

Eszterházy Károly Catholic University
Doctoral School Of History

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**Methodology for teaching children with special educational needs, with particular
emphasis on history teaching**

History teaching tailored to specific disabilities

Thesis of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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The research topic and hypothesis of the dissertation

My dissertation presents methodological issues and challenges in the education of children with special educational needs, with a particular focus on history teaching. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, it was necessary to explore its literature background as well as its empirically researchable characteristics and difficulties. The thesis analyzed the situation of children with special educational needs within the Hungarian education system, supplemented by historical background, and outlined the expected future development paths. The research sought to demonstrate, not only from a domestic perspective but also from an international perspective covering several countries, that changes in pedagogical approach cannot be postponed.

The hypothesis of the research can be summarized as follows: children classified as having special educational needs can achieve approximately the same results as their peers not classified in this category with the application of appropriate pedagogical attention and methods.

Objectives

The main goal of my dissertation is to expand the multidimensional treatment of the topic with the help of new research perspectives and to confirm or refute the research hypothesis. My twenty years of teaching experience, which I would like to put at the service of children's education, has been a significant support in this endeavor. Since all knowledge is necessary in the development of children with special educational needs, who are growing in number, I hope that my years of experience as a teacher have been useful in this research. The dissertation may also help to draw attention to the fact that the education of children with special educational needs is still not sufficiently prepared, effective, or organized in the schooling system. In many cases, integration of children with special educational needs is only formal, so the task of research is to promote their genuine inclusion with the appropriate innovative approach.

Structure of the dissertation

The structure of the dissertation was determined by the fact that there is no universally accepted, professionally canonized concept of children with special educational needs, only synonyms, individual interpretations, or analogies dealing with disability. Similarly, conceptual clarification was required in relation to children's rights, the definition of minimum standards for integration in relation to school socialization and social acceptance. This is framed by the domestic context and situation relating to the topic, the historical characteristics of which I examined. I interpreted the available statistical data by presenting the international context. This allowed me to draw conclusions about the situation in Hungary and abroad by comparing them. This formed the basis for a historiographical overview of the concept of special educational needs as a status.

Empirical evidence made it possible to nuance the picture emerging from purely conceptual, historical, and statistical data. I performed this by supplementing it with a detailed presentation of the workings of the Movement Improvement Unified Special Education Methodology Institute (hereinafter: EGYMI) and my own teaching experience. The subject of history

provides an extremely vivid way of illustrating and conveying the learning difficulties, challenges, and attempts at solutions faced by children with special educational needs.

In my dissertation, I outlined methods and ideas that I have already tried out and documented in my own lessons over a five-year period. I am still working with these methods today. I have summarized my suggestions for improvement and the utilization of my research results here. The completion of my dissertation can be considered therefore only a symbolic moment, as I have continued to document and analyze pedagogical effectiveness based on children's feedback and results.

Literature review

The first step in my research was to review the domestic and international literature. I looked for answers, attempted solutions, and examples of success and failure. The literature was a great help in understanding the actual abilities and potential of these children and the approach that should be taken to situations involving special needs. The domestic and international literature revealed a high degree of diversity. I would like to highlight the work and approach of Dr. Éva Gyarmathy from the domestic literature, which fundamentally questions the system in which we learn and teach. To put it simply, she changes perspective and looks at institutions from the child's point of view. Dr. Emese K. Nagy's adaptation of Complex Instruction Program to domestic conditions was exemplary for me and worth following in terms of good practices. Moreover, Dr. Ágnes Dárdai Fischerné's works on history didactics are considered cornerstones of the literature, yet I have come to the conclusion that the issues examined from different perspectives are separate, focusing on one field of science, and are not connected or reflective of each other.

Additional research methods

With the help of the literature, I primarily aimed to clarify concepts. There were a few key concepts in the research: children with special educational needs, integration/inclusion, and the teachability of history for this specific group of students.

The research methods applied here are varied: I have implemented historical, legal, statistical analysis, comparative examination, and empirical pedagogical data collection solutions, as well as descriptive and critical approaches, in relation to both the social environment under investigation and education. These were inspired by discussions at various scientific conferences, further training courses, workshops, and exchanges of ideas with domestic and foreign experts. The ideas and methods of Tibor Prievara, Dr. Zsuzsanna Tölgyessy, and John D. Clare were very helpful in shaping my research.

Due to the complexity of the chosen research topic, I attached great importance to my own fieldwork and data collection. I would therefore like to highlight the interviews, observations, data collection, participation in parent forums and individual counseling sessions conducted at the EGYMI. From a methodological point of view, it is important to note that the data I worked

with was not based on a representative sample. At the same time, it is suitable for comparing the characteristics of an institution with national statistics and international measurements.

My fieldwork was linked to previous research, so comparing the two data sets allowed for further conclusions to be drawn in a context where there is relatively little local, institutional, and specific information available. Another independent component of my own data collection was that the developed methods to be introduced could be tested in practice at my workplace. This helped to finalize the developed version of the methodological recommendations.

