is often a subject to long-term work which can last for several months to years. A statement made by one teacher is a good example of how rewarding a pupil's reaction might be after the teacher's long-term effort (although she spoke about a pupil whose functional abilities exceed the criteria for pupil selection indicated in Chapter 3): "This is a lot of hard work but that's what brings a lot of joy. Here I'm filled with something indescribable. I have a boy here, we've been practising a poem since September and he speaks only a little, and all of a sudden last week he just said the poem. Tears ran down my face as I was shocked."

In the category *Interest in the pupil's personality* the teachers said they were fascinated by "a large scale of various expressions" of the pupils, by how the pupils "cross their boundaries" and also that the pupils "are themselves, have distinct personalities, if they don't want to do something, they simply won't." These statements could be probably interpreted as a low degree of the pupils' adaptability. However, in the assessment of this behaviour there is a noticeable relationship of the teachers towards their pupils, which has a strong support function in developing a positive picture of the pupils' personalities.

The topic *Humour in working with the pupils* was described in a different paper (Kantor, Urbanovská, 2014). The category *The teacher feels good among the pupils* related to authenticity, spontaneity and other positive qualities of the pupils, as evidenced by further data acquired during interviews.

The category *Others* included statements about feelings of work satisfaction, overcoming the pupils' difficulties when a teacher has an own class after a long time, situations when work increases the feeling of own value on the part of the teacher, when the teacher enjoys supporting the pupil's family, when work has a meaning, freedom of approaching the pupil, which the teacher has in this educational programme, the fact that the class is a family, the fact that the teacher is aware of being happy because his/her own children are healthy, and the feeling that the pupils need the teacher. An interesting statement from the category *Others* is about the validation of own value. This was given by a teacher, who is at the same time a mother to a disabled child: "I was at home for thirteen years and I always thought I'm no good, I took care of M. but I thought I would never achieve anything in life, that my life has finished. When I started this job I knew I wanted to do it and I felt that I actually do something, help, that I am useful, and that what I do has some value."

The second area mapped the difficulties that the teachers encounter in educating pupils with severe multiple disability (see Figure 2).

Subcategories:	Presence:
Fatigue and exhaustion	11
Slow progress and stereotype	9
Difficult comprehension of pupils	7
Unpleasant behaviour of pupils	6
Insufficient team cooperation	5
Insufficient methodological guidance	4
Insufficient staff	4
Risky health condition and fate of some pupils	3
The pupil does not cooperate with the teacher	3
Difficult situations with parents	2
Other statements relating to working with pupils	9
Other statements relating to organization and material provisions	5
Other statements not directly relating to education of pupils	6

Figure 2. Difficulties that teachers encounter in educating these pupils.

The statements in the category *Fatigue and exhaustion* related to physical fatigue (2), physical demands of working with pupils with severe physical disability (9) and psychical demands (7). One of the teachers noted the following: “When we do clay modelling, it’s very physically demanding for women to unfold their fingers, hold the clay for them, press, roll out, very difficult for the assistants.” Naturally, physical demands relate to any transfers and physical manipulation with the pupil, which places considerable demands on the assistant teachers.

The category *Slow progress and stereotype* was aptly expressed by a statement describing the length of time taken by seating the pupils on the toilet: “When we go to seat F. on the toilet and do that every hour, we spend a lot of time on that toilet. And we have pupils who are ok in hygiene. Those next door, they’re in the bathroom all the time. I think the teacher and assistant teacher should mainly work in the classroom. I don’t mind doing that but I can either take them to the toilet or teach but not both, there’s just not enough time.”

The category *Difficult comprehension of pupils* is related to a study that analysed the factors facilitating comprehension of pupils with severe multiple disability (Kantor, 2014). The category *Unpleasant behaviour of pupils* included the following two reactions: unpleasant sounds (3), rubbing nails against the carpet (1), pupils intentionally relieve themselves (1), pupils vomit on the teacher or bite the teacher (1) and slobbering (1). The category *Insufficient team cooperation* related to cooperation with an assistant in the classroom (2), physiotherapists (1), specialised physicians (1) and in case of institutionalized schools also with a social service worker (1).

Another difficulty described by the teachers was *Insufficient methodological guidance*, as documented e.g. by the following statement: “Maybe it’s nonsense but I grope in the dark, no one’s gonna tell you what to do, many of the FEP outcomes are rubbish. If you have a curriculum, you have something to adhere to. If you have no curriculum, you have no guidance.” The teachers also indicated that insufficient methodological guidance results in doubts about own work and own abilities. In this respect, two of the teachers indicated a need for more teacher education for special primary school teachers.

