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AN EVALUATION OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE OF JOINING AND PARTICIPATING IN STU- DENT GROUPS IN JEDLIČKA INSTITUTE AND SCHOOL



ABSTRACT

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An evaluation of student experience of joining and participating in student groups in Jedlička Institute and School

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This study aimed to identify factors that affect a person with disabilities' involvement in groups. The study looked at the factors through the relationships in the group and the limits and supporting mechanisms that relate to group involvement. The final product of the research is the production of recommendations called for to improve students' involvement in groups. The functional concept of groups and the bio-psycho-social concept of disability represent the theoretical approach.

The study follows a qualitative research methodology, primarily utilizing semi-structured interviews. All interviews took place among high school students of the Jedlička Institute and Schools in autumn 2018.

The findings showed that as Jedlička Institute and Schools' students have different health conditions, they also have different needs related to accessibility. On the Jedlička Institute and Schools territory, the environment together with personal assistants assures that the students have opportunities to be involved in groups. It is not the same with the environment outside Jedlička Institute and Schools. As the groups sometimes have presentations and tournaments outside the institution, the group leaders have to deal with a lack of accessibility in Prague. Part of the reality is that the group members are not involved neither in the organisation of the group meetings or the theatre presentations.

Keywords: group involvement, wheelchair user, accessibility barriers, group support, qualitative research

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1. INTRODUCTION

This research is relevant for the group leaders and other people engaged in after-school groups in the Jedlička Institute and Schools (hereafter JIS). Indeed, the study offers the possibility to learn about the barriers the students experience concerning group involvement. Moreover, it provides some data related to relationship experiences in groups as well as how students see the support in the groups. The knowledge about the barriers, the support and the relationships are relevant as it offers a view on how the group's function and what obstacles the students might meet in them. The groups are part of the JIS services, and this research can help see possible ways to improve them.

As I was previously doing my placement in JIS, I started to be curious regarding how the after-school groups support student involvement. I was also interested to see if all the members can be involved in groups and have the same possibilities to be involved in groups. As the students have different needs related to their disability, I wanted to see how different needs shape the group context. I previously worked in the disability field in Moldova. Researching the theme in the Czech Republic offered me the possibility to learn about the experiences of people in the Czech context. I previously studied some factors related to Czech social and school systems concerning disability during my placement period. Even so, this study was a possibility to learn about the personal view of the students. It gave the chance to hear their opinions which builds my understanding of the disability context in the country in a new way.

As a person with a disability and wheelchair user who studies social work, I was motivated to research students' barriers related to group involvement as well as the support available. Designing the study, I wanted to go beyond the static view of disability. I started by explaining how the disability concept developed and chose as a defining perspective the bio-psycho-social concept. Indeed, this concept is dynamic and shows

the elements from which the understanding of disability is built and acknowledge the role of the environment including social and personal factors besides the health condition. This concept offered a premise to understand the disability-related terms as needs and barriers experienced by the students with disabilities.

I have based the research on the functional perspective on groups. The chosen perspective is preoccupied with how to make the groups more effective in performing (Hollingshead & Poole 2005). It includes analysis of the performance of the group and coming up with strategies to improve it. The study consists of experience in groups that have specific common goals, and the study aims to formulate recommendations to enhance involvement in the groups. The functional perspective fits best in this research as it offers a guide into understanding the importance of relationships in the group as well as involving members in decision making and how this can increase involvement in groups as well as its effectiveness.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Disability context

In this part of the literature review, I plan to analyse different resources which can help connect disability and need in social interactions. I approach this task by reviewing different concepts of disability. To conceptualize disability, I refer to the World Health Organization (2011) which has developed a comprehensive report, called the World Report on Disability. The report defines disability as the result of the interaction between the health condition, the persons' psychological factors and the environmental barriers that hinder being fully and effectively involved in society on an equal basis with others. In this way, the report seeks to review the obstacles which hinder the social participation of the persons with disabilities in their day to day life. This in turn, helps understand the connection between disability and involving persons with disabilities in social and group activities.

The World Health Organization (2011) argues that disability is a human dynamic and complex condition. What is more, the report suggests that almost everyone will experience some degree of impairment, temporarily or permanently during their lifetime. According to this report, there are three main models of disability: medical, social and bio-psycho-social concepts.

Many disability scholars describe the **social** and **medical concepts of disability**. Thomas & Woods explain the medical approach to disability. According to Thomas & Woods (2003), in the medical approach, the person has a dysfunction which is a personal responsibility - "a personal tragedy". In contrast to this, the social model changes the source of difficulty from the person to the environment. To explain the social model, I reviewed Oliver. Oliver (1996) suggests that society disables the person,

sustains and creates barriers to social interactions. Another resource I reviewed was the article “Disability Models Affect Disability Policy Support through Awareness of Structural Discrimination”, written by Dirth & Branscombe (2017). In the article is explained the social approach on the example of a wheelchair user. The authors argue that the person will be considered being disabled not by diagnosis, but by the inaccessibility of built environments. In result, it is the stairs that make the person disabled. The responsibility for changing the situation falls on society. (Dirth & Branscombe 2017) The medical and the social models have two opposite view on disability. The medical approach searches the problem in the person and tries to “heal” or “rehabilitate” the person. On the contrary, the social approach tries to push the society to assure equal opportunities for every person. Shakespeare (2006), cited in the World Health Organization (2011), suggests that a balanced approach is needed, giving appropriate weight to the different aspects of disability.

In this research, we will follow the third model – **the bio-psycho-social concept**. The World Health Organization (2011) describes it as a dynamic interaction between a person’s health conditions and both environmental and personal factors. This concept is more holistic as it gives a balanced approach to different aspects of disability. The idea suggests three realities compose disability. It includes the environmental context (social reality), the health condition (biological reality) and personal factors (psychological reality). These three aspects in different combinations affect a person’s ability to be involved in social activities (World Health Organization 2011, Johnson – Migalski & Drout 2018).

The article “Using the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health in Adlerian Approaches” written by Johnson – Migalski & Drout (2018) includes a holistic view of the subject. This article investigates the body’ functions and structure as well as personal and environmental factors and their effects on a person’s activities and participation. Besides, this article explains how the social, the biological and the psychological realities are connected.

The first term is the **biological reality also known as health condition**. According to Johnson – Migalski & Drout (2018), this term relates to body and mind functionality and structure. The second term **is the psychological reality also called personal**

factors. The World Health Organization (2011) describes this term as formed from motivation and self-esteem that influence how much the person will be involved in activities.

