# Univerzita Karlova v Praze

## Pedagogická Fakulta


# Diplomová Práce

*A qualitative study of*
*itinerant specialist support for the inclusion of*
*preschoolers with disabilities in the Czech Republic*


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# *A qualitative study of itinerant specialist support for the inclusion of preschoolers with disabilities in the Czech Republic*

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*I, Soo Hoon Lee declare that I developed this dissertation independently with the use of the resources listed in my bibliography.*

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# Abstract

The area of support for students and teachers surrounding the implementation of inclusive schooling is a crucial one. Having accessibility to resource persons or specialists in special needs education provides assurance for general teachers in meeting the learning needs of all students, particularly students with disabilities. One way of addressing students' and teachers' needs for support is through itinerant specialist support.

This qualitative study investigates four main aspects of itinerant specialist support in Czech preschools: the system of itinerant specialist support, its practicality and adequacy in promoting inclusion, the collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and preschool teachers, and preschool changes as a result of itinerant specialist support and inclusion. Findings from interviews and questionnaire responses of itinerant specialists and preschool teachers demonstrated that itinerant support using the consultative model was found to be practical by preschool teachers for facilitating inclusion. Teachers particularly valued the professional feedback and moral support, and the information cum methodical guidance they received but wanted more frequent visits from their itinerant specialists.

Additionally, teachers were perceived as active participants in specialist-teacher collaboration although itinerant specialists often found themselves leading the collaboration. The choice on collaborative approach and roles depended on the experience, needs and context of teachers. Research findings showed that itinerant specialist support had succeeded in bringing different aspects and levels of change in preschools. Most importantly, the results proved that itinerant specialist support using the consultative model was an effective way of cultivating positive teacher attitudes and transfering knowledge and skills from itinerant specialists to preschool teachers. Finally, evaluation of findings identified four essential attributes for itinerant specialists to be effective in providing consultation. Essentially, itinerant specialists should have the professional knowledge cum hands-on experience working with children with disabilities, interpersonal skills, and collaboration skills. Another quality which surfaced from the findings was the specialists' moral commitment in promoting inclusion.



**KEYWORDS:** Itinerant specialist support, Peripatetic teaching, Itinerant consultation

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# Contents List

## List of Figures



## List of Tables

# 1 INTRODUCTION

> '…by definition, research is not a self-indulgent activity for the researcher. It has to matter to others.'
>
> (Salmon, 2003: 26)

Ethically speaking, it is essential that research has to matter to the researcher and also to others. Firstly, the topic under investigation must matter to the researcher so that he or she pursues it with enthusiasm, rigor and order. Then for it to have true value, the research should also benefit others.

My research topic is: **A qualitative study of itinerant specialist support for the inclusion of preschoolers with disabilities in the Czech Republic**. This chapter is divided into five main sections. The first section explains the meaning of inclusive education in this research. The second section gives a description of the Malaysian context namely in the areas of inclusive education, preschool education and my professional practice. Next, this chapter explains my rationale for choosing the research topic. The fourth section gives a brief outline of the education system in the Czech Republic including the functions of Special Education Centres (*Speciálně Pedagogická Centra)*. The final section of this chapter explains the significance of this study and how it is hoped that the research would bring benefit to my non-governmental organisation (NGO) and others.

## 1.1 The meaning of inclusive education in this research

Inclusive education is globally recognised as a socially just and rights-based approach in which to educate children with disabilities (Bailey et al, 1998; Salamanca Statement, 1994; Biwako Millennium Framework, 2003-2012; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006).

> 'In our opinion, placement in inclusive settings should be a goal for all children with disabilities. The legal, moral, rational, and empirical arguments provide a consistent and compelling foundation which supports this position.'
>
> (Bailey et al, 1998: 36)

For the purpose of this research, I would like to borrow the definition of inclusive education given by Loreman et al (2005: 2).

> 'Inclusion means full inclusion of children with diverse abilities in all aspects of schooling that other children are able to access and enjoy. It involves regular schools and classrooms genuinely adapting and changing to meet the needs of all children, as well as celebrating and valuing differences.'

The authors note that teachers often use the term 'inclusion' and 'integration' interchangeably as if they were synonymous. They were adamant in making a distinction between both terms.

> 'Integration programs aim to involve children with diverse abilities into the existing classes and structures within a school. They endeavour to "normalize", to help a child fit into a pre-existing model of schooling. Inclusion differs in that it assumes that all children are part of the regular school system from the beginning of school. The need, therefore, for children to adapt to a school setting is not an issue as they are already a part of that system.'
>
> (ibid: 2)

To explain the common misconception of inclusion, Loreman et al illustrate further what inclusion is not.

> 'Educating children part-time in special schools and part-time in regular schools is not inclusion. Educating children in special, mostly segregated, environments in regular schools is not inclusion. Educating children in regular classes, but requiring them to follow substantially different courses of study in terms of content and learning environment to their peers, is also not inclusion…'
>
> (ibid: 2)

### 1.2 The researcher's context in Malaysia

Where I come from in Malaysia, inclusion in education is still at the infancy stage despite integration efforts having started more than 25 years ago. Presently, there is no law pertaining specifically to the strict implementation of inclusive education although existing legislation encourages this practice within reasonable accommodation. As such, inclusive education in Malaysia is more a privilege than a guaranteed right.

### *1.2.1 Development toward inclusive education in Malaysia*

In Malaysia, the term *inclusion* and *inclusive education* have been broadly used by the government to refer to 'functional integration' (MOE, 2004: 29) rather than the unconditional acceptance of pupils with disabilities into mainstream classes. In 1981, the Ministry of Education introduced the concept of integration by establishing special education classes in mainstream schools for the purpose of enhancing social integration between children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The integrated programme employs the isolation and semi-inclusive approach in teaching and learning. However, only pupils with learning disabilities and who are deemed as 'educable' are integrated, while pupils with visual impairment and hearing impairment are generally educated in special schools. The incorporation of the term 'educable' in the 1997 Education (Special Education) Regulations has received strong criticisms from various sectors particularly NGOs in the disability movement and parents' groups. By adopting this term in policy, the Ministry of Education is articulating that not all children with disabilities are deemed 'educable'.

> 'A pupil with special needs is educable if he is able to manage himself without help and is confirmed by a panel consisting of a medical practitioner, an officer from the Ministry of Education and an officer from the Department of Welfare, as capable of undergoing the national educational programme.'
>
> (ILBS, 2005: 136)

Furthermore, although the 1997 Education (Special Education) Regulations make a single reference to an inclusive education programme, it is meant to cater only 'for pupils with special needs and who are able to attend normal classes together with normal pupils' (ibid: 135). Additionally, the Ministry of Education encourages special education teachers to arrange with mainstream teachers for either full-time or part-time inclusion of pupils with disabilities who have achieved satisfactory levels of reading, writing and arithmetic skills (JPPP, 2007: 25). In other words, teachers can decide whether or not pupils from the special education classes are eligible for education in mainstream classrooms. Clearly, there is neither compulsion nor obligation for the implementation of inclusion in Malaysian schools.

More recently in December 2007, the Malaysian government passed the Persons with Disabilities Bill which prohibits the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the general education system on the basis of their disabilities (MWFCD, 2007). Concerning education, the Bill provides:

> 'The Government and private educational providers shall, in order to enable persons and children with disabilities to pursue education, provide reasonable accommodation suitable with the requirements of persons and children with disabilities in terms of, among others, infrastructure, equipment and teaching materials, teaching methods, curricula and other forms of support that meet the diverse needs of persons or children with disabilities.'
>
> (ibid: 21)

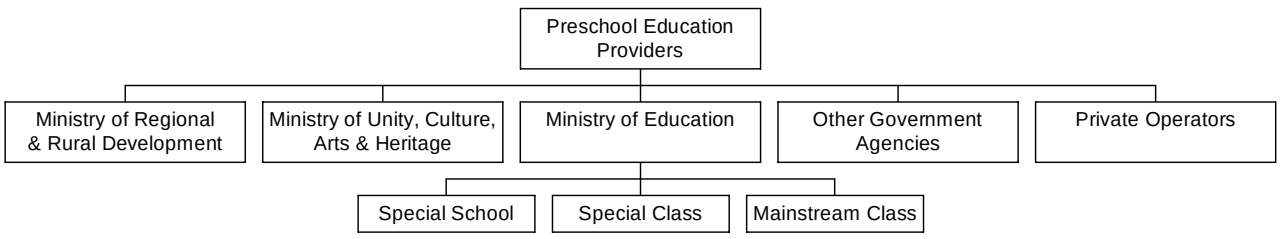
However, the Persons with Disabilities Bill fails to outline clauses for enforcement and penalty for non-compliance of its provisions. In short, it is a Bill without bite! Additionally, if the implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Bill will take the government as long the time it took to table the Bill, change will not start within the next five years.

### *1.2.2 Preschool education in Malaysia*

Preschool education was incorporated into the national education system following the institution of the Education Act 1996. Generally catering for children between the ages of four and six, preschool education is not compulsory in Malaysia. The provision of preschool education (refer Figure 1.1) is largely by the government and complemented by the private sector. Government-operated preschools are run by the:

- Ministry of Education
- Social Development Division (KEMAS), Ministry of Regional and Rural Development
- National Unity and Integration Department, Ministry of Unity, Culture, Arts and Heritage
- Other government agencies namely the State Islamic Religion Departments and The Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM)

**Figure 1.1** Preschool education providers in Malaysia



Preschools operated by KEMAS under the Ministry of Regional and Rural Development are popularly known as KEMAS kindergartens. The KEMAS programme started in 1970 to cater for children between the ages of four and six in line with government strategies to develop the rural community (KEMAS, No Date). The National Unity and Integration Department caters for children aged five to six years through its unity kindergartens in the suburbs and housing estates. The unity kindergartens began running since 1976 and aim to cultivate racial harmony among children of the different ethnic groups in Malaysia (JPNIN, 2007). The KEMAS kindergartens and unity kindergartens do not come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education but instead are governed under their respective Ministries. Nonetheless, the provision of preschool education by the government is based on the National Preschool Curriculum. The general aim of all the government-run preschools is to provide children with learning experiences to develop their potential in all aspects of growth, master basic skills and instil positive attitudes as preparation for entry into primary schools. Preschools in the private sector also abide by the National Preschool Curriculum and are regulated by the Ministry of Education. Professional bodies such as the Malaysian Kindergarten Association, Malaysian Association of Child Care Providers and National Association of Preschool Teachers have been established as a result of the growing number of private preschools. These preschools include kindergartens set up by private enterprises and non-government establishments such as churches, temples and religious associations. Kindergarten programmes are commonly offered along nursery and child care programmes.

The provision of preschool education for children with disabilities was started by the Ministry of Education in 2004 with the opening of preschool classes in 28 special primary schools: 21 classes for children with hearing impairment, five classes for children with visual impairment and two classes for children with learning difficulties (Haniz Ibrahim, 2006). However, these preschool classes are run in isolated settings where children with disabilities are being educated in special schools apart from their peers in the mainstream schools. In 2006, the Education Ministry expanded its preschool programme by introducing the integrated special education preschool programme for children with learning disabilities in 44 mainstream primary schools (ibid). The children, although placed within mainstream settings, are being taught in special preschool classes separated from their peers in the mainstream preschool classes. This concept of educating preschool children with learning disabilities is similar to that of the special education classes in the primary and secondary schools.

Going by the public-private sector divide, the government is the largest provider of mainstream preschool education in Malaysia. In 2005, the government sector operated a total of 15,561 regular preschool classes (MOE, 2006). However, this figure is not too huge when compared to the 11,000 private preschools operating in Malaysia. Table 1.1 (compiled using statistics from MOE, 2006) gives a breakdown of the number of preschool classes run by the government and private preschools in Malaysia. Although preschool education is being widely provided, these programmes are non-inclusive, catering to the learning needs of typically developing children and not children with disabilities. In cases where there are enrolments of children with disabilities in regular preschool programmes, the children are being accepted at the discretion of preschool teachers (ACS, 2007).

**Table 1.1** Provision of mainstream preschool education in Malaysia in 2005

| Mainstream preschool education providers | | Total number of preschool classes |
|---|---|---|
| Government (15,561 classes) | Ministry of Education | 4,004 |
| | Ministry of Regional & Rural Development | 8,307 |
| | Ministry of Unity, Culture, Arts & Heritage | 1,500 |
| | Other government agencies | 1,750 |
| Private operators | | 11,000 |
| TOTAL | | 26,561 |

### *1.2.3 My professional practice*

Although existing research and literature advocate for inclusive education to commence from preschool level (Buysse and Bailey, 1993; Bailey et al, 1998; Odom, 2000; Rafferty et al, 2003; Schwartz et al, No Date), this practice is not a norm in Malaysia. From my experience working with parents of young children with learning disabilities, I was often confronted with their frustrations over securing a regular preschool placement for their children.

> 'For parents who wish to enrol their children with special needs into a regular preschool programme, they are frequently at the "mercy" of preschool operators. As many experienced parents will testify, the search for a preschool with welcoming attitudes can be a frustrating task.'
>
> (ACS, 2007: 8)

As special educators and practitioners providing early intervention services to young children with learning disabilities and their families, my colleagues and I strive at every opportunity to bring the children whom we serve into mainstream education. It is our belief that children with disabilities are first and foremost children. Like their typically developing peers, children with disabilities have the right to grow, play and learn in a society that accepts and includes them. Since 2006, following a survey (ACS, 2007) which I had conducted on preschool education in Malaysia, I started establishing contacts between my NGO and local preschools as well as strengthening networks with other NGOs in Malaysia that share our beliefs on inclusion. It is the aim of my NGO to work closely with private preschool operators to promote the enrolment of more children from my NGO as well as children with disabilities in general into regular preschools. Additionally, we want to share our knowledge and experiences with other NGOs that are also working toward similar goals.

From the discussion in this section, it is undeniable that there have been progressive efforts by the Malaysian government to make mainstream education more inclusive. However, these efforts are neither proactive nor intensive. Much remains to be done to actively promote the inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream education, rightfully from as early as preschool years. The next section will explain my rationale for choosing my research topic.

## 1.3 Rationale for research

### *1.3.1 The current situation and needs in Malaysia*

Statistics from the Ministry of Education show that in 2005, an estimated 40% of mainstream preschool classes operating in Malaysia were run by private operators (refer Table 1.1). This suggests the considerable role private preschool operators could take on in support of inclusion. Nonetheless due to lack of legislative provision and enforcement, private preschool operators are not liable to open their doors to children with disabilities. The above situation, coupled with the reality that numerous applications for regular preschool enrolment of children with disabilities had been rejected, became a significant research problem in Malaysia. Indeed more concrete steps needed to be taken to investigate why children with disabilities were being turned away from their local preschools and consequently, what could be done.

Between July 2005 and December 2006, I conducted a small-scale survey entitled *Inclusive Preschool Education in Malaysia: A Comparative Study of Present Situation and Future Direction* (ACS, 2007). Survey respondents were 191 private operators of various mainstream preschools services (i.e. child care centres, nurseries and kindergartens) for children aged between two and six.

Some of the survey findings underpin my motivation for pursuing the present research topic, namely:

- Teacher limitations (i.e. teacher's lack of experience in teaching children with disabilities) was the most frequent reason (75%) given for respondents' past refusal to enrol children with disabilities.
- Some 48.2% of the 85 respondents who did not enrol children with disabilities indicated that they would do so if they received professional support.
- Almost half of the 106 respondents who were enrolling children with disabilities requested for professional support (i.e. teacher training, assessment and problem solving).

The results of the survey presented a myriad of possibilities for Malaysian NGOs in the disability services to promote inclusion in preschool settings, particularly in private preschools. Firstly, the findings revealed that the lack of training and experience among preschool teachers had resulted in many mainstream preschools rejecting the enrolment of children with disabilities. Hence, there is dire need for the provision of special education support in terms of expertise knowledge and skills, professional advice and teachers' training to promote inclusion in mainstream preschools. This is where NGOs, particularly early intervention service providers, can collaborate with preschools.

Secondly, the findings demonstrated the receptivity of a large number of private preschool operators towards external support to facilitate inclusion in their establishments. This welcoming environment, described as 'system openness' (Havelock and Hamilton, 2004: 4), is the onset goal of change agents when advocating for change within social systems. When there is an openness to change, it makes it easier for change agents such as itinerant teachers to introduce and promote the concept and practice of inclusion in schools. Hence, it is rationale to see itinerant specialist support as an avenue for Malaysian NGOs to promote inclusive education in private preschools.

### *1.3.2 International practice of itinerant specialist support*

Itinerant specialist support is recognised in many countries as an avenue for promoting inclusion beginning from early childhood education to primary and secondary education. The United States, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic are among countries currently using this model of support delivery to promote inclusive schooling. Itinerants are commonly special educators or professionals working in special education establishments such as early intervention centres or special schools (Wesley et al, 2001; Noah's Ark, 2006; MINOCW, 2007). In Australia, for example, itinerant specialist support is made available by the government through agencies such as the Centre for Inclusive Schooling, in Western Australia (CIS, 2006) and also non-governmental organisations (i.e. Noah's Ark Inc, Victoria). Special schools, generally known to possess the specialist staff, special education resources and technology, are recognised as positive partners for mainstream schools. For this reason, there have been moves to transfer the expertise from special schools into mainstream schools to support the inclusion of children with disabilities. According to Dinnebeil and McInerney (2000), itinerant teachers are in a unique position to offer ongoing support and professional development for mainstream teachers as they possess the knowledge and skills.

### *1.3.3 Relevance of research to my professional practice*

Following my previous research in Malaysia (ACS, 2007), my organisation has plans to set up an itinerant support service for promoting inclusion in private preschools. The service will help support preschool teachers in facilitating learning of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms and thus encourage the children's enrolment in private preschools. This research gives me a great opportunity to study the system of itinerant specialist support in the Czech Republic and the collaboration between itinerant specialist teachers and mainstream preschool teachers.

## 1.4 The research context in the Czech Republic

Education is compulsory for nine years in the Czech Republic. This is being provided in basic schools, which covers primary and lower secondary education, for children aged between six and 15 years. Preschool education can begin when children reach age three while upper secondary education takes two to four years depending on the type of school. However, education can be deferred for a maximum of two years for children with

disabilities. The Czech Republic has a long tradition of segregated institutional care and special education for children with disabilities dating back to the 19th century (Eurydice, 2007). For children who are unable to follow the mainstream education, they are entitled for education in primary practical schools (formerly known as auxiliary schools) for a maximum of 10 years. According to the Information Network on Education in Europe (ibid) since 1990, there have been increasing efforts to integrate children with disabilities into the mainstream education system. One of the outcomes of these efforts is the establishment of educational guidance institutions such as the Special Education Centres (SECs) and Educational-psychological Consulting Centres.

The Law on Schools (*Školský Zákon 561*) which was passed in September 2004 stipulates that children with disabilities can be individually integrated in mainstream schools given that existing educational conditions and special pedagogical care meet the standards of SECs (Eurydice, 2007). Having said that, in practice individual integration of children with disabilities only takes place with the recommendation from SECs and with the agreement of parents and school head teachers. Additionally, the Law's provision of guidance services in schools and school guidance facilities stipulates the content of educational guidance services, their providers and their recipients (i.e. children with disabilities, their parents and teachers). One of the primary functions of SECs is to offer guidance and methodical support to teachers in mainstream schools for integration through its team of itinerant specialists namely psychologists and special educators. The centres also perform special educational and psychological diagnosis of children with disabilities. It was reported that there were a total of 90 SECs in the Czech Republic in 2005 (ibid).

## 1.5 Significance of research

The research findings primarily serve as a general guideline for the setting up of itinerant support service by my NGO to facilitate inclusion in Malaysian preschools. The findings have provided better understanding into the systematic and practical aspects of itinerant specialist support in the Czech Republic. Additionally, the results have offered useful insights into specialist-teacher collaborative relationships and identified pre-requisite skills for itinerant personnels. Hopefully, the research outcomes also serve as useful references for those looking into introducing itinerant support as a way of promoting inclusive education in their own organisations and countries.

For my participants, this research has drawn out the significance and implications of good collaborative relationships in facilitating preschool inclusion. The findings will hopefully promote better understanding between the collaborating parties and bring about improvement in their professional practice.

**Summary**

The chapter started with a definition on inclusive education and a description of the Malaysian context. The rationale for the research topic was then explained followed by a brief outline of the Czech education system. The final section explained the significance of this research.

# 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Mertens (2005: 88) states that the purpose of a literature review is:

> 'to provide the reader with an overall framework for where this piece of work fits in the "big picture" of what is known about a topic from previous research. Thus, the literature review serves to explain the topic of the research and to build a rationale for a problem that is studied.'

This literature review draws heavily on research work and journal articles from the United States as extensive studies and writings (Wesley et al, 2001; Sadler, 2003; Ryan et al, 2004; Dinnebeil et al, 2006) have been generated in the area of itinerant early childhood special education (ECSE) in the country. Additionally, the review incorporates literature from other countries where itinerant specialist support is also practiced. The introductory section highlights the significance of specialist support in facilitating teachers' inclusive practices in mainstream schools. Following this is a working definition of itinerant specialist support. Subsequently, the rest of this chapter is divided into four parts to coincide with the four primary research questions of this dissertation.

## 2.1 Introduction

The issue of support surrounding the implementation of inclusive schooling is a crucial one. Having accessibility to resource persons or specialists in special needs education provides assurance for general teachers in meeting the learning needs of all children, particularly children with disabilities. Clough and Nutbrown (2004) found that early childhood educators identified the availability of adequate support for pupils and teachers as the key issue for successful inclusion of young children with learning difficulties in the United Kingdom (UK).

> 'Whether the need for support is part of educators' constructions of what is needed effectively to include pupils with learning difficulties or part of the reality of effective education provision, participants in the study confirmed that issues of support are often a major concern when inclusion is under consideration.'
>
> (ibid: 206)

Similarly, another study (Heiman, 2004) saw British mainstream teachers citing the need for specialists to assist them in formulating lesson plans for including children with disabilities. In Malaysia, collaboration between special and regular educators is crucial for inclusion because the latter are perceived as not having sufficient training and skills for teaching students with disabilities (Manisah Mohd Ali et al, 2006). In private preschool education, preschool educators indicated more willingness to enrol children with disabilities if they were given some form of specialist support (ACS, 2007).

In the history of the delivery of specialist support, there are generally two avenues of service provision: school-based and itinerant. For school-based support, specialist teachers who are well-versed in special education cater specifically to the school where they are based. For example, these specialist teachers are known as special needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) in the UK, *interne begeleider* (internal support coordinator) in the Netherlands and support teacher in Australia (Crowther et al, 2001; Pijl and Van Den Bos, 2001; Forlin, 2001). Itinerant specialist teachers, on the other hand, services several schools (usually in a particular district) as part of their job requirement (Dinnebeil et al, 2004).