Research results and their further use

The hypothesis of my research has been proven to a certain extent, namely that children classified as having special educational needs can achieve approximately the same results as their peers not classified in this category, provided that appropriate pedagogical experience and methods are applied.

One of the objectives of the dissertation was to clarify the concept. Based on domestic and international examples, I demonstrated that there is no generally accepted, canonical definition in the conceptual system. There are differences between the definitions used for administrative purposes, in the literature, and in practice in individual countries when referring to children. Domestic institutions and conceptual history have revealed valuable partial solutions in pedagogy, but these are generally applied in isolation and are not linked to complex concepts that take into account the physical, neurological, and social characteristics of the child while also sufficiently involving the family. From international examples, it is worth adopting into pedagogical methods also in Hungary, for example, that family visits should be part of the protocol to be followed, as the individualized experiences there influence the methods chosen for the child in concerned. In this way, the reinforcing role of the family can be realized in the pedagogical process.

The role of legal regulation is limited by formalities; it only goes so far as to set out certain obligations for institution operators and education administrators in relation to children with special educational needs. However, it does not require the institutions concerned to fulfill these obligations, or only requires them to fulfill them in part. Closely related to this is the need to assess in advance the human and material resources required to fulfill these state obligations and then to ensure that they are provided in a predictable, continuous, and normative manner. Further additions to the regulations are also justified, particularly with regard to the involvement of parents and families in the development, socialization, and education of these children.

In the case of children with special educational needs, it is crucial that we do not follow the traditional isolation of subjects (in curricula) that is commonly practiced in schools. For them, it is completely natural to connect different things. For instance, a historical period does not necessarily have to begin with a presentation of historical events, but rather, based on the lessons of the matrix method, we can arrive at historical events by recalling elements of music, literature, and natural history. The goal is not to adhere to rigid subject boundaries, but to integrate what has already been learned, which provides a basis for acquiring new knowledge.

Some tested methodological suggestions:

- Time management: Part of a wide range of professional techniques that take into account one of the most significant problems of children with special educational needs, namely, understanding and structuring the concept of time. Another part reflects on the fact that their understanding and use of abstract concepts outside their own world is limited. For example, during lessons, the concept of time must be made tangible and concrete, and it must be conveyed in a way that is appropriate to their level of experience. Another example, abstract concepts such as governance, directing (a state), control or leadership (in an organisation) can be explained using the analogy of driving a car (controlling the steering wheel, steering, driving the vehicle). Of the known methods of induction and deduction, the method of reasoning from the specific to the general is the most effective.
- Visualization: experience shows that it can influence understanding, emotional response, and memory simultaneously. Therefore, particular emphasis should be placed on the visual representation of knowledge, concepts, and events. Thus, the use of maps, photographs, cartoons, short videos, and children's drawings plays an extremely important role. It is advisable to check the knowledge acquired using non-traditional assessment methods, but primarily through drawing, connecting figures, completing figures, and creating pie charts (referring on pizza slices).
- Role-playing: presenting different historical events helps students understand them, dramatization helps them experience them, and processing the events helps structure the processes. Experience has confirmed that by stirring up emotions, students can recall the information they have learned as if it were a recent event, even years later. For example, Martin Luther King's famous speech remained vivid in their memories.
- The significance of objects: induction and deduction logical reasoning methods can be applied to them by making historical processes and events concretely experienced and tangible. This can be achieved through museum visits and handling old objects (be it a document or a seal), primarily with the help of museum education. This means striving for a kind of experiential learning, for example through the study of microhistory. Analyzing family photos and old family letters can help them form a general picture of a given era or institution.
- Gamification: now a widely accepted method, but here we can use it to convey a different kind of knowledge to them. Individual experience and the emotional motivating power of competition help them to absorb abstract knowledge. For example, the ruling family of an era – see ravens in Buda Castle. Gamification is one of the most successful paths to cognitive acceptance, so it is not a complementary tool in this context.
- Making short films: this is relatively easy to do nowadays thanks to children's use of digital devices. It is very important to gain more and more in-depth experience when children with special educational needs work on a story or an institution by making a short film. For example, individual short films were made about the events of 1956, featuring interviews and conversations with eyewitnesses, as well as period clothing, etc. The creators were able to experience these as almost personal history. However, this required lengthy preparation with the help of teachers. The implementation strengthened skills in the students (the psychological and social intelligence-developing nature of group work) that few other methods can compete with.

- The examples above also show how important it is to understand the emotions of children with special educational needs. Animal-assisted education also can be a useful tool for this, and although there may be limitations in an urban environment (e.g., horses – their role in migration of peoples), it is worth trying to implement it.

I believe I have provided sufficient evidence that teaching children with special educational needs requires methods that differ from the usual routine. These methods also differ from those commonly used in that they are time-consuming. This should be taken into account by educational authorities, which is why it is justified to ensure longer teaching hours in legislation. EGYMI has attempted to do this by implementing an extended school day within a segregated (separated for) framework, even though integration poses countless challenges.