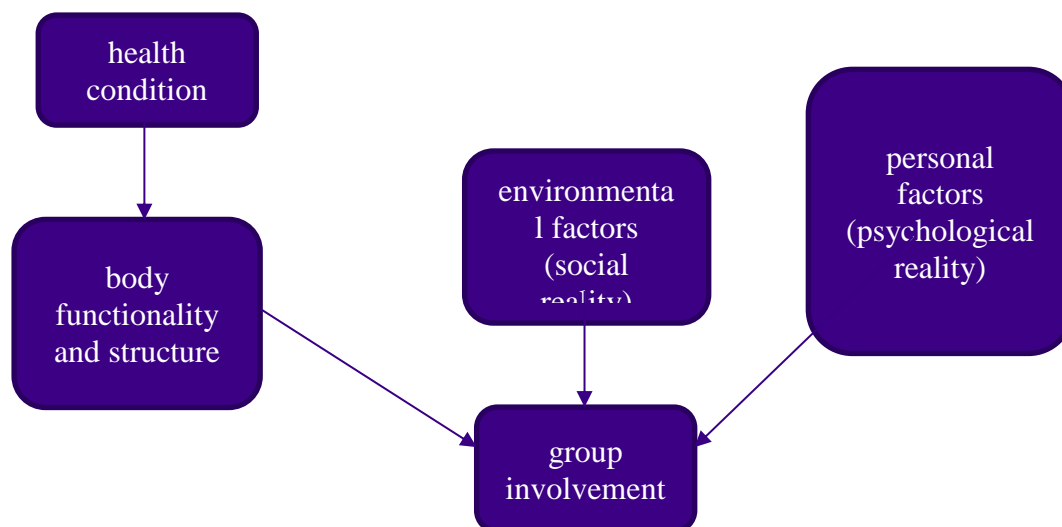


FIGURE 1. The representation of the connection between the disability elements and group involvement

The last term is **the social reality or environmental factor** and it represents the world in which the person lives. Peterson (2005) cited in Johnson – Migalski & Drout (2018) explains that social reality affects a person's ability to be involved and participate in social life. Moreover, by creating opportunities for the person to be involved in social activities, we decrease the level of the disability. Therefore, disability implies fewer opportunities to be involved. The World Health Organization (2011) explains that environmental factors include access to buildings or public transportation as well as access to assistive products and technology like wheelchairs and white canes. Furthermore, the report suggests that without these two elements the person will participate less in social life and education as he/she will not be able to walk, use public transport or even read.

In the same way, a social network can create disabling conditions for the person or form more opportunities for being involved which can facilitate and decrease disability at an individual level (Johnson – Migalski & Drout 2018, World Health Organization 2011). For example, a person who knows his/her strengths and weaknesses might manage more easily to find a job as he/she knows personal boundaries and possibilities and can speak about it at the interviews. The social skills obtained can also help a person

to find new friends and re-adapt after the person ends the school and starts the life of a mature person. The bio-psycho-social perspective connects disability and involvement in the group. In other words, being more disabled means less participation – less possibility to be involved.

In this part of the review, the disability concepts were described and especially the one which will be used for this study. The bio-psycho-social approach is a connection of three elements, the health condition, the personal factors and the social reality. Review of this concept showed that socialization and experience gained in groups might decrease some of the limits the person has to face.

Through group experiences a person can be helped to learn about collaboration and their own strengths and weaknesses. Also, a group can be the place where a person has an accessible and friendly environment. Besides, the other members of the group might meet the same problems related to their social involvement and difficult environments. Consequently, the members can share their ideas and even create actions to change environments into accessible places.

2.2 The Jedlička Institute and Schools context

To connect the conceptual paragraph with the practical background I reviewed the information presented in the JIS leaflet (n.d.). According to it, the institution is a high-quality and accessible school, which has as its mission preparing children and youngsters with physical disabilities for their integration into life. The school offers different free time activities including students' groups. Existing groups include singing group, theatre, Tap Tap – music group, a support group on Mondays and bocca (sports) group. These groups offer the students the possibility to develop social skills, develop personal abilities and learn new skills. Following Johnson – Migalski & Drout (2018) being a member of a group is part of the individual level of the social reality. Being a member of such groups can help decrease the level of the disability following bio-psycho-social concept. In the research, will be studied two elements mentioned here:

the support a person receives or offers as well as the barriers to involvement the person might meet.

2.3 Perspectives on small groups

In this part of the literature review, the ideas that explain groups and experience in them will be described. I followed Hollingshead & Poole (2005), “Theories of Small Groups: Interdisciplinary Perspectives”, as the authors explain the group concept by dividing the group theories into several categories. There are diverse types of groups. Depending on the group type the person’s experience will be different. Hollingshead & Poole (2005) collected theories on group functioning and typology. One of the concepts they describe is the functional perspective.

2.3.1 The functional perspective and experience

In the context of this research, I consider viewing the groups from a functional perspective explained by Hollingshead & Poole (2005). This perspective describes and predicts “group performance and focuses on the functions of inputs and processes” (Hollingshead & Poole 2005, 24). It has several core assumptions, including (1) the groups are goal oriented, group-oriented or task; (2) the quality of the group behaviour and performance varies, and a researcher can evaluate it; (3) interaction processes can be regulated; (4) internal and external factors influence groups performance and behaviour.

Wittenbaum et al. (2004) define the functional approach in the article “The Functional Perspective as a Lens for Understanding Groups”. The authors present the theoretical assumptions and review theories that fit into the **functional perspective**. Wittenbaum et al. argue that the functional approach is a normative perspective to understanding and predicting group performance. Therefore, this approach describes group effectiveness and studies why some groups are thriving, and others are not. It studies the conflicts that might appear in groups and conflict management. It allows connecting group effectiveness and performance with relationships in the group and members’

involvement. Moreover, the functional perspective includes studying group decision making which is part of the student's participation in the groups. According to Hollingshead & Poole (2005) citing Janis & Mann (1977), Hackman & Morris (1875), McGrath (1984) and Hirokawa (1982), the quality of group decision making depends on the quality of interactions and communication.

The person's experience researched according to this perspective might relate to experiencing working together for a common task or goal; discussing and taking decisions together; sharing information and time; developing relations with different members including the leader; accepting someone's view; argument a personal opinion and other. Furthermore, the functional concept can apply to many types of groups, with the requirement that the group has a goal or task. Hollingshead & Poole (2005) argue the functional perspective helps judge about the quality of the group processes and considers coming with strategies for improvement.

The functional concept considers evaluating how efficient a group is, as well as how productive it is. The efficiency of a group increases when the members of the group are involved in group processes and participate in decision making. By giving opportunities to the group members to engage and by supporting the development of relationships in the group, the leaders assure more involvement in working for the common goal as well as more interest for the group.

2.4 Group experience

In this part of the literature review, we will see what experiences can be expected in student groups if we review them from the functional standpoint. Sahin et al. (2014) wrote an article related to research that focuses on after-school activities. The groups, according to the authors, developed as functional groups and were analysed based on the same approach. Regardless of the group in which the school students participated, the students reported experience in learning about their own and their colleagues' strengths and weaknesses. The students also explained they feel comfortable in after-school groups because of having a common group task. Besides, the students

experienced joyfulness, motivation and commitment as well as trusting the group and collaboration. The research pointed out many positive outcomes related to joining a group.

Kalyva & Agaliotis (2009) wrote a subchapter in the “Handbook of Social Interactions in the 21st Century”. The subchapter connects social skills with social inclusion. In the handbook, the authors argue that students with disabilities often meet difficulties in acquiring and using the necessary social skills to sustain positive personal interactions. Such skills according to the authors ensure better participation in society and a better social inclusion.

