

Preparing Professionals for the Visually Impaired in the Academy of Special Education in Warsaw, Poland

Focus : Achieving Quality in Education: Strategies for Change
Topic : Personnel Preparation

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The Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education, established in 1922, is the oldest pedagogical university in Poland. It is also the only institution educating teachers with the main task of preparing on the highest academic level specialists to work with disabled individuals requiring special care and help in order to facilitate full development of their powers and abilities. Simultaneously with its educational activity, the Academy conducts scientific activity, as well as popularizes knowledge in the widely understood realm of special education and in supportive, as well as related sciences.

The program and organization of educating teachers and social workers ready to work with disabled individuals has always been related to social needs and to the education system functioning in Poland. Also, to an increasingly wide extent, it facilitates the optimal execution of tasks related to the Polish entry into the European Union.

ASE educates teachers, house-fathers and social workers to work with disabled and gifted people preparing staff with highest qualifications.

Candidates can choose between education and special education. During the first year of studies they attend lectures promoting all faculties. After passing an exam they start the chosen faculty from the second year of study. It is also possible to study 2 faculties at the same time.

Those faculties are:

- education of individuals with intellectual disabilities,
- education of individuals with movement disabilities and chronically ill,
- glottodidactics and integrated teaching
- education of totally and partially deaf individuals,
- education of blind and visually impaired individuals,
- resocialization pedagogy,
- correctional pedagogy,
- psycho pedagogy of creativeness,
- education of ability with computer science,
- social work,
- speech therapy,
- special andragogy,
- work education and

- management of educational and care institutions.

Full time studies are free of charge. Every year there is over 2 000 full time students on two faculties: education and special education. Extramural studies have to be paid for. They are on the same level as full time studies. Every year extramural studies take up around 600 students. Since the Academy introduced the Bologna system studies 3+2 years and 5 years are conducted in parallel. The graduates from five-year studies receive master's degree and the graduates from three-year vocational studies receive bachelor's diploma.

Till now II level studies are extramurally. They could be taken over also by graduates from bachelor studies from other universities.

Full time studies and extramural studies have the same academic level.

Postgraduate studies

The Academy conducts also postgraduate studies for people who wish to develop their professional knowledge. Faculties and specializations conducted by ASE correspond with the need of practice as well as professional and intellectual aspirations of candidates for studies.

The graduates from ASE (full time and extramural studies) and other universities could be admitted to postgraduate studies. Every year ASE conducts about 20 various postgraduate studies and there is about 1 000 students. The studies last 3-4 terms and have to be paid for.

ASE forms students' attitudes towards professional responsibility and serving the general public. The goal of the studies is to form the highest level of pedagogical culture, openness for children, youth and adult, attitudes of kindness and readiness for dialogue, and ability to communicate and establish social contacts. The graduates obtain a broad humanistic knowledge, especially in the field of the education sciences. They master the ability to use scholarly literature, critically analyze cognitive content and conduct research. They are also prepared to active self-education and self-improvement, especially in the process of persistent education.

All students gain general humanistic knowledge attending classes of philosophy, sociology, current European problems and computer techniques.

A block of basic knowledge subjects encloses: neurology, auksjology, history of education, general education, general psychology, development psychology and general didactic.

Directional knowledge subjects contains: history of special education, methods of self and other learning, general human pathology, special education, special didactics, speech therapy, social pathology, psychiatry and psychopathology of children and youth, clinic psychology, social law, bibliotherapy, occupation therapy, kinesis therapy, music therapy, psychotherapy, artetherapy, pedeutology and methodology of researches.

Education and Rehabilitation of the Visually Impaired

Studying education and rehabilitation of the blind and visually impaired students are skilled to work as house-fathers, teachers and therapists with people with visual impairment in different age. They also prepared to run researches in a field of education of people with visual impairment.

Specialized subjects cover theory and practice of education of the visually impaired, psychology of the blind and visually impaired people, optometry, early intervention, methodise of education, O&M, ADL, visual rehabilitation, Braille, rehabilitation of the blind multi handicapped, computer techniques etc.

Specialized knowledge subjects:

1. Anatomy, physiology and pathology of sight
2. Teaching methods of accessible technology for the visually impaired
3. Education of the blind and visually impaired
4. Psychology of the blind
5. Integrated learning for the blind

6. Integrated learning for the visually impaired
7. Computer techniques for the blind and visually impaired
8. Methods of teaching visually impaired pupils in integration schools
9. Methods of teaching visually impaired pupils in integration kindergartens
10. Methods of teaching O&M for visually impaired
11. Methods of teaching O&M for the blind children
12. Methods of teaching O&M for the blind youths and adult
13. Early intervention
14. Methods of teaching ADL
15. Rehabilitation of the blind multi handicapped
16. Visual rehabilitation of visually impaired children
17. Visual rehabilitation of visually impaired youth and adults
18. Individual rehabilitation of the visually impaired
19. Adaptation of the environment for the visually impaired
20. Law for visually impaired people

Students practice in education and rehabilitation centres in Poland and those speaking foreign languages can also visit centres in other countries. The practice covers all levels of education and types of rehabilitation. Curriculum contains 200 hours of practice for each student.

Early intervention

Two years ago a new faculty has been created to meet the needs of young visually impaired children and their families.

The faculty prepares future specialists as well as for complex diagnostic and rehabilitation of handicapped children since their birth till beginning of a school life as for working with their families. The graduates obtain a broad knowledge of the early psycho-physical development, both of non-handicapped and disabled children. By getting to know the process of learning and its mechanism, the possibilities for adaptation the process of learning to the child's possibilities, students are prepared to give an effective support of child's development. They gain knowledge of the assessment of children's functioning in the view of designing and carrying on of an individualised program of early intervention, support the children's development and equalise their educational chances. Simultaneously students recognise the complex situation of families with disabled children and learn how to give an equal help and advocacy.

The students are also trained to give support to the parents of handicapped or with special education needs children, to help them to get a proper help from other specialists and social workers. Moreover they learn how to cooperate with other specialists like doctors, psychologists, therapists, speech therapists and teachers. Thus they are prepared to work in a field of early intervention not only with visually impaired children but also with children with other handicap or development disturbances.

The practical aspect is very important. The students have their practices both in early intervention centres, on rehabilitation camps for handicapped children and their families and in special and integrated kindergartens.

Other facilities

Beside the teaching work the Academy has also other facilities, i.e. specialist laboratories.

Speech Therapy Clinic is the only such institution in Warsaw. The clinic diagnoses and corrects speech disabilities. Furthermore, students under control of speech therapists conduct their first practical classes. A use of medical offices and fully-equipped lecture enables combining teaching and therapeutic activities.

Centre of Rehabilitation for Multiply Disabled Children conducts psychological and pedagogical diagnosis, counselling and psycho movement rehabilitations for children with multiple disabilities. There is also a state-of-the-art diagnostic and therapeutic office in the centre. The centre employs specialists for blind and visually impaired children, children with mind strokes, autism and difficulties in verbal communication.

References:

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