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**SPECIJALNA EDUKACIJA  
I REHABILITACIJA**

**SPECIAL EDUCATION  
AND REHABILITATION**

**1**

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## **DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL PLAN (IEP) FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED MULTIPLY DISABLED STUDENTS IN BULGARIA AND THE BASIC AREAS COVERED IN IT**

*The education of Visually Impaired Multiply Disabled Students requires a creative, team-based, dynamic and individualized approach. In this regard for each student an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is developed in order to meet his/her unique needs, interests, abilities etc. The educational laws of each country provide standards on how to develop the IEP. At the current moment in Bulgaria Regulation No 1 of 2009 of Ministry of Education provide such guideline and frame. The Regulation and parts of its text are described.*

*The author puts also an emphasize on the process of educational programming (Lewis & Allman, 2000). The process is explained with all its steps and their requirements. The framework of the Bulgarian IEP according to Regulation No 1 is attached into the text in its original version.*

*The article focuses further in details on the main areas of education of Visually Impaired Multiply Disabled Students that should be covered in the IEP (Silberman, 1986; Sacks & Silberman, 1998): motor skills, cognitive skills, communication skills, self-help skills (daily living skills), social skills, prevocational skills, and leisure skills.*

*A short comparison is made between the American and Bulgarian features of these areas and their slight differences. Each area is furthermore explained and described. Photographs are included in order to provide good examples of the implementation of the areas.*

**Key words:** *Individualized educational plan, visually impaired multiply disabled students*

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There are not even two Visually Impaired multiply disabled students who function in exactly the same way, who have the same abilities, the very same needs etc. For that reason an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is developed for each student in order to meet the unique, specific and individual needs of every multiply disabled student.

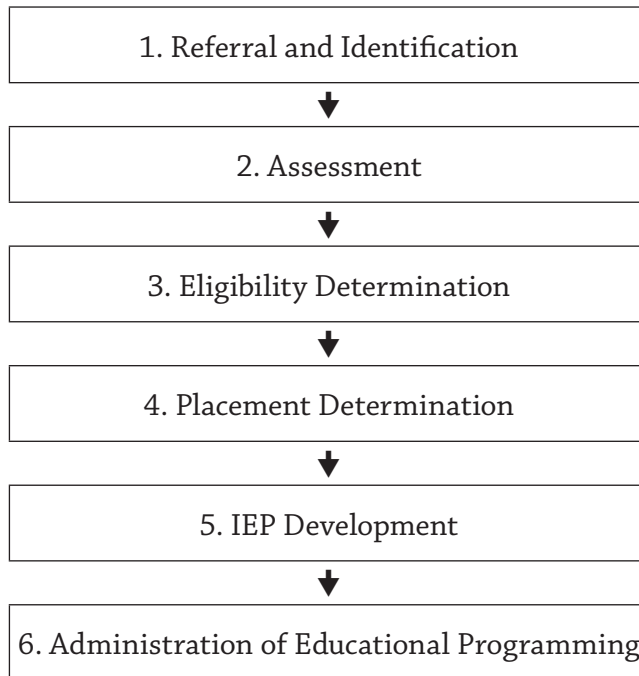
It is a usual practice the educational laws to give specifics instruction and to provide standards on how to develop an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) for students who are not able to follow the national curriculum or another adapted school curriculum. Some countries started the process of taking legislative steps as early as the 70-s of last century – for instance the US passed in 1975 PL 94-142. Other countries as Bulgaria passed appropriate laws in late 90-s of last century and beginning of the new century – 1999 and 2002.

The educational laws usually put also strict requirement about the components the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) should include. Some of these are (PL 94–142 of US of 1975):

1. A statement of the student's present levels of educational performance and his/her potential for education.
2. A statement of the annual goals and the short-term objectives.
3. A statement of the special education, related services, modifications and accommodations the student may need.
4. A statement of the projected date of beginning of the services.
5. A statement of how the student's progress should be measured.

Lewis & Allman (2000) illustrate the process of the educational programming, incl. the development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) as follows:

*Figure - The process of educational programming  
(Lewis & Allman, 2000)*



Stages 4 and 5 are originally in the opposite order. Their positions were changed by the author due to the fact that this is the order followed in Bulgaria.

### **Identification**

In many countries it is the schools' or the local educational authorities' responsibility to search for students who have any type of impairment. It is a common practice also to distribute to the public brochures at places often visited by parents as for instance clinics, doctors' offices, nurseries, kindergarten, parents counseling centers etc. In some cases parents may discover problems in their children themselves and contact specialists.