## 2.2 Itinerant specialist support: a working definition

The deployment of itinerant specialist teachers to support students with disabilities and their teachers in mainstream schools is not a new concept. The United States, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic are among countries currently using this model of service delivery to promote inclusive schooling. As early as 1961, the Ministry of Education in the UK had proposed peripatetic specialist help for ordinary school teachers (Richmond and Smith, 1990). In the US, the itinerant service delivery model is used ‘to provide services to young children (ages 3 years – 6 years) with disabilities whose primary placement is a community-based early childhood program’ (Dinnebeil et al, 2006: 153). In the Netherlands itinerant specialist teachers, known as *ambulante begeileder* (ambulant teachers), bring their expertise from special schools to assist teachers in the mainstream primary and secondary schools. This is not unlike the medical model analogy of an ambulance dispatching hospital personnel to support patients in need of health care. In the Czech Republic, itinerant specialists from the *Speciálně Pedagogická Centra* (Special Education Centres) who function as consultants in special education, collaborate with mainstream teachers and parents of children with disabilities (Eurydice, 2007).

Dinnebeil et al (2004: 167) describe itinerant early childhood special education (ECSE) teachers as 'traveling teachers'.

> 'Instead of functioning as a classroom-based teacher, itinerants visit children on their caseloads on a regular basis and have a responsibility to address the goals and objectives found on the child's Individual Educational Plan (IEP).'
>
> (Dinnebeil et al, 2004: 167)

Sadler (2003: 8) portrays itinerant ECSE teachers as 'inclusion specialists' who support preschoolers with disabilities in community settings. More specifically, Harris and Klein (2004) give the following definition of itinerant ECSE consultation:

> 'Itinerant ECSE consultation is an indirect service delivery approach in which an individual with specialized training in ECSE consults with early childhood educators to support young children with disabilities within a wide range of inclusive community-based settings, for the primary purpose of supporting the child's participation in typical early childhood activities, and the child's timely progress toward, and achievement of, educational goals.'
>
> (ibid: 125-126)

Although differing terms are used to refer to itinerant specialists in different countries, three characteristics stand out distinctly:

1. Itinerant specialists are educators or professionals in the field of special needs education.
2. Itinerant specialists are traveling teachers or professionals; they are not based in the classroom.
3. Itinerant specialists' main role is to facilitate inclusion in mainstream schools.

In line with the above characterization of itinerant specialists, itinerant specialist support in this research is defined as support from itinerant specialists to general educators in assisting them to meet the learning needs and promote the participation of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Specifically for this study, the research context encompasses Special Education Centres and mainstream preschools in the Czech Republic. Preschoolers with disabilities in this research refer to preschool-going children who are aged between three to six years and are having one or more disability.

## 2.3 What is the system of itinerant specialist support?

The query into how itinerant specialists support children with disabilities and their teachers in mainstream preschools is one of the central themes of this research and dissertation. The operating standard of the Ohio Department of Education in the United States (ODE, No Date: 1), for instance, states that 'itinerant ECSE services are defined as direct and indirect instruction, including large-group, small group, individual instruction and/or parent and teacher training and consultation.' Dinnebeil et al (2004) identify two ways in which itinerant ECSE teachers support young children with disabilities in community-based early childhood education centres.

> 'One way is to provide direct services to the child, working with the child either individually or in small groups with other children to address IEP objectives. Another way that itinerant teachers can fulfill their responsibilities is through *indirect* methods by supporting the work of general education staff (i.e., early childhood teachers and caregivers) as they address children's IEP objectives within the context of naturally-occurring classroom routines. In an indirect service delivery model the itinerant teacher works in partnership with children's teachers and caregivers to support children's development.'
>
> (ibid: 167-168)

Of late, the indirect or consultative model has been strongly recommended in the ECSE field as it is seen to promote the transfer of knowledge and skills from itinerant teachers to mainstream teachers. The consultative model is based on the principle of 'distributed practice' (ODE, No Date: 2). The efficacy of distributed practice lies in the notion that children's learning becomes more effective when instruction is given throughout the day rather than during one intensive session.

> '[I]tinerant ECSE teachers provide assistance and support to other adults in the learning environment who will work with the child in the absence of the itinerant teacher. As a result, children are afforded more learning opportunities for effective intervention during the majority of the week when the itinerant teacher is not there.'
>
> (ibid: 1)

Dinnebeil and McInerney (2000) concur that the consultative/indirect model, compared to the direct model, is a more efficient way of employing itinerant service resources. However, they note that a majority of itinerant ECSE teachers are practicing using the direct teaching model because they are not trained specifically in consultative work.

> 'The itinerant teachers who participated in our research were much more likely to work directly with children because they felt most comfortable in this role, a phenomenon that is understandable given the fact that teacher education programs primarily emphasize learning to work directly with children, as opposed to working with other adults.
>
> (ibid: 21)

While recognising the benefits of the indirect model, Richardson-Gibbs (2004) maintains that direct service activities strengthen indirect consultation. Working directly with the child with disability in the classroom, whether individually or jointly with the classroom teacher, will enable the itinerant specialist to better understand the strengths and needs of both child and teacher. Nonetheless, mainstream teachers are more likely to prefer the direct model as while the itinerant specialist is engaging the child with disability, they are able to concentrate on giving instruction to other children in the classroom. However, this channel of support does little to promote professional development among mainstream teachers because they are neither learning nor practicing inclusive strategies. On the contrary, it suggests prolonged dependence on itinerant specialists to provide instructional teaching to children with disabilities.

For itinerant ECSE service delivery using the consultation framework, Wesley and Buysse (2004) identify eight stages of consultation processes: entry, initiating consulting relationship, assessment, goal identification, strategy selection, implementation, evaluation and termination. At the point of entry, the authors stress on the importance for itinerants to familiarise themselves not only with fundamental information on school factors (school's mission and organisational structure) but also the cultural background and experiences of their consultees.

Next, the task of building trust between the itinerant specialist and mainstream teacher is highlighted as one of the challenges during the process of initiating consulting relationship.

> '…itinerant ECSE consultants travel from program to program and typically work for different agencies than those for whom their consultees work. Because they are in many ways external to the programs in which they are consulting, consultees may view them as outsiders to their system, which could affect the ease with which consultants are able to establish trust.'
>
> (ibid: 138)

Subsequently, the processes of assessment, goal identification, strategy selection and implementation call for close collaboration through information cum knowledge sharing, and mutual understanding and execution of shared goals. Wesley and Buysse (2004) point out the multiple roles of itinerant teachers during the implementation stage; from the role of observer moving on to technical advisor or modeler or coach.

The next process of evaluation is one where desired goals and actual outcomes are compared and assessed. One of the challenges in evaluating the efficacy of itinerant consultation is the difficulty in monitoring the amount of quality time and effort spent by mainstream teachers to address the IEP goals of children with disabilities in the absence of itinerant teachers (Wesley et al, 2001; Dinnebeil et al, 2004).

Finally on termination, Wesley and Buysse (2004) observe that the consultation process does not end with the achievement of identified goals. On the contrary, it is the responsibility of itinerant teachers to continuously assist mainstream teachers in meeting new goals for their students with disabilities.

> '…rather than preparing to terminate consultation, itinerant ECSE consultants should focus on a gradual transfer of their roles and responsibilities to the consultees with respect to that particular goal for change. By transitioning in this way, itinerant ECSE consultants signal that their direct involvement to address a particular goal is no longer needed and consultants can shift their attention to other concerns and goals for change that the consultee may identify.'
>
> (ibid: 145)

Needless to say, the success of the entire consultation process depends on the collaborative relationship forged between teachers. Kelley (2004) emphasised the importance of viewing the consultation process as a partnership between itinerant and mainstream teachers.

> ‘If the itinerant consultation process is to accomplish the goal of providing support to the early educator in the delivery of services to young children with disabilities, then the model used to promote this goal must involve the consultees in joint operational planning, role clarification, strategy selection, and evaluation with the itinerant consultant.’
>
> (ibid: 186)

In summary, it is the aim of the first research question to investigate the system of itinerant specialist support to Czech preschools. It incorporates the following sub-questions:

- What is the legislation governing the provision of itinerant specialist support?
- Who do itinerant specialists work with?
- What is the nature of the provided support?
- What are the processes of itinerant specialist support?

Similar to the differing terms used to refer to itinerant specialist support, different countries have different systems in its service provision. Having a clear understanding of how the support is delivered in the Czech Republic, its processes and the participation of the stakeholders is fundamental to discerning the findings of the subsequent research questions.

## 2.4 How practical and adequate is itinerant specialist support in facilitating inclusion?

In determining the rationale and efficacy of itinerant specialist support in facilitating inclusion, the inquiry into how mainstream teachers perceive its usefulness is inevitable. How much value mainstream teachers give to the support from itinerant specialists depends largely on the practicality of the support rendered. Fletcher-Campbell and Cullen (2000) found in their study that:

> ‘All the mainstream teachers… were delighted to have external support teachers in their classrooms, *provided that* they felt that they were offering “value-added” and doing something that could not be done otherwise, through normal school resources.’
>
> (ibid: 90-91)

Richmond and Smith (1990: 302) maintain that advice and support that is not pertinent to the school context in which teachers teach; that is '[a]dvice that does little to increase the ability of class teachers or schools to meet needs within ordinary school provision' hold little value for mainstream teachers. This is because:

> 'Teachers are required to meet the needs of children within the constraints of the school organisation and resources. Meeting the special needs of children requires an understanding and experience of child development, a knowledge of the individual child and the ability to organise a classroom if not a school.'
>
> (ibid: 302)

Hence it is vital that itinerant specialists are familiar with the conditions of which mainstream teachers have to operate and provide practical advice with achievable results for their consultees. For example following the itinerant specialist's diagnosis of a child's difficulties, the mainstream teacher would require practical advice on teaching strategies and materials. Likewise, Zalizan M. Jelas (2000) in studying the perceptions of special educators and mainstream teachers within an inclusive schooling project stresses that:

> 'The kind of help that specialists should offer must fully consider the context of the mainstream class and ensure that the support respected the values and needs of the mainstream classroom, its teacher and students.'
>
> (ibid: 194)

According to Kelley (2004: 187), 'For an itinerant consultation model to be effective in transforming consultee knowledge and skills, it must promote customized knowledge development on the part of the itinerant consultant.' Additionally, Wesley and Buysse (2004) pointed out that the information and skill given to mainstream teachers must be at their current level of understanding and matched to their learning styles and settings. As busy educators who are constantly challenged with meeting the diverse learning needs of all pupils in mainstream classrooms, teachers welcome ideas and advice that can empower them to better meet these challenges. On the other hand, redundant meetings with specialists which do not offer innovative and transferable knowledge and skills are perceived as a waste of teachers' precious time.

As it is, time is an important element in itinerant specialist support. Notably, itinerant specialists are not full-time educators in the school and thus, are not readily available as and when mainstream teachers need their support. The frequency and length of contact itinerant specialists have with mainstream teachers could well determine the adequacy of the support. It would seem that concern over the lack of time for consultation is mutually shared between mainstream teachers and itinerant specialists. Fletcher-Campbell and Cullen (2000) observed in their study that while the mainstream teachers spoke of the lack of time for post-sessional feedback and forward planning, support staff related on the lack of time in following up if their intervention was being transferred to the classroom.

> 'Mainstream teachers greatly appreciated having direct access to advice and support as and when they wanted it. While this is, of course, difficult to manage, particularly where there are large teams with members having heavy workloads, the dividends may well pay off. Advice over the phone may eliminate the need for more formal intervention.'
>
> (ibid: 92)

Even as collaborating teachers and specialists agree that scheduled formal meetings are important aspects of maintaining communication, they do not disregard the merit of informal communication. A research into 10 exemplary schools in the United States found that special and general education teachers often cited informal communication as important to their successful collaboration.

> 'E-mail, voice mail, unscheduled meetings, and brief information exchanges in the course of teaching all played a role in assuring that students' needs were met and teachers were kept informed of student issues and progress.'
>
> (Schulte, 2002: 398)

In short, the second research question asks for Czech preschool teachers' opinion on the practicality and adequacy of itinerant specialist support. The perspectives of itinerant specialists are also sought. Bearing in mind that the support teachers receive is peripatetic in nature, they may not find it as practical or adequate as school-based support, and may want more from their itinerant specialists. As such, a sub-question of this inquiry seeks teachers' suggestions for change to enhance the practicality and adequacy of itinerant support in their school context.

## 2.5 What are the characteristics of the collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and mainstream teachers?

The collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and mainstream teachers is complex and multifaceted. This research attempts to identify the characteristics of the specialist-teacher collaborative relationship in terms of their collaborative approach, collaborative responsibilities and collaborative comfort.

### *2.5.1 Collaborative approach*

Collaborative approach looks at how the itinerant specialist and mainstream teacher perceive the level of their participation in the collaboration. This may involve activities such as information sharing, decision making, planning, problems solving and tasks execution. In short, it seeks to gauge the equality in power sharing within a collaborative relationship. Is the collaboration more specialist-directed where the specialist, who is perceive as the expert, leads in making decisions? In contrast, is the relationship perceived as teacher-centred where the specialist facilitates the mainstream teacher in the decision-making process?

Schulte and Osborne (2003) summarise six implicit viewpoints on collaborative approaches within the consultation literature: equal-but-different, peer facilitator, unique service delivery model, consultant-structured consultee-participation, shared assent to variable roles, and equal value/equal power. Caron and McLaughlin (2002) in citing the definition of collaboration given by Friend and Cook (1996), point out the fundamental characteristics of collaboration from the equal value/equal power viewpoint:

> ‘Collaboration should be voluntary. Each participant should be valued equally. Collaborators should have shared responsibility for both participation and decision making and each should have equal decision-making power.’
>
> (Caron and McLaughlin, 2002: 288)

Richmond and Smith (1990) assert that class teachers must not be seen as passive recipients of help but instead be encouraged to contribute to class and school changes. In a study of mainstream teachers’ perception of the support they received from peripatetic remedial teachers, the researchers found that mainstream teachers ‘valued highly the opportunity to

share their views and judgements about children's needs with other professionals but in the context of mutual professional respect and understanding' (ibid: 295).

> 'The class teachers in this study saw themselves as responsible for managing the education of the children in their classes and therefore they expected to be consulted about and involved in the arrangements for providing extra help for children. They emphasised the need for liaison and for co-ordination of the remedial teachers' work with that of the class teachers:'
>
> (ibid: 305)

### *2.5.2 Collaborative responsibilities*

It is pertinent that mainstream teachers are clear about the roles and responsibilities of itinerant specialists so that they have reasonable expectations from the collaboration. The importance of role clarification and definition of responsibilities of itinerant teachers is often highlighted in literature surrounding itinerant ECSE services as there appears to be a blur in the roles of itinerant teachers among general educators (Dinnebeil, 2000; Wesley et al, 2001; Dinnebeil et al, 2006).

Dinnebeil et al (2006: 156) define *roles* as specific positions itinerant teachers assume as part of their job, and *responsibilities* as activities itinerant teachers undertake as part of their job. The authors distinguish six key roles of itinerant ECSE teachers: assessor, consultant to other adults, direct service provider to children with disabilities, lifelong learner, service coordinator and team member (ibid: 157). The researchers learnt that parents and early childhood teachers appeared to believe more strongly in the role of the itinerant teacher as direct service provider to children with disabilities while itinerant teachers and their supervisors emphasised the importance of the role as consultant.

> 'That both parents and early childhood teachers appeared to believe more strongly than itinerant teachers and supervisors in the importance of direct service provision could be related to a lack of resources and supports in community-based programs. …Conversely, itinerant teachers and supervisors emphasized the importance of consultation, perhaps reflecting systems that have more supports or procedures in place that enable consultation to be a viable model.'
>
> (ibid: 165)

The importance of role clarification was highlighted by Zalizan M. Jelas (2000) in studying the perceptions of special educators and mainstream teachers regarding inclusive practices in Malaysia. The study found that special educators and mainstream teachers who were involved in a partial inclusion project maintained 'discrete role boundaries' within their formal professional duties without establishing some form of collaboration to make the inclusion more meaningful for students involved. Referring to the special educators as specialists in the inclusion project, the researcher maintained that: 'Mainstream teachers viewed the role of specialists as "underestimating" their competence and authority and this was neither welcomed nor considered helpful' (ibid: 193-194).

> 'Thus, if teachers responsible for the implementation of inclusive practices have unclear perceptions of their role, it may seriously undermine the efforts and maintenance of restructuring programs toward inclusion.'
>
> (ibid: 187)

Having seen the differing perceptions of stakeholders regarding the role of itinerant ECSE teachers, it is not surprising that the itinerant's responsibilities are perceived and valued differently across the different constituents (Dinnebeil et al, 2006). Nevertheless, Dinnebeil and McInerney (2000), in their earlier writings, had identified three broad classifications of the responsibilities of itinerant ECSE teachers. Firstly, itinerant teachers are responsible for modifying the physical learning environment. This includes modification of material and equipment to enhance the learning of children with disabilities. Secondly, itinerant teachers are responsible for equipping mainstream teachers with appropriate intervention strategies which could be introduced through peer coaching. Thirdly, it is the responsibility of itinerant teachers to work with mainstream teachers in designing and implementing systematic assessment of children's progress.

In Queensland, Australia the Standard Work Profile for the Support Teacher (Learning Difficulties) designates 11 major responsibilities for school-based and itinerant support teachers (Forlin, 2001). These responsibilities seem to cover a wider scope compared to those of the itinerant ECSE in the United States. The work profile encompasses areas ranging from student assessment to collaborative planning and teaching. Additionally, it highlights the need for support teachers to maintain specialist teaching expertise and strong networking cum knowledge sharing within their profession.

For starters in cases where there exist no clear guidelines as to the roles and responsibilities of the itinerant specialist, it is useful for the specialist and mainstream teacher to sit together and agree on what would be reasonable expectations of each other. When I first worked with a preschool teacher two years ago, all I did during our first meeting was to listen to her concerns about having Mervin[1] (a boy with Down's syndrome) in her class. From her account, I was able to gather her knowledge of children with Down's syndrome, her feelings about having Mervin in her class and the support she was expecting from me as a special educator. She informed me that she did not have the sufficient skills and experience to cope with Mervin although she had previously taught a child with disability in her class. The teacher was honest about her strengths and feelings of insecurity, and that prepared me for what I could and could not expect from her during our initial collaboration. In return, I was able to assure her of my supportive role and confidence in her. In most situations where there is a good collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and mainstream educators, the ability to establish trust is imperative (Wesley and Buysse, 2004). Making roles, responsibilities and expectations explicit early in the collaborative relationship can go a long way in enhancing trust between the collaborators.

Due to the consultative nature of itinerant specialist support, possessing strong interpersonal skills and knowledge for practising collaboration is pre-requisite for itinerant specialists. However, Wesley et al (2001) found that early interventionists who act as consultants to early childhood educators did not recognize the processes of collaborative consultation. Instead, itinerant interventionists saw the role of providing consultation as equivalent to providing direct early intervention services.

> 'At times they talked about keeping lines of communication open, individualizing their services, modeling behaviours, and collaborating with other professionals. They did not, however, identify strategies selection and problem solving as interactive processes involving the consultee or speak of stages of consultation. Moreover, they did not identify practices key to collaborative consultation such as working with the consultee to clarify roles and identify areas of expertise that both consultant and consultee bring to the consultation process.'
>
> (ibid: 122)

[1] Name has been changed to safeguard confidentiality.

### *2.5.3 Collaborative comfort*

In every collaborative relationship, it is useful to learn the comfort level of collaborators as it could influence the effectiveness and success of the partnership. Wesley and Buysse (2004: 129) define professional comfort as 'a feeling of ease or well-being in the professional role.' In the same way, collaborative comfort can be interpreted as a feeling of ease or well-being of collaborators in a collaborative relationship. Wesley et al (2001) found that the comfort level of early interventionists who worked as consultants to child care providers in mainstream settings was affected by six major factors: consultee characteristics, child characteristics, programme characteristics, available resources, consultant characteristics and consultant's history with the programme. Consultee characteristics were a primary cause of discomfort for early interventionists when child care providers reportedly did not have the knowledge and conviction in children with disabilities, inclusion and consultation.

> 'Consultants thought child care providers would be more receptive to the consultant's presence in the centre if the child care providers knew more about disabilities in general and about the specific children they were serving in particular… Another source of discomfort originates from consultees who want quick fixes in the form of authoritative expert advice or a prognosis for children as a doctor would be able to offer.'
>
> (ibid: 117-118)

Additionally, the degree of discomfort reported by early interventionists increased with the severity of disability of the children they were supporting. This is largely due to interventionists feeling that they did not have the needed expertise to address the needs of the children. As to programme characteristics, interventionists cited discomforting factors such as inadequate staff-child ratio, staffing issues and under-developed curriculum. They found it especially challenging when having to provide consultancy either in low quality learning environments or academically focused programmes. In addition, the issue of resources was of paramount importance as interventionists reportedly felt more at ease in their work if they had access to an expert team, flexible funding, technology and training. Having said all that, Wesley et al (2001) discovered that consultant characteristics also contributed to their own professional comfort. The researchers pointed out the dilemma of itinerant teachers between being a generalist and being a specialist.

> ‘On the one hand they talked about feeling more comfortable if they could call in specialists such as occupational and physical therapists to deal with particular conditions. On the other hand, they felt that by doing this, their role became devalued and consultees did not accept or regard them with the same credibility as they did the therapists.’
>
> (ibid: 120)

Early interventionists felt necessary to be knowledgeable and effective due to the expectations of their consultees. Other than recognizing the need for acquiring expert and up-to-date information, the consultants spoke of improving their interpersonal skills to increase their professional comfort. However, for those who possessed a longer history in consultation work, they were understandably more comfortable in their role.

A good collaborative relationship between the itinerant specialist and mainstream teacher is significant in ensuring the success of an inclusive programme. As illustrated in this section, the third research question investigates how itinerant specialists and mainstream preschool teachers perceive their collaboration in terms of their collaborative approach, their understanding of their respective responsibilities and the comfort they experience in working together. A further sub-question seeks recommendations from itinerant specialists and teachers for any changes to their collaborative relationship.

### 2.6 What has changed in schools following itinerant specialist support and inclusion?

Thousand and Villa (2005) identify five important elements to realizing organisational change for inclusion: vision, skills, incentives, resources and action planning. These elements can be linked to the context of itinerant support and consultation, more so the role of itinerant specialists in developing mainstream teachers to become competent and confident inclusive educators.

> ‘A school system may have the vision, incentives, resources, and action plan to accomplish the desired change of becoming an inclusive school, but unless educators believe they have the skills to respond to students’ and colleagues’ needs, a likely outcome will be anxiety because they doubt they are good teachers.’
>
> (ibid: 63)

Existing literature suggests that change towards a more inclusive learning environment is possible if collaborating special and mainstream educators share mutual goals and make collaborative decisions (Richmond and Smith, 1990; Heiman, 2004; Wesley and Buysse, 2004). Hence, it is possible for itinerant specialist support delivered using the consultative model to promote school change, particularly direct change in mainstream educators. An example of change is the increase in the self-esteem of child care providers following support from itinerant ECSE teachers.