The category *Insufficient staff* relates to staff relocation (2) and situations when somebody quits (2). Working with pupils with severe multiple disability also involves coping with unhappy fates of some of them. The category *Risky health condition and fate of some pupils* included e.g. the following statement: “One six-year-old has just died after a coma. That’s one of the sad things, you never know how long some of them will last. I’m not saying I’m sorry, it’s better than to be grieving, but six years daily is six years daily.”

In the category *Difficult situations with parents* the teachers mentioned a lack of trust and cooperation, and coping with unreal expectations of the parents. The category *Other statements relating to working with pupils* included e.g. one-sided communication with a negligible pupils’ response, feelings of sorrow thinking about what a pupil could do without disability, feelings of helplessness and absolute dependence that teachers might experience, or situations when teaching is unsuccessful because the teacher brings own problems to the classroom.

Other statements relating to organization and material provisions included the difficulty of harmonizing the schedules of various pupils from various years and educational programmes by the teacher (deputy head), prices of professional courses that teachers need but cannot afford, insufficient classroom equipment and barriers in work built by the surrounding environment.

In the category *Other statements not directly relating to education of pupils* a typical statement is e.g. the following one that described a degree of deterioration of the teacher’s personality: “I wanted the deputy head to assign me to some practical classes because I’m forgetting to read and write here. Really. I have to think about simple spelling and I’m a linguist. I don’t say this to anybody.” An interesting comment

came from a male teacher who was afraid of being accused of abusing female pupils during basal stimulation.

The third area mapped the strategies that teachers use in coping with difficulties associated with teaching pupils with severe multiple disability (this area is linked with the previous part). The categories in this third part including the respective numbers are specified in Figure 3.

Subcategories:	Number:
Promoting a good working team and climate in the class	21
Teacher personality development (e.g. by means of teacher education, courses, etc.)	11
A good assistant or educator in the class	10
The teacher also teaches in other classes, or has another job	5
Setting real objectives in the area of pupil education	3
Various forms of supervision or intervision	2
Change	2
Others	9

Figure 3. Strategies used by teachers to cope with difficulties

A considerable amount of statements in this area related to *Promoting a good working team and good climate*. In this context attention should be paid to the attributes that teachers use to characterize a good working climate. Throughout the interviews, the following attributes emerged in this category: good atmosphere, wellbeing, peace, family environment, good background, mutual trust, assistants and teachers work together, feelings of safety and security, corresponding structure and regimen, pupils and teachers experience together, feelings of contact with the pupil, good class relationships, good pupil motivation before learning activities, “playing around” with the pupil, music and basal stimulation.

Another significant category is *Change*, which the teachers described as enrolment of new pupils or a need to do “revolution in routine procedures”. The category *Others* included for example short-term placements before the teacher is employed, humour, support of innovations and changes by the school management, personality of a teacher who likes stereotype, sufficient time for transition from work to a home environment, good observation skills that allow identification of small pupil progress, etc.

5 Discussion

The discussion section presents a summary of conclusion and examples of good practice according to a model by Hagemann (2012) relevant for teachers, leading employees and the educational system.

In the context of the teaching process involving pupils with severe multiple disability, an important finding is the fact that a number of valuable benefits result from the **interaction with the pupil**. The conclusions of this study suggest that a deeper theoretical understanding of the factors that influence the interaction process and development of the teacher-pupil relationship is one of the possible sources of effective strategies of professional support of teachers. Moreover, developing appropriate conditions in the classroom that facilitate effective interaction during the educational process might help teachers in the long run saturate their feeling of meaningfulness of their work and renew their internal sources required for teaching this group of pupils.

The theories relating to the education of pupils with severe multiple disability proposed by the author according to the research, considers this education a comprehensive process involving a number of sub-processes. These processes relate to adaptation, communication, pupil personality development, saturation of pupils' physical and health needs, family-level interventions, etc. The basis of these processes is the interaction process, which is performed vertically (interaction at a specific moment) as well as horizontally (development of the teacher-pupil relationship over time). Interaction is thus a significant process without which it would be impossible to carry out other processes of special education intervention.

During the interviews the teachers also mentioned specific strategies that might enrich the repertoire of techniques for coping with pressure in the classroom, e.g. by developing an adaptation space after a change from the working environment to a home environment. Some of these strategies are significant for **school management and leading employees** – this includes for example short-term placements before a teacher is employed, developing a schedule that provides an opportunity for teachers of pupils with severe multiple disability to teach in other classes as well.

In terms of the educational system and individual educational institution, below are mentioned specific forms of teacher support. Professional support of teachers of pupils with severe multiple disability is rarely based on supervision and intervention. Clinical supervision plays a significant role in the healthcare sector, which has underpinned its significance for a long time. Also in the area of social services, we frequently experience various forms of supervision-based employee support. So far, there are no data on using supervision in the area of education. However, based on the data acquired during this study it might be assumed that supervision is used by school institutions very seldom.

