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A NEW APPROACH TO DISABLED STUDENTS RECRUITMENT AND STUDYING LINKED WITH AN INTENSIVE REHABILITATION

Introduction

Depending on a method of searching and calculating the fraction of children and youth in a modern society exhibiting various types of born or later obtained physical deficiencies is varying between 3 and 5 per cent.

Another well known, more or less universal, phenomenon shows that the ratio of young people running for higher education is of about one order of magnitude smaller than their participation in the world of adults, which doesn't mean the world of labour. Of course, as it has been mentioned, this calculation takes into account only physical disabilities. We are also talking about a mean situation within a developed society, since the position of handicapped children and youth in poor regions of the world is even much worse and complex.

In a country like Poland being in an intensive transition from centralized to free-marked economy a distinguished differences in that respect occur between big cities and rural areas. But, even in big academic centres young disabled people approaching the age of studying are far from having an quell access to the higher education. Reasons are of course multi-fold and majority of them are well known, but proper diagnosis seams to be only a smaller deal of a success to apply an adequate solution.

Analysing this situation on *Lower Silesia case-study* a municipal academic centre of Wroclaw City has been compared with smaller towns (around 100 T population) such as Jelenia Gora, Legnica and Walbrzych including their rural vicinity.

Searching an access to higher education in general the main discrimination factor was found to be a poverty of families who couldn't effort to send their daughters and sons to academic centres distant of about 100 km and to support their stay there. Comparing with that, the situation of disabled potential candidates for higher education, it has been found that they have "more equal" chances, since no matter whether they are coming from big or small towns they are not sufficiently prepared to meet average requirements of higher education conditions.

All this observation brought the author and his associates to create a unique system and programme of preparation of high school disabled pupils to undertake higher education and to take care on them during the study period.

The system consists, therefore, of two activity-areas: (1) pre-study guidance to work over mental barriers and school programme deficiencies and (2) through-study programme assisting disabled student to make the similar progress that any other student of the same level of intelligence and a comparable load of work. This requires implementation of an individual study curriculum. All process is combined with a simultaneous intensive medical and spa treatment including colleague-assisted- and self-work.

The paper is presenting detailed solutions already examined to fulfil the above two groups of tasks and these which have been planned, so far.

The KK completed as the promoter the *Leonardo da Vinci Program* pilot project entitled: *Education and Rehabilitation of Disabled Students* in cooperation with TU Dresden, Germany and TU Liberec, Czech Republic and the local spa Uzdrowisko Cieplice Ltd [1] (see: www.kk.jgora.pl/perdis).

Author's research team and the KK are working in a natural environment of a leading Polish health resort and are supported by students and volunteers educated in physiotherapy, nursing, pedagogy, foreign languages and computer science.

Pre-Study Period Tasks

In a long-term perspective it would be desired to get in touch with all disabled children as soon as possible to provide a proper approach and treatment even from kindergarten. To achieve this the record identifying a type of deficiency the address of a child and some other crucial data would be required. Ministry of Education of Poland is working on a full implementation of such software.

Our short-term goal is to reach youth of upper-high-school (last three grades) using several channels – mostly through special schools and associations of certain disability people. These young disabled are direct targets of our concern. We are planning to provide them with an individual guidance by specially prepared teachers.

The last requires to build-in this new type of duties into teacher's standard set of obligation. It also demands an elaboration of curriculum of teaching and training of such tutors, as well as organizing special post-graduate courses preparing teachers for this new guidance mission. Having care-pedagogy as the one of higher education areas the KK is planning to offer such teaching and training as a summer courses. They will be oriented towards two main goals – how to overcome a psychological barrier to undertake higher education and how to assist a potential candidate, especially coming from rural areas, in making over for not adequate general knowledge to undertake studies.

Some additional research requires also a methodology of testing preferences of a disabled candidate to study in a chosen area or to find-out his/her abilities which have not been discovered, so far.

The KK expecting a country-wide recruitment of disabled candidates is planning to attract them by an action called: *Open doors of the college and the health resort*. The last including two to three weeks treatment program, preferably during vacation period prior of three to two years to reaching the age of studying.

Activities Provided During the Study Period

The first step already implemented in the KK has been based on a principle: >There are no students which are not practicing<. Only an acute form of illness could free a student for a limited period from an obligatory physical exercises. In all other cases a doctor should point out the type of rehabilitation recommended in a certain case and a student is obliged to show up and practice. This also or rather mainly concerns disabled students.