> 'Child care providers acting in the role of consultees have reported that the expectation of gaining skills to function independently, along with the attention and support of the consultant, elevated their morale and level of confidence on the job.'
>
> (Palsha & Wesley, 1998, cited in Wesley and Buysse, 2004: 139)

Teacher consultants also play an important role in school reform by facilitating the ongoing professional development of teachers through on-site training of teaching practices and instructional techniques (Ryan et al, 2004). On-site training is seen to be a more practical form of in-service teachers' training as consultants are able to suggest customised solutions and strategies relevant to teachers' context. Hence, it is reasonable to expect mainstream teachers who are collaborating with itinerant specialists to become more competent in coping with children's behavioural problems and practising inclusive classroom strategies. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research and literature that investigate the nature and extent of these teacher changes following itinerant specialist support.

While itinerant specialist support is known to bring about change, the process is noticeably time-consuming and challenging. The fact that itinerant specialists are entering the collaborative relationship as *outsiders* implies that they are likely to face attitudinal barriers in implementing change.

> Itinerant teachers are challenged to find ways to implement change in environments that they do not have direct control. …It is difficult to enter into another person's "turf" and offer suggestions for change.'
>
> (Dinnebeil and McInerney, 2000: 25)

Richardson-Gibbs (2004) accentuates further the challenges of itinerant ECSE teachers as change agents through her personal reflection as an itinerant:

> 'Although we may wish to change entire programs to have them better meet the needs of the young children we are supporting, we are often simply unable to affect anything more than a teachers' or peers' attitudes toward children with disabilities.'
>
> (ibid: 180)

Undeniably, the roles and responsibilities of itinerant specialists are complex and challenging particularly the crucial role surrounding change. It is reasonable to assume that support from itinerant specialists would bring about positive changes in mainstream teachers, children with disabilities and possibly other changes within the school too. Investigation into the extent of which itinerant specialists can affect change for an increasingly inclusive educational programme may well determine the efficacy and rationale of providing the support. Hence, it is the focus of the final research question to seek the views of itinerant specialists and preschool teachers as to the changes they have witnessed or experienced as a result of itinerant specialist support and inclusion. No doubt it is difficult to pinpoint specifically if the perceived changes are products of itinerant support or other existing factors. However, it is not the aim of this research to identify specific contributors of school change but rather what has changed. Admittedly, existing literature relating to itinerant ECSE services is largely focused on seeking views of itinerant teachers. However in exploring this research question, it is crucial to include the investigation into mainstream teachers' perspectives for if there is change, they are the ones experiencing it first hand.

**Summary**

This chapter aims to provide a brief overview of itinerant specialist support. A large part of the literature review is based on the itinerant early childhood special education service in the United States. In a nutshell, this literature analysis is focused on answering the following questions:

1. What is the system of itinerant specialist support?
2. How practical and adequate is itinerant specialist support in facilitating inclusion?
3. What are the characteristics of the collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and mainstream teachers?
4. What has changed in schools following itinerant specialist support and inclusion?

Review of existing literature on itinerant specialist support has reinforced the significance of the research topic. Additionally, the process has been useful in the formulation of sub-questions for this research.

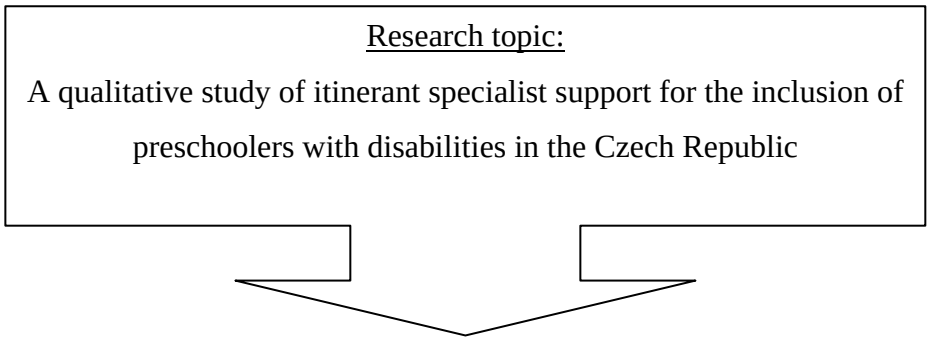
# 3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Referring to research design, Robson (2002: 79) maintains that:

> 'Design is concerned with turning research questions into projects.'

This chapter is about **how** I found answers to my research questions. I recall quite clearly my first lecture on educational research when a very distinguished Professor had drilled the class on the core conditions for research. Research, he said, is a pursuit of truths which is undertaken intentionally, rigorously and systematically after which the outcomes and procedures are open to public scrutiny (Best, 2007). No doubt, research is not a project to be undertaken haphazardly at one's whims and fancies. This chapter incorporates a systematic outline of my research questions, theoretical framework, methodology, sampling strategy, data collection and data analysis methods, and finally, additional research considerations such as validity, reliability and ethical issues.

## 3.1 Research questions




1. What is the system of itinerant specialist support?
2. How practical and adequate is itinerant specialist support in facilitating preschool inclusion?
3. What are the characteristics of the collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and mainstream preschool teachers?
4. What has changed in preschools following itinerant specialist support and inclusion?

## 3.2 Theoretical framework

### *3.2.1 Research paradigm*

According to Mertens (2005: 7):

> 'A *paradigm* is a way of looking at the world. It is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action.'

Birley and Moreland (1998: 30) give the following definition:

> 'A paradigm is a theoretical model within which the research is being conducted, and organises the researcher's view of reality.'

Referring to paradigms as 'models', Silverman (2000: 77) explains that:

> '…*models* provide an overall framework for how we look at reality. In short, they tell us what reality is like and the basic elements it contains ('ontology') and what is the nature and status of knowledge ('epistemology').'

In brief, paradigm is about how we perceive reality and how knowledge is derived. This research is embedded in the interpretivist paradigm, which assumes in principal that 'reality is socially constructed' (Robson, 2002; Mertens, 2005). Contrary to the positivist paradigm which holds that: 'there is an objective reality "out there"' (Gray, 2004: 17), interpretivism subscribes to the ontology of multiple realities and adopts the constructivism epistemology.

> 'Truth and meaning do not exist in some external world, but are created by the subject's interactions with the world. Meaning is constructed not discovered, so subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon.'
>
> (ibid: 17)

Weber (2004: v) puts forward an interesting interpretation saying that interpretivism incorporates both subjective and objective characteristics.

> The subjective characteristics reflect our perceptions about the meaning of some world. The objective characteristics reflect that we constantly negotiate this meaning with others with whom we interact. In other words, it is objective in the sense that it reflects an intersubjective reality.
>
> (ibid, 2004: v)

By his interpretation, objective reality is not the *one and only* as in the case of positivism, but rather *one of many* realities. In other words, the multiple realities in interpretivism consist of individually constructed realities and intersubjective realities. Humans are by nature social beings. They interpret their world as individuals and also as participants in various social groups due to the different roles they play in society. Reality is objective as long as everyone believes in the same truth. In the social world (even sporadically in the scientific world) where meaning is dependent on human interpretation, truth today may be myth tomorrow. Likewise, what works in one context may not work in another.

This research firstly looks into the implementation of itinerant specialist support as provided by the law and policies on school reform – which in a sense is *objective* in nature. However, as law and policies are interpreted and practised by humans, herein lies the *subjective* aspect of this research. Hence although specialists and teachers refer to the same law or policies, the results and changes produced could differ due to the interaction among the subjects who are practising these policies.

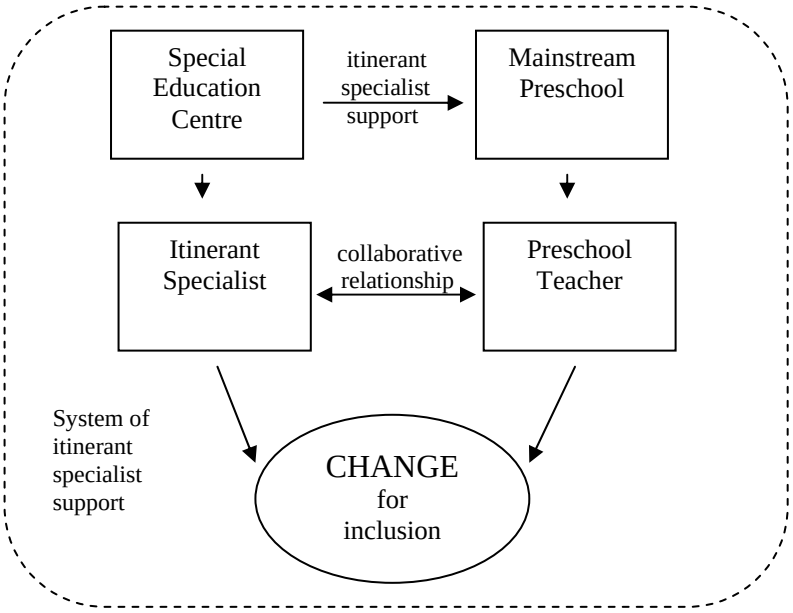
> '…the purpose of acknowledging the objective reality of change lies in the recognition that there are new policies and programs "out there" and that they may be more or less specific in terms of what they imply for changes in materials, teaching practices, and beliefs. The real crunch comes in the relationships between these new programs or policies and the thousands of subjective realities embedded in people's individual and organizational contexts and their personal histories.'
>
> (Fullan, 2001: 45 – 46)

By assuming the existence of multiple socially constructed realities, the goal then of the interpretivist researcher is 'to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge' (Mertens, 2005: 14), or in Creswell's (2007: 21) words: 'to make sense (interpret) the meanings others have about the world.' Additionally, interpretivism recognises that research is a value-laden exercise. It 'emphasizes that research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them' (Mertens, 2005: 13). The aim of my research is to understand the different aspects of itinerant specialist support through the eyes of itinerant specialists and mainstream preschool teachers. In doing so, I have made explicit my personal interest in choosing my research topic, and later on will rationalise my methodology, methods and samples. Based on my deliberations in this sub-section, I have justified my choice of selecting an interpretivist paradigm for this research.

### *3.2.2 Conceptual framework*

This research studies the link between Special Education Centres (SECs) and mainstream preschools (refer Figure 3.1) in bringing about change; in this case change toward including children with disabilities in regular preschool settings. The research firstly investigates the structural link which is the system (legislation, operational framework, collaborators etc.) of the itinerant specialist support provided by SECs to mainstream preschools. Secondly, the research looks into the collaborative relationship between specialists from the SECs and teachers from the mainstream preschools who are receiving their support. As a result of this link, change toward inclusion is possible in preschools.

**Figure 3.1** Conceptual framework for itinerant specialist support




In deliberating on school change, Common (2001) discusses two metaphors of the teacher: (1) teacher as agent and consumer, and (2) teacher as actor and defender.

> 'The first metaphor underpins the dominant model for school change. The second underpins the image most teachers have of themselves as they go about doing what they consider to be normal and necessary in their classrooms.'
>
> (ibid: 204)

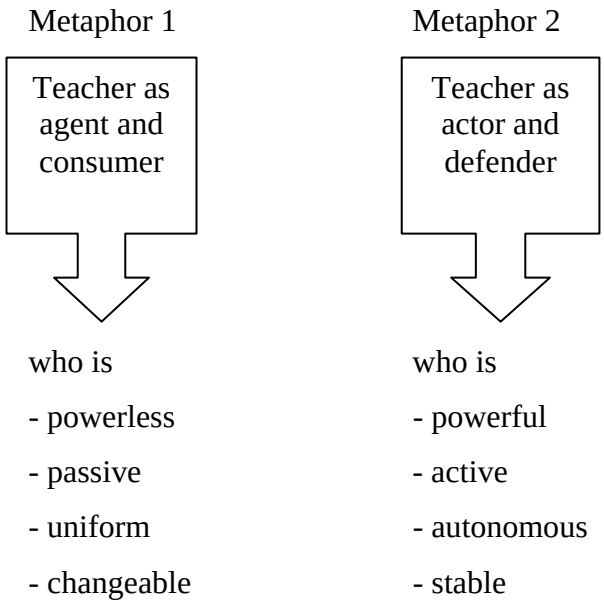
Figure 3.2 illustrates the two metaphors. As observed by Common, the first metaphor represents the prevailing top-down approach to school change or school reform. In this model, policy makers and professional change agents dictate how schools must change.

> 'This metaphor depicts teachers as agents and consumers of reform ideas and products who have characteristics or qualities of powerlessness, passivity, uniformity and changeability…'
>
> (Common, 2001: 205)

On the other hand, the second metaphor does not perceive teachers as passive task implementers of bureaucracy or mere recipients of prescription from professionals.

> 'Teachers are not agents, nor consumers, but are believed to be actors and defenders who have qualities or characteristics of power, action, autonomy, and stability… In their classrooms, teachers are the producers of knowledge; that is, the central authority source of knowledge for their students, the creators of norms, and the arbitrators of justice, handing out rewards or punishments.'
>
> (ibid: 205)

**Figure 3.2** Two metaphors of the teacher (adapted from Common, 2001)



Common notes that professional reformers fail to see the reality of the classroom for teachers; that is, they fail to recognise teachers as reformers in their own right who possess the power to plan and make changes independently or collectively. This metaphor divide suggests a power struggle between professional reformers and teachers, whereby school change can only take place successfully if this power relationship is addressed by reformers. Pointing out that teachers hold the power of consent in schools, Common further maintains that it is crucial for professional reformers to share the power to reform schools with teachers by obtaining their consent in the decision making process through collaboration.

> 'Collaboration means the formation of educational partnerships between reformers and teachers, at the very least, to discuss what reforms are needed and how they can come about. …For teachers to implement reforms, it appears that the intent of the reform and the implementation plans accompanying it must be regarded as both desirable and possible by teachers.'
>
> (Common, 2001: 208)

This research explores the collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and preschool teachers which is a complex and multifaceted process. As suggested in the two teacher metaphors, the specialist who is perceived as a change agent in this research faces the tricky task of juggling between being an authoritative expert and a facilitator in performing his or her role as an itinerant consultant to teachers. On the other end, teachers receiving the support may have different perceptions of their collaborating specialist and the support itself. Do teachers see themselves as passive recipients of support? Do they take an active role in deciding the course of their collaboration with the itinerant specialist? Answers to these questions will surface in chapter four on analysis.

In summary, this section on theoretical framework has explained my rationale for choosing the interpretivist paradigm. This research aims to study the multiple perceptions of preschool teachers and itinerant specialists on various aspects of itinerant specialist support. A conceptual framework for the research was also illustrated. This section used the two teacher metaphors to deliberate on the formation of teachers' and specialists' understanding of collaboration.

### 3.3. Methodology

Methodology, according to (Silverman, 2000: 77), is 'a general approach to studying research topics.' In finding answers to its research questions, this research uses a qualitative approach which is exploratory in purpose. Bryman (2004: 19-20) construes qualitative research as 'a research strategy that emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.' In other words, the qualitative researcher is more concerned with obtaining descriptive and in-depth data concerning the values, perceptions or experiences of participants rather than focusing on numerical data. An exploratory study, says Robson (2002: 59), is used when the purpose of the researcher is 'to ask questions', 'to find out what is happening, particularly in little-understood situations' and 'to seek new insights.' The primary purpose of this research is to understand itinerant specialists' and teachers' perspectives on the different aspects of itinerant specialist support, a phenomenon which is unfamiliar to me. This study focuses on finding out how specialist support is delivered, and explored specialist-teacher collaborative relationships by asking questions and seeking in-depth answers from itinerant specialists and preschool teachers. Based on these reasons, the selection of an exploratory qualitative approach for this research is a rational choice.

### 3.4 Sampling strategy

In selecting samples, this research utilised purposeful sampling and snowball sampling. Figure 3.3 gives a description of how the sampling was administered.

**Figure 3.3** Sampling strategy of itinerant specialists and preschool teachers

| *Purposeful sampling* | SEC 1 | SEC 2 | SEC 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | · 1 specialist | · 1 specialist | · 1 specialist |
| | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| *Snowball sampling* | · 2 specialists from SEC 1 | · 1 specialist from SEC 2 | · 2 specialists from SEC 3 |
| | · 5 teachers from 3 preschools | · 3 teachers from 1 preschool | |

### *3.4.1 Purposeful sampling*

According to Creswell (2008: 214), 'In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon.' The researcher's intention, in this case then, is based on 'the researcher's judgement as to typicality or interest. A sample is built up which enables the researcher to satisfy her specific needs in a project' (Robson, 2002: 265). In this research, purposeful sampling is used in selecting three Special Education Centres (SECs) and three main itinerant specialists from each of these centres. The three SECs for this research were chosen based on the premise that these centres were supporting mainstream preschools teachers who were integrating children with learning disabilities in their classrooms. Children with learning disabilities include children with Down's syndrome, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and children with 'mental handicap' (a common term used in the Czech Republic) and other behavioural disorders. This selection is consistent with my interest and work with children with learning disabilities back in my home country. However, it was interesting to note that SEC 2 was catering to children with multiple disabilities which included children with learning disabilities combined with other forms of disability. Additionally, in practice the other two SECs also catered to a small number of children with physical disabilities although their services were primarily for children with learning disabilities. Another consideration in selecting these SECs was that they were servicing preschools and teachers in different districts of Prague in the Czech Republic, hence giving this research a maximal variation in site location.

In choosing the three main specialists, it was chiefly based on the criteria that they could converse proficiently in English, and were interested to participate in this research. The fact that these specialists were voluntary and keen participants is a crucial point as it gives credibility to information they provided. It should also be noted that all three specialists who were purposefully selected were team leaders in their respective SECs. To relate the earnestness of one specialist, I would like to cite one of my telephone conversations with her on June 3, 2008:

> 'Now is a busy time for us [specialists at the centre]. Your project is very interesting but would also take a lot of time from us and this we are not able to give you. But I read in your research proposal that you want to learn something from us so that you can take it back to practice in your country. I want to help you.'
>
> (IS 3, 3/6/2008)

### *3.4.2 Snowball sampling*

As Mertens (2005: 319 - 320) suggests:

> 'Snowball sampling is used to help the researcher find out who has the information that is important to the study. The researcher starts with key informants who are viewed as knowledgeable about the program or community. The researcher asks key informants to recommend other people to whom he or she should talk based on their knowledge of who should know a lot about the program in question.'

After identifying three main itinerant specialists through purposeful sampling, I sought their help to recommend respondents for my questionnaires and select information-rich preschool teachers for my interviews. Snowball sampling was necessary for this research because I was a stranger doing research in a foreign country. I did not have the relevant contacts to find suitable participants and I did not speak the native Czech language. It was not an easy task getting teachers to trust me at face value, and participate in the research. As put forth by Creswell (2008: 217): 'In certain research situations, you may not know the best people to study because of the unfamiliarity of the topic or the complexity of events.' The three main specialists whom I had purposefully selected in the beginning of the research were the best candidates to seek participation from their colleagues in the SEC. Furthermore, these specialists knew which preschool teachers had substantial experience working with children with disabilities and itinerant specialists. Through the introduction of the specialists, I felt welcomed into preschools during my interviews with the teachers.

As a result of snowball sampling, I found five more itinerant specialists and eight preschool teachers giving me a total sample of eight itinerant specialists and eight preschool teachers. Five teachers, including one head teacher who also taught in the preschool, were recommended by the specialist from SEC 1 while the specialist from SEC 2 recommended three teachers. Due to the centre's busy schedule, the specialist from SEC 3 was unable to seek participation from preschool teachers but she recommended two of her colleagues. By using snowball sampling, I managed to collect data from more than one participant from each SEC or preschool. This is useful for validating responses by participants from the same sites. Creswell (2007: 126) stresses the importance for qualitative researches to 'not only to study a few sites or individuals but also to collect extensive detail about each site or individual studied.' He cited points made by Pinnegar and Danes (2006) that the purpose in qualitative research is to explain the particular and the specific.

## 3.5 Methods of data collection

In line with its interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach, this research employed 'a more personal and interactive mode of data collection' (Mertens, 2005: 14), contrary to the scientific methods advocated by positivist researchers. Despite the utilisation of non-empiricist methods, this research carries a 'scientific attitude'. Robson (2002: 18) asserts that it not 'a particular set of procedures' which defines an empirical inquiry but a 'scientific attitude.' He explains that a research demonstrating scientific attitude is a research carried out systematically (conducted after careful considerations), skeptically (subjected to public scrutiny) and ethically (adhering to a code of conduct). In this respect, this research was carried out using systematic data collection methods and procedures.

Creswell (2008: 225) recommends that:

> 'In *qualitative* research, you ask **open-ended questions** so that the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings. An **open-ended response** to a question allows the participant to create options for responding.'

As such, I have chosen to use semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions on questionnaires for data gathering. My aim was to obtain in-depth answers to my research questions from the perspective of my participants (itinerant specialists and mainstream preschool teachers).

### *3.5.1 Semi-structured interviews*

This method enables the interviewer to ask predetermined questions and yet allows the interviewee to elaborate substantially within the scope of the chosen topics without feeling restricted as in a fully-structured interview. Creswell (2008) notes that interviewers have the advantage of controlling the responses they sought because they could ask specific questions to elicit the desired information. Although this suggests biases on the part of the interviewer, interviewees have the flexibility to respond in any manner they choose as long as their answers are relevant to the questions being asked. Semi-structured interviews were used specifically to answer my four research questions and conducted by two means for this research: one-to-one semi-structured interviews and small group semi-structured interviews.

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were carried out with three itinerant specialists while two small group semi-structured interviews were conducted with preschool teachers. Individual interviews were chosen for itinerant specialists because they were working in different SECs and catering to different groups of clientele. It was vital that each specialist was given sufficient time and freedom to elaborate on her experiences during the interview. On the other hand, the interviews of teachers were conducted in two small groups according to the preschool they were attached to. The first group consisted of a class teacher and the head teacher, who also taught in the preschool. The second group consisted of the class teacher and two of her assistant teachers. The decision to conduct teacher interviews in groups was made because these teachers were collaborating with each other in the classroom/school and also collaborating as a team with the itinerant specialist who was supporting them. Like interviews in a focus group, small group interviews are useful 'to collect shared understanding from several individuals as well as to get views from specific people' (Creswell, 2008: 226).

> 'Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information and when interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other. They are also useful when the time to collect information is limited…'
>
> (ibid)

One-to-one interviews with itinerant specialists each lasted about one hour 30 minutes, and in one instance much longer due to necessity of using an interpreter. The small group interviews with preschool teachers took about two hours. I formulated separate sets of questions for specialists and teachers, but there were overlapping questions on both sides. To ensure validity and reliability of my interviews, I took the following measures:

- *Before the interview*
  1. I sought feedback from two of my main itinerant specialists in developing my interview questions. Their comments were valuable in determining if my questions were appropriate to the school context in the Czech Republic.
  2. Interview questions for itinerant specialists and preschool teachers were translated into the Czech language by a professional translator and checked by my tutor. Refer to Appendices J to M for interview questions.
  3. The interview questions were sent by email to the relevant interviewees at least three days (in some cases a week) in advance before the interview was to take place.

