

The Czech Republic through the historical lens of special pedagogy and modern challenges

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Abstract

For many years before the field of special education took on a scientific form, many people thought about how to educate and train individuals who in some way differed from the so-called “norm”. It is clear, having been documented by many authors (Sovák, Renotierová, Monatová, Titzl, etc.), that over the years there have been a number of historical approaches of various societies (in the spirit of their own morals or other principles) to people with health or other disabilities, or if we want to put it another way, to persons with various adverse traits or conditions, whether they would be in behaviour, senses or other circumstances and attitudes. The so-called periodisation of the historical development of care for people with disabilities was created. The first historical periodisation was created by Sovák, from which some later authors drew upon. In some historical interpretations of the origin of special education, we can observe the diverse efforts of the authors to prove where the impulse of the origin of the field was. By this we mean the perpetually addressed issues regarding care – support – practice and the emergence of the theory of special education as a scientific field. There is often a stark division of the two phenomena, which is certainly scientifically understandable, but from a practical point of view it is in fact difficult to grasp. The author has always opted for the documented and professional point of view and the direction, a decision which is always enriching for any learning.

Keywords: Czech Republic, history, development, Miloš Sovák, new challenges, special pedagogy

Introduction

Let us keep in mind that the indicated and addressed issue, i.e. care – support – practice and theory (special education as a scientific field) may seem somewhat vague from a practical point of view. It must be emphasised that the issue of special care (which should have a system and goals) is quite naturally – historically – related to the question of a comprehensive understanding of normalcy in society, which was, is and will be derived from socio-ethical breadth of the learning process and the logically entailed care in a particular society and time, i.e. a historical time. In this context, it is worth pointing out that the current understanding of special pedagogical issues is principally oriented towards the creation of a kind of a “supernorm”, i.e. the creation and practice of the so-called trends of uniform normality. From the point of view of the practice of a special educator, we can sometimes see the often persistent effort of experts to force phenomena, matters and also interpretations of history into where they are not in that “supernorm”.

The definition of norm and normality, so important for special pedagogical care, is influenced by various factors determining the concept of norm and normality. Experts cite many such components and factors. To interpret the historical development of special education, it is probably reasonable to follow Fischer and Škoda (2014), who talk in detail about:

- time aspect,
- spatial aspect,
- situational aspect, i.e. (situational effect of a current phenomenon),
- cultural aspect (Fischer, Škoda 2014).

Knowledge of the components of normality that are certainly an understandable basis of special pedagogical care makes it possible to periodise its development. Diverse approaches to people with disabilities have a rich history. On the topic of periodisation, many authors have written and are still working on very expert treatises that are, however, overwhelmingly a conscious (sometimes perhaps unconscious) value modification of Sovák (1980). Particularly significant and beneficial are the periodisations conceived by B. Titzl, T. Vojtek and P. Klíma. Their historical articles on special education go far beyond the usual framework of popularisation-professional works of other authors. Their content is deep, and they strive for a thoroughly substantiated reflection of historical sources to the present.

If we follow the development of special pedagogical care and special pedagogical thought in relation to the value and interconnection of practice and theory, the whole range of perspectives must be studied. From the point of

view of objectivity and comprehensive knowledge of the historical development of theory and practice (care and thinking), it is necessary to decide what we imagine under the term “beginning of care”. Which components pertain to the beginning? Which arise consciously? Which are just a product of empiricism? When does theory emerge as a scientific discipline? The decisive factor in determining the beginning of the theoretical connection with practice is that the first theoretical foundations are formed and practiced, but in a comprehensive system, and not only on empiricism, intuition or the application of basic patterns.

The previously mentioned Titzl (2002) speaks in a similar spirit. In essence, he says that the beginning is up to the professional decision and assessment of the researcher. Other authors strive to be more specific, which is certainly commendable, but Titzl’s position is more constructive and easier to grasp. It is always a matter of “creating a theory” that complements practice, hence a practice based on communication, on knowledge from other fields, etc. It is thus clear that the general theory of special education, common to all special pedagogical disciplines, began to take shape much later than, for example, the first foundation institute, etc. We must state that the professionally functional framework of special education (including university studies) was conceived only by M. Sovák. We know that this statement can be challenged, but we are doing so with full knowledge of previous efforts, starting with Adolf Strümpel and through the commendable work of a number of other experts. Modern, especially pedagogical thinking, in agreement with Titzl, etc., thus developed in our country at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Although there is a lack of tangible (physically existing) theoretical background (or is just waiting to be discovered), from time to time a new source of professional knowledge (e.g. Eliášková 2020) emerges, which documents the time and methods of special pedagogical care, albeit only after so-called care, and not collectively, i.e. as special pedagogical principles of the theory of the main field of special education as we know it today. Understanding this state, i.e. the lack (possibly non-existence) of historical professional works, is a convincing argument of the above statement that Sovák is the founder of that field where practice and theory have fully penetrated. But as mentioned, a number of promising scientifically based special educators are turning their attention to the history of special pedagogical thinking and looking for scientific and professional practices that must have existed. And on them, with the help of scientific analysis, they perform a commendable job, reactivate them taking into account the relevant norm and time, and thus give practitioners a whole range of stimulating aspects of daily work with the disabled population. We consider these researchers to be supporters and sometimes implementers of the start of the paradigms of special education. Therefore, awareness of the history of practice and theory of the field of special education is necessary as a basic pillar.

