

## Two Cases from Hans Christian Andersen Kindergarten in Ljubljana Slovenia

In HCA kindergarten there are 770 children in 43 groups, from 11 months till 6 years old. There are 29 children with special needs included in groups and one special department for children with more disabilities.

### **First Slovenian case - INCLUSION OF A CHILD WITH WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES**

A child, named Lev, with muscle disease, came to the kindergarten when he was 11 months old. He had a muscular dystrophy, that results in increasing weakening and breakdown of skeletal muscles over time. He couldn't walk and move around by himself. Lev didn't have any difficulties with entering kindergarten. For him everything was really interesting, he played a lot by himself and explore different toys, materials, classroom. Because of his disease and physical disabilities, Lev had a permanent assistant assigned to him. But not from the beginning - first 4 months in kindergarten, despite his diagnosis, he was without an assistant.

At the beginning of the school year mother told teacher that Lev needs healthy environment and that any kind of disease could be fatal for him. Teacher felt fear, pressure, responsibility for his health and health of others children in the group. Everyday communication between parents and teacher or assistant was necessary. Teacher felt parents' concerns about health and many times, unintentionally, they pressure her.

Cooperation with parents was good, but their demands and wishes about their child were getting higher and higher. They wanted more and more from teacher – they expected to do different exercises with him, physical therapy (even breathing exercising), help him walk with special equipment ect. Questions in teacher's minds were: How will I protect him, so he won't be hurt? How will I explain to the other children? What kind of approaches, methods, skills will he need? What kind of adjustments will he need? Who can I ask for help? Do I know somebody with same experience? Is there any literature about it? Some good practice? Special training or seminar, workshop?

During school years new children were entering Lev's group and other children taught them how to behave and help Lev. Lev is socially very opened and communicative, that's why also very popular in the group and others don't see any obstacles when they play and communicate with him. All children gain a lot – they have an experience, which can help them develop acceptance and understanding toward people with disabilities.

Because of the child with special needs in her group she had to plan more, think about activities, adjust programme, sometimes daily routine. She had to be flexible, open, creative, reflective, empathetic and patient.

In relation to the parents she sometimes feels like an »outside« member of the family – objective member who ease parents´ distress, fear and also tell them about their child´s development, behaviour, habits ect. without »too much« emotional involvement.

### Questions:

- ✓ *Cooperation with parents of special needs children: How to deal with parent´s expectation, emotions, pressure? How far can we go?*
- ✓ *The role of a teacher: her emotions, lack of knowledge, personal beliefs, values - how to deal with it and overstep them?*
- ✓ *Responsibility (personal, institutional)*

## Second Slovenian case - A CHILD OF IMMIGRANTS IN OUR KINDERGARTEN

Mark came to our kindergarten at the age of two. He and his family are from Macedonia. Before entering kindergarten, teacher had individual conversation with parents about Mark – in Slovenian and Croatian language, which parents understood little. They told her, that Mark speaks Macedonian language. Teacher had a feeling that they are open as a family, but don't understand the whole picture of kindergarten. She spoke Croatian with them, but still there was a big linguistic barrier. At the beginning she thought this will be the only barrier and that they will get used to the kindergarten and its activities.

Soon it was obvious that parents saw kindergarten as a kind of day-care centre, not educational institution, where we try to reach different goals, offer children much more than just protection. For parents it was important that someone is »taking care« of their child and they did not expect more from the teachers.

Beginning of the school year. Mark cried a lot. Not just first weeks, but months. He was reluctant to interact with teachers, children. He rejected physical and eye contact. During different activities in the group, he was very absent and restless. Teacher couldn't find anything that Mark would be interested in. He roamed around the classroom a lot. At home, parents did a lot instead of him, so there were things that he couldn't do by himself in kindergarten. First he didn't understand and follow the instructions that teacher gave to the group, later he took the easiest way out. It was difficult for him to connect with other children.

After many unsuccessful tries, she started to feel resistance, antipathy towards him, she couldn't establish connection with him. She was aware of her negative emotions. Mark kept refusing any physical, emotional, verbal contact, that's why she felt resistance, frustration, powerlessness. She gets her energy from children's feedback, their small progress and success, but in this case she was missing it. It was difficult to find something positive.

On her consciousness level she didn't want to feel this emotions, but she did.

He stopped crying after half a year and for parents that was enough, they were satisfied. But Mark didn't feel good in the group, he still refused contacts with everybody. Parents weren't conflictual, they were kind to teacher, but had different opinion, view of education. Later, they started to speak with Mark in Slovenian language, which was too difficult for them and incorrect. Teacher encouraged them to speak with him in their mother tongue. She also asked them to encourage Mark to do things by himself, but often there was no respond from them. They didn't attend parent – teacher meetings, so teacher called them, when it was necessary. She often advised them about education and they agreed with it, but didn't follow it.

After months of trying, thinking and searching, she found something, where she saw that Mark is interested in. In her group they started with, as they called them, »English minutes« - few

minutes per day when teacher speaks with children in English language, sings some English songs, count, learn some new English words ect. At such activities Mark's face changed. He started to listen, cooperate, even made an eye contact. Teacher saw opportunity to connect with him, that's why she exposed him and encouraged him to be more active.

She found something, that he was interested and good at. After weeks he also became more calm, active, open. Children started to see him differently. Later teacher noticed that he is also interested in arts, especially dance and drama.

### **QUESTIONS:**

- *How to come close to foreign parents at first or early contact?*
- *What kind of support does a teacher in such situation need?*
- *Do you have some ideas how to integrate a child similar to Mark? What if "English minutes" never come?*
- *How should kindergarten's protocol/system support child's and parent's integration?*
- *What competences does the teacher have and are good for integrating different children into a kindergarten?*