- *During the interview*
  1. The date, time and venue of the interviews were determined at the convenience of the interviewees. Two interviews with itinerant specialists were held in their respective SECs while one interview was conducted at the specialist's home. All interviews with teachers were held in their preschools.
  2. Two individual interviews with itinerant specialists were conducted completely in English because the interviewees were comfortable using the language. One small group interview with preschool teachers needed the full service of an interpreter. In two cases, although the interviewees could understand English fairly well, I had brought along my interpreter at their request. It was important that the interviewees felt at ease during the interview and did not have to worry about the possibility of 'getting stuck' with language. In situations where I needed the services of my interpreter, I ensured that she received and understood the interview questions beforehand.
  3. For every interview, I explained the interview procedure to the interviewees and asked if they needed further clarification about my research or interview questions before we began. Where applicable, I introduced my interpreter.
  4. I took notes during all interviews and also audio-recorded the interviews into separate folders using a digital voice recorder.

### *3.5.2 Open-ended questions on questionnaires*

The purpose of using questionnaires was to obtain data from more research participants to support findings from the semi-structured interviews. Due to time and language constraints, I was unable to conduct a large number of face-to-face interviews with itinerant specialists and preschool teachers. Using questionnaires was an effective method of gathering data from several participants at various locations within a short period of time because it was less time consuming compared to face-to-face interviews. I formulated separate questionnaires for itinerant specialists and preschool teachers. Each questionnaire contained a covering letter explaining the objectives of my research and five open-ended questions.

A total of 30 questionnaires were distributed through the three main itinerant specialists identified at the beginning of this research. However, only eight itinerant specialists and seven preschool teachers completed and returned their questionnaires. Of the total returned questionnaires, 14 were completed in Czech and one in English. Out of my 15 questionnaire

respondents, seven also served as my interviewees. One of my interviewees (PT2) did not complete a questionnaire. My subsequent efforts to increase the response rate, by following up with three preschool teachers through email, did not bear fruit. To ensure validity and reliability of the questionnaires and responses received, I took the following measures:

- *Before distributing the questionnaires*
  1. Questionnaires for itinerant specialists and preschool teachers were translated into the Czech language by my interpreter. Subsequently, they were checked by my tutor. Refer to Appendices F to I for questionnaires.
  2. I consulted one of my main itinerant specialists on the clarity of the translated questionnaires before distributing them.

### 3.6 Data analysis

All semi-structured interviews and verbal translation of completed questionnaires were transcribed. To ensure validity and reliability in my data analysis, I had taken the following measures:

- *After the interview*

  To validate the collected data, I emailed the interview transcripts to the interviewees within a week after each interview. For one group interview where teachers did not speak English, I used my interpreter who was present at the interview to validate my interview transcript.

- *After receiving the completed questionnaires*

  After collecting my questionnaires, I passed 14 of them which were answered in Czech language to my interpreter for translation into English. A week later, I spent an hour going through each questionnaire with my interpreter. As it was a face-to-face session, I was able to clarify any doubts I had on the translation with her. Our session was audio-recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis was conducted following the steps recommended by Creswell (2008). It started with the exploration of collected data.

> 'A **preliminary exploratory analysis** in qualitative research consists of exploring the data to obtain a general sense of the data, memoing ideas, thinking about the organization of the data, and considering whether you need more data.'
>
> (ibid: 250)

After my preliminary exploration, I did some follow-ups to gather incomplete data such as omitted responses from teachers' questionnaires and additional data from two of my interviewees. This was done through telephone calls and email correspondences.

The next step was to code my data. Creswell (2008: 251) states that: 'Coding is the process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data.' For my data analysis, I focused more on coming out with themes rather than descriptions. Creswell (ibid: 256) further elaborates that '[b]ecause themes are similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database, they form a core element in qualitative analysis.' Codes and themes in my data analysis were gathered according to my four research questions although there were instances where an excerpt from the interview was applicable for more than one code. For example, the use of video interaction training was often mentioned by teachers in Preschool 2 and the itinerant specialist from SEC 2 (IS2) during their interviews. Video training, being a practical tool for facilitating inclusion, clarifying collaborative responsibilities and upgrading teacher competencies, emerged in my themes for research question two, three and four.

In reporting my findings, I used mainly quotes from my interview transcripts and questionnaire responses because they provided direct insight into the feelings, opinions and aspirations of my participants. I used tables to present a general idea of the background of my samples and their work settings and a simple flow diagram to illustrate the processes of initiating itinerant specialist support. For presentation of my questionnaire findings, I used simple tables for the full responses in my appendix (refer to Appendix N and Appendix O) but quoted directly from significant questionnaire responses for my chapter four.

### 3.7 Other research considerations

As asserted in section 3.5, this research carries a 'scientific attitude' (Robson, 2002: 18); that is the research adhered to research ethical values and was conducted using systematic data collection methods and data analysing procedures.

### *3.7.1 Validity*

Robson (ibid: 170) explains that validity is 'something to do with being accurate, or correct, or true.' Validity asks the question if the research is sound, defensible, well-grounded and therefore not biased (Best, 2007). It consists of internal validity and external validity. Mertens (2005), in her reference of Guba and Lincoln (1989), equates internal validity to credibility, and uses transferability synonymously with external validity.

> 'In qualitative research, the credibility test asks if there is a correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints.'
>
> (Mertens, 2005: 254)

> 'External validity means the degree to which you can generalize the results to other situations. In qualitative research, the burden of transferability is on the reader to determine the degree of similarity between the study site and the receiving context. The researcher's responsibility is to provide sufficient detail to enable the reader to make such a judgement.'
>
> (ibid: 256)

To ensure that this research is valid, I observed the steps as presented in my earlier sections on data collection methods and data analysis. Additionally, I used the following strategies:

- *Triangulation*

  Data triangulation, according to Mertens (2005: 426) 'involves the use of multiple methods and multiple data sources to support the strength of interpretations and conclusions in qualitative research.' Creswell (2008: 266) describes triangulation as a 'process of corroborating evidence' to ensure data accuracy and credibility. For this research, questionnaires were used to support and enhance validity of findings from the semi-structured interviews. I also posed several similar questions to itinerant specialists and preschool teachers in my questionnaires and during the interviews.

- *Member checking*

  Mertens (2005: 255) asserts that member checking is the most important criterion in establishing internal validity. For this purpose, I requested my interviewees and interpreter to check my interview transcripts.

- *Peer debriefing and support*

  Mertens (ibid) recommends that the researcher should engage disinterested peers in discussion throughout the research process. In the course of the research, I occasionally sought feedbacks from two critical friends back in Malaysia: (1) my colleague who is a speech and language therapist and (2) a university lecturer of special education. Both are experienced researchers in their own field. Additionally, I also had tutor support. Robson (2002) acknowledges the important role played by peer groups.

  > 'They can contribute to guarding against researcher bias through debriefing sessions after periods in the research setting. Such groups can also fulfil something almost amounting to a therapeutic function.'
  >
  > (ibid: 175)

### *3.7.2 Reliability*

> 'Reliability means stability over time in the postpositivist paradigm. In the constructivist paradigm, change is expected, but it should be tracked and publicly inspectable.'
>
> (Mertens, 2005: 257)

- *Audit trail*

  Throughout the research process, I kept a research diary which recorded details of my research time-line, research participants and the major amendments I had made to my research designs. One major change to my research design was foregoing the use of observation to gauge the nature of specialist-teacher collaborations. This decision was made after careful consideration about the language difficulty and discussion with my two main itinerant specialists. As replacement, the specialists concurred that questionnaire was a more appropriate data collection instrument because it could be translated into Czech language and was less stressful for teachers compared to observation. The research diary also documented my frustrations throughout the research process and my personal reflections on various issues. I coded and kept all my interview transcripts in soft copies and filed the returned questionnaires. All my email correspondences with itinerant specialists and preschool teachers are well-documented.

### *3.7.3 Ethical considerations*

> 'Ethics is about helping researchers to become more aware of hidden problems and questions in research, and ways of dealing with these, though they do not provide simple answers.'
>
> (Alderson, 2004: 99)

This research adheres to the ethical research guidelines issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) and the three partner Universities of the Erasmus Mundus MA SEN course. In order to fulfil my responsibilities to my research participants, I took the following steps:

- Arranged pre-interview meetings with interviewees to explain the contents of my research and how I would like them to participate.

- Prepared and gave a brief research proposal cum consent form to each of my interviewees before the scheduled interview. These documents were translated into Czech language. The consent forms were signed and returned to me during the interviews. Refer to Appendix B and Appendix C for sample copies of my research proposal cum consent form.

- Prepared a covering letter, which explained my background and research, for my questionnaires to itinerant specialists and preschool teachers. Like the questionnaire, this letter was also translated into Czech language to ensure participants understood the purpose of my research. Refer to Appendix D and Appendix E for covering letter.

- Assured all participants of their anonymity and the confidentiality of the information they provided.

- Assured interviewees that they had the right to withdraw from the research for any reason at any time. I treated them with respect and courtesy.

- Offered to send an electronic copy of my findings (in English) to the interviewees upon completion of my research.

**Summary**

This chapter began with the presentation of my research questions. Subsequently, the chapter discussed how I proceeded to find answers to my research questions by giving an outline of my theoretical framework, methodology, sampling strategy, data collection methods and data analysis. Arguments were also put forth to justify my chosen methodology and methods. Additionally, I also discussed other research considerations such as validity, reliability and ethical issues.

# 4 ANALYSIS

> 'Analyzing qualitative data requires understanding how to make sense of text and images so that you can form answers to your research questions.'
>
> (Creswell, 2008: 243)

In this chapter, I present research findings gathered using the data collection methods mentioned in chapter three. I start by explaining several language terms used by participants of this research, after which the background information of research participants and their work settings is given. Subsequently, the presentation of findings follows according to my four research questions.

## 4.1 A note on language

Before proceeding to discuss the findings in the data analysis, it is important to explain the synonymous usage of the terms *integration* and *inclusion* in this research. The itinerant specialists and preschool teachers interviewed commonly use the term *integration* to mean *inclusion*.

> 'In the Czech Republic among the practitioners and professionals, they often do not distinguish between the term *integration* and *inclusion* although there is distinction between the terms among academicians.'
>
> (Šiška, 19/6/2008)

In chapter one, I had distinguished the meaning of inclusion and integration by using the definitions by Loreman et al (2005). Based on my interaction with itinerant specialists and preschool teachers, it was apparent that inclusion is still a developing concept and process in Czech schools and society. There was clearly no distinction made between the meaning of integration and inclusion among specialists and teachers. They generally used the term integration to mean the acceptance of children with disabilities in mainstream schools and to a larger context, society. Nevertheless, it is not the aim of this research to dissect research participants' understanding and construct of inclusion. It is also not my aim to evaluate if their practices were rightfully inclusive or merely integrative. Suffice to say that inclusion is still a developing process in the Czech Republic.

Additionally, the terms *mental handicap* and *mental retardation* were used frequently by the itinerant specialists and preschool teachers in this research to refer to *learning disabilities*. Here, I would like to explain the meaning of *learning disabilities* which denotes the same meaning as the terms *mental handicap* and *mental retardation* used generally among professionals and practitioners in the Czech Republic. This research will borrow the definition adopted by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC, 2005) which states that learning disability is a lifelong condition caused by genetic and/or neurobiological factors or injury that alters brain functioning in a manner which affects one or more processes related to learning.

> ‘"Learning Disabilities" refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning.’
>
> (ibid: para 1)

## 4.2 Background information of research participants and their work settings

This section presents background information on my research participants and their work settings (refer to Appendix N and Appendix O for complete responses from questionnaires). A total of eight itinerant specialists (IS) participated in my research: IS1 to IS8. All eight were questionnaire respondents while three (IS1, IS2 and IS3) were also my interviewees. As for preschool teachers (PT), I managed to secure eight teachers as participants: PT1 to PT8. Except for PT2, all preschool teachers completed their questionnaires. Additionally, PT1 to PT5 also consented to be interviewed.

**Table 4.1** Background information on itinerant specialists (IS) interviewed

| | IS1 (based in SEC 1) | IS2 (based in SEC 2) | IS3 (based in SEC 3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Professional qualification | MA in special education | MA in clinical psychology | MA in psychology |
| Years of providing specialist support | 10 years | 12.5 years | 10 years |

**Table 4.2** Additional background information on itinerant specialists (IS) - questionnaires

| Questions for itinerant specialists | Itinerant specialist (IS) | Answers by itinerant specialists |
|---|---|---|
| ***A. Background Information*** | IS4 | 5 years |
| A1. How long have you been providing specialist support? | IS5 | 6 years |
| | IS6 | 10 years |
| | IS7 | 13 years |
| | IS8 | 13 years |
| A2. What is the background of your training/ qualification? | IS4 | MA in psychology and special education |
| | IS5 | MA in special education |
| | IS6 | MA in special education |
| | IS7 | MA in psychology, MA in special education |
| | IS8 | MA in special education |

**Table 4.3** Background information on preschool teachers (PT) interviewed

| | Designation in preschool | Experience teaching children with disabilities | Experience collaborating with itinerant specialist | Qualification in special needs education |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Preschool 1: | | | | |
| PT1 | Class teacher | 4 years | 4 years | No* |
| PT2 | Head teacher/ class teacher | 9 years | 5 years | Bachelor's degree in special education |
| Preschool 2: | | | | |
| PT3 | Class teacher | 8 years | 8 years | No |
| PT4 | Assistant | 5 years | 5 years | No |
| PT5 | Assistant | 1 year | 1 year | No |

*PT1 is currently pursuing a degree in special education

**Table 4.4** Additional background information on preschool teachers (PT) - questionnaires

| Questions for preschool teachers | Preschool teacher (PT) | Answers by preschool teachers |
|---|---|---|
| ***A. Background Information*** | | |
| A1. How long have you been teaching children with disabilities? | PT6<br>PT7<br>PT8 | 4 years<br>18 years<br>1 year |
| A2. Do you have training/ qualification in special needs education? | PT6<br>PT7<br>PT8 | No<br>Bachelor's degree in special education<br>No |
| A3. How long have you been receiving specialist support? | PT6<br>PT7<br>PT8 | 4 years<br>10 years<br>1 year |

Comparing the background information between itinerant specialists and preschool teachers, it was evident that the former are qualified at Master's level while only two preschool teachers had a Bachelor's degree in special education. In terms of experience, a majority (75%) of itinerant specialists in the study had at least 10 years experience in providing support to preschools. However on the teachers' side, only four teachers (50%) had at least five years experience in teaching children with disabilities and collaborating with itinerant specialists. Based on the above information, it was understandable that preschool teachers needed the support of itinerant specialists.

Looking at the background information on SECs (refer to Table 4.5), the centres mainly catered to children with disabilities in preschools and basic schools. The SECs were established under the supervision and funding from special schools. Besides providing itinerant support in mainstream schools, specialists also held one-to-one intervention and group activities for children with disabilities in their respective SECs. By large, these sessions aimed to prepare the children for inclusion and often these children would receive itinerant specialist support from the SEC should they move on to mainstream preschools.

**Table 4.5** Background information on Special Education Centres (SECs)

| | SEC 1 | SEC 2 | SEC 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Year of establishment | 1992 | 1994 | 1990 |
| Nature of establishment | Part of special preschool | Part of special basic school | Part of special preschool |
| Nature of service | Mainly services children with learning disabilities; some children with physical disabilities | Services children with multiples disabilities, including those with learning disabilities | Mainly services children with learning disabilities; some children with physical disabilities |
| Staff | 2 psychologists<br>2 psychologists cum special educators<br>4 special educators<br>1 social worker<br>1 speech therapist<br>1 physiotherapist<br>(All part-time staff except 2 full time) | 1 clinical psychologist<br>1 psychologist cum special educator<br>2 special educators<br>1 social worker<br>(All part-time staff) | 1 psychologist<br>1 special educator<br>1 special educator cum speech therapist<br>(One part time staff) |
| Schools/ children/ teachers serviced | 25 preschools/ 28 children<br>33 basic schools/ 33 children<br>2 secondary schools/ 2 students | 8 preschools/ 26 children / 15 teachers<br>10 basic schools/ 15 children/ 15 teachers | 9 preschools/ 30 children / 20 teachers<br>3 basic schools/ 3 children/ 8 teachers |
| Service types | • Centre-based intervention sessions<br>• Itinerant specialist support in schools<br>• Meeting/ training sessions<br>• Video training<br>• Loaning of equipments and teaching tools | • Centre-based intervention sessions<br>• Itinerant specialist support in schools<br>• Seminars/workshops<br>• Video training and team meetings | • Centre-based intervention sessions<br>• Itinerant specialist support in schools<br>• Seminars/workshops |

**Table 4.6** Background information on preschools

| | Preschool 1 | Preschool 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Start enrolling children with disabilities | Since 1999 | Since 2000 |
| Start receiving itinerant specialist support | Since 2003 | Since 2000 |
| Total enrolment of children with disabilities | 27 children with diagnosed & suspected disabilities ranging from Down's syndrome, autism, infant cerebral palsy, behavioural disorders etc. | 6 children with diagnosed multiple disabilities including those with learning disabilities, hearing problems, speech delay, cerebral palsy etc. |
| Total number of children receiving specialist support | 4 children | All 6 children mentioned above |
| Class setting and Teacher-pupil ratio | 2 special education classes (each with 12 children with disabilities, 1 class teacher & one assistant teacher)<br>1 regular class with 20 children including 2 children with disabilities (1 class teacher & 2 assistant teachers)<br>1 regular class with 24 children including 1 child with disability (1 class teacher) | Total 19 children in one regular class (including 6 children with disabilities)<br>1 class teacher<br>2 assistant teachers |

Comparing the two preschools, Preschool 1 evidently had more experience with inclusion. Preschool 1 started enrolling children with disabilities in 1999 although it only began receiving specialist support in 2003. The preschool enrolled children with disabilities (a majority not yet formally diagnosed) even if the children did not receive specialist support. One uncommon practice by the preschool was the setting up of two special education classes to cater specifically for children with disabilities which complemented two other integrated classes. According to the head teacher (PT2), integrated children who received itinerant specialist support spent their first year in the special education class before moving on to individual integration in the regular class the following year. Preschool 2 had only one integrated class which enrolled six children with disabilities.

## 4.3 Research Question 1: What is the system of itinerant specialist support?

The above research question was posed to three itinerant specialists (IS1, IS2 and IS3) whom I had interviewed for this study. This section describes how itinerant specialist support is being delivered. It seeks answers to the following sub-questions:

- What is the legislation governing the provision of itinerant specialist support?
- Who do itinerant specialists work with?
- What is the nature of the support provided?
- What are the processes of itinerant specialist support?

### *4.3.1 Legislative provision*

The sole legislation governing the provision of itinerant specialist support in the Czech Republic is the Law on Schools *(Školský Zákon 561)* for Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education passed in 2004. Under this Law, two decrees provide for Special Education Centres and itinerant specialist support:

- Decree on education of children, pupils and students with SEN, and exceptionally gifted children, pupils and students
- Decree on the provision of guidance service in schools and school guidance facilities

According to IS3, specialists had to maintain a statistical track of their clients who were in integrated settings for reporting to the Special Education office of the municipality where their SECs are located. However, in deciding how best to provide support for inclusion in schools, SECs were given the discretion and flexibility.

> 'It is up to centre how we work. We have global leading directions [as provided by Law] we have to fulfil, but concrete steps are up to us.'
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

### *4.3.2 Collaborators*

Itinerant specialists work with a wide range of people namely: parents, teachers, assistant teachers and head teachers, colleagues in own SEC, specialists from other SECs, other professionals or practitioners such as doctors, audiologists and therapists, and students with disabilities themselves if necessary.

### *4.3.3 Nature of support*

The itinerant specialist's main role is to provide teacher consultation for inclusion in schools. Except for SEC 3, itinerant specialists in this study do not provide direct intervention or teaching to children with disabilities in the preschool. Their main task is to support teachers in the preschool by providing information about the children and their disabilities, advice on modification of instructional methods and materials, recommendation for various teaching tools and equipment etc. The Law stipulates that specialists visit preschools under their care at least twice a year to provide consultation. However in practice, the frequency of visits is determined between the itinerant specialist and teacher.

> 'In the beginning of the support, it is important for the specialist to visit the school more often to help teachers change their point of view on integration. …When the integration is running in good order, then it is not necessary to go there so often.'
>
> (IS1, interview on 5/6/2008)

According to IS3, visits ranged from once a fortnight to once a month and in some cases, twice a year depending on the needs of the teachers and integrated children. The length of each visit ranged from one hour to six hours. She related that sometimes the speech and language therapist spent a whole day in the preschool to see children individually or in pairs. Sometimes teachers called the specialist when there was a problem with the integrated child that they could not handle, and the specialist would make an unscheduled visit. Other than formal school visits, all three specialists interviewed mentioned that they also provided consultation through telephone calls and email correspondences with teachers.

In addition to school visits, the support for preschool teachers was also being provided in the SECs through training workshops and seminars. In SEC 1, for example, the specialists organised twice-yearly meetings for preschool teachers under their supervision. The objective of such meetings was two-fold. Firstly, the meeting provided methodical training for teachers, for instance training on how to formulate individual education plans and how to help children with disabilities in their communication. Secondly, the meetings provided a platform for teachers to share their experiences on inclusion and exchange knowledge with each other. On the other hand, IS2 was very passionate when relating on the video interaction training she held for teachers and parents. IS2 who is a qualified practitioner in video interaction training visited preschools to videotape children and teachers under her supervision at least twice a year.

### *4.3.4 Processes*

The processes involved in the delivery of itinerant specialist support are multi-fold. Before commencement of the support to preschools, a general sequential process could be traced in identifying the main processes.

Referral
(parents make first contact with SEC)
↓
Psychological assessment of child with disability by the SEC
↓
Meeting between specialist and parents
(recommendations from specialist is discussed
and parents decide on their child's inclusion)
↓
Meeting between specialist and preschool head teacher
(discussion on the possibilities of inclusion)
↓
Preparation of integration report by specialist
↓
Submission of integration report to the authorities
(submitted by preschool head teacher to apply for financing)
↓
Upon approval, implementation of inclusion in the preschool
(with support provided by itinerant specialist)

The remaining part of this sub-section will discuss findings concerning three significant processes in itinerant specialist support: referral process, the process of deciding the child's inclusion, and evaluation. Although the collaborative process between itinerant specialists and preschool teachers is perhaps the most significant, it is not discussed in this section. A whole section (section 4.5) is dedicated to that discussion in the later part of this chapter. Concerning the referral process, parents of children with disabilities generally contacted the SEC through these means:

- Own initiative through searching of information in the website
- Recommendations by professionals such as pediatricians, neurologists, therapists etc.
- Referred by other SECs
- Referred by teachers in the preschool
- Other parents

In deciding on the child's inclusion, the specialist would normally take the lead by recommending inclusion following the child's assessment. Should parents agree on the recommendations after meeting with the specialist, the specialist would then meet up with the head teacher concerned to discuss the possibility of inclusion. Inclusion in the preschool would only take place if the head teacher agreed to accept the child with disability. It is the responsibility of the specialist to support the preschool's application for financing from the government by recommending the necessary supports for the child in the preschool (including support from the itinerant specialist and an assistant teacher). This is done through the preparation of an integration report by the specialist.

