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Special educational needs from a proxemic perspective on the example of Poland

Enclosed and humanized space is place.
Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values.
Human beings require both space and place.
Human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture,
attachment and freedom. In open space one can become intensely
aware of the place, and in the solitude of a sheltered place, the
vastness of space beyond acquires a haunting presence.
(Yi-Fu Tuan 2001: 54)

The aim of this article is to present the spatial arrangement chosen by teachers of integrated classes in Poland and to define their motivation to make a specific choice with a view to meeting the special needs of their pupils. At the stage of early school education, the space described in the article plays the role of a place that favors the first processes, such as: communication between students, education and upbringing, shaping their mutual relations, transferring messages, shaping skills, creating attitudes and identities. To satisfy the special educational needs of students with disabilities means to adapt the conditions of the – space in terms of architecture, information, communication, and society. About the goal of such processes is to counteract isolation and stigma. The article consists of three parts. The first part contains an introduction and theoretical foundations of the selected topic. The second part shows the results of the author`s own research. The final part presents conclusions.

Keywords: early school education, space, student with a disability, special educational needs, arrangement

Specjalne potrzeby edukacyjne z perspektywy proksemicznej na przykładzie Polski

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie układu przestrzennego wybranego przez nauczycieli klas integracyjnych w Polsce oraz określenie ich motywacji do dokonania konkretnego wyboru pod kątem zaspokojenia specjalnych potrzeb uczniów. Na etapie edukacji wczesnoszkolnej

opisana w artykule przestrzeń pełni rolę miejsca sprzyjającego pierwszym procesom, takim jak: komunikacja między uczniami, edukacja i wychowanie, kształtowanie ich wzajemnych relacji, przekazywanie komunikatów, kształtowanie umiejętności, kreowanie postaw i tożsamości. Zaspokojenie specjalnych potrzeb edukacyjnych uczniów z niepełnosprawnościami polega na dostosowaniu warunków przestrzeni pod względem architektonicznym, informacyjnym, komunikacyjnym i społecznym. Celem takich procesów jest przeciwdziałanie izolacji i stygmatyzacji. Artykuł składa się z trzech części. Pierwsza część zawiera wprowadzenie i teoretyczne podstawy wybranego tematu. W drugiej części przedstawiono wyniki badań własnych autora. Ostatnia część przedstawia wnioski.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja wczesnoszkolna, przestrzeń, uczeń z niepełnosprawnością, specjalne potrzeby edukacyjne, aranżacja

Introduction

The space of the integration classroom is one of the most important issues in integrated education of students with a pronounced need for special education. However the issue of the area of the integration class is one of the topics which are rarely taken up in Polish studies in the field of special education. The attempts to explain the determinants shaping its condition are equally rare.

Nowadays, an important task of well-organized education of students with special educational needs is to take their abilities and needs into account. By favoring all sides of the educational process, the child's full development is achieved. This form of education allows teaching responsibility for another human being, emotional sensitivity, kindness, and providing support to another person [Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej 2010: 8, 18].

The first processes, such as the process of education, or socialization, are formed at the initial stages of teaching children, which are undoubtedly very important elements in education. A pedagogical approach to the learner's well-being should be strengthened in our educational system.

The most important goal of education is the child's development. Education is for the child, not the other way around. In primary education, the main factor driving the child's development is the student's own activity, his/-her practical work. The objective of systematic education is to acquire specific standardized knowledge.

Invariably for many years, the subject of early school education has been adequately described by these words: "initial education is not self-sufficient education, but it mainly serves as a means of introducing and improving education to further learning. It is [...] the foundation on which it is possible to build an edifice of education preparing for direct useful participation in life" [Wołoszyn 1959: 5–6]. Therefore, the better the educational results of the pupil at the level of primary education, the better teaching performs its tasks.

It is worth adding that teachers are the primary carriers of knowledge and of appropriate applications that are necessary in teaching students with disabilities. It is the educators who, within the scope of their tasks and competences, guide their students toward specific values, attitudes and behaviors that are shaped in the educational space. They also co-organize the educational space, on which a lot depends.

The space in early school education is a crucial factor. It is here that the observations of the environment and its elements by students take place, the image of certain ideas about the world is formed, information is acquired and organized.

The child's activity and involvement in the learning environment are important assumptions in planning and implementing integrated classes. All students have the right to experience school education as an opportunity for themselves in shaping their competences and getting to know the world. They can realistically meet the expectations and achieve personal success, if the classes make sense for them, they will require real actions; they will lead to learning something the learners find interesting and important [Bałachowicz 2017: 25].

Children with disabilities must be provided with appropriate conditions at school – properly selected curriculum and teaching methods, forms of checking knowledge adapted to the development of children, and access to premises with teaching aids. Students with disabilities may require additional revalidation. Therefore, wider support of specialists is needed.