“Increasing Student Participation and Productivity in Small – Group Activities in Psychology Classes”, written by Meyers (1997) focuses on researching how to increase individual student involvement in small – group activities. The author explains that relationships in the group shape student group experience. Besides, the author argues that the student will act in the group following his/her reason to be in the group. Another important experience according to Meyers is to see if the student believes his/her contribution is important. The students who see their contribution is dispensable are more likely to “free ride” (Kerr & Bruun 1983 cited in Meyers 1997). Moreover, if the student feels his/her work is unnecessary and does not have fundamental importance for the shared task, the student is more likely not to participate or put in less effort. (Meyers 1997)

Stainton Rogers (2011) also described the “free riding” phenomenon. The author calls it social loafing and explains it as the tendency to expend less effort on a task if the person does the activity together with other people. Latane et al. (1979) cited in Stainton Rogers, found that when people are asked to shout together as loud as they can, each person tends to reduce the noise he/she makes by 29 to 60 per cent, depending on the number of people that are involved. On the other hand, Stainton Rogers argues that the reduction in effort is observed mostly when the task is trivial and meaningless. Moreover, the author finds that when the goal is essential, and the members of the group have a personal stake in the outcome, there is much less drop-off.

Furthermore, Meyers (1997) explains the perception the person has about the group influences task performance. In the same way, the attitude towards other members of the group affects the process. In fact, in a case the members do not trust each other, Meyers explains that they will tend to withdraw from the group out of a fear that others will use them. It also correlates with group members' interactions after the meetings. If the students from the group also communicate in the free time, this might be a reason to come to the group meetings and be involved.

Sharan & Sharan (1976) cited in Meyers (1997) argue about the importance to have the leadership established and rotated in the group among students. The students can be motivated to participate more by giving specific responsibilities to the group members and engaging them into the process. Moreover, Beresford (2003) explains that as the people with disabilities know their needs best and have direct experience, by bringing them in leading positions the leader assures that decisions which are made are most appropriate for the situation. As all the members in the groups are people with disabilities, by assuring their involvement in decision making and in organizational responsibilities, the leader can help the groups to function following the needs of people with disabilities (Beresford 2003). Additionally, this will ensure that the students have experience with leadership as well as with organizing roles in a group. It might help them to more easily take such positions in society.

Student groups are helpful as they might form an environment where the person can experience collaboration, dealing with different group members but also learning about personal skills and limits, learning about a colleague's strengths and weaknesses. It can offer positive experiences as well as being a place where the person will learn to deal with colleagues who are free riders. Furthermore, these groups are environments where the person can experience different relationships and form communication skills which might be useful in life after ending the school. Moreover, the groups are places where is a good environment to learn to discuss and develop decisions together.

Disability gives additional importance to the possibility to have group experience in school. By experiencing such things as joyfulness, motivation and commitment as well as trusting the group and collaboration, the person is more likely to engage in activities

later. The positive group experiences help the person be involved and participate more in social interactions which according to the bio-psycho-social concept (World Health Organization 2011) decreases the limits the person can meet in society due to disability. Moreover, persons with disabilities frequently have a lack of social skills (Kalyva & Agaliotis 2009) and need environments where they can form and practice such skills. The groups are possible places for exercising social skills, which also helps develop the personal factors of the person. According to the JIS (n.d.), the Institute has the mission to prepare the students for integration into life. Developing and practicing social skills in the group can help the person to more natural be included in the society after he/she ends the school.

2.5 Conclusion

There are many approaches to understanding groups. Depending on the approach, there can be different experiences a group member might have. Studying the approaches as well as the experiences help conceptualize the information related in the data analysis part of the thesis. The approach we use is the functional concept. This concept relates a lot to the experiences in the groups that have a common goal and have effectiveness as important task. Through choosing this concept we focus on the possibility of evaluating group effectiveness and seeing the group processes as supporting effectiveness. Moreover, we can recommend changes for the groups and base them on their role in achieving the groups' goals.

In this research we also have to address the fact that involvement in a group depends on being involved in the group, in this case, also depends on the disability-related factors. As all the members have different types of disability, they also have different needs related to it. The needs shape the level of being involved in group activities and society as such. The bio-psycho-social concept (World Health Organization 2011) holistically reviews the disability by examining three significant factors which are part of it. The disability-related needs include health condition, psychological dynamics or environment (social reality). The health condition represents the medical elements like not being able to walk or need in assistance when writing. The environment context is

the society which includes accessibility, attitudes as well as the system with policies and laws. Accordingly, the environment is mostly unprepared or has flaws in being prepared for people with disabilities. It frequently does not answer to people with disabilities' needs. The psychological needs connect to the group context, as they cover the demand in forming relationships, the need for learning social skills, learning leadership skills and organizational skills. Indeed, these needs connect with better inclusion into society, and some of them can be practiced inside the group context (Kalyva & Agalotis 2009, Sahin et al. 2014). Moreover, the students might have the possibility to practice being a leader which will help them speak easier about their needs in the group (Beresford 2003).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 The aim of the research

The study aims to analyse the factors that affect the choices of students to join and participate in a group. By examining the group experiences which students relate, the goal is to identify the certain elements which mostly influence students' involvement in the group. The results will help see the barriers the students meet.

The study looked at the students' group experiences through the limits they meet, the reasons to join the group, the existing supporting mechanisms and through relationships in the group.

Besides, the group experience and limits also divided according to its origin. The origin could be the health condition, environment or personal factors. Accordingly, this division of elements according to their source was adapted from the concepts of disability and especially the bio-psycho-social concept (World Health Organization 2011), as explained in the disability conceptualization part.

3.2 Overview of research design

The approach used for this research is qualitative. The reason I chose this approach is the fact that the frame of this study was to explore the experience of the students in the group and it relates how people see and deal with groups. Flick (2009) explains that the qualitative research does not test what is already known (f. ex. theories already formulated in advance) but has the goal to discover and develop new ideas.

Flick (2009) argues that when dealing with complex knowledge, is best to use qualitative research methods because here the object under study determines what method will be chosen and not the other way around. The participants are not reduced to simple variables as usually it happens in quantitative research but are represented entirely in their everyday context.

The purpose of this research was not to arrive at generalized results, from a vast number of people, but to study the experience of a small group of persons and understand it through the eyes of a specific sample.

Personal experience is a multilateral subject and studying it requires discussions with the person. Silverman (2013) argues that research with no personal stories in it, risks being empty and unhelpful. An excellent tool to register the student' own experience is the semi-structured interview. Moreover, Silverman (2013) explains that semi-structured interviews are appropriate as they offer flexibility in using questions which can help dig more in personal opinions, attitudes and experience.

The participants at this research are students with disabilities from JIS' high school. Five high school students were selected to participate in the interviews. This number of participants was chosen firstly, as there are only four classes formed. I interviewed five students, and there are around 20 to 25 youngsters altogether in the high school in JIS this year. Also, Carey (2012) suggests that four people should be enough for qualitative research to cover the case of an institution or organization as it is more important to concentrate on these people and research deeply the subject. The final product are recommendations that are formed from the research in order to support students' involvement in groups.