As can be seen from the previous text – each historical period in the development of human society has its means, methods, procedures and principles of approach to a population that deviates from the norms, is different, special or unique. When we talk about this population, we mean individuals, groups and communities where special education has a decisive influence. These means, methods, principles, etc. are given by a whole set of factors, such as ideology, standard of living, morality, relationships in society, etc. Opinions on the position of a defective – disabled – special individual in society and the relationship of society to him has changed, but this has already been stated and indicated here. In essence, the above circumstances divide the development of special pedagogical care into several stages. The periodisation of the development of special education is interesting, but it is only a summary and statement of available (and unearthed) materials. Titzl (2002), Renotírová (2006) and Vojtko (2007) talk about 4 stages in the development of special education in our country.

The first stage of the development of special education, usually referred to as the initial period (Vojtko 2007), is characterised and defined by Adolf Strümpel’s (1812–1899) “Pädagogische Pathologie”. This successful work is often considered to be a basic theoretical work that touches on the roots of the scientific approach to special education. Strümpel discusses the so-called child deviations, characterises paedopathology and considers, among other things, research methods. It must be noted that paedopathology at that time was in its infancy but showed great potential. Unfortunately, due to the development of science and paradigmatic phenomena, it could not be effectively established as a stable independent scientific discipline. Perhaps it can best be characterised by a later, somewhat protracted, but, from the point of view of time and development of the field, coherent definition in Chlupov’s *Pedagogical Encyclopedia* (1939), where it is stated: “Paedopathology is a specific study on the physical and mental flaws, shortcomings and deviations of youth. Thus, its subject is *loss or noticeable impairment of sight and hearing, permanent diseases of the eyes, ears, mental illness, underdevelopment or delayed mentality, weakness of will, moral disturbance, desolation, uncontrollability of children, defects of feeling, physical development, mutilation and speech disorders*” (*Pedagogical Encyclopedia* 1939, p. 367). Thus, paedopathology seems to have been the sought-after and so-called foundation of the development of special education, although from today’s point of view the development and knowledge of the roots of special education developed the special pedagogical content of the scientific field somewhat more broadly and definitely more from positions of (related) sciences other than pedagogical sciences. But it is, of course, a historical view which, as always, is an enrichment of current knowledge.

The second phase (2nd half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century) has a whole range aspects

identical to the first phase, primarily at its beginning. The first and second phase can be categorised by social approaches and social relations to the disabled. This whole stage is actually one of the decisive ones for our special education. At this time, i.e. at the beginning of the 20th century, congresses of experts took place, where various professional and practical issues of special education were addressed. It was at these congresses, which we refer to as “Čáda’s Congresses”, that the scientific base of the hitherto more or less practical area, i.e. science without sufficient theory, research and scientific competence, crystallised.

At that time, František Čáda (1865–1918) entered the subconscious of the professional community as an organiser of congresses that intended to address, clarify and popularise the care of the mentally ill and auxiliary education. We acknowledge that F. Čáda is one of the founders and promoters of Czech “paedology”. We usually define paedology in the sense of child care, or rather, we understand paedology as “the science of the child” (*Pedagogical Encyclopedia* 1939, p. 367). As it states (p. 367): “In our country, F. Čáda broadened this field (meaning paedology) immensely. Beside and after him came especially O. Chlup and C. Stejskal among others.” This only underlines the importance of this stage, where qualified and professionally established scientists enter this field and create a theoretical basis and platform for our field until this time. They connect and combine the hitherto practiced communication of issues, intuition, charity, etc. into a comprehensive theory that is based on the practical roots of care development, which preserves what has proven itself and excludes what was not a sufficient accelerating trend in terms of quality practical care in the general understanding of the word (i.e. CARE). By this we mean the paedocentrism advanced at that time and other phenomena that confirm from a historical point of view their value, whether negative or positive, or other. It should be noted that we are talking about a system of scientific theory and practice, and not about state legislative procedures, which responded to burning problems (war, poverty, begging, disability, mental disorder – see the content term paedopathology), but are not the subject of our brief outline, even though they undoubtedly cannot be neglected.