On the other hand, the results of the study suggest that currently teachers use a sort of friendly support in addressing specific issues and situations. Table 3 shows the most frequent statements in the category of promoting a good working team and good assistant or educator in the class. It is likely that teachers and assistants help each other in the classroom, analyse various issues and search for solutions to difficult situations. Obviously, this type of support cannot substitute for supervision, which provides external support of the whole working team. Similarly, these data do not imply that most teachers would welcome supervision if this type of support was available. To develop specific strategies of professional teacher support, various forms of support need to be considered (e.g. various forms of supervision, Balint or support groups) as well as ways of providing such support. Current reflections of teachers rather suggest a need for professional support, which would include supervision and case study techniques, etc. To recognize the significance of supervision in education it would be useful if future teachers gained some positive experience with supervision during their undergraduate study.

Other strategies of professional teacher support that need to be developed include **accessible educational opportunities**. This conclusion is in line with one of the frequent causes of the onset of the burnout syndrome, as described by Švingalová (2006). Educating pupils with multiple disability is professionally demanding and requires a high degree of professional erudition on the part of the teachers. Unfortunately, educational opportunities relating to working with pupils with severe multiple disability develop very slowly. In particular, there is a lack of practical courses (in the research we frequently noted missing methodological support); another problem is insufficient theory of educating these pupils. This situation results in the following two needs – importing foreign methodology and examples of good practice, and supporting domestic research and developing consistent theories and methodologies. The role of faculties of education at various universities in this process is naturally very important.

All of the mentioned strategies might be beneficial in terms of **prevention of the burnout syndrome**, whose development into a clinical form is usually a combination of personality predispositions of the teachers and long-term problems or excessive difficulties. Current research studies mentioned in the theoretical background of this paper suggest that women are more endangered by the burnout syndrome (Vercambre, 2009). At the same time, most teachers working with pupils with severe multiple disability are women. Out of the total number of 45 teachers included in this study only 2 were men; it might be assumed that there are even less male assistant teachers. Educating pupils with severe multiple disability is strongly affected by nursing activities, which are preferred rather by women.

The fact that the burnout syndrome threatens especially those teachers who are strongly committed to their work, presents a considerable risk for teachers of

pupils with severe multiple disability (Hagemann, 2012). Educating those pupils presupposes or even requires the knowledge of the pupils' personal stories and a very close relationship, which might even take an "intimate form". This fact was visible during observations of the educational process in various classes and during research interviews with the teachers. A strong commitment predisposes to the development of the burnout syndrome and requires the knowledge of personal boundaries in distributing own energy to perform the necessary care.

Attention must be also paid to the validity of the conclusions of the whole study, which is limited by the study design and some other aspects. The quality-based type of the study was selected particularly due to the lack of evidence-based data relating to the education of pupils with severe multiple disability in Czech schools. A combination of semi-structured interviews and observations provided a basic insight into the issue and an overview of key categories of the investigated topic and some properties of these categories. Most data were acquired through the semi-structured interviews, the observations represented an additional method to verify the validity of the teachers' statements and to gain a deeper insight into the issue (in particular, the observations helped us understand the significance of the interaction factors in the process of education of pupils with severe multiple disability).

Guaranteeing the validity, which is required in scientific studies with a quality-based design, is usually based on triangulation, i.e. comparison of data from at least three sources. In the present study however, there were no other sources of data concerning the researched topic to perform triangulation. The author of the study is aware that this could have decreased the validity of the study. A solution could be to include a quantity-based survey with a larger number of teachers. However, such survey would require another research study. Apart from the aspects mentioned above, the contribution of this study is the fact that it brings a body of data material that can be used to design and perform a quantity-based survey.

Another suggestion for further research surveys is testing specific factors relating to pressure during education of pupils with severe multiple disability using standardized diagnostic tools, e.g. the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The observations in various classes revealed some common characteristics of teachers, which frequently repeated, e.g. calm nature and deliberate personal pace (which might have been associated with the slow personal pace of the pupils with severe multiple disability), but also a degree of creativity, spontaneity, authenticity, etc. It is likely that educating pupils with severe multiple disability requires certain personality and character features, which predispose teachers in a positive way to cope with practical requirements. Whether there is any association between the teachers' characteristics and practical requirements could only be confirmed by means of diagnostically valid data. To obtain such data will require further research. The conclusions of future research in

this area could enrich our understanding of the role of personality factors crucial in the development of the burnout syndrome with new and interesting data.