It was evident from my interviews that specialists in this study did not have a standard practice to measure the effectiveness of itinerant support in promoting inclusion. IS2 reckoned that as a practitioner, she preferred working in the field than spending her time writing evaluative reports. She pointed out that specialists already had tremendous administrative paperwork and they often worked in staff and time constrained situations. IS3, however, highlighted the difficulty of measuring the effectiveness of specialist support as itinerant consultation involved many aspects and working with different people.

> 'How can you say exactly that this help was or was not good? You can try to gauge this by talking with people (i.e. teachers and parents) but it will be very difficult to put it into some table.'
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

Nevertheless from the interview findings, it was possible to pinpoint various channels that could possibly identify the positive development of itinerant specialist support.

- Reports that indicated the progress of the integrated child. These included the child's individual education plan and psychological diagnostic examination report which is reviewed each year.

- School visit report. It is written by the specialist after each school visit about what had transpired during the visit and contained the specialist's further recommendations for the preschool. This was practised by IS1 and IS3.
- Integration diary. According to IS1, very often the preschool teacher kept an integration diary at the recommendation of the specialist. The diary is updated at least once a week to keep track of the integrated child's developmental milestones and the child's work in the preschool.
- Reflections from video interaction training sessions. Often through the video training sessions conducted by IS1 and IS2, teachers could see the progress of their didactic skills as well as the integrated child's progress.
- Regular feedbacks from teachers and parents. IS2 cited an example whereby a group of parents of non-disabled children had written a letter to the education authorities to highlight the positive effects of inclusion on their children in the preschool.

## 4.4 Research Question 2: How practical and adequate is itinerant specialist support in facilitating preschool inclusion?

The five preschool teachers in my interviews were asked the second research question. In addition, two open-ended questions in my questionnaires relate closely to this research question:

- Do you think specialist support promotes inclusion? Why?
- Are there setbacks to specialist support? Why?

This section first presents findings on the aspects of itinerant specialist support which preschool teachers find useful or practical. Next, the adequacy aspect of the support is discussed. Lastly, preschool teachers' suggestions for change in the specialist support are put forth.

### *4.4.1 Practical aspects of itinerant specialist support*

Itinerant specialists and preschool teachers highlighted several aspects that they found useful for promoting preschool inclusion in their interviews and questionnaires responses. These aspects were identified and categorised into the following sub-headings:

- *Professional feedback and moral support*

The aspect on professional feedback and moral support surfaced frequently during my analysis of this research sub-question. Undeniably, preschool teachers found opportunities to share experiences with itinerant specialists and to receive professional advice assuring and motivating for them. At the other end, itinerant specialists were aware that teachers value this aspect of their support.

> 'The specialist is very important during the integration because the teachers in the preschool do not have knowledge of special education. The teachers involved in the integration have little opportunity to share their experiences with their colleagues because they are often the only ones in the preschool who integrate children with disabilities. The professional and moral support, in my opinion, is the most crucial aspect of itinerant specialist support for preschool teachers.'
>
> (IS2, questionnaire response)

> 'For teachers it is very hard to "defend" the integration in front of our environment [i.e. colleagues and parents of non-disabled children] as ours is the only classroom in the school that integrates children with disabilities. …The psychological support from the specialist assures us that we are doing the right thing for the integrated children.'
>
> (PT4, interview on 11/6/2008)

> 'The professional advice coupled with the exchange of experiences with the specialist help in solving specific problems concerning the child.'
>
> (PT6, questionnaire response)

- *Information about the integrated children and their disabilities*

Very often, the specialist is the first person to contact the preschool about the child with disability except in cases whereby the child is being referred to the SEC by the preschool. Hence in the initial stages of the inclusion, teachers depend on the specialist to provide them with information about the integrated children, their needs, their abilities and disabilities. Such information may be given verbally by the specialist or come in the form of reports (i.e. diagnostic report and integration report). Teachers interviewed found such information very valuable because they generally did not have sufficient knowledge on disabilities and special education. PT2, for example, noted the importance of the integration report which

contained the first information the school needed about the integrated children. The report, she said, contained diagnosis of the integrated children, their strengths and weaknesses and advice from the specialist on the kinds of support the children needed.

> 'The specialist support is very important for teachers because the specialist shares with them professional knowledge and educates teachers on the specific handicap of the child.'
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

- *Methodical guidance*

> 'The specialist provides support and methodical guidance to teachers. Teachers that practice integration are usually not special educators so they need advice on special approaches and instruments in their work with the children with disabilities. The positive feedback from the specialist is also very important for teachers.'
>
> (IS4, questionnaire response)

It is clear from the above excerpt that preschool teachers needed the methodical guidance of specialists in catering to the needs of the integrated child. Out of the eight preschool teachers in this research, only two had qualification in special education. The majority of the teachers were learning on-the-job from their own practical teaching experiences and from itinerant specialists. Other than methodic guidance within the preschool setting, teachers also benefited from special meetings and training events organised by specialists to improve their didactic skills.

> 'The special meetings organised for teachers provide a platform for us to share and exchange experiences and learn various methodic approaches to work with children with disabilities.'
>
> (PT6, questionnaire response)

- *Formulation of individual education plan (IEP)*

Every child receiving itinerant specialist support has an IEP, which comes under the responsibility of the class teacher. However, it is common practice for the itinerant specialist to help the teacher formulate the IEP during the first year of the integration (as the case for IS1 and IS2). During subsequent years, the teacher will write the child's IEP under the supervision of the specialist.

> 'The specialist advises us on which areas to focus on for the child's IEP; for example to focus more on social aspects than cognitive aspects in the beginning of integration.'
>
> (PT1, interview on 5/6/2008)

> 'The specialist helps teachers recognize the child's strengths, the specifics of his diagnosis, and modify his individual education plan. Very often we work towards the ability of the teacher to meet the child at his developmental level without considering his real age. We have to balance between the pressure we put on the cognitive development of the child and the focus on the area of socialization, self help skills and communication development.'
>
> (IS1, questionnaire response)

- *Team approach through video interaction training*

Team approach seemed to feature significantly in the collaboration between IS2 and the teachers (PT3, PT4 and PT5) in Preschool 2. All three teachers (including 2 assistant teachers) were very positive about the video interaction training method used by IS2 and agreed that the method has encouraged teachers, parents and specialists from SEC 2 to work as a team. Every training session involved IS2 sharing a video of an integrated child with the team, and then facilitating a team meeting to discuss about the video. The video is usually taken in the preschool, the SEC or the child's home.

> 'The biggest value we see in these meetings is that everybody shares their opinion. Parents usually bring new information about their child into these meetings. We can analyse the video together and the psychologist [IS2] will frame the discussion into the professional vocabulary and facilitate the sharing of every member of the team.'
>
> (PT3, interview on 11/6/2008)

- *Provision of documentation to support the preschool's inclusion project*

The documentation support from the SEC was highlighted during both my small group interviews with preschool teachers. According to PT3, the SEC through the itinerant specialist provided the preschool with all the needed documentation for integration, including diagnostic reports from different specialists such as the psychologist and special educator. PT2 who is also the head teacher of her preschool, pointed out that the integration report from the specialist was instrumental in the school's application for funding from the

government to finance the various support required by the integrated children. In relation to the discussion on documentation, two itinerant specialists (IS7 and IS8) highlighted in their questionnaires that itinerant specialist support involved too much administrative paperwork for specialists and preschools (where most of the paperwork was completed by the head teacher).

- *Creation of positive climate for inclusion in preschools*

Several teachers and specialists brought up the value of itinerant specialists in creating a positive inclusion climate in the preschools. PT3, PT4 and PT5 related that the informational talk organised by IS2 for parents in their preschool last year had resulted in more understanding and positive attitudes among parents of non-disabled children toward the school's integration project. Such sentiments were also expressed by two itinerant specialists in their questionnaires.

> 'The support by specialists to families and teachers can help with the acceptance of children with disabilities.'
>
> (IS7, questionnaire response)

> 'Specialist support leads as well as supports families and teachers, cultivates positive acceptance of children with disabilities,'
>
> (IS8, questionnaire response)

### *4.4.2 Adequacy of itinerant specialist support*

As mentioned in the analysis of research question 1, it is stipulated by Law that specialists visit the cases under their supervision at least twice a year. Specialists' visits are usually made to coincide with the IEP review of the integrated children. Nevertheless, IS1 and IS3 explained that specialists would sometimes make more frequent visits depending on the needs of teachers and the progress of the integration project. It was interesting to learn from the findings that interviewed teachers and their collaborating itinerant specialists had quite similar opinions about the inadequacy of itinerant specialist support, particularly on the issue surrounding time.

> ‘The support is often not enough because the specialist visits only twice a year. She may be able to see the general development of the child but not very helpful for each step that the teacher has to take to help this development.’
>
> (PT2, interview on 5/6/2008)

> ‘It is difficult to find time for the co-work with the help of the centers [SECs], but I see it as very important. It would be helpful if they [the specialists] could come often to the school to work with us.’
>
> (PT1, questionnaire response)

> ‘Our visits to preschools are not very frequent so the help is not intensive. It is also important to pay attention to the fact that the integrated child does not receive too much special support in the classroom (i.e. too much individual work, permanent presence of the assistant teacher) because this can exclude the child from his peers instead of promoting integration.’
>
> (IS1, questionnaire response)

> ‘The help we provide is infrequent. Often it comes with a delay because we do not have the time to visit preschools as often as we would have liked. Had we made more frequent contacts with preschools, the cooperation would probably be more open, more intensive and maybe it would have been possible to avoid some problems.’
>
> (IS4, questionnaire response)

Although Preschool 2 teachers too expressed hope for more frequent visits by the specialist, they appeared to be satisfied with the quality time they received during such visits.

> ‘Whenever the specialist visits, it is definitely quality time spent with teachers. She does her best to help and answer our problems.’
>
> (PT3, interview on 11/6/2008)

> ‘Whenever she [the specialist] comes, the teachers including the school head teacher will just ‘jump on her’ with lots of questions. She also offers help for the other children in the class when we ask.’
>
> (PT5, interview on 11/6/2008)

The teachers from Preschool 2 related that when necessary, they contacted the specialist for advice outside the scheduled visits by calling her or the SEC. In addition, preschool teachers in this research had access to a wide range of professional expertise through different specialists from the SECs (i.e. psychologist, speech and language therapist and special educator). In situations where other professionals' feedback was required, the SEC would make the necessary contact on behalf of the preschool.

### *4.4.3 Suggestions for change*

- *More frequent visits by itinerant specialists*

One of the changes to the present itinerant specialist support suggested by teachers during the two small group interviews was to increase the frequency of visits. Although the teachers in Preschool 2 proposed for their specialist (IS2) to facilitate video interaction training and team meetings every three months, they were aware of the time constraints. Two teachers (PT1 and PT8) also mentioned the difficulty to find time for co-work with itinerant specialists in their questionnaire responses.

- *Wider team collaboration*

Preschool 2 teachers suggested for IS2 to expand their existing collaborative team to include external professionals operating outside SEC 2. They observed that some of the preschool's integrated children were consulting physiotherapists and audiologists but the teachers had neither direct contact nor information from these professionals. The teachers reckoned that they could provide better help for the integrated children if the professionals shared vital information with them.

- *Training and training information*

Preschool 2 teachers asked for SEC 2 to organise more lectures aimed specifically at the problems faced by integrated children in their preschool, and to provide them with information on training workshops by other organisations. It was apparent that the teachers themselves were keen to acquire more knowledge to better help the integrated children.

- *Meetings of preschool teachers*

Teachers from Preschool 1 and Preschool 2 wanted more joint meetings with teachers from other preschools, saying that such meetings enabled them to share knowledge and experiences with other teachers who were also practising integration.

## 4.5 Research Question 3: What are the characteristics of the collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and mainstream preschool teachers?

Findings here are divided into four sub-sections: collaborative approach, collaborative responsibilities, collaborative comfort and suggested change for collaboration. In understanding this section, it is useful to note that IS1 was collaborating with PT1 and PT2 in Preschool 1 while IS2 was collaborating with PT3, PT4 and PT5 in Preschool 2.

### *4.5.1 Collaborative approach*

The three itinerant specialists interviewed often found themselves in specialist-directed situations although it was clear that they preferred teachers to equally contribute to the collaborative relationship.

> 'Usually I find myself using the expert approach in the relationship. Teachers expect solutions from specialists; they expect specialists to tell them the right thing to do. Most of the time, I find myself in the role of a leader to teachers. Usually it is up to the specialist to suggest solutions but it is up to teachers to decide which suggestions are feasible as they know more about the classroom situation. We always try to giving them the initiative to decide what to do.'
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

IS1 maintained that she did not see herself as a leader but as someone who advised or guided teachers to see the right way to integrate children.

> 'It is necessary not to be the expert. I have to be on the same level with teachers. To motivate them in their work and make them believe in themselves.'
>
> (IS1, interview on 5/6/2008)

IS2 noted that the nature of her collaborative approach with teachers depended on the teachers' experiences with integration. She said that teachers who were new to integration needed more guidance than those who had experience. She admitted that in most cases it was the specialist who decided what was good for the children with disabilities.

> 'It is very important to guide the teacher by suggesting ideas and not to make judgements on what is right or wrong because this is not healthy for the self-esteem and self-confidence of teacher.'
>
> (IS2, interview on 29/5/2008)

IS2 stressed that she preferred to be a partner than a leader in her collaboration with teachers but sometimes it was difficult because it was her responsibility to ensure that teachers used the right strategies for the success of the integration. Her feelings suggested the dilemma faced by itinerant specialists in providing support to teachers. IS5 highlighted the setbacks of authoritative specialist support.

> 'The specialist support can become too authoritative if specialists do not respect teachers' space and creativity in the classroom. This can make the teacher feel inadequate and de-motivated for further integration work.'
>
> (IS5, questionnaire response)

Additionally, IS3 pointed out that specialists might enter the collaboration as the expert but this role could change eventually as they continued working with teachers.

> 'The relationship may change to a point where both [the teacher and the specialist] are at the same level. Teachers know the children more than the specialist as most of the children's time is spent with teachers in school. The specialist should not forget this fact.'
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

The teachers in Preschool 1 related that they respected their itinerant specialist (IS1) for her expertise and experience. PT1 described the specialist as her mentor and advisor.

> 'When we have some questions and when we need help, we can go and we can ask [the specialist]. She emphasises on something that maybe we don't see all the time so it is important for us to consult and discuss the things and to have feedback from the specialist.'
>
> (PT1, interview on 5/6/2008)

Similarly, Preschool 2 teachers saw their itinerant specialist (IS2) as the key person in their cooperation. In their team, they concurred, the specialist's role was more like a mentor and not a leader. IS2 did not task the teachers by telling them what to do but ask for their opinions.

> 'The specialist is the mentor in the team in a way that whenever we have a team meeting the feedback from her is essential for us to confirm that we are on the right track.'
>
> (PT3, interview on 29/5/2008)

### *4.5.2 Collaborative responsibilities*

When it came to the clarification of responsibilities, the three itinerant specialists interviewed were firm in their understanding that the main responsibility of integration lied with the preschools. They asserted that the SEC might lead in deciding on the type of support but ultimately it was the preschool that had to integrate the children with disabilities.

> 'We are leading the procedure but how they will do it at school is up to them. We give them all the materials and support they ask but then they have to do it."
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

IS2 noted that teachers often followed the strategies suggested by itinerant specialists who were perceived to have more experience. Nevertheless, IS3 stressed that specialists did not dictate how preschools did their job.

> 'We do not control the preschools but we just counsel and provide support for them to take control and make the integration work.'
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

At the receiving end, teachers who were collaborating with IS1 and IS2 were equally clear that they carried the main responsibility of integrating the children with disabilities in their preschools. They, however, pointed out that it was the responsibility of the itinerant specialist to offer support by providing them with various information, documentation, the children's assessments reports, methodic guidance and professional feedback.

One subject which came up frequently throughout all the interviews was the responsibility of preparing the integrated children's individual education plans (IEPs). Although it was stipulated in the Law that the preparation of IEPs was the responsibility of teachers, IS1 and IS2 explained that they would write the IEPs in the first year of the integration.

> 'In the first year, the specialist writes the IEP for the child because teachers have no experience in this area. For the following years, teachers write the IEP themselves but they will discuss with the specialist about it. The IEP has to be evaluated by the specialist.'
>
> (IS1, interview on 5/6/2008)

IS3 raised the issue that schools usually expected the SEC to do everything for them including preparation of the children's IEPs. She opined that it should be done collaboratively because teachers knew the children better than the specialists.

> 'What we think is we are the guiding centre and schools should fulfill their duties i.e. coming up with the IEP. Some centres do the IEP for schools but we think it should be cooperation.'
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

Teachers in both Preschool 1 and Preschool 2 had no qualms about preparing the integrated children's IEP but they expected information and guidance from the itinerant specialist.

> 'The specialist provides the background information for the IEP that teachers have to prepare such as the child's psychological report, speech therapist's report, with recommendations from the specialist.'
>
> (PT3, interview on 11/6/2008)

When asked if teachers were clear about the respective responsibilities of the itinerant specialist and teachers in meeting the needs of the integrated children, IS3 maintained that most of the time teachers were not clear about what they should do.

> 'Usually it depends if they already have experience working with the centre. If they have, teachers know their own responsibilities. On the other hand the new teachers, they are not clear. This may be also because different centres have their own way of working so it may be confusing for the teachers.'
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

On how itinerant specialists helped clarify responsibilities of both sides for preschool teachers, IS1 said that she customarily explained to teachers on the areas she could support them during their first contact, and re-emphasised the responsibilities during subsequent visits.

> 'Expectations are set during first contact. I explain to the teacher what she can expect from me, give her my contact details, speak to her about the problem of the child, what is the first task of integration – usually it is the socialisation of the child.'
>
> (IS1, interview 5/6/2008)

> ‘We make responsibilities clear by repeating when there is confusion. What is important is there must be good communication between the centre and the school so that any problems or misunderstandings can be discussed and resolved.’
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

IS2 highlighted that responsibilities of teachers were determined by their head teacher. She said she could suggest certain strategies but it was up to the teachers to take them on. However, she added that it would be easier if she had a good relationship with the head teacher so that the head teacher could follow up with the teachers on her suggestions. For IS2, the use of video interaction training was a good strategy for her to demonstrate to teachers ‘what they should be doing’. Through the video, she stressed, teachers could see for themselves what worked and what did not work for the integrated children.

### *4.5.3 Collaborative comfort*

The two pairs of collaborating teams in this research expressed comfort with their collaborative relationship. IS2 said she was comfortable working with the teachers from Preschool 2. She noted the openness in the class teacher PT3 who was always keen to discuss her problems and showed initiative of wanting to improve her knowledge and skills. Talking in general terms, IS1 noted that there were fewer problems in preschool integration compared to basic school integration. If any problem should arise, it was always discussed with teachers.

> ‘The greatest problem is to start the integration because head teachers and teachers are afraid as they do not have the experience. Once the child is accepted, very often teachers are surprised that the situation is better than they expect.’
>
> (IS1, interview on 5/6/2008)

On her challenges working with preschool teachers, IS1 added:

> ‘The challenge is to adapt my way of collaborating with different types of teachers. I must have a positive attitude when meeting teachers by always finding ways to praise and motivate them. I have to know how to pass my suggestion to improve the quality of the integration without seeming as an expert who is telling teachers what to do.’
>
> (IS1, questionnaire answer)

IS3 felt that her collaborative comfort with teachers depended on their personalities. She reflected that she was mostly comfortable working with preschool teachers, highlighting that teachers appreciated the fact that the specialists were going to them instead of them having to go to the centre for help. Nonetheless, she added that discomfort could surface if teachers were not cooperative.

> '…when teachers do not prepare for our visit and we don't feel welcomed in school. For example when there is no work area for us to work with the child, teachers do not allocate time for discussion with us, or expect us to give impromptu professional assessment on a child whom we are not suppose to see in the school without the parents' knowledge.'
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

Preschool 1 teachers felt that the character of IS1 helped build the comfortable relationship between them. In Preschool 2, the teachers agreed that it was motivating for them to work with IS2 who was very passionate about helping the integrated children in their preschool.

> 'It is very motivating to collaborate with a person who does what she does for a "hobby". It is not just a duty for her but she wants to do her best to help the progress of every child.'
>
> (PT4, interview on 11/6/2008)

To summarise, the findings in this section have clearly demonstrated that there exist mutual respect and satisfaction between two pairs of collaborating SECs and preschools regarding their collaborative relationship. Teachers and specialists showed clear understanding of their respective responsibilities and were comfortable in their collaboration with one another. Having said that, teachers however voiced need for itinerant specialists to visit them more often to enhance existing collaboration. The infrequency of visits did not go unnoticed among itinerant specialists but they were often restricted by time and staff constraints. Evaluation on the findings for this section on collaborative relationship will be discussed in chapter five.

Before moving on to the final research question, some suggestions from itinerant specialists and preschool teachers for the improvement of their existing collaborative relationship is first presented.

### *4.5.4 Suggestions for change*

The suggestions by itinerant specialists and teachers are divided into structural and attitudinal change.

- *Structural change*

IS1 re-emphasised the need to increase the frequency of specialists' visits to schools saying that it would ensure better support and closer collaboration with teachers.

> 'I think twice a year is not enough. …if the specialist is able to make more visits to school, perhaps five times a year, it can improve the collaboration.'
>
> (IS1, interview on 5/6/2008)

However, she admitted that making more visits with the present condition was impossible.

> 'We currently have too many caseloads, too much administrative paperwork and responsibilities in running centre-based activities.'
>
> (IS1, interview on 5/6/2008)

IS2 suggested for preschools to open more classes for integration rather than selecting just one class in the preschool. Nevertheless, she observed that such a change was difficult due to the attitude of the other teachers who were not involved in the integration. Teachers in Preschool 2 felt that it would be motivating if the head teacher also participated in their team meetings.

> 'Although she supports the integration, she doesn't take part in the team sessions at the SEC. If she does, it would simplify some organizational matters as well for better internal cooperation issues in the preschool.'
>
> (PT4, interview on 11/6/2008)

- *Attitudinal change*

IS2 stressed the need for all teachers to support the integration project in their schools. Citing the situation in Preschool 2, she observed that PT3, PT4 and PT5 were isolated in their integration efforts as theirs was the only class in the preschool to include children with disabilities. She opined that teachers who were not involved in integration were not ready to accept it as inclusion was not a norm in Czech society. Possibly greater involvement from head teachers would promote better support for inclusion in schools. IS1 and IS2 mentioned the vital role of head teachers in steering preschool inclusion.

## 4.6 Research Question 4: What has changed in preschools following itinerant specialist support and inclusion?

As stated by IS5 in her questionnaire, 'Specialist support is necessary to enable the start of integration', hence change as a result of specialist support is perceived simultaneously as change as a result of inclusion. Answers to the fourth research question are taken from questionnaire responses as well as interview transcripts.