My purpose was to collect data to answer the research questions as well as to explain the main topics of interest: experience and barriers to joining a group — the questions developed from possible experience and obstacles found in the literature review. During the interview, I used the items from the interview paper selectively. I had the paper in front of me as a guide. I used questions that are not in the interview to be able to open more the themes. I did not take notes during the discussion so as to not intimidate the person and keep eye contact as in an informal discussion. I also kept silence when

the person stayed in silence. It helped by giving space to the person to express themselves.

3.3 Research ethics

To conduct the research, I applied for a permit from the JIS board. The institution permitted me to do the study and signed an agreement with me.

The research confidentiality relates to the process of data collecting. Before starting any of the planned interviews, I ensured an explanation to the person concerning the research purpose, as well as my role and relation to the research. As recommended by Tinson (2009) I considered myself responsible for informing the person which institution I represent, what I collect data for as well as who will have access to data. I also explained how approximately how long the conversations could be and that the interviews are anonymous. Dixon (2015) recommends using informed consent which includes informing all the participants at the interview about the nature of the study and reasons for it. I ensured that the participants agreed voluntarily and were not under pressure. Every participant in the discussion signed a paper acknowledging that I would use the data collected for the research purpose. Dixon (2015) also remarks that the researcher should inform the participants that they can withdraw from the interview at any time with no repercussion. I told every participant about this before starting each of the interviews.

I disguised the names of those who participated in the interviews. As recommended by Heaton (2010) I assured confidentiality by de-identifying the data which was used in the research in order to protect the person who gave the interview. After the investigation was completed the findings were presented to the participants in the study in a group discussion. Due to this, I considered it especially important to assure confidentiality concerning colleagues, JIS' staff and workers. Tinson (2009) suggests using the context of the quotes appropriately so nobody could identify the person. In the context of this research, I translated the quotes from Czech, and the background was kept only as needed to confirm the ideas.

As specified by Heaton (2010), the raw data is typically confidential to people who are involved in its collection or processing. As I am the only person involved, apart from the person from whom I took the interview, I did not share the raw data with anybody. I deleted the raw data after I completed writing the research. The raw data for this research included audio-recording and transcripts that were only used by me, and I destroyed them when the research process complete. The interview questions were formed according to the themes, and this directed the interview process (Appendix 1).

3.4 Research data collection

One of the classes that participated in the research is the class where I previously had my placement. We knew each other before the research process, and I have friendly relationships with many of them. Also, I knew some of the other students because we met previously, when I was doing my placement. The five interviewees in the study have their names changed to a letter and a number: W1; W2; W3; W4; W5 (W meaning a student in the high school in the JIS).

To select the people for interviews, I presented the thesis idea and a short description of the interviewing process in each of the four classes of the high school in JIS. In two of these classes, a teacher made a brief presentation for me beforehand, and I continued after her. The persons who participated in the interviews were those who expressed the interest voluntarily in joining. Three of the meetings took place in the teachers' room after lessons. Also, one of the interviews took place in the room where the participant lives and one took place in the classroom after the students left. Only at one interview second person was present, the student's mother who also assisted the person. In all the other cases, only two people were in the room, me and the interviewed person. Usually, we would have a coffee and sometimes cookies that I would bring with me. The interviews were one to two hours long, and all of the students agreed to the recording them. I did not use notes during the interviews. Before starting every one of the interviews, I legitimized myself. After the interviews, I made transcripts of every record and kept them confidential until I finished writing the research findings. The interviews took place in Czech as all of the students are Czech' speakers. I translated

the prepared questions in Czech and had both, English and Czech versions with me. The transcript was in Czech and after being translated by me into English. The quotes used in the research text are a translation from Czech.

4. RESEARCH PROCESS

4.1 The summary of the data collection

From the five interviewed students four decided to speak about the theatre group, and one chose to talk about the bocca sports group. Both of the groups presented here, work to complete a task. The way they work follows the functional perspective described by Hollingshead & Poole (2005). Therefore, the groups are interested in having high effectiveness in performing and in goal achievement. The experience in such groups might relate to developing relationships with the members and with the leader; accepting someone's view as well as discussing and taking decisions together. Wittenbaum et al. (2004) explains this concept as the normative perspective to understanding and predicting group performance. To obtain group effectiveness and to have better results in goal achievement, it is essential to have high rates of students' involvement. On the other hand, to give students opportunities to be involved, it is necessary to understand the limitations related to disability. We explained these limitations in the disability context part.

The groups function in different ways. One of them - the theatre group is an after-school activity for the students. It exists already for around three years. It works during the year, for the period when the school operates. The group prepares one or two plays per year. They develop a theatre play then present it in the school and sometimes the group is invited to participate in theatre festivals in Prague. Many of these locations are partly accessible or inaccessible. The theatre group this year has around 25 members. Every September usually new people become students of the schools, and many of them join the theatre group. Typically, the theatre group meets once a week, but in the last weeks, before playing on the stage, the theatre group might meet twice a week. The theatre group works by forming small groups of 4 to 5 people who train together.

Every person has his/her role and has to work on it inside the small group. While a one small group trains the others do some other task or relax.

The second group named during the interviews is the bocca group. Bocca is a sports group which has around 15 members. The group meets twice a week. The members of the group are students, ex-students and people from outside the school. There are tournaments once on a month where the members of the group participate. They prepare for the competition during the month and the location of the tournament changes depending on which school organizes them.

The two groups that students chose to speak about are both functional groups which include having a group goal or task and work for it. All in all, the bocca group requires much less responsibility from the members which is very helpful for those members that have severe disabilities, with additional symptoms like tiredness. Moreover, if the member feels tired suddenly, he/she can inform the group on the same day that he/she will not visit it or just not come. The person can skip as many meetings as he/she needs and after return whenever is possible.

4.2 Data analysis

The data gathered and analysed is presented in this chapter. The data represents the experiences of the students and is divided into themes about the limiting and supporting factors as well as the experience related to group involvement. These factors are important as they help to see what element is responsible for disabling the person as well as what the group experiences of the members are. As a result, we can see possible solutions which would create more opportunities for the students to be involved in groups.

4.2.1 Group relationships

The relationships inside the group have an essential role and shape very much the experience of the group members. In this part, I will review the experiences which were described by the students through the relationships they have with group members and with the leaders. Studying the relationships members develop between themselves and with the leaders is part of the functional perspective on groups. Meyers (1997) explains that the bonds are defining characteristics of the group. Having group experiences can be very helpful for students with disabilities. According to Kalyva & Agaliotis (2009), people with disabilities frequently have a lack of social skills. The groups are possible places for practicing social skills, which also helps develop the personal factors of the person.

The members said they support each other. Several students explained that if they need help to go to the group meeting, one of the groups' members would always help. For the theatre and bocca group' members the relationships with other members are very important. The person who does bocca explained that he/she keeps the contact with the members also in the summer period when the school is closed. Several students explained that they attend the group as they have friends in it or as they had friends in the group before. Moreover, one of the members explains he/she feels demotivated to participate further in group activities because many of his/her friends left the school. Based on the findings results, many of the groups' members choice to join a group as they have friends in the groups, and they keep on developing friendships as the groups are comfortable environment to do so.