In Polish legislation, special educational needs apply to children who are unable to meet the curriculum, unlike their peers. Such students should have their curriculum adapted to their capabilities and needs. A child with special needs can be called both a gifted student and a student with difficulties in learning, which serves as recognition their special educational needs [Pilch 2006: 869–870]. According to the identified needs, appropriate educational methods, resources, and didactic-educational interactions should be selected. They are meant to create optimal conditions for intellectual development and personality, at the same time meeting special educational needs. Students with special needs have different cognitive-perceptual functioning which generates individual ways of learning and acquiring skills. According to the dictionary of the Polish language, the word "special" (*specjalny*) means: "relating to one selected subject, issue, one person or thing; characteristic, intended exclusively for someone or something; special [...]" [Szymczak 2010: 266].

In Poland, there are four forms of special education for students with a certified disability – two segregated and two non-segregated. The segregated forms include special schools and special classes that can be created within mainstream schools. Non-segregated forms include mainstream classes attended by students with disabilities who require specialist care. They can benefit from revalidation classes. On

the other hand, teachers are obliged to adapt the curriculum to the recommendations that are required in the decision on the special educational needs of the student. The second non-segregated form refers to integrated classes, in which an additional teacher co-organizing the teaching process is employed, who has appropriate qualifications - of a special educator. The classes are less numerous.

The effectiveness of educating students with disabilities in a mass school is determined by: didactic and educational conditions; material conditions; teachers' competences, employed specialists. They support the education process, cooperation with other specialist institutions, and cooperation with the child's parents or caregivers [Smith 2008: 334–335].

Currently, the choice of the institution in which the student will be educated depends on his/her parents or legal guardians. The decision concerning the need for such education is determined by the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 7 September 2017 on judgments and opinions issued by adjudicating panels operating in public psychological and pedagogical counseling centers. Under this regulation, special adjudication panels issue the decision on the need for special education.

According to research, up to 55% of students with disabilities are educated in special schools in Poland, only 30% of them attend public facilities, while only 14% are educated in integration classes or schools [Chrzanowska 2015: 569]. It turns out that segregated education remains the dominant type in Poland.

All institutions should have appropriate teaching aids, spatial conditions as well as appropriate methods of knowledge transfer adapted to the students' abilities. Appropriate adaptation motivates students, helps them to perform certain activities, and increases self-esteem. Although segregation is the dominant type of special education in Poland, I personally opt for the integration system which, as the name suggests integrates a group of students, allows them to understand the problems of everyday life and various disabilities, and teaches them appropriate values and approaches. Students within this system feel fulfilled in their class if the teaching and learning processes are properly managed by the people functioning in it, and if material objects and space are properly used.

Place and space in literature

Space is- the background of social interactions, as well as an inseparable element of social identity that plays a special role in our society.

In turn, the organization of the physical environment may favor the acquisition of knowledge and the efficient performance of a given activity, or, on the contrary, it may hinder or prevent it.

The character of a given space is the limit that defines a specific place. The more it is adapted to a given group of people, the more it can be an component of a specific cultural canon, a given social community, a clear and recognizable element that distinguishes a given group in the society.

According to the dictionary of the Polish language, "space" (przestrzeń) is firstly: "an unlimited three-dimensional area in which all physical phenomena take place", and secondly: "a part of such an area limited by boundaries; also: a place occupied by an object", it can also be considered: "the distance between something and something", or: "all social and political phenomena" (PWN).

The concept of space is perceived as rather vague category. On the one hand, it is: "the entirety of relations between coexisting material objects, their sizes, distances, shapes", on the other hand, it is a three-dimensional unlimited extension "a set of arbitrary objects between which relationships of geometric, algebraic or abstract nature have been established" (PWN).

The word "space" has many meanings and connotations. Space can be understood as: an abstract mathematical idea, a feature of matter or, the natural environment, or a cultural and social product of society [Jałowicki, Szczepański 2009: 314].

Space can also be considered in terms of the structure of meaning. There are four hypotheses. The first one refers to the space described as clear and bright, where ideologies and interpretations are eliminated. In this position, the pure form of space is not related to any content (in the sense of the sensual, material, practical). It is the quintessence, comparable to Plato's number. Another kind of second space is human creation, justified by an empirical description. It is, among others, a product of history and various human activities (agriculture, crafts, industry). Space is a workplace for the entire society and the objects it produces that manage it. It is an objectification of what is social, and therefore of what is spiritual. Another hypothesis shows space neither as a mental and social issue (as in the philosophical hypothesis), nor as a social work or a place of produced works. It is an "intermediary" – a tool, environment, mediation. Space is a policy tool that can be manipulated. In the last hypothesis, space can be called a product or a sum of products, a thing or a set of things, a commodity or a set of commodities. But it is not the most important instrument of all production and exchange, it is mainly based on the reproduction of social relations. The last hypothesis is related to the third by means of developing and perfecting it [Jałowicki, Szczepański 2009: 315].