Logically, however, there is another solution besides methodological innovation:

- If there were a major curriculum reform, it should lead to a radical reduction and restructuring of the knowledge that's been taught so far (concepts, events, dates, source management, comparisons). The current educational cycle consists of 2x4 years of history teaching, in which the amount of knowledge that is lagging behind and cannot be accepted is constantly increasing. This is already tangible and demonstrable in the second cycle.
- In competency assessment, it would be reasonable to make distinctions for students with special educational needs. This does not mean giving them exceptions. They would still participate, but under conditions adapted to their abilities and aptitudes. They would be given more time to answer and would be asked questions that they can understand. It is important that they are able to answer in an environment that reduces their stress levels. For example, the teaching assistant would read the question aloud, and it would be possible to repeat the question several times and ask follow-up questions. Partial points could also be awarded when evaluating answers. Partial results that contain good elements should also be scored, not just the expected complete answer. If their competency assessment remains unchanged, the education authorities will perpetuate the shared failure of the teachers and institutions that educate them.

The final conclusion of my research is that, when it comes to the education, upbringing, and development of children with special educational needs, the good intentions and creativity of teachers working in integration are indisputable. This helps them to cope with these challenges. However, their information is incomplete and their methodological support is entirely inadequate.

The conclusions and results should be used in teacher training and continuing education, in proportion to the frequency and severity of the phenomenon. This increases the responsibility of teachers to, in addition to the curriculum content and methods created for the "average majority," they should also be familiar with and apply the methodology of effective teaching of minorities, as well as the administrative tasks related to them, the relevant legal sources, and the tasks and contact details of the supporting background institutions.

After examining the curricula of a few selected Hungarian teacher training institutions, we can conclude that the training of our future teachers today is dominated by subject-specific, general and professional methodology, general psychology, and child psychology. Only rarely can we find a course, whether theoretical or practical, whose title would indicate that it deals with

differences from the norm, with otherness, or with the systematic treatment of subjects requiring special attention.

A severe dilemma for families raising children with disabilities and the doctors, teachers, and assistants who work with them is whether the child in question should fulfill their compulsory education requirements by integrating into a mainstream educational institution or attending a special, segregated institution. A responsible answer to this question can only be given in each individual, specific case. Every condition and each personality is different, and both integrative and segregated educational environments have advantages and disadvantages. Each has its dangers, risks, and opportunities, as outlined in the SWOT analysis included in the dissertation, which can help every decision-maker weigh up the optimal solution.

The results of the dissertation can therefore be used in teacher training, continuing education, educational management, educational organization, and legal regulation, but they can also serve to strengthen parent-school dialogue and raise awareness of children's needs.

Author's publications in this research topic are as follows

1. Petrikné Jánossy Csilla: Történelemtanítás „más” gyermekeknek. *Tani-tani Online*. 2020. 03. 15.
https://www.tani-tani.info/tortenelemtanitas_mas_gyermekeknek (Letöltés: 2026. 02. 28.)
2. Petrikné Jánossy Csilla: Rendszerszemlélet az oktatásban... : avagy mit is nyújthat a "mátrix-módszer" a történelem tantárgy oktatása során? *Tani-tani Online*. 2020. 12. 20.
https://www.tani-tani.info/rendszerszemlelet_az_oktatásban (Letöltés: 2026. 02. 28.)
3. Petrikné Jánossy Csilla: Szegregáció vagy integráció?... *Tani-tani Online*. 2021.03.07.
https://www.tani-tani.info/szegregacio_vagy_integracio (Letöltés: 2026. 03. 01.)
4. Petrikné Jánossy Csilla: Módszertani kérdések a történelemtanításban CP-s (cerebrális parézis) gyermekek körében. *Történelemtanítás: Online történelemdidaktikai folyóirat*. 2019. 2. szám
<https://www.folyoirat.tortenelemtanitas.hu/2019/06/janossy-csilla-modszertani-kerdesek-a-tortenelemtanitasban-cp-s-cerebralis-parezis-gyermekek-koreben-10-02-07/> (Letöltés: 2026. 03. 01.)
5. Petrikné Jánossy Csilla: Segregation or integration...?
In: Trentinné Benkő Éva; Márkus Éva; Árva Valéria; Svraka Bernadett (szerk.)
Diversity and Pedagogy. Budapest, ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, 2021. pp. 184-198.
6. Petrikné Jánossy Csilla: Történelemtanítás sajátos nevelési igényű gyermekek körében.
In: Rózsa Sándor (szerk.): Doktorandusz hallgatók VI. konferenciája. Eger, Líceum Kiadó, 2018. pp. 229-243.

7. Petrikné Jánossy Csilla: Pillanatkép a sajátos nevelési igényű gyermekek és az őket oktató-nevelő pedagógusok helyzetéről a köznevelésben.
In: Molnár Dávid, Pap Péter István (szerk.): Doktorandusz hallgatók X. konferenciája.
Eger, Líceum Kiadó, 2022. pp. 159-187.