I have friends there. Depends on the situation sometimes we meet after bocca. Especially we meet with those who are also students here. We meet and talk. Sometimes we meet after the lunch and talk. ... We communicate also during the summer time, even JIS is closed. During summer we are all home in different Czech regions, so we call or write each other. We talk and ask how is every of us, where we had the vacation and other things. (W5).

If we have the training in the old building I go there on my own and always somebody will help me – a colleague or a person going in that direction. I do not need to think about this.

In the beginning I personally at the beginning I felt good because I had there a lot of friends and we had good understanding between ourselves and now as those people leave from here, go to other schools. ... it's not the way it was one or two years ago. Because we created relationships – friendship together, our groups and now the people just left. (W3)

Another experience described by the students is having in the group members who are less active, so-called “free riders”. Kerr & Bruun (1983) cited in Meyers (1997) explain that having in the group “free riders” comes as a result of some people seeing their activity in the group as unnecessary. As the members of the theatre group reported having members who are less involved in group activities, this might show that some members see their participation as meaningless and need to be involved more in group activities that help understand the task of the group or in events where the members discuss the group goal.

Many of the students explained that when working with a less active or unpleasant member, will continue to work with the person. An element of this is developing the ability to work with people that are unpleasant. Three of the interviewed students explained they see working with unpleasant members as a challenge, as a possibility for self-development. The students who are considered as less active did not participate in this research and did not explain what is the reason they are seen as less active.

Some people whom are fine for me, but some people are unpleasant for me because they have fun of the theatre activity. They are not responsible. I don't like they do so because I work for it and some people just come and laugh, make fun of it.

I work with the person as he is. Sometimes it is harder, but I work anyway. ... When I work with an unpleasant person/irresponsible person, I develop my patience. (W4)

If maybe sometimes you do not like the person with whom you have to work. If it happens that I need to work with a person I do not like, I look at it as a challenge.

Some people are always tired members. (W1)

Another essential experience that the students told about is the possibility to learn about their abilities and limits inside the groups. The students need to understand personal limits as well as skills. Moreover, the students need to learn to speak about individual needs and ask for assistance. Having this knowledge can help the person talk about personal needs during searching for a new place to live or at the interview for a job. In the group context, the students can improve their knowledge about personal abilities and limits. To learn about their skills, they try to do things with minimum support. This correlates with JIS objectives to educate students to be as independent as possible and to ask for assistance only when it is necessary (JIS n.d.).

As Kalyva & Agalotis (2009) argue the people with disabilities have a lack in social skills, the groups help the students form and practice such skills, which might be helpful in the period when the students will start life in society. The students said they have the possibility to form new skills inside the groups. The students reported learning to work in a team, as well as, communication with other members, even with those who are unpleasant.

I think before the person tries on himself, the person should not say I cannot do it. I need help. I think it is better to try first do it on yourself and see if it works or not, find out how well it works and only after asking for help. In the group we can train it. In the group I learn what are my limits.

There are people who can just sit and if a person has a weak showing the others will simply specify and talk in a friendly way. In the group we learn about our strong and weak parts...It is a good place to learn work in a team. Also, this is good for personal development. (W1)

I learned in the group to be more flexible and adapt to the persons from the group who are unpleasant to me. I learned to communicate and work with them. (W4)

Stainton Rogers (2011) explains that the members who have individual roles related to the common goal less experience disinterest for the goal and are more united. The members of the theatre group reported that they consult each other. The members usually come with a critical eye, in a friendly way, to explain about failures and help improve the role. Many of the students have a role in the play, which the person will present on the stage. Therefore, these experiences give the group members possibility to be involved with a personal input to the group goal.

I need to think or discuss with other members what else has to be done for the play as the play is done not only with the leaders. I need to talk with the group and with the leader and see the different elements of it. (W2)

If I want to change something in the theatre, I need to speak with the leader of the theatre group. I also can discuss it with other group members so if we come to a common idea, we can happen in a more significant number and this will make our voice louder, so the chef will have to consider it.

I am glad we present our play in different places. I am glad what we worked for has a final product. I am glad we didn't waste the time. (W3)

The findings show that the relationships developed in the group keep the members connected. The students have needs related to group involvement. These needs are diverse depending on the disability type. Indeed, the group environment helps in covering some of them, including space to learn various social skills, including working in a team and being flexible and work with unpleasant members.

Additionally, the students explained that they joined the groups or stay there due to having good relationships inside. Hollingshead & Poole (2005) argue that better relationships are an essential factor that ensures better group performance and goal achievement. This includes different elements of the personal experience in the group.

The data analysis related to students experience inside the groups showed several results. Firstly, the data shows that as the members of the group experience support in the group, this brings to better relationships which connect with group effectiveness. Secondly, most of the students explained that when they interact with unpleasant members or free riders, they see it as a possibility to develop personal skills and ability to work in a group even in challenging situations. Nevertheless, none of the members who is consider a “free rider” participate in the interviews. It is not known why some students are considered to involve less or be “unpleasant”. The finding shows that not all the members have strong relationships in the group. Some of the members have stronger connection between themselves and some have not that good connections.

Another result relates to the connection between students experience and group involvement, which the disability conceptualization part explains. The data showed that students learn about personal skills and limits inside the group. Having the possibility to consult each other about the roles in the play adds even more to understanding own abilities and limits. Adding to person’s development relates to personal factors in the bio-psycho-social context. Improving the personal factors decreases the boundaries created by the health condition (World Health Organization 2011). Such change is possible due to positive outcomes from interactions with the members. On the other hand, the students also need to learn to speak about their needs and limits and even speak about this with unknown people.

One student, who is member of the bocca group, reported strong bonds inside the group and explained that the group members contact each other even when the school is closed. According to the findings, the connection is supported by the members themselves and there is no special support coming from the group’ leaders related to this.

4.2.2 The role of the leader

In the theatre group, the leaders organize the group and are responsible for all the elements related to it. The leaders decide about the play, arrange the scene, choose and share the roles, make the schedule for meetings and inform if it changes, discuss with other schools and theatres if the play will be shown somewhere else, organize the transportation as well as collaboration with other teachers if needed. The student can

agree or not agree with the role. Therefore, the student is only responsible for learning and training the character, then be in time at the meeting place and train with other members at the meetings. The bocca meetings and tournaments are also fully arranged by the trainers. The trainers will inform the students if anything changes. The students on the other side, need to come to the meetings and be active there, and there is nothing required after the sessions, besides preparing the role.

The leader shares the roles according to what people can or have abilities to do. He prepares it in the way to make them suitable for the person, and the person cannot protest it much. (W1)

The leader says who what will do in the play. My responsibility is to play my role good and respect what we discussed to do. We can add something also from ourselves to the play which is not something I am responsible for doing but if I want and I can I do. (W2)

The theatre has two people who are responsible for organizing it. They inform us if anything changes. (W3)

In bocca, I am responsible for practicing and be prepared for the tournament at least in some way. In general, there is no high responsibility in bocca (W5).

As can be seen the leaders and trainers in the theatre and the bocca groups are responsible for organizing the group meetings as well as the events where the group participate. The members are responsible only for the activities in the group, playing the role and preparing for the tournaments. As soon as the member have left the place where the group meets, the member is not involved in the group's organization in any way. The leaders on the other hand, have many responsibilities. As a result, the students have a passive role regarding organizational processes.