The most important forerunners of space description (starting with the educational space and ending with the geographical one) are Florian Znaniński [1938], Edward T. Hall ([1997], Yi-Fu Tuan [1987], Alexander Wallis [1990], Christopher Alexander [1977], James J. Gibson [1979], and Augustyn Bańka [1996].

Understanding space is not only about perceiving the reality around us in physical terms. The perception of space is not only about describing spatial rela-

tions between people, landscape elements and objects, especially when we use the category of “place” to designate them [Nowotniak: 6].

According to the dictionary of the Polish language, “place” (*miejsce*) is: “space that can be occupied or filled with something”, or: “part of space where someone is, something is or is taking place; also: a room serving specific purposes”, it can also be said that it is “the position, rank or role of someone or something” (PWN).

The pedagogy of place emphasizes the educational role of the place. It is treated as a far-reaching category that can stimulate and support pedagogical ideas [Mendel 2006: 25].

Maria Lewicka tries to reach the “universals of place” that can be treated as the beginning of the “theory of place”. She explores the relationship between a person and a place, its causes, consequences, and forms it can take in the contemporary world. She points out that the word “place” comes from the colloquial register in Polish. It has its own meaning and a specific etymology [Lewicka 2012: 27].

Trying to define the concept of “place”, I have encountered many difficulties. Subjective interpretations are applied to the terms assimilated by science, although they come from everyday language. The term “place” accepted by social sciences (humanistic geography, environmental psychology) is defined as “filled space”, “part of a space that serves something or where one lives”. Space is not a subject of the analysis, but what it encompasses, and that is the content in which one is present, giving it individual and cultural meanings [Lewicka 2012: 30].

A “place” is usually defined as a location with a specific meaning in geographical space. A German psychologist Carl Graumann differentiates between two understandings of the term “Lebensraum”, which means “living space” (in geography and psychology). In turn, there are two phrases in English language: “living space”, which means “living space” in the biological, geographical, and political context, and “lifespace” – “living space” - corresponding to phenomenology, anthropology, and psychology. The first space is related to the place where a person lives, while the other one is a space managed by people, a place of experiences and meanings [Lewicka 2012: 31].

In the signs corresponding to “place” and “space” in the Polish Sign Language – both hands alternate movements in opposite directions the left hand forward, left and right the other way round (backward, slightly to the right), to mark the area, while the other hand opens it in the other direction.

In the newly established, permanent human settlements, the word “place” began to be identified with the word “city”. In the Slavic languages, the notions “city” and “place” have an equivalent wording and meaning. In Lithuanian language, the word “miestas” refers to “city”, while the word for “place” is “vieta”. In Germanic languages, the words for “place” and “city” have a common origin –

“sted” and “stadt”. In the linguistic sense, with the development of urbanization, the “city” becomes a “place” [Lewicka 2012: 29–30].

Educational space

A man-made school space that provides students with complete freedom and access to everyday, didactic resources is guided by educational humanism. It respects the individuality of students and takes their needs and possibilities into account. Certainly, many teachers ask themselves the question – what to do to make a given space “alive”, inviting, and at the same time fulfilling specific requirements? The answer may be educational spaces teeming with life, which breaks the existing patterns and meets new expectations.

Educational space can be understood as a dimension of social space in which elements of the culture of a given social system distinguish it from other systems [Modrzewski 2008: 106–107].

For years, few changes have occurred in the spatial organization of Polish schools. Classes are usually organized in accordance with one, classic arrangement – evenly arranged desks (single or double), facing the teacher and the board. The classroom can be considered the center – the most important place in the school space. It is in this place that important development processes have been taking place for many years, which are not possible in private space. Students in the classroom play their roles, occupy the indicated places, become the class, and thus – lose their individual identity. The appearance of students with disabilities in our educational system has resulted in a partial departure from traditional teaching. A school with educational humanism in mind strives for proper access to educational and social spaces for all students [Nalaskowski 2002: 48].

School architecture in Poland has remained unchanged for many years. The most important aspect is the appropriate arrangement of the classroom, which will foster learning, integration, knowledge, conversations and games.

Didactic space may be considered rich if it is possible to significantly modify the form of working with students there, including individual, pair, or group work as well as activities for the whole class. Modern technologies or room equipment are not the most important here. Changes in the arrangement of desks and chairs in the classroom must be followed by changes in the way classes are conducted, appropriate to a given form of working with students. Incorrect arrangement of desks in relation to the adopted method of conducting classes may bring worse results than the front-line arrangement, e.g., it may create the possibility of discussions between students on topics unrelated to the lesson. Any changes introduced must result from deliberate procedure. When changing the

setting, teachers should consider not only the students' abilities and the spatial conditions but also their own didactic workshop and the idea for a given lesson. Desks in the classroom should be positioned so as not to distract students. Furthermore, students should not be forced to look for the teacher. If teamwork is planned and students do not need constant eye contact with the teacher, the desks can be arranged in groups. It should be borne in mind that the way the desks are arranged in the classroom determines the sense of importance of the students. In early school classes, children placed closer to the teacher will feel honored. In this case, it is best to arrange the tables in L-shape or semicircle. This way, the teacher has the same access to each student. Proper arrangement of desks significantly improves the quality of teaching at school.