Čáda’s congresses contributed to addressing the issues of upbringing, education and care for the intellectually challenged. At the same time, the interest in the “new kind” of education began to grow along with the number of teachers who sought to establish auxiliary classes and schools, and schools for the disabled in general. The content and significance of the so-called Čáda Congresses has been described, documented and analysed many times. It should be borne in mind that the three congresses (organised between 1909 and 1913) and especially the establishment of a new scientific discipline – paedology, were an important step in designing the scientific field of special pedagogy and a new fresh impetus in special pedagogical thinking in general. In this context, other activities, namely four Czech congresses (1922–1930) for child research and the fifth (first Slavic) congress (1933) cannot be forgotten. The historical significance of these congresses is crucial in the area of theoretical and practical procedures, and Sovák himself mentioned these congresses many times in his university lectures. It is a pity that they are somewhat forgotten, which will certainly change over time, as their legacy is great and perhaps this is where we will find the links in the chain of development of special education, including didactics, methodologies and intervention efforts. The whole second period is actually a “revolutionary” change in our science. In addition to paedopathology, the term remedial pedagogy is beginning to be used (Jan Mauer 1878–1937). Research and the process of learning are slowly disappearing from the understanding of special education as a solution of individual “paedies”. A common platform is sought, etc. And what is utterly crucial is that theory is inseparable from practice and vice versa. Therefore, knowledge also comes from practice and also returns there, through various types of education.

The third stage of special pedagogical thinking is, of course, closely and inextricably linked with František Štampach (1895-1976). In this context, we would like to refer the reader to František Ludvík and his “History of Defectology: A Historical Outline of Youth Care Requiring Public Protection and Assistance”, published in 1956 in Prague and serving as a sufficient theoretical repository for following the development of special pedagogical thinking in our country. Perhaps only for the sake of completeness and the author’s obligation to present basic facts: Štampach defined the theory for the so-called defects and diseases of youth. He then focused his scope of care on the older age group. In his work he introduced the so-called 4 work sets (psychopaedics, orthopaedics, speech therapy and visual impairment) and as a basic principle of his social pedagogy he established re-education in the sense as we understand it today.

The fourth stage appears on the scene of special pedagogical thinking after World War II and is associated primarily with the names of František Ludvík, Bohumír Popelář and Miloš Sovák. We could mention more and more. However, when we talk about the “founding father” of modern special pedagogical thinking and subsequent (e.g. educational, but also legislative) steps, we always mean Miloš Sovák, who, following from the information stated here, created a valid starting point for special pedagogical theory and practice in our country.

At the end of this article, which has sought to map the path of both special pedagogical thinking and care in our country and which is only a small contribution in the spirit of modern understanding of the legacy of our predecessors, it is necessary to state that the need to honour the lectures of such scholars, such as Sovák, Kabel and Edelsberger. They have aroused historical interest in our field in contemporary experts in special education and introduced them to the knowledge of the historical path of knowledge and its use.

The study of historical aspects therefore brings us to the fifth stage, which entails a whole range of knowledge, changes and concepts, the real significance of which, however, will only be assessed by history.

Among the founders of special education in what was then Czechoslovakia are several important personalities. We would like to introduce one of them to you.

**Miloš Sovák (1905–1989) – a figure in special education
WHO WAS PROFESSOR SOVÁK**

Prof. MUDr. PhDr. MilošSovákDrSc. was a doctor and a professor at Charles University. I have chosen him today as a figure and the founder of Czechoslovak speech therapy and the creator of speech therapy theory and practice.

He was born on 15 April 1905 in Bechyně. He was the youngest of seven children. His father was a professor of Czech, German and mathematics. There were six generations of doctors in the family on his mother's side.

During the Second World War, he actively participated in the Prague Uprising as a doctor in the infirmary and helped save the archive of Prague from the burning town hall to the church of St. Nicholas. After the announcement: "Doctors, help the freed prisoners of the concentration camp in Terezín", he left with his colleague MUDr. Holubec, and there they took over operations of the former SS hospital in Kréta near Terezín.