The Rector of the KK among a few close associates nominated also his Plenipotentiary for Disabled Students. This highly competent person (special pedagogy) is collaborating with a MD, a psychologist and a head of PE Dept. A special treatment is provided by the KK *Physiotherapy Division*.

The above mentioned regulations and activities are just first elements of the system called *the Center of Rehabilitation and Integration of Disabled Students (CERIN)*. It is located on the KK campus presenting a beautiful park-wavy-area in a three-storey building. The ground floor has been rented to a medical company ltd providing, so far, medical care, crio-chamber and special fitness equipment. The first floor will house various research and treatment labs and the attic faculties and staff rooms as well as the *CERIN* administration.

The above mentioned labs will be served by teaching staff and students of *Physiotherapy Div.* of the Faculty of Nature. The adequate research is dealing with elaboration of treatment methods and testing and recording of their results. Another group is working on special tools and equipment assisting disabled students in learning and completing other everyday needs.

The KK beautiful campus was recently converted from military barracks, therefore requires a lot of additional investments to facilitate traffic of some groups of less mobile disabled. A swimming pool and a gym, including special facilities to train disabled have been designed and are waiting for financial means. Meanwhile, some requirements of this treatment are satisfied by the health resort Cieplice – the permanent partner of the KK.

Additional resources are required to convert a ground floor of students' dormitories into "integrative rooms" – in principle shared by two roommates from which one is a disabled and the second is ready to assist her/him. Such rooms should of course have an easy access from outside.

There are numerous legal and formal problems to be solved and the first after completing investment money is to secure a continuous treatment activity. The only way in Polish legal circumstances is to establish a non-public medical unit to be prepared to apply and win financing from a special fund linked with the budget money of the Ministry of Health. We hope this task will be completed by already mentioned medical company renting a part of *CERIN* building.

Prospective and Timing

The already mentioned international project *PERDIS* was completed in August 2001. It dealt with a few selected study curricula specially devoted for the sake of disabled (linguistics – translations; computer science – programming and administration; physiotherapy – dry massage and bio-renovation; pedagogy – personal assistance).

The final report of *PERDIS* suggested to create a special center, but chiefly concerned on education of disabled. Therefore, first project accredited at the tri-lateral (Czech – German – Polish) *Academic Coordination Center of Euroregion Neisse* in May 2003 was named *Euroregional Center for Education of Disabled Students (ERNEDUCENT)* [2]. Later it appeared that the main goal of the *Center* should be a rehabilitation of disabled students, no matter what and where they are studying. Therefore, the current idea is to provide specialized rehabilitation treatment not only for all disabled students from four higher education units located in Jelenia Gora (over 8 T students), but also to create conditions for students from other Polish and foreign universities and colleges to come for a period of e.g. one semester or even shorter to get a treatment offered to domestic students.

The expected optimistic timing shows that we could begin a regular drafting of disabled students for the *CERIN* program for the academic year 2008/2009, a country-wide recruitment in 2009/2010 and perhaps to start bringing students from *Euroregion Neise* the same year or a year later at the last option offering our treatment services to all foreign students.

The basic offer is to undertake 6 – 10 semester studies at one of local higher education units linked with a continuous treatment at the *CERIN* facilities and the health resort. The KK is already prepared to offer bachelor (6 semester) studies in three linguistics – English, German and Polish. A periodical stay could be based on transfer-semester principle (ECTS), if a person could find a curriculum allowing to continue studies at one of local higher education units (Wroclaw University of Economics (www.ae.jgora.pl), Wroclaw University of Technology (www.pwr.jgora.pl) and Karkonosze College (www.kk.jgor.pl) [3]. Finally, a treatment of disabled student could be also based on her/his leave-of-absence from a mother-university. Such treatment could be also provided during summer or even shorter winter holidays.

Numerous legal aspects need do be solved especially payment by both, domestic and foreign students. Other than linguistic study areas in local higher schools should make a great progress to teach foreign students fully or at least partly in English. Partly, means to prepare e-learning tools mainly for general topics lectured at the first year of study.

References

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Summary

Based on the situation of disabled youth in Poland and the Lower Silesia region of author's activities, a new concept of higher education linked with an intensive rehabilitation has been presented. The projects includes activities in two areas: (1) pre-study-period to deal with: identification of potential students, testing of their abilities, braking mental barriers to study and completing their education; (2) during-study-period to assure: medical and psychological care, physical rehabilitation in own and spa facilities, adequate learning tools, mobility on the campus, integrative student dormitory and others.

Expected timing of realization of the project has been also given.

Key words: disabled, higher education, rehabilitation.