### *4.6.1 Teacher changes*

- *Change in teacher attitudes*

IS5 pointed out in her questionnaire response that specialists helped eliminate teachers' fears and prejudices toward inclusion. Often it was highlighted in the findings that teachers commonly had reservations about inclusion during its initial stages but this soon changed with understanding and experience.

> 'In the beginning teachers are afraid because they don't know how to work with the children. At first they only see the handicap, not the child. After more contact with the child, they grow to like and love the child. This is changing very quickly and very often they feel more successful.'
>
> (IS1, interview on 5/6/2008)

> 'There is usually deeper understanding among teachers about the integrated child's problems and what forms of actions they should take and why. The change is also in the feelings of the teachers that they are not alone in their problems.'
>
> (IS4, questionnaire response)

The above observations by itinerant specialists were mirrored in teachers' responses.

> 'I am more open to accept the children and help them. New children scare me in the beginning and then I learn how to work with the child so it becomes better.'
>
> (PT1, interview on 5/6/2008)

> 'Although in the beginning of integration I was kind of scared about it. I have now overcome this fear. I like the job very much now and I will not fear any wider integration.'
>
> (PT6, questionnaire response)

- *Change in teacher competencies*

Change in teacher competencies was seen in their knowledge, interpersonal skills and reflective skills. The most mentioned was perhaps the improvement in teachers' knowledge; that is increased understanding of didactic and pedagogic knowledge.

IS1 observed that initially teachers might have high expectations on the integrated child's academic achievement and it was the specialist's role to bring their expectations to a realistic level. With guidance, teachers often learnt to focus on more practical skills such as the social and self help skills of the child with disability instead of merely on academic skills.

> 'Teachers very often let go of their stress and belief that the integrated child has to be able to acquire similar knowledge and skills as his or her non-disabled peers. They lessen the performance-oriented approach and learn to see the progress of the child with disability even in tiny little steps. They notice more the relationship and communication of the integrated child with his peers.'
>
> (IS1, questionnaire response)

> 'Teachers have deeper understanding of the integrated children and increased knowledge of methodic practices. The communication between school and parents becomes more effective because they share information about the children. This sharing often leads to better and more unified programmes [integrated methods used in school, home and SEC] for the children.'
>
> (IS2, questionnaire response)

PT1 related that by working with the itinerant specialist, she had become more open to criticisms in a positive way that has helped to improve her work with children with disabilities. At the point of the interview, she was pursuing a degree in special education. PT1 reckoned that her self-confidence had improved since she started teaching children with disabilities four years ago and explained her reason:

> 'When there is a new child with a new disability, the teacher has to learn about it. She is more able to handle the situation when she has to teach children with the same disabilities next time.'
>
> (PT1, interview on 5/6/2008)

IS3 appeared to support the idea that experience with integration could boost teachers' confidence. She said: 'Teachers show more self-confidence after experiencing integration. They have the necessary knowledge of different disability types and know how to work with the children.' Additionally, IS2 opined that the moral support given by specialists in assuring teachers that the methods they had used were good was very important for enhancing teachers' self-confidence.

Moreover, IS3 noted teachers' increased understanding and use of professional terminology.

> 'Teachers learn to use more professional terms. Instead of saying the child is naughty, the teacher will probably say that he/she has hyperactivity problem. Teachers can make sense of the child's problem instead of thinking that the child is misbehaving on purpose.'
>
> (IS3, interview on 3/6/2008)

The teachers in Preschool 2 brought up the fact that their experience with video interaction training, which was introduced by IS2, had made them better reflective practitioners.

> 'Thanks to video training, we can see for ourselves how we react to the children segment by segment. We can see every single second of the child's behaviour and reflect on why he behaves in a certain way, what we have missed previously in our interaction with him.'
>
> (PT3, interview on 11/6/2008)

> 'Through the specialist and video training, we have learnt that we have to always keep one eye on the integrated children and the other eye on the other children. We need to observe the integrated children all the time because they often come into situations where they may need help.'
>
> (PT5, interview on 11/6/2008)

> 'Teachers have to decide how much they should help the integrated children. By seeing the videos taken in the homes or SEC, we noticed situations where we might have helped the children but it is not necessary because they can handle on their own. We don't have to do everything for them. I realised that sometimes maybe I am doing too much and it can be counter productive.'
>
> (PT4, interview on 11/6/2008)

### *4.6.2 Pupil changes*

When it came to pupil changes, it was interesting to find that itinerant specialists and preschool teachers spoke more often about changes in the peers of the integrated children rather than the changes in the children with disabilities themselves. This could be attributed to PT3's views that it was difficult to measure the progress of children with disabilities as their success differed from child to child but for the typically developing children, teachers saw that integration always had a positive impact.

> 'I can see changes mainly in the other children because they accepted Marek[1] [child with disability] among them perfectly. They are taught how to take care of him and they tolerate his little 'sins'. …They just don't think of him as being different yet they treat him very thoughtfully.'
>
> (PT6, questionnaire response)

> 'Integration is important for the normal children because they treat the child with disability like any other child although he or she may be a little different. …I have been here four years but I have not seen them laughing at the child with disability just because he or she is different.'
>
> (PT1, interview on 5/6/2008)

For the children with disabilities, it was observed that they generally benefited by imitating their peers in the preschool. Most teachers and specialists mentioned improvement in social, communication, self-help and fine motor skills. However, IS1 noted that integration often did not work well for children with autism and behavioural problems.

> 'Some of the children I would say just flourish during the years they are in the preschool. They learn a lot by imitating their peers, mostly in the social communication, self-help and cognitive areas.'
>
> (PT1, interview on 5/6/2008)

> 'It is difficult for the children with autism to orientate themselves to the kindergarten environment. It is difficult to provide them with the structure and visual support that they need to learn in the kindergarten.'
>
> (IS1, interview on 5/6/2008)

[1] Name has been changed to safeguard confidentiality.

### *4.6.3 Other preschool changes*

As the inclusion process is capable of reforming the whole preschool, it is inevitable that there are changes among the other teachers and parents of typically developing children.

> 'My colleagues are not afraid of integration anymore and they start to take integration as a normal situation in the schooling system. They accept the idea that every child is different and accept the necessity of individual education plans.'
>
> (PT7, questionnaire response)

The shift in attitudes of the other teachers in Preschool 2 was slow though visible. Teachers interviewed related that their colleagues generally accepted the children with disabilities but they would not accept the idea of integrating the children in their own class. Touching on the acceptance of children with disabilities, IS2 said that acceptance among parents of non-disabled children normally increased with integration. She added that more changes were possible in the preschool if the itinerant specialist also worked closely with the head teacher.

> 'If the school head teacher is involved in the integration programme, there can be changes in the school programme such as more integrated activities between children from the integrated class and children from other classes which can lead to improved social relationship among children.'
>
> (IS2, questionnaire response)

PT2, who is also head teacher in her preschool, stressed that for integration to be successful, it had to start from the teachers themselves. Teachers needed to show initiative in helping the integrated children.

> 'They accept the children with disabilities because they want to, and not because the law or government says so. …Teachers help themselves to help the children.'

It was apparent from the responses given by several itinerant specialists in their questionnaires, they believed in their ability to bring change to the whole preschool, and not only within the class practising the integration.

> 'Usually during the integration, we also manage to change and cultivate the social climate in the whole preschool, not only within the integrated class. The adults become more tolerant. The non-disabled children are given a chance to feel that they can help another child.'
>
> (IS1, questionnaire response)

> ‘Changes in the acceptance and understanding of the child with disability usually result in the calming down of the school integration climate. There is reduced fear for integration and more recognition of the diversity of children with disabilities among teachers. The overall change of school climate can eventually bring about change in societal climate.’
>
> (IS7, questionnaire response)

### *4.6.4 Changes in itinerant specialists*

As a complementary question, itinerant specialists were asked in their questionnaire if they had developed professionally in the course of providing support to preschool teachers. These are results from their feedbacks:

> ‘I learn from my own suggestions and support to teachers. The different teacher attitudes, ideas, methods, and collaborating relationships and teams have enriched my professional knowledge and experience. The feedback I get from teachers, parents and colleagues motivate me in my work.’
>
> (IS2, questionnaire response)

> ‘The personal contact with teachers who are willing to integrate children with disabilities for me is usually very enriching. My work exposes me to many new views on integration and I often discover new approaches and handy instruments for integrations.’
>
> (IS4, questionnaire response)

> ‘Definitely. Meeting people with different opinions and attitudes makes you think and value these opinions to justify your professional conviction. Working with the teachers teaches us tolerance, empathy and creativity because teachers work in different settings and need different kinds of support.’
>
> (IS5, questionnaire response)

> ‘Because teachers always bring their questions to us, the specialists always need to study more and search for information we can share with them.’
>
> (IS8, questionnaire response)

In a nutshell, this final section of analysis touched on various changes that were observed and experienced by itinerant specialists and teachers following the provision of itinerant specialist support for inclusion in preschools. The changes mentioned were manifold and if positive, could bring long lasting benefits to the preschools. Indeed as testified by IS5, 'School climate can become joyful when integration is working well.'

**Summary**

In brief this chapter has presented findings to my four research questions following the data analysis of my interviews and questionnaires. In the subsequent chapter, I will discuss and evaluate these findings.

# 5 EVALUATION

> 'Evaluation refers to the process of determining the merit, worth or value of something, or the product of that process.'
>
> (Scriven, 1991; cited in Mertens, 2005: 47)

This chapter ascribes value to findings presented in the previous chapter. It interprets, assesses, and deliberates my research findings against the backdrop of my reviewed literature in chapter two. Additional literature further supports my findings and evaluation.

The layout of this chapter is structured as such:

- System of itinerant specialist support
- Practicality and adequacy of itinerant specialist support in facilitating preschool inclusion
- Collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and preschool teachers
- Preschool changes following itinerant specialist support and inclusion
- Essential attributes for itinerant specialists

## 5.1 System of itinerant specialist support

The provision of itinerant specialist support in the Czech Republic is stipulated by the Law on Schools 2004. However, Special Education Centres (SECs) being the service provider have the flexibility to decide on the nature, type and frequency of the support according to the needs of teachers and children with disabilities in the preschools. Similar to the delivery model in the Netherlands and the model being recommended in the United States, itinerant specialist support in the Czech Republic employs the indirect or consultative model (Dinnebeil and McInerney, 2000; Dinnebeil et al, 2004). The itinerant specialist's main task is to provide teacher consultation for inclusion in schools. Nevertheless in some instances, as demonstrated in the research findings, itinerant specialists (i.e. from SEC 3) also spent time working directly with children with disabilities in the classroom on top of their consultative responsibilities.

In addition to on-site consultation, various training activities were organised by the SECs for preschool teachers to help them upgrade their knowledge and skills. SEC 1 and SEC 2 also held meetings for preschool teachers under their supervision to provide methodical training and promote sharing among teachers. Video interaction training was used intensively by IS2 to facilitate training and team collaboration among teachers, parents and specialists from her SEC. Although it is officially stipulated that specialists should visit teachers under their supervision twice a year to provide consultation, visits ranged from once a fortnight to twice a year depending on needs of the teachers and integrated children.

Itinerant specialists worked with a wide range of people including teachers, parents, and other professionals within and outside their SECs. Parents of children with disabilities generally sought help from the SEC based on their own initiatives or were referred to the SEC by professionals such as doctors, neurologists, and therapists. Prior to the commencement of the support, itinerant specialists in this research appeared to take on several crucial tasks. This included assessing and diagnosing the child with disability and making recommendations for his or her inclusion. Application for provision of itinerant specialist support would only take place after both the child's parents and the preschool head teacher agree to the inclusion.

It was found that the present itinerant specialist support was lacking in formal evaluative measures. Itinerant specialists did not have a formal framework or procedure to assess the effectiveness of their support whether in terms of the success of the inclusion or the satisfaction of their collaborating teachers with the consultation process. Nonetheless from the interview findings, several possibilities of locating the positive development of itinerant specialist support were identified. These included reports and videos which documented the progress of the children with disabilities and verbal feedback specialists received from parents and teachers.

As mentioned in chapter two, Wesley and Buysse (2004) had identified evaluation as one of the eight stages of consultation processes. The authors highlighted the importance for itinerant consultants to involve their consultees in establishing both formal and informal opportunities throughout the consultation process for evaluation and feedback.

> ‘Conversations throughout the consultation relationship serve to evaluate the process itself and may address issues concerning communication between consultant and consultee; their respective roles, responsiveness, and boundaries of expertise; and the adequacy of resources.’
>
> (ibid: 144)

While reflecting that evaluation was an area for improvement in the provision of itinerant specialist support, IS3 expressed difficulty to measure the effectiveness of the support saying that itinerant consultation involved many aspects and people. Similarly, Wesley and Buysee (ibid) noted that itinerant consultants and consultees faced difficulty in selecting appropriate methods of measuring consultation outcomes for a wide range of positive changes that could occur within the children, the consultees, and the programmes. The authors suggested that evaluation measures should incorporate assessment of consultee and programme changes using instruments such as knowledge and skills inventories and environment rating scales. Additionally, it should also consider consultee’s satisfaction with the process and content of consultation, and the consultant’s interpersonal style.

To summarise, itinerant specialists used needs-based approach in providing support to preschools. According to specialists, the nature, type and frequency of their support is based on the needs of teachers and children with disabilities in the preschools. On processes, evaluation has been identified as a lacking area in the present itinerant specialist support. The process of evaluation is necessary to identify strengths and weaknesses as well as to identify goals for improvement in the itinerant consultation.

## 5.2 Practicality and adequacy of itinerant specialist support in facilitating preschool inclusion

On practicality, preschool teachers and itinerant specialists emphasised the following aspects of itinerant specialist support:

- Professional feedback and moral support
- Information about the integrated children and their disabilities
- Methodical guidance
- Formulation of individual education plan (IEP)
- Team approach through video interaction training

- Provision of documentation to support the preschool's inclusion project
- Creation of positive climate for inclusion in preschools

The fact that professional feedback and moral support was seen as most valuable explained the reality that teachers practising inclusion in their preschools were often isolated in their cause. This was strongly pointed out by IS2 and Preschool 2 teachers when they described the lack of understanding and involvement among other teachers about the inclusion project in their preschool. Nevertheless, it was also brought up that itinerant specialists had the potential to change the school attitude and climate toward inclusion.

Research findings showed that teachers found the information, knowledge and skills provided by itinerant specialists useful and practical for facilitating inclusion in their context. This included pedagogic and didactic knowledge and practical information involving documentation for the inclusion project. Preschool 2 teachers were convinced that the video interaction training by IS2 was a useful approach to promote team collaboration, knowledge exchange and improvement in teachers' didactic methods. Hence, itinerant specialist support is seemingly an effective model in transforming teacher knowledge and skills because specialists have to make recommendations according to teachers' needs and context. This observation is consistent with available literature on itinerant consultation (Richmond and Smith, 1990; Kelley, 2004; Wesley and Buysse, 2004).

Infrequent specialist visit emerged as the most inadequate aspect of itinerant specialist support. Teachers often asked for more visits from itinerant specialists. Increased visit is seen to enhance specialists' understanding of the context within which teachers had to teach (Richmond and Smith, 1990). IS4 noted that advice from the specialists was often delayed as they were unable to provide advice as and when problems occurred in the preschools. According to Richmond and Smith (ibid), increased frequency of visits would not only increase the practicality of the advice teachers received but also enhance the possibility of itinerant professionals to influence teachers' classroom practices. Having said that, teachers interviewed were satisfied with the quality of the interaction time they had with specialists and the range of professional advice that the SECs were able to provide them. Other than scheduled visits, itinerant specialists and teachers used informal modes of communication such as telephone calls and email correspondences to maintain their collaboration.

As to changes, teachers interviewed asked primarily for more visits from the specialists. Additionally, Preschool 2 teachers also suggested for wider team collaboration with specialists outside their supporting SEC, more training opportunities and more frequent meetings with other preschool teachers who were practising inclusion.

To reiterate, itinerant specialist support was found to be practical in facilitating preschool inclusion. Teachers particularly valued the professional feedback and moral support they received but wanted more frequent visits from their itinerant specialists.

### 5.3 Collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and mainstream preschool teachers

Going back to the two teacher methaphors (Common, 2001) discussed in chapter three, the findings revealed that itinerant specialists did not perceive their collaborating teachers as passive recipients of support. Even in the beginning of the inclusion project where itinerant specialists might find reservations among teachers, teachers were still active decision makers in their own classrooms. Specialists needed teachers' consent and cooperation to make inclusion work in the preschool. Specialists interviewed preferred to take on the role of a partner, advisor or guide rather than a leader or expert although often they found themselves in the leading role especially during the onset of the inclusion project. However, IS3 had pointed out initial roles adopted in the beginning of the collaboration could change with teachers' increased knowledge and experience with inclusion.

At the receiving end, preschool teachers interviewed in this study perceived the itinerant specialist as their mentor and advisor in areas where they needed support and assurance that they were on the right track. This corresponded with the teachers' earlier answers that they valued most the professional feedback and moral support from itinerant specialists. Teachers interviewed appeared to see themselves as having the autonomy to choose, from a range of suggestions by the specialist, the best approach to include children with disabilities according to their individual classroom situation. In other words, teachers did not see themselves as passive task implementers of itinerant specialists. Hence, it appeared that itinerant specialists and preschool teachers in this study perceived teachers as 'actors and defenders who have qualities or characteristics of power, action, autonomy, and stability' (Commons, 2001: 205).

Itinerant specialists' aspiration of being a partner rather than a leader is coherent with the development in models of consultation. The expert model practiced since the 1940s, according to Schulte and Osborne (2003), often did not lead to change. This was because 'the model put consultee in a subordinate position relative to the consultant' and consultant did not take into consideration consultee's feedback (ibid: 115). The authors also highlighted that in practice when collaborators had differing views of collaboration, it could create tensions in the collaborative relationship. This point was brought up by IS3 when she said that preschool teachers sometimes worked with specialists from different SECs who might have differing collaborative approaches, which could be confusing for teachers. It was common practice for itinerant specialists to make clear expectations and responsibilities during their first contact with teachers. Teachers interviewed were clear that they carried the main duty of integrating the children with disabilities in the school but with the assurance of support from specialists. The fact that these teachers had collaborated for several years with their itinerant specialists might speak for their self-perception as active collaborators and their clarity on collaborative responsibilities. On the contrary, as pointed out by IS3 during her interview, teachers who were new to itinerant specialist support and collaboration frequently were not clear about their responsibilities and those of the itinerant specialist.

On collaborative comfort, it was evident that personal characteristics of itinerant specialists and preschool teachers affected the comfort of both parties in their collaboration. Wesley et al (2001) found that the comfort level of early interventionists who worked as consultants of child care providers in mainstream settings was affected by consultee characteristics and consultant characteristics. IS2 spoke about the openness of Preschool 2 teachers in discussing their problems while IS3 related on being uncomfortable when teachers did not take her visits seriously. At the other end, teachers in Preschool 2 were motivated by IS2's passion towards her work.

On changes in collaboration, itinerant specialists and teachers did not propose changes to their existing collaborative relationship. Instead they suggested for increased frequency in specialist visit, setting up of more classes for inclusion and more welcoming attitudes of other preschool teachers toward inclusion. The teachers and specialists appeared satisfied with their collaborating relationship. However, their suggestions for change demonstrated that factors outside the collaborative relationship affected their collaborative comfort.

In summary, it can be said that there is no single best model of collaborative approach in specialist-teacher collaboration. The choice on collaborative approach and roles depends on the experience, needs and context of teachers. Additionally, collaborative approach changes as the collaboration progresses. Roles and responsibilities may change as teachers become more informed, experienced and competent.

### 5.4 Changes in preschools following itinerant specialist support and inclusion

Fullan (2001: 115) once wrote that:

> 'Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it is as simple and as complex as that.'

Fullan (ibid) also said that effective classrooms and schools were results of having quality teachers. It is reasonable to assume that improvement in inclusive practices would accompany the increase in teacher experiences and competencies with inclusion. Existing literature on inclusion (Dinnebeil et al, 1998; Supiah Saad, 2006; ACS, 2007) supports this assumption. From my research findings, teacher changes was one of the most apparent change brought on by itinerant specialist support. Teachers not only reported reduced fear and increased understanding concerning children with disabilities and inclusion, but they also showed and reported improvement in a wide range of competencies. Improved teacher competencies included areas in knowledge on disabilities and methodic practices, knowledge of professional terminology, reflective skills, self-confidence and communication with parents. Hence, itinerant specialist support using the consultative model is an effective way of cultivating positive teacher attitudes and transfering knowledge and skills from itinerant specialists to preschool teachers. This finding is consistent with literature on itinerant consultation (Dinnebeil and McInerney, 2000; Dinnebeil et al, 2004).

On pupil changes, the process of inclusion has taught peers of children with disabilities tolerance and acceptance of differences. Peers learnt that inclusion was a natural experience and were reportedly helpful toward their friends with disabilities. As for the children with disabilities, they often progressed in their social, communication and self-help skills by imitating their peers. IS1, however, highlighted the reality that inclusion often did not work well for children with autism and behavioural problems.

Other visible changes from my findings were greater acceptance for children with disabilities and inclusion among other teachers and parents of typically developing children in the preschools. By comparison, acceptance of inclusion among other teachers was greater in Preschool 1 than Preschool 2 although the former had only one additional year of experience with inclusion compared to the latter. This more welcoming climate in Preschool 1 could be attributed to the fact that the head teacher, PT2 was morally supportive of inclusion and involved actively in the preschool's inclusion project. No doubt in the Czech Republic, inclusion can only take place in schools with consent of head teachers. However, head teachers generally do not participate personally in the inclusion project and prefer to let teachers who run the inclusive classrooms to work directly with itinerant specialists. IS1 and IS2 had pointed out during their interviews that more changes were likely to take place in the preschool if the itinerant specialist worked closely with head teachers. Likewise for consultants as school reformers, Fullan (2001: 189) noted:

> '…most reformers have now learned that it is a mistake to bypass the principal. Principals need to understand the model, value it, and work on the interaction that is at the core of successful teacher (and consequently) student learning.'

Furthermore, observing that most school reforms tended to focus on structural change (i.e. formal requirements and events-based activities), Fullan (2001; 2002) stressed that 'reculturing' was the key to real change.

> 'Transforming culture – changing what people in the organization value and how they work together to accomplish it – leads to deep, lasting change.'
>
> (Fullan, 2002: 18)

Hence, the itinerant specialist who also carries the responsibility of a change agent needs to focus on cultural change besides structural change. The success and sustainability of inclusion lies in the cultivation of positive values, beliefs and attitudes of the whole school that inclusion works and is beneficial. Fullan (2001; 2002) states that to create this positive culture, school reformers or in this case itinerant specialists need the cooperation and active involvement of school principals. It was encouraging to read itinerant specialists' testimonials on the changes they had witnessed surrounding the school's social climate including changes in teachers' and parents' attitudes. Indeed, the research findings have established that itinerant specialist support had succeeded in bringing different aspects and levels of change in preschools.