After the end of the Second World War, he participated in the establishment of a school for the hard of hearing, a school for students with speech difficulties and for the mute. They were so-called new type schools. In 1946, he founded the Institute of Speech Therapy in Prague. The main activities of the institute were research, and the medical and pedagogical care for children and youth. The institute also engaged in research of voice, speech and hearing disorders and, last but not least, professional training of teachers and speech therapy instructors.

He was instrumental in introducing the almost world first of free rental of hearing aids for the hearing impaired, re-education courses for the hearing impaired and expressed interest in the issue of left-handedness. He instituted care for left-handed people and brought to light the inadequacy and impacts of left-handedness retraining. Among retrained lefthanded people he pointed to fidgeting, behavioural changes, neuroses, stuttering, dyslexia, dysgraphia and much more.

The Institute of Speech Therapy also contributed to the creation of a nationwide register of children with cleft palates and developed a system of sleep therapy for stuttering. Stuttering can arise from many causes, one of which may be training people out of left-handedness. According to substantiated observations, the stuttering stopped when the retraining stopped. 2

Speech therapy was subject to the agreement of the Ministry of Education and Health. These were the guidelines of the Ministry of Health from 1952 to meet the needs of schoolchildren.

Based on Sovák's experience as a doctor, he founded speech therapy schools of "a new type, schools for the hard of hearing and schools for children with speech impairments.

Sovák states that every hearing and speech disorder has serious consequences for the proper development of speech. 3

He taught phoniatics at AMU and at the same time lectured at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University and was the head of the department for voice hygiene and speech therapy. From 1948, he lectured on voice abnormalities at the Faculty of Education, Charles University. In 1950, he was appointed Associate Professor of Corrective Pedagogy (with regard to speech therapy). In 1963 he was awarded a doctorate in pedagogical sciences. In 1964, he founded the Department of Special Education at the Faculty of Education, Charles University, and headed it until 1970, when he retired. On 29 September 1989, he died in Prague from melanoma that had appeared on his leg. As it was 1989, medical care at that time was not yet as advanced as it is now.

His metastases gradually spread to all organs. Despite the difficult treatment, he still focused his brain on tremendous activity, and although he felt that the end was near, he did not want to die and fought with all his

might for every minute of his life. Even in his last days, he still thought about special education and told the other patients in the room about it.

What was Professor Sovák actually concerned with in the field of special education?

Professor Sovák made a major contribution to the field of special education in the areas of speech therapy as speech therapy as a scientific discipline and as an independent branch of special education.

As in the whole special education, as well as in speech therapy, the subject of care is a person with a disorder.

Speech therapy (The Czech term *logopedie* comes from the Greek: *logos* = word and *paideia* = education)

It is the science of the physiology and pathology of the communication process, as well as prevention and correction, educational care for defects and disorders of communication. Speech therapy is a section of special pedagogy dealing with the development of education and training of people with disabilities and disorders of the communication process.

The communication process is specific to the human individual. The tool is speech and hearing. Both of these components are linked to each other, without the right ability to speak, hearing will not develop properly and vice versa.

The society in which one communicates is very important for speech, and from birth a child listens to the sounds around it, then imitates the sounds until it slowly begins to develop speech.

Defect (from Latin *defectus* – loss). We distinguish between an organ defect (developmental anomaly, consequence of an illness, consequence of an injury) and a functional defect (disorder or impairment of organ tissue, e.g. cardiac, gastric neurosis, etc.). In terms of origin, the defect can be divided into prenatal, perinatal and postnatal. AND ALSO A DEFECT OBTAINED DURING LIFE.

Defectology is the study of a person with a defect, i.e. a person affected by a physical, sensory or mental defect. To correctly detect a speech defect, we use speech therapy diagnostics.

Speech therapy diagnostics is the starting point for choosing methods of speech therapy care. It is necessary to make a diagnosis. The main means is unimpaired speech of an individual. It must be a spontaneous speech. And it is always necessary to evaluate the individual as a whole.

Proper speech education and timely elimination of defects and disorders are important for the proper development of speech. The whole process is connected with the overall development of the child, personality and intellect. Speech therapy does not just treat speech, hearing and voice. It also concerns itself with the overall development of the human individual.

Hearing defects significantly contribute to the correct and incorrect development of speech. Every hearing impairment has serious consequences in the development of speech.

If a child is born with absolute hearing loss or loses hearing before the speech development process begins, the child will be a deaf-mute – profoundly deaf. It may even happen if he/she loses his/her hearing between the ages of 6 and 7, when speech is still developing and not yet fully consolidated. If hearing loss occurs after the child is 7 years old, then it results in hearing loss. Speech changes and deforms.