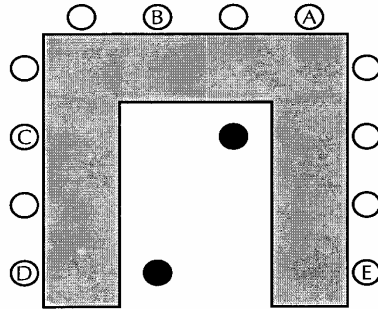
When designing a classroom, one must remember about the appropriate arrangement of tables and tables. The right solution is variable arrangement of desks, selected depending on the requirements of the classes. Children should be scattered around the classroom. Students with disabilities should be placed among their peers without disabilities. Reverse use will result in a kind of solution. The selection of places for students should be based on general principles, taking the special educational needs and individual preferences of students into account. In the classroom, the teacher may suggest additional zones, such as: relaxation, tranquility, reading, nature, or art.

Currently, in the literature regarding mainstream education, we can find more proposals for the spatial arrangement of the classroom than in the literature in the area of special education. The spatial forms of arrangement related to integrated education, described, among others, by Zenon Gajdzica [2008] and Joanna Popławska and Bożena Sierpińska [2001], include the arrangement of: tables, a board, a place to rest, and above all, students, in particular in relation to their colleagues without disabilities. The spatial arrangement can be adapted to the type of lessons and the forms of work used.

In the examples of J. Popławska and B. Sierpińska provided below, the following markings were used.

- - a teacher
- o - a student
- A - a student with a hearing impairment
- B - a student with a visual impairment
- C - a student with an intellectual disability
- D - a student with cerebral palsy (or using a wheelchair)
- E - a student with conduct disorder

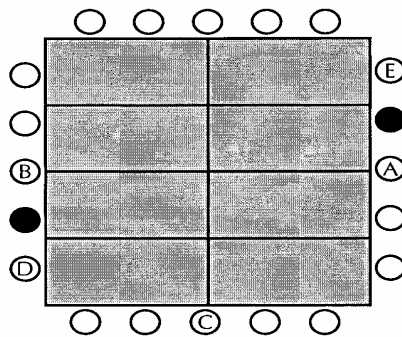
There are advantages and disadvantages to each system. Here are the authors' seven suggestions:



Insert 1. Horseshoe-shaped arrangement

Disadvantages: arrangement favorable to small groups.

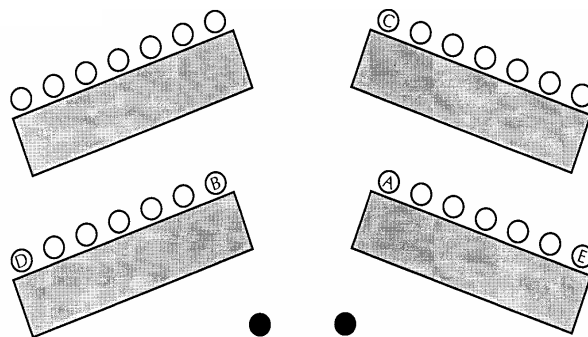
Advantages: suitable work space for the teacher with students; teacher support and control is made possible to a greater extent.



Insert 2. Arrangement in the shape of a solid square

Disadvantages: formal arrangement taking up a lot of space.

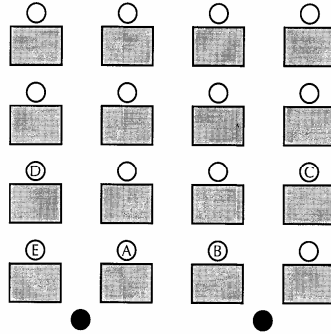
Advantages: greater activation possible, reduces distance, ideal for teamwork.



Insert 3. Herringbone-shaped arrangement

Disadvantages: the arrangement can cause competition and division between groups.

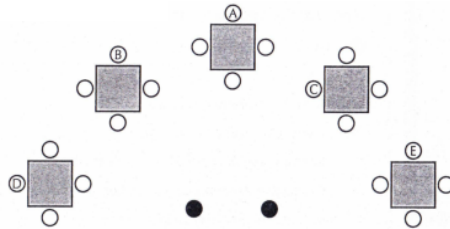
Advantages: good communication between groups, perfect arrangement for workshops and teamwork.



Insert 4. Arrangement of the "classroom" type

Disadvantages: students may feel overly exposed.

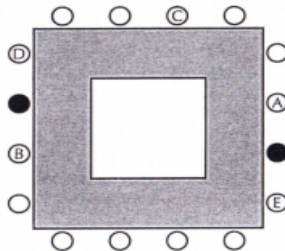
Advantages: adequate teacher access to students, easy individual contact, this arrangement is recommended for individual work.