Most of the staff members and those responsible for organizing the groups are not people with disabilities. These responsibilities include communication with schools and organizations outside JIS and discussing accessibility issues for events outside JIS. As a result, the students not only do not see other students be responsible for

organisation and logistics, but they also do not see persons with disabilities having these roles.

4.2.3 Health condition and accessibility

All the JIS (n.d.) students are people with disabilities. The students who are members of the groups have specific health condition (Johnson – Migalski & Drout 2018). In consequence of having different health conditions, the students also have different needs related to disability. Some of the students use manual wheelchairs, but many use electric wheelchairs. As the theatre group goes for a presentation outside JIS, they meet an unprepared environment, including the inaccessible stage. The students who use manual wheelchairs still can be lifted if several people assist in this.

On the other hand, the electric wheelchairs are very heavy, and frequently the assistants cannot lift them. One of the theatre group members explained that as he/she uses an electric wheelchair, he/she agreed with his/her colleague, who has a manual wheelchair, that they would use it together. They arrived at the presentation place using one wheelchair for two. In this case, people who use electric wheelchairs and cannot sit on manual wheelchairs have additional barriers in participating in theatres outside of JIS territory.

Last week we went to that theatre with our musical, the scene was not accessible, and it is not possible to get to the podium with an electric wheelchair. I do not have a mechanic wheelchair, so I sat on the lap of my colleague, and he/she drove me there. So, we went like this to the school then to the bus and went for the play. ... The leader still doesn't know yet where to present the play as we would need a theatre which would be fully accessible. (W1)

The environment in the bio-psycho-social concept (World Health Organization 2011) represents everything that comes from 'outside'. It includes accessibility, personal assistants and other elements. In this part of the chapter, I will describe several factors related to the environment. One of the barriers that appear when we speak about people who are wheelchair users is the inaccessibility of buildings and transportation as well as streets and pavements. This barrier mostly limits the people who are wheelchair

users. As many of the students are wheelchair users, the entire JIS (n.d.) territory is wheelchair accessible. The students who participated in the interviews explained they could go to the group meetings on their own and without help. The situation can change depending on the health condition and what wheelchair the person has. Some students need assistance in driving the wheelchair. In other words, the buildings and the territory are accessible for wheelchair users, but if the person loses the ability to push the wheels or use the controller, assistants help with this. The situation is also visible in table 1.

Here in the area, everything is accessible (W1).

The way to the meeting place is accessible (W2).

I get to the place where we have theatre easily. ... the theatre group is on the first floor. I only need to take the elevator, and I am there. (W3)

I go to the theatre group meetings always on my own.

If I need support during the theatre group meetings, then the assistants from there help me. They are there during the group meetings. (W4)

I depend on assistant during the travel because if my hand freeze, I might lose the control and I need an assistant to put my hand back to the control panel and maybe drive the wheelchair for me because I might freeze and not be able to drive.

I need assistance all the time, and I need help also to get to the group place. A wheelchair user can get there on himself but not me as I need assistance. If I go to see my friend, I need an assistant with me also. (W5)

Different health conditions affect how students are involved in groups, as is visible in table 1. Some of the students need only an accessible environment, and some need assistance for different activities. Also, the person's health condition might make it difficult to move her/him from the wheelchair which means that the person will stay in the electric wheelchair most of the time.

The students repeatedly reported that the environment inside JIS answers to the student's needs, related to accessibility. Even so, members of both groups mentioned that they have activities out of the JIS territory. The problem is accessibility in the city and in the building where they have the theatre plays. The students usually come to the event venue by an accessible school bus. As a result, they do not meet accessibility-related difficulties on the way. Otherwise, the students can plan and find a convenient way on their own and with the help of the assistants if needed.

TABLE 1: Limits and supporting mechanisms that relate to group involvement

Equal opportunities to be involved in group activities		
Limits the student meets related to group involvement		Factors that support involvement in groups
Health condition	Environment	Environment
Depending on their health conditions the students will have different limits	Lack of accessibility in the city theatres and other buildings where the theatre group could perform	Wheelchair accessible environment in JIS
Different needs related to accessibility and assistance	Selective opportunities to be involved in activities outside JIS	Wheelchair accessible transportation Personal assistants

Two of the essential environmental elements are accessibility and assistance. Even though the students report that they have easy access to group meeting places inside JIS, the accessibility in the city remains problematic. The groups use wheelchair accessible transportation to get to the meeting places, but it remains a problem to access the buildings themselves. Mainly it is hard for the students who use electric wheelchairs as these wheelchairs are more massive, and some students might not be able to change wheelchairs due to health conditions. Resulting from this, the groups meet limits in organising activities outside JIS.

To sum up, we can conclude that there is a lack of accessibility outside JIS. Even though students who use manual wheelchairs still can be lifted by assistants, the students who use an electric wheelchair cannot. The Table 1 presented above, summarizes the barriers and the supporting mechanisms that are related to group involvement and which are developed from the bio-psycho-social perspective explored in the part of the literature review about conceptualization of disability.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study aimed to describe the factors that affect the choices of students to join and participate in a group. The methods used to collect and analyse data assure the reliability of the research. For collecting data method of semi-structured interviews was used, and the process of analysis incorporated interview quotes. In this way, if another researcher approaches the students, he/she should have the same results, if he/she will interview the students in the same period and the same conditions. To check the analysis and gain further insights, I presented the findings to the students who participated in the research. The students had the opportunity to come with their feedback.

Following the aim, the research looked in students' limits, support and relationships in the group as defining the experience of the student. Therefore, it was important to identify the elements and barriers which mostly influence students' involvement in the group and formulate recommendations to increase opportunities for students' involvement in the group. Consequently, the data analysis has several parts, including the review of the relationships in the group, the role of the leader, the health condition of the participant and accessibility. The themes on health condition and accessibility are related to limits and support that the student can have when the role of the leader is part of relationships in the group.

The students that participated in this research are all people with disabilities who study in JIS – a school for people with disabilities. The research includes the disability – related factors in the group context. The significant results relate to the study themes as they are presented in the data analysis chapter. The data about relationships between members showed there is free riding present in the theatre group. The students also report having unpleasant and irresponsible people in the group. One of the results of this research shows that having some less responsible members in the group led to

members seeing this as an opportunity for personal development. The students explained that the less accountable or unpleasant members who, are a challenge to be overcome, help them learn how to deal with difficult people. Nevertheless, none of the members who are seen as free riders, unpleasant or irresponsible in the group, participate in the interview. In result, it is not proved that there would be such people in the group. The finding shows that some people in the group do not like each other and there are problems related to relationships between certain people.

Another finding shows that the members of the theatre group are used to offering support to each other and in addition, some members reported having friends in the groups. The member of the bocca group explained that there is strong connection between the members. They are used to communicate even when the school is closed and try to organize meetings during the summer time. This increases the quality of the relationships and group effectiveness. Having a high involvement in group activities also adds to group efficiency (Meyers 1997). As all of the members have different types of disability, they also have different needs related to it. The needs dictate the level of being involved in group activities and society as such.