## 5.5 Essential attributes for itinerant specialists

As presented in section 4.2 in the previous chapter, all eight itinerant specialists in this research held Master's level qualification generally in special education or psychology. Apart from providing itinerant support to teachers in regular schools, they were working directly with children with disabilities in the SEC. Having both professional and hands-on knowledge is an advantage for itinerant specialists when they have to provide practical advice to teachers in the mainstream preschools. The view by Richardson-Gibbs (2004) that direct service activities strengthened indirect consultation, was reflected by IS2 in her interview.

> 'During my career I have seen that it is very good connection to have itinerant special educators in the SEC who at the same time are also teaching in the special school. …because they possess not only methodic knowledge but also practical experiences from working with children with disabilities in special school settings. This practical knowledge is useful for them in supporting children with disabilities in mainstream education.'
>
> (IS2, interview on 29/5/2008)

In addition to their professional competence, itinerant specialists in this research appeared to recognise the importance of interpersonal skills in providing consultation to teachers (as demonstrated in answers from completed questionnaires). In general, they acknowledged the need to enhance their communication skills as their job involved transferring information and knowledge to teachers, mediating team work among different adults, and collaborating with teachers with different characters and needs.

In addition to interpersonal skills, Wesley et al (2001) highlighted that possessing knowledge for practising collaboration is pre-requisite for itinerant teachers. According to the authors, the ability of itinerant teachers to understand collaborative consultation processes and to clarify roles and responsibilities with their consultees was integral to effective collaboration. Likewise, Klein and Harris (2004) maintained that collaboration skills and the ability to select the appropriate collaboration process were critical to the successful delivery of itinerant services. From the discussion in section 5.3 on collaborative relationship, it was evident that itinerant specialists in this study practised various skills of collaboration such as reciprocal power sharing and clarification of roles and responsibilities.

Essentially, for itinerant specialists to be effective in their job they should have the professional knowledge cum hands-on experience working with children with disabilities, interpersonal skills and collaboration skills. Similarly, Brown (1999; cited in Fullan, 2001) pinpointed three essential skills for external consultants: technical, interpersonal and consulting skills.

Having said that, an additional quality that surfaced in my research findings was the itinerant specialists' moral commitment in promoting inclusion. This was evident from itinerant specialists' questionnaire responses and also from my interviews with three itinerant specialists. A majority of itinerant specialists believed strongly in promoting inclusion in schools. They derived motivation, inspiration and enrichment from their work which involved meeting and collaborating with different people. Preschool 2 teachers spoke highly about IS2's dedication to her work and children with disabilities.

> 'For me, the possibility of integrating children with disabilities from a very early age is very promising. The situation of integration is very hopeful in the preschool compared to the basic schools, especially with the support from specialists. It is a challenge to make this possibility a reality.'

> '…the personal characteristic of the specialist is very important. She needs to have the professional knowledge and experience and the commitment in the work.'
>
> (IS2, questionnaire responses)

**Summary**

This chapter started with an evaluation of the system of itinerant specialist support in the Czech Republic. Next, it scrutinised the practicality and adequacy of the support in facilitating preschool inclusion. The third section evaluated the collaborative relationship between itinerant specialists and preschool teachers. Preschool changes following itinerant specialist support and inclusion was next discussed. Finally, an additional section on essential attributes for itinerant specialists was created foreseeing its significance for the successful delivery of itinerant specialist support. Additionally, this final part of the evaluation will have further implications in the provision of itinerant support in my home country.

# 6 CONCLUSION

> ‘An imaginative conclusion will move on from the careful description and analysis of your earlier chapters to a stimulating but critical view of the overall implications of your research.’
>
> (Silverman, 2000: 252)

Summary and evaluation of my research findings are first presented in this final chapter. Subsequently, implications of the research findings on my professional practice are discussed after which limitations of this research are identified. Lastly, recommendations for future research are proposed.

## 6.1 Summary and evaluation of research findings

Itinerant specialist support in the Czech Republic is delivered using the consultative model. The itinerant specialist’s role is to provide teacher consultation although there were instances where the specialist was working directly with children with disabilities depending on the needs of teachers and children. The process of evaluation was found to be lacking in the present itinerant specialist support. Itinerant specialists and their collaborating teachers did not conduct formal or informal evaluation on the effectiveness of the support and their collaboration. Hence, it is crucial for the present support system to identify evaluative measures for scrutinising support content and specialist-teacher relationships, and identify goals for change.

Itinerant specialist support was acknowledged by teachers and their supporting specialists to be practical in facilitating preschool inclusion. Teachers particularly valued the professional feedback and moral support, and the information cum methodical guidance they received but wanted more frequent visits from their itinerant specialists. Teachers were satisfied with the quality of the interaction time they had with specialists and the range of professional expertise the Special Education Centres were able to provide them. Other than scheduled visits, itinerant specialists and teachers used informal modes of communication such as telephone calls and email correspondences to maintain their collaboration.

Although itinerant specialists and teachers did not follow a particular model of consultation or collaboration, specialists preferred the equal partner approach to the expert or specialist-directed approach. Teachers were perceived as active participants and decision makers in specialist-teacher collaboration. The choice on collaborative approach and roles depended on the experience, needs and context of teachers. Additionally, collaborative approach could change as the collaboration progressed. Roles and responsibilities changed as teachers became more informed, experienced and competent.

The research findings demonstrated that itinerant specialist support had succeeded in bringing different aspects and levels of change in preschools. Most importantly, the results proved that itinerant specialist support using the consultative model was an effective way of cultivating positive teacher attitudes and transfering knowledge and skills from itinerant specialists to preschool teachers. Teachers reportedly showed more positive attitudes towards inclusion and improvement in their pedagogic and didactic knowledge, interpersonal skills and reflective skills following their collaboration with itinerant specialists.

Children with disabilities and their peers also benefited from inclusion following specialist support in the preschools. While children with disabilities showed progress in their social, communication and self-help skills, their peers learnt tolerance and acceptance of differences. It was also found that head teachers could play a significant role in making inclusion accepted and successful in their preschools. Hence, it is vital that itinerant specialists include head teachers in their collaboration with teachers in the preschools.

Although it was not my intention to look into the essential attributes of itinerant specialists, it was evident from the research findings that itinerant specialists should possess certain qualities to be effective in providing teacher consultation. Essentially, itinerant specialists should have the professional knowledge cum hands-on experience working with children with disabilities, interpersonal skills, and collaboration skills. Another quality which surfaced from the findings was the specialists' moral commitment in promoting inclusion.

## 6.2 Implications for practice

Before discussing the implications of the research findings on my professional practice, I would like to bring forward this quote by Fullan (2001: 49):

> '…the uniqueness of the individual setting is a critical factor – what works in one situation may or may not work in another. …Research findings on the change process should be used less as instruments of "application" and more as means of helping practitioners and planners "make sense" of planning, implementation strategies, and monitoring.'

As I have mentioned at the beginning of this investigative journey, the research findings will primarily serve as a ***general guideline*** for the setting up of itinerant service in my professional practice. I do not intend to generalise my findings to a bigger context nor do I have the intention of replicating the Czech itinerant support model in my home country.

In chapter one, I had explained why itinerant support has been identified as a workable avenue for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), particularly among early intervention providers, to promote preschool inclusion in Malaysia. Private preschools in Malaysia were reportedly unsupportive of inclusion in the past because their teachers lacked the necessary skills and experience to teach children with disabilities (ACS, 2007). In investigating the model of itinerant support delivery, the findings have shown that the consultative model was effective toward developing positive attitudes, knowledge and skills among preschool teachers. Another advantage of this model was itinerant specialists were able to customise their advice and suggestions according to teachers' needs and context. Hence, the consultative model appears to be feasible for the delivery of itinerant support in Malaysia.

The challenge now for NGOs is personnel preparation for itinerant consultation. No doubt, practitioners in the field of early intervention possess the fieldwork competencies required to address the learning needs of children with disabilities. These competencies include knowledge and skills relating to children with disabilities, early intervention practices, and family-centred practices. However as demonstrated in chapter five, for itinerants to be able to offer effective consultation, they should also possess good interpersonal skills and collaboration skills because the itinerant's main role is collaborating with other adults and not direct intervention with children.

Additionally, it should be noted that early interventionists in Malaysia are for the most part special educators who have acquired their job qualification through hands-on practice in special education settings. This situation presents three possible dilemmas in the personnel preparation of itinerant consultants. Firstly, early interventionists may feel inadequate in their ability to address needs of specific children who require the specialist expertise of professionals such as psychologists and therapists. Secondly, early interventionists who are by and large special educators may not have strong moral commitment toward inclusion. Thirdly, early interventionists may not have the necessary knowledge on inclusive strategies such as curriculum modification, adaptive teaching strategies, facilitated interaction, and peer supported learning to support children with disabilities in inclusive settings. Therefore, it is essential that the above mentioned dilemmas are addressed in the personnel preparation of itinerant consultants among early interventionists.

Another consideration for NGOs is maintaining the children's educational placement in mainstream settings upon their completion of preschool education. In preparation for the transition of children with disabilities from preschools into public primary schools, there has to be parallel efforts to include them into mainstream primary education. This is an area of great challenge as it involves influencing school policies and collaborating with the government sector to make mainstream education more inclusive.

### 6.3 Limitations of the research

Language is a barrier as I do not speak the native Czech language. I have to depend on my interpreter and herein lies the risk of biases on the part of my interpreter. For this study, I used a total of three part-time interpreters and a professional translator (for translating my interview questions). My interpreters consists of my Czech language teacher (who also translated my questionnaires) and two Masters level students from the Charles University. As a result of using an interpreter, interview time was lengthened and I had to ensure that the attention of my interviewee was kept high throughout the interview. Although two of my interviewees did not require an interpreter and were proficient in English, there were instances during our interviews when they had to search for the right words. Sometimes such episodes could break the flow of the interview.

Time is another constraint because I had been delayed in finding my participants due to the language barrier and also because I had to depend on itinerant specialists to secure my teacher participants. I was only able to start data collection in the last week of May 2008 and had just three weeks to complete all my interviews because school was getting busy before the school holidays towards end of June.

One other limitation of this study is the small number of my samples, which is linked to the restrictions in language and time. Firstly, it was difficult to obtain participation from specialists and teachers because a majority of them were inhibited by the language barrier. Secondly, because of the necessity to translate my questionnaires and interview questions, I was delayed in starting my data collection process. Furthermore, not many specialists and teachers were keen to participate due to their busy schedules in June.

It was unfortunate that I was unable to obtain an interview with a preschool teacher who was receiving support from my third Special Education Centre (SEC). This would have helped to validate my findings on the collaborative relationship between the specialist from SEC 3 (IS3) and her collaborating teacher.

### 6.4 Recommendations for future research

- Itinerant specialist support is widely practised for the promotion of inclusive education in several countries namely the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. More studies should be carried out to investigate and compare the characteristics and strengths of the different available models.

- It would be interesting to do a comparative study to investigate preschool teachers' opinions about itinerant support using the consultative and direct model. Are there differences in specialist-teacher collaborative relationships and preschool changes as a result of itinerant support using two different models? Would complimenting existing teacher consultation with direct child intervention bring better results for the children with disabilities in Czech schools?

- It was highlighted that the present itinerant specialist support lacked evaluative measures. Hence, research should be carried out to address this gap; for example, studies to select appropriate methods of measuring consultation outcomes for a wide range of changes involving changes in the stakeholders (i.e. children with disabilities and teachers), organisational change and attitudinal change.

- An indepth research will be useful to investigate the areas for further professional development of itinerant specialists.

- One of the practical strategies used by itinerant specialists in this research is video interaction training. Further research should be carried out to identify some of the best strategies used by itinerant specialists in facilitating inclusion in schools.

**Summary and conclusion**

This chapter has summarised and evaluated the main findings of my research. In addition, I have discussed the research limitations and proposed areas for future research. This research began with my purpose to study the itinerant specialist support model in the Czech Republic for future implementation in Malaysia. The findings have confirmed my belief that itinerant support is a feasible avenue for promoting inclusive education. More specifically, itinerant support using the consultative model is an effective avenue for cultivating positive teacher attitudes, and promoting the transfer of teacher knowledge and skills for inclusion. The main challenge now for non-governmental organisations looking into providing itinerant support is the personnel preparation of itinerant consultants. The success of itinerant consultation ultimately depends on the knowledge, skills and commitment of itinerant personnel.

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**List of Appendices**

**Research Schedule**

| Month/ Date | Activity | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| April | Participant gathering.<br>Preparation of research instruments.<br>Writing Chapter 2: Literature Review. | |
| 9/4/2008 | First meeting with IS1 at SEC 1. | During my meetings with potential interviewees, I explained to them about my research project and how I wanted them to participate. Each of them received a summary of my research proposal and a consent form. |
| 14/4/2008 | First meeting with IS2 at SEC 2. | |
| 23/4/2008 | First meeting with teachers at Preschool 2 accompanied by IS2. | |
| May | Participant gathering continued.<br>Started data collection: interview and distribution of questionnaires.<br>Writing Chapter 1: Introduction. | |
| 13/5/2008 | Met the head teacher of a preschool at Jinonice, Praha 5 to seek the school's participation. | The preschool did not receive itinerant specialist support. |
| 13/5/2008 | Sent emails to SEC 3 and a preschool in Cerveny Vrch, Praha 6 to ask for participation in research. | IS3 consented to participate on 29/5/08 but preschool was unable to do so. |
| 27/5/08 | Preschool 1 teachers agreed to be interviewed through IS1's contact. | |
| 29/5/2008 | Interview with IS2 at her home with Interpreter A. Interview questions were sent to IS2 and the interpreter prior to the interview. | Interview was conducted at IS2's home because she had fractured her leg. |

| Month/ Date | Activity | Comments |
|---|---|---|
| June | Distribution of questionnaires continued.<br>Collection of completed questionnaires.<br>Data analysis.<br>Writing Chapter 3 (Research Design) and<br>Chapter 4 (Analysis) | |
| 3/6/2008 | Interview with IS3 at SEC 3. | Prior to the interviews, the interview questions were sent to all interviewees and the two interpreters.<br>After the interviews, I sent the interview transcripts to IS1, IS2, IS3 and to PT1 at Preschool 1 for validation. |
| 6/6/2008 | Interview with IS1 at SEC 1.<br>Group interview with two teachers at Preschool 1 with Interpreter B. | |
| 11/6/2008 | Group interview with three teachers at Preschool 2 with Interpreter C. | |
| 18/6/2008 | Meeting with Interpreter C to translate responses from completed questionnaires. | I asked Interpreter C to validate the transcript of our interview with Preschool 2 teachers. |
| July | Data analysis continued<br>Writing Chapter 5 (Evaluation) and<br>Chapter 6 (Conclusion) | |

## SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL

**Research Title**

Itinerant specialist support for the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream preschools

This research is to fulfill the completion of the researcher's M.A. Special Educational Needs 2007/2008 at the Charles University, Prague. Itinerant specialist support in the context of this research refers to the advisory support provided by special educators/professionals from the Special Education Centres to teachers in mainstream preschools to facilitate integration/inclusion. The focus of the researcher is to learn about the collaboration between the two parties as it is her aim to start this type of collaboration in her home country some day.

**Research Questions**

1. What is the mechanism of itinerant specialist support?
2. How practical and adequate is itinerant specialist support in facilitating preschool inclusion?
3. How is the collaborative relationship between specialist teachers and preschool teachers?
4. What are the school changes as a result of itinerant specialist support?

**Research Instruments**

1. Questionnaire using five open-ended questions.
2. Semi-structured interviews with specialist teachers and mainstream preschool teachers.

**Participation from Special Education Centres**

1. Distribution of questionnaires to specialist teachers in three targeted Centres and to preschool teachers (between 5-8 preschool teachers who are receiving support from each Centre).
2. Specialist teachers in the three targeted Centres will be asked to complete questionnaires.
3. Researcher will interview a specialist teacher from each Centre. Interviews will be audiotaped to ensure accuracy of data collected.

**Participation from preschool teachers**

1. Preschool teachers will be asked to complete questionnaires. The researcher will then select teachers from three preschools for interviews. Interviews will be audiotaped to ensure accuracy of data collected.

For further information, please contact the researcher, Ms Soo Hoon Lee at:
Email address: lee_soo_hoon@hotmail.com
Telephone: 773 456 278

**CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

I have read and understood information provided on the research and the process of my involvement.

I have been assured that all information provided by me will be treated with confidentiality and anonymity.

I know I have the right to withdraw from the research for any reason at any time.

I will be informed of the conclusion of the research, and will be given an electronic copy of the research findings (in English) should I require one.

I hereby agree to be a voluntary participant of the research and will give my full cooperation to the researcher.

……..
Name:
Date:

*Consent form adapted from British Educational Research Association (2004) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.*

## STRUČNÝ OBSAH NABÍDKY VÝZKUMU

**Název výzkumu:** ***"Podpora odborníků při zahrnování handicapovaných dětí do tradičního předškolního vzdělávání".***

Tento výzkum je jedním z předpokladů získání titulu M.A. v oboru Speciální Pedagogika na Karlově univerzitě v Praze. Odborná pomoc v kontextu tohoto výzkumu se odvolává na poradenskou podporu, poskytovanou učitelům tradičních mateřských škol speciálními pedagogy a odborníky ze Speciálně-pedagogických center za účelem usnadnění integrace. Badatelka by se chtěla dozvěděla co nejvíce o spolupráci mezi oběma zmíněnými stranami a jejím následným cílem je přispět ke vzniku obdobného typu spolupráce ve své vlasti.

**Předměty výzkumu:**

1. Jaký je mechanismus odborné pomoci?
2. Do jaké míry je odborná pomoc praktická a vhodná k usnadnění integrace?
3. Jak funguje vztah spolupráce mezi speciálními pedagogy a učiteli mateřských škol?
4. K jakým změnám dochází u obou zkomaných činitelů – učitele i dítěte - v důsledku odborné pomoci?

**Prostředky výzkumu**

1. Dotazníky, tvořené pěti otevřenými otázkami
2. Semi-strukturované rozhovory se speciálními pedagogy a učiteli tradičních mateřských škol

**Zapojení Speciálně Pedagogických Center**

Distribuce dotazníků speciálním pedagogům ve třech vybraných centrech a učitelům mateřských škol (5-8 učitelů tradičních mateřských škol, kteří využívají podpory jednotlivých Speciálně Pedagogických Ceter)

1. Tři speciální pedagogové (z jednotlivých Speciálně Pedagogických Ceter), kteří budou požádáni o vyplnění dotazníku.
2. Badatelka povede rozhovor se speciálním pedagogem z každého Speciálně Pedagogického Centra. Rozhovory budou nahrávány za účelem zajištění správnosti posbíraných dat.

**Zapojení učitelů tradičních mateřských škol**

1. Učitelé mateřských škol budou požádáni o vyplnění dotazníku. Badatelka si poté vybere tři z těchto učitelů pro osobní rozhovor. Rozhovory budou nahrávány za účelem zajištění správnosti posbíraných dat.

Pro další informace kontaktujte, prosím, badatelku - Ms. Soo Hoon Lee emailem lee_soo_hoon@hotmail.com nebo telefonicky na čísle 773 456 278.

**SOUHLAS SE ZAPOJENÍM DO VÝZKUMU**

Přečetl/a jsem si a rozumím informacím, týkajícím se mého zapojení do tohoto výzkumu.

Byl/a jsem ujištěn/a, že s informacemi, které poskytnu, bude nakládáno důvěrně a anonymně.

Vím, že mám kdykoliv a z jakéhokoliv důvodu právo spolupráci na tomto výzkumu ukončit.

Budu informován/a o výsledcích výzkumu a v případě, že o to požádám, obdržím výstupy z výzkumu v elektronické podobě (v angličtině).

Tímto potvrzuji, že se do výzkumu zapojuji dobrovolně a badatelce poskytnu svou plnou spolupráci.

Jméno:

Datum: Podpis:

*Formulář souhlasu upraven podle upraveného vydání Etických směrnic pro výzkumy ve vzdělávání, vydaných Britskou asociací výzkumů ve vzdělávání (2004).*

**THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS PART OF A DISSERTATION RESEARCH FOR THE M.A. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS 2007/2008.**

Dear Valued Participant,

I am Soo Hoon Lee, a Malaysian student currently pursuing my M.A in Special Educational Needs at the Charles University, Prague. I am working on a research entitled: ***Itinerant specialist support for the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream preschools***. This questionnaire is part of my research.

Itinerant specialist support in the context of this research refers to the advisory support provided by special educators/professionals from the Special Education Centres to teachers in mainstream preschools to facilitate integration/inclusion. My focus is to learn about the collaboration between the two parties as it is my aim to start this type of collaboration in my home country some day.

I sincerely thank you for your participation and cooperation in answering this questionnaire. I assure you the confidentiality and anonymity of the information you will provide. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Soo Hoon Lee
May 2008
Email: lee_soo_hoon@hotmail.com
Tel: 773 456 278

**TENTO DOTAZNÍK JE SOUČÁSTÍ VÝZKUMU K M.A. DIZERTAČNÍ PRÁCI V OBORU SPECIÁLNÍ PEDAGOGIKA VE ŠKOLNÍM ROCE 2007/2008**

Vážená účastnice / Vážený účastníku,

Jmenuji se Soo Hoon Lee, jsem studentka z Malajsie a v současné době studuji na Karlově univerzitě v Praze obor Speciální Pedagogika, ve kterém usiluji o získání titulu M.A. Pracuji na výzkumu, nazvaném ***"Podpora odborníků při zahrnování handicapovaných dětí do tradičního předškolního vzdělávání".*** Tento dotazník je součástí mého výzkumu.

*Odborná pomoc* v kontextu tohoto výzkumu se odvolává na poradenskou podporu, poskytovanou učitelům tradičních mateřských škol speciálními pedagogy a odborníky ze Speciálně-pedagogického centra za účelem usnadnění integrace. Ráda bych se dozvěděla co nejvíce o spolupráci mezi oběma zmíněnými stranami a mým následným cílem je přispět ke vzniku obdobného typu spolupráce v mé vlasti.

Upřímně Vám děkuji za Vaši účast a spolupráci, kterou mi projevíte vyplněním přiloženého dotazníku. Ujišťuji Vás o důvěrnosti a anonymitě informací, které mi poskytnete. Budete-li mít jakékoliv otázky, prosím, kontaktujte mě.

S pozdravem,
Soo Hoon Lee
květen 2008
Email: lee_soo_hoon@hotmail.com
Tel: 773 456 278

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ITINERANT SPECIALIST

### A. Background information:

1. How long have you been providing itinerant specialist support? ……..
2. What is the background of your training/qualification? …….
3. Contact details (tel/email) – *optional* …….

### B. Main questions

1. Do you think itinerant specialist support promotes inclusion? □ Yes □ No

   Why?

2. Are there setbacks to itinerant specialist support? □ Yes □ No

   Why?

3. What challenges do you face in working with mainstream preschool teachers?

4. What are the common changes as a result of itinerant specialist support? (i.e. changes in teachers/ school culture/ pupils/ parents)

5. Has working with preschool teachers/preschools helped you developed professionally?

   □ Yes □ No

   If yes, please explain how.