Insert 5. Bistro-style arrangement

Disadvantages: no eye contact with students, "subgroups" are formed, teachers find it difficult to control the class.

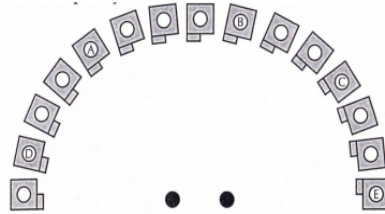
Advantages: the system is recommended for workshops and problem exercises.



Insert 6. Square-shaped arrangement

Disadvantages: impaired eye contact, unsuitable for informal occasions.

Advantages: arrangement suitable for group discussions, all positions taken are treated equally, no top position in the arrangement.



Insert 7. Arrangement of a chair with mini tables

Disadvantages: arrangement not suitable for left-handed students and not suitable for writing tasks.

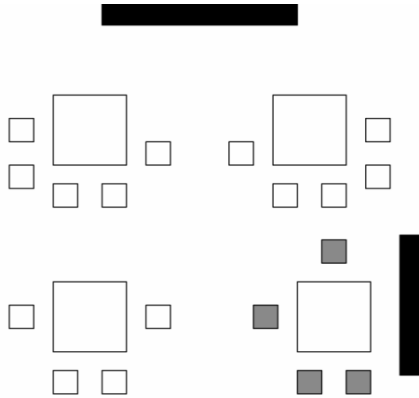
Advantages: possibility of free arrangement of chairs, popular arrangement for informal activities, interpersonal exercises [Popławska, Sierpińska 2001: 20-23].

The spatial arrangement of students in the classroom can be analyzed from many perspectives. There are numerous forms of arrangement of tables and equipment, as well as general classroom arrangements. According to Z. Gajdzica, the main questions that arise are the following: "What place should [students] occupy in relation to each other (together or separately)? Should they be placed in the center of the class (near the board) or out of the way?". In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to consider the nature of the class, the concept of educating students adopted by teachers. People with disabilities, along with their dysfunctions and character traits should also be taken into consideration. Gajdzica has developed four spatial arrangements aimed at students of integrated classes.

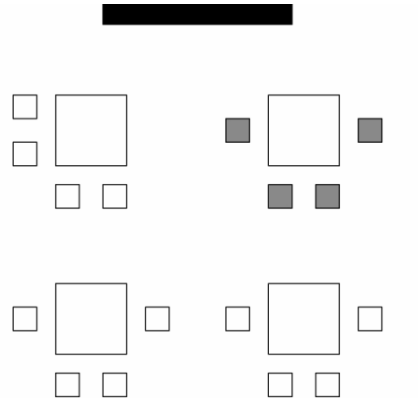
The arrangements are designed for the placement of students in the classroom only. The constructed systems are narrowed down to the standard arrangement of tables, the location of the board (or tables – see the first diagram), and the marking of places for students with and without disabilities. Due to the fact that the teacher often changes the place during the lesson, his or her position has not been included in the arrangements. However the teacher's desk is located close to the board [Gajdzica 2008b: 268–269].

Insert Layout 4. Four proposals for the spatial arrangement in the integrated class: isolation (1), exposure (2), maximum integration (3), limited integration (4) [Gajdzica 2008: 225].

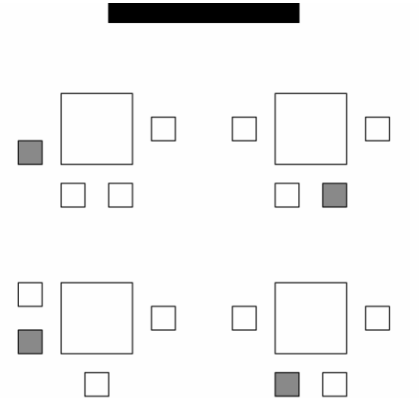
1.



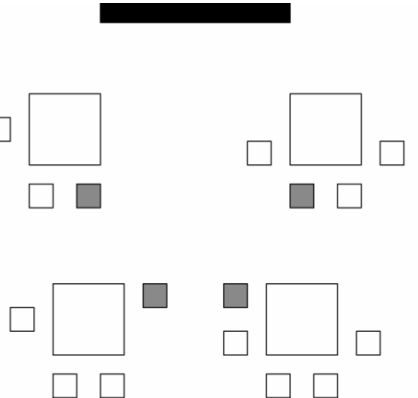
2.



3.



4.




Key:

a board 

a table 

a non-disabled child 

a disabled child 

Isolation – the first arrangement

Isolating students with disabilities from students without disabilities is not in line with inclusive education. The advantages that can be noticed in this system

include the fact that students with more severe disabilities can follow a different curriculum. In such situations, it will be appropriate to set aside a visible space for students with moderate disabilities, hyperactive, or with great difficulties in communication. Moreover, a better solution might be to conduct classes in a separate room, creating a special class in a mainstream school. Due to this type of dilemma, the system is used very rarely.