The results show that the students learn about personal skills and limits inside both groups. The theatre group gives the possibility to the students to discuss each other's performance and come with recommendations. Therefore, this adds to learning about individual abilities and limits, as well as, learn speak about them. Additionally, the members reported they learn working in a team, learn communication with other members, including with those who are unpleasant. This relates to personal factors in the bio-psycho-social concept as described in disability conceptualization part of the literature review. Developing personal skills and attitudes gives more opportunities for being involved in group activities as well as in diverse activities in society (World Health Organisation 2011).

Many of the findings relate to the environment. Even though the school and group environments are accessible for people with disabilities, it is not the same with the environment outside JIS. As the groups are used to having presentations and tournaments outside the institution, the group leaders have to deal with the lack of accessibility in Prague. The World Health Organization (2011) explains that environmental

factors include access to buildings or public transportation as well as access to assistive products and technology. Lack of wheelchairs and ramps in buildings affects how a person can be involved in social life or group activities. As there is a lack of accessibility in theatres in Prague, the theatre group has to usually has to present its plays on the JIS territory. This mostly heats the group' members who use electric wheelchairs as they cannot be lifted on the stairs.

Part of the reality is that the group members are not involved in the organization of the group meetings, nor of the theatre presentations. All the responsibilities related to organization is taken by the groups' leaders, trainers and staff members. In result, the students have only responsibilities related to theatre or bocca and none related to group organization or decision making. Responsibilities like communication with schools as well as discussing accessibility issues for events outside JIS are done by the leaders or trainers who are not people with disabilities themselves. Meyers (1997) recommends having the leadership established and rotated in the group among students. According to Hollingshead & Poole (2005) in this way also increases group efficiency. Moreover, Beresford (2003) also recommends involving people who have direct experience in deciding positions. As the group members have the direct experience with disability, they might be interested in discussing the accessibility issues outside JIS. Finally, not only the students do not see other students in charge of organisation and logistics, they do not see persons with disabilities having these roles either.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The data analysis helped define several areas which could be improved. The improvements could be implemented by the groups' leaders and organizers. These recommendations have the aim to help prepare the students for the life after school in a better way, through group activities. Additionally, the recommendations are designed to help improve the relationships inside the group which will help to group functionality and goal achievement.

- There is a need for activities that help the members of the group to connect. Such activity could start with discussing together the group organization processes and difficulties. As the theatre group is a functional type of group, as we can see in the group description part, the relationships inside the group have high importance for the performance and goal achievement in the group (Hollingshead & Poole 2005). Acting together for the interest of the group will unite the members and create trustful relationships.
- Through understanding that different people with disabilities have different needs, I realized how important it is to practice talking about the personal needs of people with disabilities. The environment outside JIS poses many problems related to disability, and soon as the students complete their studies, they will have to deal with the barriers outside JIS, whilst having less support than they have in JIS. Organizing a theatre evening or just going for a coffee requires knowing whether the place is accessible or not. The ability to speak about personal needs is supportive not only for planning social life but also for finding a job or moving to a new apartment. While reflecting on this, I realized that the groups could help students to further develop the ability to speak about personal needs and to ask for support in different life situations. Indeed, this can start with discussions and exercises inside the group. Later these skills can be improved during the organizational

process when the theatre group goes for a theatre festival or presentation outside JIS.

- The leader could involve the students in organizational processes such as calling the theatres, talking about group needs and discussing the possibility to present the play there. The students can be motivated to involve more by giving specific responsibilities to the group members and engaging them into the process.

- As the theatre group thinks about having more presentations outside the JIS, the group needs to find theatres or other buildings where it is possible to present a theatre play and which are wheelchair accessible. Through the process of discussing accessibility issues outside JIS and involving in finding solutions could help the students learn about the world outside JIS. Also, this can help the students learn about the existing situation in Prague, related to accessibility. A possible recommendation would be to firstly, talk in the group possible presentations of the theatre group and existing limitations for some members. Secondly, the group can review the possibility to support the members who use electric wheelchairs and not accept to participate without them. Thirdly, if the group agrees on the first two, the group can create a joint action to have equal opportunities for all the members and act as one.

- All the above can take place during the theatre meetings, and the group members can share the responsibilities. In this case, the group transforms a personal disability to group reality. The group take the limits of some members and recognize them as typical. In result, these individual limits transform into group limits. The people who use electric wheelchairs do not have to face these limits on themselves anymore, and the group will have to create conditions for every group member to be involved in group activities. They will either chose activities that can be done by all the members or will ask for better conditions to cut some of the barriers. The group, in this case, represents the interests of each of their members which empowers the members who use electric wheelchairs and makes their needs to be respected. In this way, the group can push the theatre to create conditions for the persons who use electric wheelchairs to have the same terms as other group members.

- A possible adverse outcome, if no solution can be found, would be to only involve students that use manual wheelchairs in presentations outside the JIS.

This would increase the opportunities for presenting the theatre performances, but it would influence the relationships in the group negatively. The fact that many of the theatres are not accessible for the students who use wheelchairs relates to the understanding that it is often the environment which disables people. Moreover, according to the data analysis chapter, although the students who use manual wheelchairs can be lifted by the assistants in some cases, it is not possible with students who use electric wheelchairs as the wheelchairs are too heavy. The environment, in this case, functions selectively and disables the people who use electric wheelchairs more than those who use manual wheelchairs

6.1 Feedback from the students

I met the students in their classes and presented the findings, results and recommendations. The students were asked to formulate their opinion. The students explained that in the groups they can have some freedom and take decisions related to their individual role in the theatre or individual play in bocca. The members responsibilities relate only to the group activities. The students agreed they are not involved in any organisational activity or in decision making in the groups. Moreover, the students explained they would like to have possibility to be involved in such activities, as this would allow them more control over the process. A few of the students said they think that involving the groups' members in decision making is a utopia.

The students' comments confirmed my recommendations. Even if a few students said they thought that implementing the recommendations would be impossible, the majority explained that they would like to work on implementing them. I presented the results and recommendations to the students and not to the groups' leaders as in this way the students had the power to decide what to do with them. The students will further discuss the recommendations they chose for the specific groups and work with the leaders of those groups to implement them. This ensures that the students will not be guided by external leader but will have the power to decide what and how much to present and to implement in the specific groups.

The students also had the idea to approach the editor of the JIS journal “Muzes” and to propose to write an article about the thesis. The students guided me to the media coordinator, who is also a teacher in the school and who writes articles for this journal. I contacted the media coordinator, and this proposed article will be part of the dissemination. The article will help share the information about the thesis in a summarised and easy to read form. As the journal usually is distributed in the school, it will be very accessible for the students and staff members.

The students were interested to hear about the results of the thesis. The feedback process was an activity that empowered the students to say what they think and have the last word in the thesis. Moreover, the students could decide in this way what to do with the results and the recommendations in the future. It was also a possibility to show how the data was used so the persons who participated in the interviews could see that the thesis results and recommendations do not contain any names or other personal data. Additionally, the persons who participated in the interviews could recognize their opinions in the results. Some of these students continued discussing their opinions after the presentation of the results. This shows that the information from the interviews presented in part in the results and recommendations accurately reflected the students’ opinion.