***Thank you very much for your kind cooperation. Kindly return this form by post/ email to:***
***Soo Hoon Lee, U Krize 8, 15800 Praha 5 – Jinonice, Czech Republic***
***Email: lee_soo_hoon@hotmail.com***

## DOTAZNÍK PRO SPECIÁLNÍ PEDAGOGY

**Vstupní informace:**

1. Jak dlouho již poskytujete odbornou pomoc? …….
2. Jaké máte vzdělání / kvalifikaci? ……
3. Vaše kontaktní informace (telefon / email) – *nepovinné* .....

**Hlavní otázky**

1. Domíváte se, že odborná pomoc napomáhá integraci handicapovaných dětí?

   □ Ano □ Ne

   Proč? Jak?

2. Má odborná pomoc nějaké stinné stránky / nevýhody? □ Ano □ Ne

   Proč? Jaké?

3. Jaké výzvy vám přináší práce s učiteli tradičních mateřských škol?

4. Jaké časté / typické změny podle Vás přináší odborná pomoc? (např. změny v jednání učitelů / změny v kultuře dané školy / změny u žáků / změny u rodičů)

5. Pomáhá Vám práce s učiteli tradičních mateřských škol ve Vašem osobním profesionálním rozvoji? □ Ano □ Ne

   Pokud ano, prosím, uveďte jak:

***oc Vám děkuji za Vaši laskavou spolupráci. Prosím zašlete mi tento dotazník poštou / emailem na:***
***Soo Hoon Lee, U kříže 8, Praha 5 – Jinonice, 158 00, e-mail: lee_soo_hoon@hotmail.com***

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHER

### A. Background information:

1. How long have you been teaching children with disabilities? ……
2. Do you have training/qualification in special needs education? □ Yes □ No

   If yes, please specify the type of training/qualification: …….
3. How long have you been receiving itinerant specialist support? ……
4. Contact details (tel/email) – *optional* …….

### B. Main questions

1. Do you think itinerant specialist support promotes inclusion? □ Yes □ No

   Why?

2. Are there setbacks to itinerant specialist support? □ Yes □ No

   Why?

3. What challenges do you face in working with the itinerant specialist?

4. How have you changed in working with the itinerant specialist?

5. Have there been any other changes (i.e. colleagues/ school culture/ pupils/ parents)?

   □ Yes □ No

   If yes, please elaborate.

***Thank you very much for your kind cooperation. Kindly return this form by post/ email to:***
***Soo Hoon Lee, U Krize 8, 15800 Praha 5 – Jinonice, Czech Republic***
***Email: lee_soo_hoon@hotmail.com***

## DOTAZNÍK PRO UČITELE MATEŘSKÝCH ŠKOL

**Vstupní informace:**

1. Jak dlouho učíte handicapované děti? ……
2. Máte nějaké vzdělání / kvalifikaci v oboru speciální pedagogika? □ Yes □ No

   Pokud ano, uveďte, prosím, jaké vzdělání / kvalifikaci mate ……
3. Jak dlouho již dostáváte odbornou pomoc? ……
4. Vaše kontaktní informace (telefon / email) – *nepovinné* .....

**Hlavní otázky**

1. Domíváte se, že odborná pomoc napomáhá integraci handicapovaných dětí?

   □ Ano □ Ne

   Proč? Jak?

2. Má odborná pomoc nějaké stinné stránky / nevýhody? □ Ano □ Ne

   Proč? Jaké?

3. Jaké výzvy vám přináší práce s speciálními pedagogy?

4. Jak jste se vy sám / sama změnil/a během spolupráce se speciálními pedagogy?

5. Pozorujete nějaké další změny (např. u kolegů / v kultuře školy / u žáků / u rodičů)?

   □ Ano □ Ne

   Pokud ano, uveďte, prosím, co nejdetailněji, jaké:

***Moc Vám děkuji za Vaši laskavou spolupráci. Prosím zašlete mi tento dotazník poštou / emailem na:***
***Soo Hoon Lee, U kříže 8, Praha 5 – jinonice, 158 00, e-mail: lee_soo_hoon@hotmail.com***

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – SPECIALIST TEACHER

### A: Background information on Special Education Centre (SEC)

1. Information on establishment of SEC
2. Number and qualification of staff
3. Types of schools receiving itinerant specialist support from SEC
4. Number of schools/children/teacher receiving itinerant specialist support from SEC

### B: System of itinerant specialist support

1. What is the policy/guideline governing the provision of itinerant specialist support?
2. Who do itinerant specialists work with?
3. What are the types of support provided?
4. What are the processes involved in the provision of itinerant specialist support?

### C: Collaborative relationship between the itinerant specialist and preschool teachers

1. How would you describe your collaborative approach with preschool teachers?
2. Describe your responsibilities in collaborating with preschool teachers.
3. Describe the responsibilities of the preschool teachers.
4. Are preschool teachers clear about your respective responsibilities?
5. Are you comfortable working with preschool teachers? Why?
6. Is there need for any change in the collaborative relationship? Why?

### D: Changes in the preschool as a result of itinerant specialist support and inclusion

1. Have you seen changes in preschool teachers following your collaboration?
2. Have you seen changes in the child/children with disabilities?
3. Have you seen any other changes? If yes, what are they?

***Thank you for your participation!***

## OTÁZKY PRO ROZHOVOR S UČITELEM ODBORNÍKEM

### A: Základní informace o Speciálním Pedagogickém Centru

1. Založení Centra
2. Počet a kvalifikace zaměstnanců
3. Typy škol, které dostávají od Centra podporu
4. Počet mateřských škol a dětí, které dostávají od Centra podporu

### B: Systém odporné podpory

1. Jakými zákony se řídí poskytování podpory od odborníka?
2. Kdo hradí podporu tj. služby centra (kdo je zapojen?)
3. Jaké jsou druhy poskytované podpory?
4. Jaké jsou procesy spojené se zajišťováním podpory od odborníka?

### C: Spolupracující vztah mezi učitelem specialistou a předškolním učitelem.

1. Jak byste mohli popsat Váš spolupracující vztah s předškolním učitelem?
2. Popište Vaše povinnosti v rámci spolupráce s předškolním učitelem.
3. Popište povinnosti předškolního učitele.
4. Má předškolní učitel jasno o Vašich povinnostech?
5. Jste ve spolupráci s předškolním učitelem spokojeni? Proč?
6. Je potřeba nějakých změn v tomto spolupracujícím vztahu? Proč?

### D: Změny u učitele a dítěte v důsledku odporné podpory

1. Zaznamenali jste u předškolního učitele nějaké změny vlivem Vaší spolupráce?
2. Zaznamenali jste změny u žáka/žáků s postižením vlivem Vaší spolupráce předškolním učitelem?
3. Všimli jste si jiných změn? Pokud ano, jaké jsou to změny?

***Děkujeme Vám za Vaši spolupráci!***

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – PRESCHOOL TEACHER

### A: Background information

1. When did the preschool start enrolling children with disabilities and receiving itinerant specialist support?
2. Number of children with disabilities in the preschool and nature of their disabilities
3. Number of children with disabilities who are receiving itinerant specialist support
4. Class size and teacher-child ratio

### B: How practical and adequate is itinerant specialist support in facilitating inclusion?

1. Which aspects/strategies of the itinerant specialist support are useful?
2. How adequate is the support from the itinerant specialist?
3. Would you like to see any changes/addition to the support you are now receiving from the itinerant specialist? If yes, what are they and why?

### C: Collaborative relationship between preschool teacher and the itinerant specialist

1. How would you describe your collaborative approach with the itinerant specialist?
2. Describe your responsibilities in collaborating with the itinerant specialist.
3. Describe the responsibilities of the itinerant specialist.
4. Are you clear about your responsibilities and those of the itinerant specialist?
5. Are you comfortable working with the itinerant specialist? Why?
6. Is there need for any change in the collaborative approach? Why?

### D: Changes in the preschool as a result of itinerant specialist support and inclusion

1. Have you seen changes in yourself?
2. Have you seen changes in your pupil(s) with disabilities?
3. Have you seen any other changes? If yes, what are they?

***Thank you for your participation!***

## OTÁZKY PRO ROZHOVOR S PŘEDŠKOLNÍM UČITELEM

**A: Základní informace**

1. Kdy začala školka přijímat děti s postižením a dostávat podporu od odborníka?
2. Počet dětí s postižením ve školce a povaha jejich postižení
3. Počet dětí s postižením, kterým se dostává podpora od odborníka
4. Velikost třídy a počet žáků na jednoho učitele

**B: Jak praktickou a přiměřenou je podpora od odborníka pro umožnění inkluze?**

1. Která hlediska/strategie podpory odborníka jsou užitečné?
2. Do jaké míry je podpora od učitele odborníka přiměřená?
3. Přivítali byste nějaké změny či dodatky podpory, která se Vám nyní dostává od učitele odborníka? Pokud ano, jaké a proč?

**C: Spolupracující vztah mezi předškolním učitelem a učitelem odborníkem.**

1. Jak byste mohli popsat Váš spolupracující vztah s učitelem odborníkem?
2. Popište Vaše povinnosti v rámci spolupráce s učitelem odborníkem.
3. Popište povinnosti učitele odborníka.
4. Máte jasno o povinnostech učitele odborníka?
5. Jste ve spolupráci s učitelem odborníkem spokojeni? Proč?
6. Je potřeba nějakých změn v tomto spolupracujícím vztahu? Proč?

**D: Změny u učitele a dítěte v důsledku odporné podpory**

1. Zaznamenali jste u sebe nějaké změny vlivem Vaší spolupráce s učitelem odborníkem?
2. Zaznamenali jste změny u žáka/žáků s postižením vlivem spolupráce s učitelem odborníkem?
3. Všimli jste si jiných změn? Pokud ano, jaké jsou to změny?

***Děkujeme Vám za Vaši spolupráci!***

**Findings from itinerant specialist questionnaires**

| Question for itinerant specialist | Itinerant Specialist (IS) | Answer by itinerant specialist |
|---|---|---|
| ***A. Background Information*** | | |
| A1. How long have you been providing itinerant specialist support? | IS1 | 10 years |
| | IS2 | 12.5 years |
| | IS3 | 10 years |
| | IS4 | 5 years |
| | IS5 | 6 years |
| | IS6 | 10 years |
| | IS7 | 13 years |
| | IS8 | 13 years |
| A2. What is the background of your training/ qualification? | IS1 | MA in special education |
| | IS2 | MA clinical psychology |
| | IS3 | MA in psychology |
| | IS4 | MA in psychology and special education |
| | IS5 | MA in special education |
| | IS6 | MA in special education |
| | IS7 | MA in psychology, MA in special education |
| | IS8 | MA in special education |
| ***B. Main Questions*** B1. Do you think itinerant specialist support promotes inclusion? Why? | | |
| All (8) | Yes. | |
| IS1 | The specialist helps teachers recognize the child's strengths, the specifics of his diagnosis, and modify his individual education plan. Very often we work towards the ability of the teacher to meet the child at his developmental level without considering his real age. We have to balance between the pressure we put on the cognitive development of the child and the focus on the area of socialization, self help skills and communication development. Very often we also lead teachers and their assistants in distinguishing between compensation and activation – which says what and how much help we need to provide for the child. | |

| | |
|---|---|
| IS2 | The specialist is very important during the integration because the teachers in the preschool do not have knowledge of special education. The teachers involved in the integration have little opportunity to share their experiences with their colleagues because they are often the only ones in the preschool who integrate children with disabilities. The professional and moral support, in my opinion, is the most crucial aspect of itinerant specialist support for preschool teachers.<br>We provide professional feedback and methodic guidance through video interaction training and team meetings, and conduct study tours and seminars for teachers – this definitely helps. |
| IS3 | The specialist support is very important for teachers because the specialist shares with them professional knowledge and educates teachers on the specific handicap of the child. It also gives teachers the possibility to share the child's progress with someone. |
| IS4 | The specialist provides support and methodical guidance to teachers. Teachers that practice integration are usually not special educators so they need advice on special approaches and instruments in their work with the children with disabilities. The positive feedback from the specialist is also very important for teachers. |
| IS5 | Specialist support is necessary to enable the start of integration. Specialists help eliminate fears and prejudices among teachers. They provide information on special education, methodic guidance and help with the documentation requirements for integration. From the specialists, teacher can ask questions on their anxieties and share their successes about their work. |
| IS6 | Specialists recommend specific approaches for teaching children with disabilities that enable them to take part in regular preschool class activities. |
| IS7 | The support by specialists to families and teachers can help with the acceptance of children with disabilities. |
| IS8 | Specialist support leads as well as supports families and teachers, cultivates positive acceptance of children with disabilities, and supervises the use of individual education plans. |

| B2. Are there setbacks to itinerant specialist support? Why? | |
|---|---|
| Seven | Yes (except IS6). |
| IS1 | Our visits to preschools are not very frequent so the help is not intensive. It is also important to pay attention to the fact that the integrated child does not receive too much special support in the classroom (i.e. too much individual work, permanent presence of the assistant teacher) because this can exclude the child from his peers instead of promoting integration. |
| IS2 | One of the setbacks is the insufficient capacity of the SEC in meeting the demand for specialist support in preschools. Also, the personal characteristic of the specialist is very important. She needs to have the professional knowledge and experience and the commitment in the work. |
| IS3 | With specialist intervention, there comes risk of accentuating the 'handicap' of the child when he/she receives professional support or care. |
| IS4 | The help we provide is infrequent. Often it comes with a delay because we do not have the time to visit preschools as often as we would have liked. Had we made more frequent contacts with preschools, the cooperation would probably be more open, more intensive and maybe it would have been possible to avoid some problems. |
| IS5 | The specialist support can become too authoritative if specialists do not respect teachers' space and creativity in the classroom. This can make the teacher feel inadequate and demotivated for further integration work. |
| IS6 | It depends on the individual situation of the integration. |
| IS7 | There is too much administrative paperwork involved for schools and specialists in the provision of support for the child with disability. |
| IS8 | There is too much administrative paperwork for the specialist and school director. |

| B3. What challenges do you face in working with mainstream preschool teachers? | |
|---|---|
| IS1 | The challenge is to adapt my way of collaborating with different types of teachers. I must have a positive attitude when meeting teachers by always finding ways to praise and motivate them. I have to know how to pass my suggestion to improve the quality of the integration without seeming as an expert who is telling teachers what to do. |
| IS2 | For me, the possibility of integrating children with disabilities from a very early age is very promising. The situation of integration is very hopeful in the preschool compared to the basic schools, especially with the support from specialists. It is a challenge to make this possibility a reality. Mediating team work collaboration among families, teachers, specialists from the SEC and sometimes with other professionals is also challenging. |
| IS3 | The challenge for me is to keep on learning and pass on my newly-gained knowledge to teachers. |
| IS4 | I have to consider the best way to transfer knowledge to teachers, including new views on integration, and its advantages and disadvantages. |
| IS5 | The challenge is to convince teachers that integration is not impossible, only that they need to prepare well for each child with disability by seeing him/her as an individual unit. |
| IS6 | Recommending quality approaches for integration can be challenging. |
| IS7 | I am challenged to improve my communication with teachers. |
| IS8 | Comparing the development of children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. |

| B4. What are the common changes as a result of itinerant specialist support? | |
|---|---|
| IS1 | Teachers very often let go of their stress and belief that the integrated child has to be able to acquire similar knowledge and skills as his or her non-disabled peers. They lessen the performance-oriented approach and learn to see the progress of the child with disability even in tiny little steps. They notice more the relationship and communication of the integrated child with his peers.<br>Usually during the integration, we also manage to change and cultivate the social climate in the whole preschool, not only within the integrated class. The adults become more tolerant. The non-disabled children are given a chance to feel that they can help another child. |
| IS2 | Teachers have deeper understanding of the integrated children and increased knowledge of methodic practices. The communication between school and parents becomes more effective because they share information about the children. This sharing often leads to better and more unified programmes [integrated methods used in school, home and SEC] for the children.<br>Peers of the children with disabilities accept integration as a natural process. If the school head teacher is involved in the integration programme, there can be changes in the school programme such as more integrated activities between children from the integrated class and children from other classes which can lead to improved social relationship among children. |
| IS3 | Teachers expand their professional terminology; learn to understand and use the right terminology for the child. This reduces their personal anxiety in coping with the child with disability. |
| IS4 | There is usually deeper understanding among teachers about the integrated child's problems and what forms of actions they should take and why. The change is also in the feelings of the teachers that they are not alone in their problems. |
| IS5 | There are changes in teachers' methodic and didactic approaches, and their attitudes toward children with disabilities. School climate can become joyful when integration is working well. |

| | |
|---|---|
| IS6 | Teachers show better understanding of the special approaches used and improved understanding of the integrated child's individual needs. |
| IS7 | Changes in the acceptance and understanding of the child with disability usually result in the calming down of the school integration climate. There is reduced fear for integration and more recognition of the diversity of children with disabilities among teachers. The overall change of school climate can eventually bring about change in societal climate. |
| IS8 | The teachers become more informed. The parents of other children accept the integrated children positively. |
| B5. Has working with preschool teachers/preschools helped you develop professionally? | |
| All (8) | Yes. |
| IS1 | I have to develop professionally to overcome the challenges in my work [as mentioned in question B3]. The contact with preschool teachers inspires me very much for my own work with children. As I am seeing various schools, I can pass ideas and experiences from one school to another and verify what works so I know what to recommend further to teachers. |
| IS2 | I learn from my own suggestions and support to teachers. The different teacher attitudes, ideas, methods, and collaborating relationships and teams have enriched my professional knowledge and experience. The feedback I get from teachers, parents and colleagues motivate me in my work. |
| IS3 | Due to the practical-oriented nature of my work, I have gained first hand knowledge through my own practical experiences working with teachers, parents and children. |
| IS4 | The personal contact with teachers who are willing to integrate children with disabilities for me is usually very enriching. My work exposes me to many new views on integration and I often discover new approaches and handy instruments for integrations. |

| | |
|---|---|
| IS5 | Definitely. Meeting people with different opinions and attitudes makes you think and value these opinions to justify your professional conviction. Working with the teachers teaches us tolerance, empathy and creativity because teachers work in different settings and need different kinds of support. |
| IS6 | Every experience with teachers will always enrich the specialist. |
| IS7 | Improved in communication skills. |
| IS8 | Because teachers always bring their questions to us, the specialists always need to study more and search for information we can share with them. |

**Findings from preschool teacher questionnaires**

| Question for preschool teacher | Preschool teacher (PT) | Answer by preschool teacher |
|---|---|---|
| ***A. Background Information*** | | |
| A1. How long have you been teaching children with disabilities? | PT1 | 4 years |
| | PT3 | 8 years |
| | PT4 | 5 years |
| | PT5 | 1 year |
| | PT6 | 4 years |
| | PT7 | 18 years |
| | PT8 | 1 year |
| A2. Do you have training/ qualification in special needs education? | PTI | I am currently studying for a degree in special education. |
| | PT3 | No |
| | PT4 | No |
| | PT5 | No |
| | PT6 | No |
| | PT7 | Bachelor's degree in special education |
| | PT8 | No |
| A3. How long have you been receiving itinerant specialist support? | PT1 | 4 years |
| | PT3 | 8 years |
| | PT4 | 5 years |
| | PT5 | 1 year |
| | PT6 | 4 years |
| | PT7 | 10 years |
| | PT8 | 1 year |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ***B. Main Questions*** | | |
| B1. Do you think itinerant specialist support promotes inclusion? Why? | All (6) | Yes |
| | PT1 | They [itinerant specialists] can help them [children with disabilities] to join the most of the work at the school. The children develop because of them. |
| | PT3 | Children who are integrated are chosen by specialists from SEC. |
| | PT4 | The SEC provides preschool with all the documentation needed for integration, including diagnostic reports from different specialists such as psychologist and special educator. |
| | PT5 | The speech therapist from the SEC gives her professional point of view and recommendation for the child with disability in the preschool. |
| | PT6 | The professional advice coupled with the exchange of experiences with the specialist help in solving specific problems concerning the child. The special meetings organised for teachers provide a platform for us to share and exchange experiences and learn various methodic approaches to work with children with disabilities. |
| | PT7 | By means of consultation, exchanging of experiences and team collaboration in searching for the best way to help the child with disability. |
| | PT8 | Video training by specialist offers possibility to evaluate, understand and explain children's behaviour. Specialist helps with formulation of |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | children's individual education plan, communication with parents, advice on usage of appropriate teaching tools and loaning of equipment and tools. |
| B2. Are there setbacks to itinerant specialist support?<br>Why? | PT1 | It is difficult to find time for the co-work with the help of the centers, but I see it as a very important. It would be helpful if they would come often to the school to work with us. |
| | PT3 | No |
| | PT4 | No |
| | PT5 | No |
| | PT6 | No |
| | PT7 | No |
| | PT8 | Time consuming for teachers. Teachers tend to generalize individual child to other children with similar disabilities. |
| B3. What challenges do you face in working with the itinerant specialist? | PT1 | It challenges me to do better and more qualified job. Very important for me was the videotaping and talking about it, I could see mistakes and good things in the work with the children. |
| | PT3 | Finding ways on how to help individual children with disabilities in the preschool. This is usually discussed during team meetings and video training with specialists at the SEC. |
| | PT4 | Working with different people to integrate the child with disability. |
| | PT5 | Working together for the benefit of disabled kids. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | PT6 | Implementing the recommendations by specialist because they apply not only to the child with disability but his peers too. |
| | PT7 | The continuous learning involved to know more about special needs education. |
| | PT8 | [No challenges given] |
| B4. How have you changed in working with the itinerant specialist? | PT1 | I believe, I am more open for the criticism (in a good way), that is helping me to improve the work. And I am more open to work with these centers. |
| | PT3 | I have learnt to use the video training interaction method for my regular work. |
| | PT4 | Working as a team. |
| | PT5 | I have learnt to collaborate as a team. |
| | PT6 | Although in the beginning of integration I was kind of scared about it. I have now overcome this fear. I like the job very much now and I will not fear any wider integration. |
| | PT7 | I tend to relate more between my work and special needs education. |
| | PT8 | I do not think I have changed. My approach to the child is still the same, I still tend to approach the disabled child just as the other children. I keep trying to search for the best possible activities/ instruments that will help the child to join the children‘s group in the most effective way. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| B5. Have there been any other changes? | PT1 | No |
| | PT3 | Integration has brought positive impact in the progress of the social behaviour of all children and the whole atmosphere in the classroom. |
| | PT4 | The parents of all children [including those without disabilities] are supportive and understanding of the integration project. |
| | PT5 | Only some of my colleagues are understanding and agreeable of the integration in the preschool. |
| | PT6 | I can see changes mainly in the other children because they accepted Marek* [child with disability] among them perfectly. They are taught how to take care of him and they tolerate his little 'sins'… They just don't think of him as being different yet they treat him very thoughtfully. |
| | PT7 | My colleagues are not afraid of integration anymore and they start to take integration as a normal situation in the schooling system. They accept the idea that every child is different and accept the necessity of individual education plans. The other children in the school increasingly seek them for social interaction. Other children's parents perceive the children with disabilities like any other child. |
| | PT8 | No |

*Note*

* Name has been changed to safeguard confidentiality.