Exposure – the second arrangement

Exposure is the most frequently used arrangement. Where does its name come from? Students are set apart by taking places in the front of the classroom. In the same way as in the first arrangement, disabled students are assigned to one place, they learn at a common table. The disadvantage of this system is that students with disabilities are singled out, whereas the possibility of constant monitoring and lack of marginalization can be considered a benefit. Working in a given system with children with minor developmental disorders, whose reactivity is close to the average, can be successful. If there are students with disabilities for whom individual work with the teacher is recommended, difficulties may arise within this arrangement [Gajdzica 2008b: 270].

Maximum integration – the third arrangement

This is the most often used arrangement, aimed at maximum integration. The advantage of this arrangement is that students without disabilities can interact with students with disabilities. With the consent of the class teacher, learning is based on the functioning of students, on equal rights. The arrangement leads to socialization and friendly interactions. The disadvantage of the system is the space of the special educator. He/she is forced to move quickly around the classroom, working with students with disabilities over other children, which makes the educational process difficult. In this kind of space, it is important to take the dysfunctions of students into account [Gajdzica 2008a: 227].

Limited integration – the fourth arrangement

The last arrangement is used less frequently. It has the advantages of the previous models and it has almost no disadvantages. Pupils with disabilities interact with their peers at one table. Isolation and prejudices are eliminated through communicative integration. The special educator can quickly provide information, solve a problem, or discreetly control students. This can primarily benefit students with

significant thinking difficulties, over-excitability, or communication disorders [Gajdzica 2008a: 228].

To sum up, exposure (the second system) should be analyzed and tested more thoroughly, due to the fact that it is believed to be an unfavorable system and at the same time one of the most frequently used models in the practice of inclusive education. On the other hand, limited integration (the fourth system) is the most favorable spatial arrangement. As it is usually overlooked by teachers, it is used very rarely [Gajdzica: 2008b: 271].

The spatial organization of the classroom significantly determines the level of the students' comfort, the reception of the class content, and the development of mutual relations. It is up to the people who create the classroom to determine how it helpful and how harmful it will be for its users. Properly arranged space includes, among others: "eliminating information noise" – using clearly communicated messages, adjusted to the needs of students, especially those with hearing impairments; properly adapted places and paths for students with visual impairments; relaxation corner for hyperactive students; cheerful, study-friendly, and not overly distracting arrangement of the classroom (wall colors, wall decorations, teaching aids, objects).

The author's own research concept

In research, I found it interesting to learn about the spatial systems of integrated classroom at the stage of early school education. The method I used was a questionnaire. I surveyed teachers who instruct integration classes. The main goal was to obtain information on the spatial systems of integrated classrooms which are currently functioning in education system in Poland. The questionnaire was prepared in writing and the questions were structured in a concise and comprehensive form.

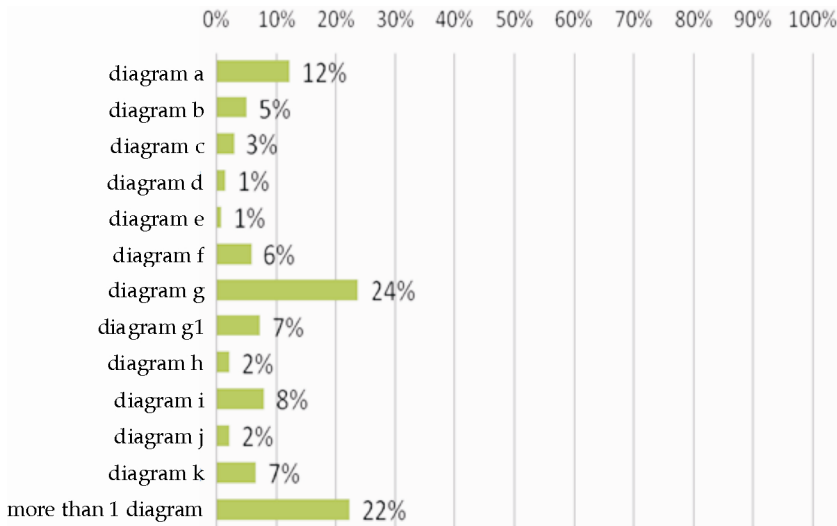
In the questionnaire, I included eight open-ended questions, which consisted of two parts: substantive – questions to the respondent – and descriptive – specifying the teacher's education and professional experience. To answer the questions included in the questionnaire, an appendix was needed, containing – a set of spatial systems found in the literature [Appendix 1]. Most of the questions allowed teachers to express their opinions and to choose one or more arrangements from a given set in the Appendix.

The research was carried out in the area of the Silesian Voivodeship in Poland. It comprised 139 questionnaires. Out of the 54 schools with integration departments officially registered in the Silesian Voivodeship (4 schools do not exist

anymore and 15 schools did not agree to take part in the research) (si.kuratorium.katowice.pl).