7. REFLECTION

The research process was complex and at the same time rewarding in respect to the achievements and the learning. While working on the research I improved multiple skills. I developed a better understanding of qualitative research and the research topic. Moreover, the process made me realize that by working through semi-structured interviews, the researcher has more opportunities to collect additional information which might show the situation in a more holistic way. Having questionnaires with pre-defined answers would limit the results.

I developed skills in collecting the literature, in working with it, and summarizing ideas from it and afterwards building a text based on the collected ideas. Also, I learned to connect the views from the literature review with the practical knowledge and find a theoretical background for the phenomena from the field. This ability to combine theories and practice as well as working with literature created a building block in my professional development. As a result, I realized the field I worked in is exciting and is my calling.

Furthermore, I gained knowledge related to the importance of building trustful relationships with people whom I interview. I learned that developing specific skills such as active listening, empathy, flexibility and the use of proper language are essential for conducting a successful interview. On the other hand, I am sure that because I had my placement in the same school, my approach to people was easier because the students could recognize me and be more open to me. I also observed that if I was approaching a class and asked if somebody is interested in giving me an interview, there were not so many people involved. On the contrary, if the teacher would have provided an introduction before, I presented the research, many more people would have shown interest. It made me realize that participation of the teacher in the process helped me

have more trust from students and, consequently, have more valid data. Being legitimized in this way, helped me to provoke the interest of the students to the research.

Many of the students who participated in the interviews said that in the groups were members who are irresponsible or free riders. This shows some attitudes in the groups. All the participants of the interviews expressed their wish to participate in them by themselves. This shows that the participants were those active students, who probably were used to take the initiative. None of those who participated at the interviews said he/she was a free rider or was seen by the group as irresponsible. That is why we have no data from the people who are seen as disrespectful and we can only conclude that there are some difficulties in relationships in the groups. The students confirmed that in their feedback.

One of my learning points is on how difficult can be to assure confidentiality in such closed environment as the school is. As the classes in the school have maximum 10 persons, it was not hard to see the person leaving with me. I also did not think through the recruitment process. Every time I came to the class and presented the idea of the thesis, the students would express their interest to participate aloud, so other students and assistants could see that. I realized it would have been good to have the meetings with the students outside the school territory. In the context of this research meeting outside JIS territory would have involved more organizational work, as it would require finding a wheelchair accessible place and arrange support for the person to arrive there. The teacher who helped me to legitimize myself also helped me with offering the teachers' room for the interviews. She arranged it so that nobody was there during the interview. This made me realize that I needed to think about possible issues beforehand and that an assistant or partner could help me to resolve some issues. In this case the teacher was my partner and she kept confidentiality of those people who participated in the research.

One of the findings was about people with disabilities having different needs. It made me realize that in work with people with disabilities, it is critical to analyse their needs and skills of every person individually. I understood this information as of critical importance for planning activities together. Learning about a person's needs and skills can help to overcome possible barriers that the person with disabilities could meet

when she or he is involved in a group. I also realized that these needs and skills should be discussed with the person beforehand.

Another finding is related to the group relationships. The students see the interaction with irresponsible or unpleasant members as a possibility to grow personally. Having such results made me reflect on how I could do the work in a group if I have the role of a leader. I think that it is essential not to hide a problem from the members but to discuss it and give voice to those who are called irresponsible. It is important that everybody have space to express himself and explain his own behaviour. In this way the group can support the person instead of blaming him.

During the placement periods in JIS I realized that the institute is an environment which differs from the region that surrounds it. On its territory it has many organizations working with people with disabilities in different ways. Obviously, the school has become a place where a lot of professionals and experts can be found who work for the interests of the persons with disabilities. While observing this I understood that the school keeps the students in an artificial environment, where the experts and other people organize all the activities and where the students only can decide if to take an activity and how to perform it. I also realized that the students are interested to try decision making or organizing roles. Reflecting now on the thesis process, I see that my service model is based on responding to the needs of people in order to form more opportunities for the members of the community. I understand myself as a guide who can provide information and assure that the person understood it, train the person, search or create more opportunities for involvement and connection of people. In the core of my behaviour is the desire to work for empowerment of the people who have less power. Most probably I have this desire as myself I experienced feeling powerless many times during my life. Because I have a disability, many times I had to accept a choice of other people on where to study, with whom to communicate, how to behave with people etc. For me making decisions regarding my life relates to maturity and quality of life.

I have a disability which changes in time, which means that the physical condition I have today might change for the worse in future. It will make me even more dependent on other people and less able to be independent. The students that I interviewed were

mostly those who have a more severe disability. It made me think about how my abilities might change in time. For the first time, I approached the acceptance that in future my diagnosis might take from me some of my freedom. I was always afraid to think about this; I ignored it. The research process brought me back to this and made me start my journey of acceptance and preparation for it.

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ABBREVIATIONS

JIS: Jedlička Institute and Schools

n.d: no date

f. ex: for example

Appendix 1: List of figures, tables and pictures

FIGURE 1: The representation of the connection between the disability elements and group involvement..... 8

TABLE 1: Limits and supporting mechanisms that relate to group involvement... 31

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Group details

In this part, I will ask you general information about the groups you joined.

How long you study here?

Are you a member or did you join any group in here? If yes which?

Choose a group which you see as very important for you at the moment.

How long are you a member of this group?

How often you meet with the members? What time do you meet? Where do you meet?

How many members are in this group? (I will name the group from here as the person names it. Ex. the theatre group)

Group experience

In this part of the interview, I will ask about your experience in the group.

What do you do in the group? (group activities, group aim, person role in the group)

What responsibilities do you have in the group? (This question helps narrow down the previous subject from “role in the group” to responsibilities only. I intend to give additional questions, so the person speaks about her/his attitude towards her role and

responsibilities. I intend to use questions like: “How it makes you feel? Is this hard/comfortable/pleasant (any adjective here she used before when answering about responsibilities or role) How come you feel this way? Etc. The question builds as if the person for sure has responsibilities. I did it intentionally. If she does not, she will correct me)

Do you feel connected with anybody inside the group? Who are these people?

What this group gives you personally? How come you decided to join this group? (These two questions sound general and it is supposed to be so as this gives space to the person and might open new subjects which I could not take in consideration when writing the interview questions. Further, I can pick the new subjects and open them or if none, go on with the next question)

Barriers

How is it to go to group meetings? (a general question that opens a new part of the interview. I do not feel the need to explain to the person what this part is about and it feels nicer to just go into the subject as people go in normal conversation. It looks more natural to me and will help the person feel comfortable when she answers)

Do you manage to go to all the meetings? Are there meetings to which you cannot go?

Do you need help to get there or you go on your own? What help you need? (I might come with additional questions here to help the person describe the needs she/he has)

(If the assistant comes with her) How the assistant helps you?

What does the assistant do during the meeting?

Does he also help you during the meeting or only to get to the group and back? How the assistant helps you during the meeting?

What other things you cannot do at the meeting? How do you feel about this?

How can you inform the organisers if you want to organise something in the group or you do not agree with something?

How well do group meeting hours fit with your school responsibilities?

What other groups you would like to join? How come you did not?