6 Conclusion

This study presented the so far unpublished conclusions of a quality-based study performed in Czech school involving teachers and also pupils with severe multiple disability. The objective of the study was to map the categories crucial for understanding the issue and to identify teachers' personal benefits as a result of educating pupils with severe multiple disability, difficulties that these teachers encounter in educating these pupils, and strategies that help teachers in overcoming these difficulties. The results of the present study were related to current theories and published conclusions concerning the issue of teacher pressure, development of the burnout syndrome and the issue of professional teacher support. The study also described some examples of good practice, discussed the validity of the research and suggested possibilities of further research in the area.

Project affiliation: The issue “Benefits and difficulties in educating pupils with severe multiple disability and possibilities of professional support of their teachers” has been researched as a part of a project IGA_PdF_2015_020 called “Non-traditional views on quality of life in people with specific needs”.

References

- [1] DOWNING, J. (2008). *Including Students With Severe and Multiple Disabilities in Typical Classrooms*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- [2] FOWLER, J. (1996). The Organisation of Clinical Supervision Within the Nursing Profession: a Review of the Literature. In *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 1996; 23/4:471-478.
- [3] FORINASH, M. (2001). *Music Therapy Supervision*. Gilsum: Barcelona Publishers.
- [4] HAGEMANN, W. (2012). *Syndrom vyhoření u učitelů. Příčiny, pomoc, terapie*. Ústí nad Labem: Univerzita J. E. Purkyně.
- [5] HODAČOVÁ, L., et al. (2007). Hodnocení pracovní psychické zátěže u zaměstnanců různých profesí. *Československá psychologie*. 2007; 51/4:335 – 346.
- [6] KALLWASS, A. (2007). *Syndrom vyhoření v práci i osobním životě*. Praha: Portál.
- [7] KANTOR, J., LIPSKÝ, M., WEBER, J. et al. (2009). *Základy muzikoterapie*. Praha: Grada.
- [8] KANTOR, J. (2013). *Výstupy edukačního procesu v oblasti sociálních kompetencí žáků s dětskou mozkovou obrnou*. (Dizertační práce). Olomouc: Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Palackého v Olomouci.
- [9] KANTOR, J. – JURKOVIČOVÁ, P. (2013). *Základy speciální pedagogiky osob s omezením hybnosti*. Olomouc: VUP.
- [10] KANTOR, J. – URBANOVSKÁ, E. (2014). Communication in students with severe cerebral palsy. In *Journal of Exceptional People*. 2014; 1:4/33–50.
- [11] KOPŘIVA, K. (1997). *Lidský vztah jako součást profese*. Praha: Portál.

- [12] KUTTER, P. (2002). From the Balint method toward profession-related supervision. In *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 2002; 62/4313-325.
- [13] LUDÍKOVÁ, L. et al. (2013). *Kvalita života osob se speciálními potřebami*. Olomouc: VUP.
- [14] LUDÍKOVÁ, L. et al. (2014). *Výzkum kvality života vybraných skupin osob se speciálními potřebami*. Olomouc: VUP.
- [15] MASLACH, C., GOLDBERG, J. (1998). Prevention of burnout. New perspectives. In *Applied and Preventive Psychology*. 1998; 7/63-74.
- [16] MIČKEROVÁ, D., BUREŠOVÁ, D. (2006). *Syndrom vyhoření u pomáhajících profesí*. Opava: Slezská univerzita.
- [17] MICHALÍK, J. (2015). *Systémová podpora inkluzivního vzdělávání v Čechách*. Olomouc: USS. On-line. Retrieved from: www.inkluzie.upol.cz
- [18] MONTERO-MARIN, J. et al. (2009). A new definition of burnout syndrome based on Farber's proposal. In *J Occup Med Toxicol*. 2009; 4:31.
- [19] NORLUND, S. et al. (2010). Burnout, working conditions and gender – results from the northern Sweden MONICA Study. In *BMC Public Health*. 2010; 10:326.
- [20] RICAUD, M., M. (2002). Michael Balint: An Introduction. In *American Journal of Psychoanalyses*. 2002; 62:17-24.
- [21] RUSH, M. D. (2003). *Syndrom vyhoření*. Praha: Návrat domů.
- [22] SALINSKY, J. (2002). The Balint Movement. In *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 2002; 62/4:327-335.
- [23] ŠVINGALOVÁ, D. (2006) *Stres a vyhoření u profesionálů pracujících s lidmi*. Liberec: Technická univerzita.
- [24] VERCAMBRE, M. et al. (2009). Individual and contextual covariates of burnout: a cross-sectional nationwide study of French teachers. In *BMC Public Health*. 2009; 9:333.
- [25] VYMĚTAL, J. (2003). *Lékařská psychologie*. Praha: Portál.

(reviewed twice)

Mgr. Jiří Kantor, Ph.D.
 Institute of Special Education Studies
 Faculty of Education
 Palacký University, Olomouc
 77140 Olomouc
 Czech Republic
 e-mail: jiri.kantor@upol.cz