The author`s own research results

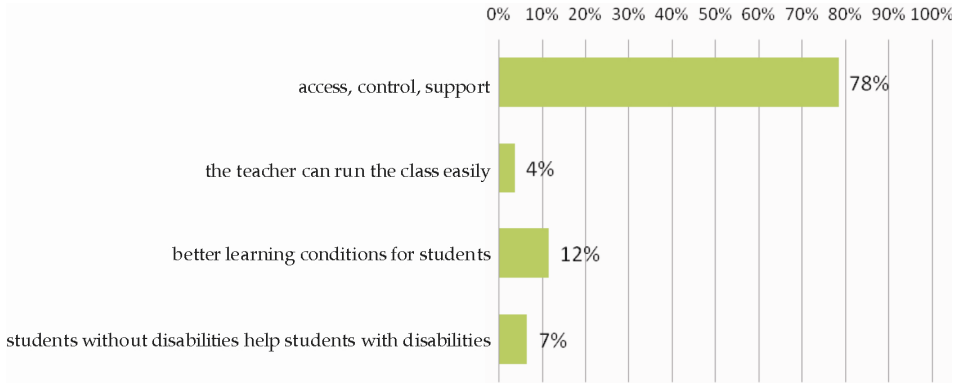
In the research results, I have presented four graphs that relate to the teachers` choices concerning the most common arrangements. The other graphs show the reason for the teachers` choices referred to as motivation.



Insert Chart 1. Preferred arrangement for individualized classes

Source: the author`s own study based on doctoral research results

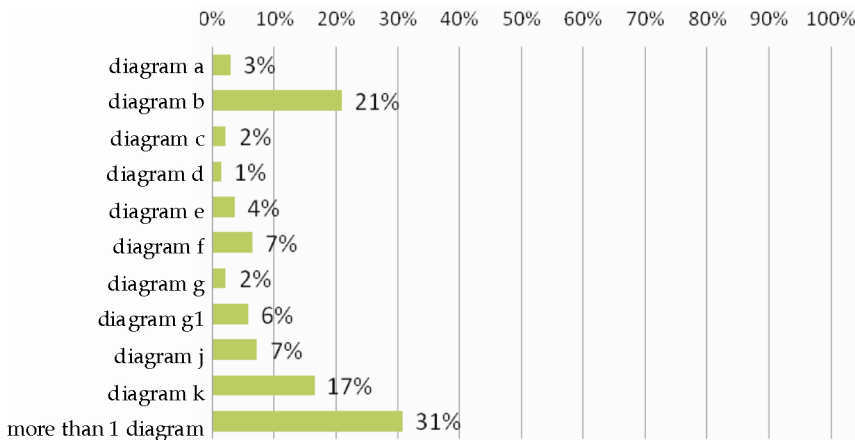
In integrated education in individualized classes separated into groups the classical arrangement of the classroom remains the leading system. Interestingly, in this type of classes, the surveyed teachers prefer to arrange space using more than one system. They frequently introduce the horseshoe arrangement to individualized classes, the advantage of which is the appropriate space for the teacher`s work with students, and the teacher`s support and control are possible to a greater extent. In this type of classes, according to the teachers, the arrangement in the shape of a solid square, which takes up a lot of space, does not work at all. Moreover the herringbone-shaped arrangement may be the cause of competition and divisions between groups [Popławska, Sierpińska 2001: 20–23]. The arrangements that the teachers do not opt for in this form of classes are those structured according to group classes.



Insert Chart 2. Preferred arrangement for individualized classes – motivation

Source: the author’s own study based on doctoral research results

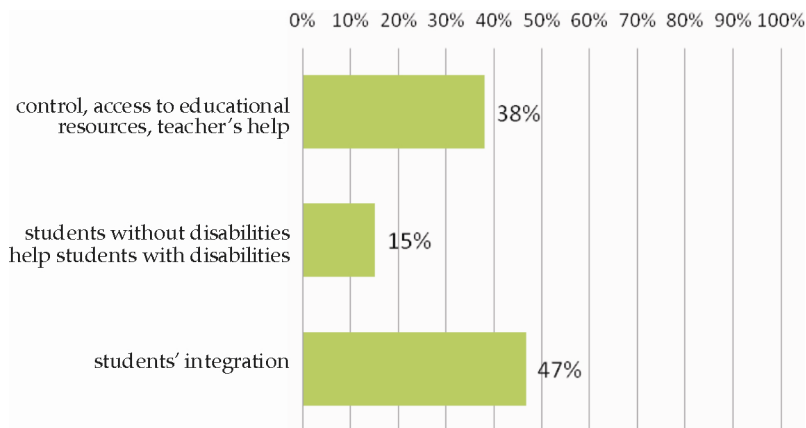
Considering that in the typical classroom arrangement, students’ desks are scattered across the room, the teacher may feel comfortable at work thanks to the better access to students and the possibility of quick check-up. According to the interviews special educational needs are mostly satisfied in these spatial arrangements.