Partial hearing loss causes hearing impairment. The child learns to speak, but with great difficulty.

Sovák's importance to special education also lies in his great influence in the establishment of speech therapy institutions.

In 1940, he established for teachers the first instructional course to correct speech defects, especially at auxiliary schools. A year later, he founded a school for the hearing impaired, headed by Vlastimil Čisář and also a school for those with speech disorders (stuttering, headed by Josef Zíma). In 1946, the aforementioned Speech Therapy Institute of the Capital City of Prague was established.

Sovák also contributed to many training sessions for speech therapists and already provided these briefings in the regional cities of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Until then, the speech therapy centre education and all activities were in Prague. Professionalism and gaining experience, especially from practice, were very important to Sovák.

As the head of the Speech Therapy Institute, he personally and in a team participated in the elaboration of draft guidelines for speech therapy care, which were submitted to the Ministry of Education and Health.

Under his influence, speech therapy clinics, speech therapy consulting offices, sanatoriums for the needs of long-term care of youth with disorders were established.

From 1927, Sovák also organised summer holiday courses to help those afflicted with stuttering, where it was mainly about introducing new elements into the therapy of stuttering with a strong focus on pronunciation of speech.

Sovák also helped to establish new schools for pupils with disorders. These were Special Schools for Children and Pupils with Speech Disorders, Kindergarten and Elementary School for Children with Speech Disorders, Elementary School for Mute Children, Special School for Non-Speakers.

One of the tasks of these schools was to prepare the pupil for transfer to a regular school. An important feature of these schools was the systematic cultivation of correct pronunciation and fluent speech and, last but not least, the treatment of the psychological origin of the speech defects.

Stárek (2022, p. 244) sums up the modern view of inclusion ... “Nowadays, there are many forms of education for people with intellectual disabilities in the Czech Republic which were mentioned in the text. The benefit of individual integration in “ordinary” school is direct socialisation with peers without disabilities. On the other hand, the pupils without a disability can be confronted with diversity, and they learn what inclusion means. By respecting the differences of others, inclusive education can be seen as a useful form of education. Therefore, the discrimination can be eliminated which will in turn enrich the quality of life of all pupils involved.”

The literary significance of Professor Sovák on special education

Professor Sovák is the author of many books and publications in the field of special education. I have already mentioned his two works. To these the following can be added: *Voice, Speech, Hearing* (1944), *From the Life of a Deaf Person* (1946), *Hearing Disorders, Speech Disorders* (1953), *General Defectology* (1958), *Speech Therapy in a Special School* (1965), *Speech Therapy* (1966) *Laterality as a Pedagogical Problem* (1962), *Dictionary of Abnormalities* and many others.

We would mention a textbook for universities, *Outline of Special Education*, which deals with children with mental, emotional, visual, auditory and physical disabilities, as well as children included in the so-called borderline cases. This textbook includes the areas of didactics, methodology, all disciplines of special education, deals with the environment, prevention, education, methods.

His other important work is the *Dictionary of Abnormalities*, intended for workers in the field of care for the disabled in the school and medical sector, social care, justice and others.

Conclusion

Thus, each period brings its own thoughts and stimuli that help society to connect and perceive any disability within the majority society. As can be seen from the text, the main topics appeared, which change into new ideas and open a perspective not only for special pedagogy. As stated by eg Stárek (2021) ... the article attempts to highlight the components of the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation and factors in the field of helping professions - such as social work or special pedagogy. Questions are raised: What structural components and elements of interdisciplinary cooperation are important for helping professions? Meanwhile, everyone usual work is important to not forget about professional development, being responsible for our work and taking part in multidisciplinary and multi-organizational project and systems. For most workers this is usual, and they do not even realize it, it is automatic. The reality is unfortunately different, and the idea of multidisciplinary cooperation is in helping professions underrated and in real interaction it is not met.

Field cooperation is becoming one of the important topics not only in the sector of special pedagogy, but also in helping professions. Another conveniently interesting and modern topic is extraordinary situations. Each of us in our lives will face emergencies, whether a fire, accident, traffic collision or natural disaster, and it is crucial that we know how to recognise them and how to adequately react. The legally-guaranteed protection in the case of emergencies and for the protection of life and health of the citizenry or property is primarily the remit of the integrated emergency response system. Protection provided by the integrated emergency response system does not arrive in mere seconds, and a person is thus forced by necessity to deal with the situation and help as well. For this reason, it remains necessary to support and perfect the education and training of citizens, and it proves effective that this process is supported by schools or educational institutions. (Stárek, Klugerová, 2020)

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