Insert Chart 3. Preferred group schemes

Source: the author’s own study based on doctoral research results

In group classes (like in individualized classes), the teachers prefer more than one pattern and this is the response that appears most often. In group classes, the recommended schemes are the bistro-style workshops and the limited integration scheme, the advantage of which is undoubtedly the interaction of students with disabilities with peers, the teacher’s quick access to students, and discreet control.



Insert Chart 4. Preferred group scheme – motivation

Source: the author's own study based on doctoral research results

The main goal of inclusive education is to integrate students with disabilities with their peers. Spatial systems should be designed in such a way as to favor the integration of students, and to a lesser extent, to support students with disabilities by healthy students. It is important to make sure that non-disabled pupils do not feel responsible for their classmates from the very beginning.

Conclusions

Classroom space is indispensable for self-identification, as it shapes the sense of security. The system connected with it and the interactions established should serve students with disabilities. The models of the location of students with disabilities presented in the literature refer to a one-dimensional concept that should be analyzed in terms of the socialization of children with disabilities, the function of the special education teacher, and the effectiveness of acquiring social competences.

As far as special education is concerned, the classroom – the heart of the school – has been neglected for years. Classrooms are often poorly arranged, which ultimately results in poor educational outcomes, defective communication between students, and the lack of class integration. Space has a significant impact on the effects of teaching and learning and on the well-being and behavior of its users.

This study is an attempt to show the existing spatial arrangements of integrated classes at the stage of early school education in the Silesian Voivodeship in Poland and the motivation of the teachers' choices. I believe that my research has contributed to the extension of knowledge about inclusive education and has supplemented the missing data by including the issue of space. The available

Polish literature still lacks not only a description of space, but also indicators of its structure determined by the analysis of empirical data. The existing descriptions and recommendations are insufficient, as they relate only to what the classroom space should look like rather than to the aspects of its relationship with the achievement of educational goals, socialization in the peer group of students, the atmosphere in the classroom, the contribution of the teachers' work, or the causes of difficult situations (stigmatization, information deprivation, generating excessive social distance).

By taking up the issues presented here, I wished to draw the readers' attention to the current arrangements and problems related to them. It should be kept in mind that in Poland, inclusive education is just one of the possible choices. It is a right, not an imperative or an existing educational standard. The choice is made by parents, and despite its many advantages, it is not always a good solution for all children with disabilities – especially for students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities. However, it is worth remembering that each student needs a competent, caring teacher, reliable specialists, appropriate teaching aids, equipment, and, above all, carefully planned classroom space. I hope that the information presented here will serve as a valuable inquiry into the area of inclusive education and that it will be of use to many people operating in the area of special education.

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Attachment

Spatial arrangements – propositions of Popławska, Sierpińska

Legend:

• – a teacher

o – a student

A – a student with a hearing impairment

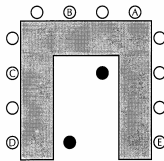
B – a student with a visual impairment

C – a student with an intellectual disability

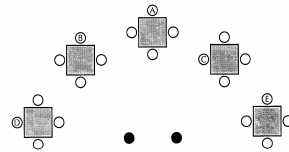
D – a student with cerebral palsy (or using a wheelchair)

E – a student with conduct disorder

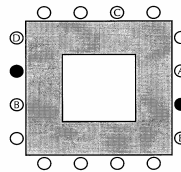
a)



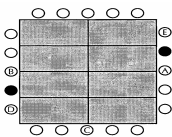
b)



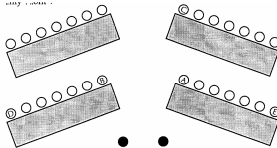
c)



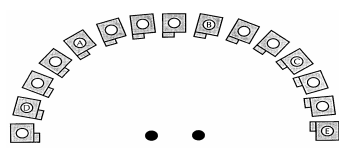
d)



e)

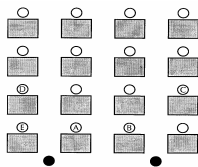


f)



g) a single table


g1) a double table




Spatial arrangements – suggestions of Gajdzica

Key:

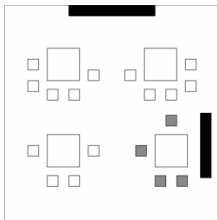
a board 

a table 

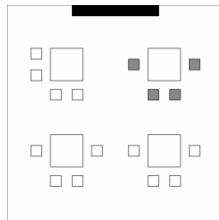
a non-disabled child 

a disabled child 

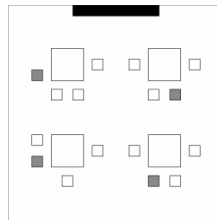
h)



i)



j)



k)