## **Assessment**

After a child is identified as having any impairment, he/she should be assessed by a team of professionals. The assessment should be:

- completed in a reasonable amount of time;
- done after parents' permission such assessment to be carried out;
- full, detailed and cover all areas related to the impairments suspected;
- based upon the understanding that no child should be discriminated on a racial, ethnical or religious basis;
- provided in the mother's tongue of the child and the family;
- based on reliable and valid assessment instruments.

In Bulgarian Regulation No 1 of 2009 the whole Chapter II (Paragraphs 12 – 17) is dedicated to the complex educational assessment process and its basic requirements. For instance, Paragraph 12 postulates that: „The complex assessment should be carried out by a team of specialists...”, while Paragraph 13 states that: „The main goal of the assessment ... is to perform basic assessment of the student's development and to recommend the type and form of education, based on this assessment”.

## **Eligibility Determination**

After the assessment is completed the educational team shall take a decision whether or not the student is eligible for special education. For a student with visual and multiple disabilities this decision is almost automatically taken. In addition, in Bulgarian Regulation No 1 of 2009 the term „children and students with multiple disabilities” is officially used (Paragraph 2).

## **Placement Determination**

The team members should select and propose the best educational environment for the student. There are many options: usually the regular classroom is considered as the least restrictive environment. However, for multiply impaired students there can be also other suitable options as special classes in the regular school, special school etc.

## **IEP Development**

Once the student is referred and admitted to an educational setting, the team should develop and IEP for each student. Parents must be included as equal members in all meetings of the educational team and be able to express their desires, hopes and visions of the particular needs of their children. In Bulgarian Regulation No 1 many Paragraphs postulate the parents' role and involvement – e.g. No 14, 15, 20, 23, 26, 27 etc.

There are 3 main types of IEPs (Lewis & Allman, 2000):

- 1) Individualized Family Service Plan for young children aged 0 to 3, and in Bulgaria aged 0 to 6–7;
- 2) General IEP for students until seventh or eight school grade, and in Bulgaria until school graduation;
- 3) Transition IEP for students age 14 and older with a focus on the needs for transition to other services. Such a plan is in no existence in Bulgaria.

## **Administration of Educational Programming**

The success of the educational programming depends to a great extent to the level of parents' involvement in the whole process. In Bulgaria the role of parents was for a long time underestimated and it was not earlier than 1989 that we started our efforts to make parents and families active participants in the assessment, planning and training of their multiply impaired children.

It is believed in the special literature that when working with parents, professionals should:

- ❖ accept families for who they are;
- ❖ allow parents to be active participants and be able to express themselves at any time;
- ❖ try to support and help families by sharing our experience and knowledge with them etc.

There is a unified frame of an IEP form, which has been originally developed for integrated students with special needs, but is widely used for multiply disabled students in Bulgaria. It has the following format (the format was slightly changed after the adoption of regulation No 1 of 2009):



**FRAME**  
**of an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)**  
**for a child or a student with special educational needs**  
**for the school year ...../.....**

**I. Identification and main data of the student**

1. Name of the student .....
2. Date and place of birth ..... Age .....
3. Individual identification No ..... Class .....
4. Medical documents and diagnosis .....
5. Parents' data:  
Mother .....
- Working place, address, phone No .....
- Father .....
- Working place, address, phone No .....
- Starting date: .....
- End date: .....

**II. Assessment results and current level of functioning of the student**

1. Health status .....
2. Psychological status .....
3. Behavior status .....
4. Communication and language status .....
5. Cognitive skills, habits and competences (assessed by special teachers) .....
6. Cognitive skills, habits and competences (assessed by the kindergarten staff) .....
7. Areas of best performance of the student .....
8. Areas of interests of the student .....
9. The social environment – family, community, the classroom .....

**III. Criteria used for the assessment of the student**

1. Cognitive skills .....
2. Communication and language skills .....
3. Acquired skills and competences by the student .....
4. Emotional status and behavior .....

**IV. Potential abilities and needs of the student**

Abilities	Needs

**V. Main goals and objectives related to the abilities and needs of students**

Goals	Objectives

**VI. Special methods and aids**

- Visual
- Practical
- Verbal
- Therapeutical: drama, art-, puppet, individual and group therapy
- Observation during play and natural activities

**VII. Main areas of the IEP**

Areas	Goals	Objectives	Results	Duration
1. Self-help skills (daily living skills)				
2. Motor skills				
3. Communication skills				
4. Cognitive skills				
5. Emotions and behavior				
6. Social skills				
7. Training – core curriculum subjects				
8. Art skills and leisure skills				
9. Prevocational skills				

**VIII. Assessment scale of the level of student's knowledge, skills and competencies, cognitive development, language-speech development and communication skills, emotional, behavioral characteristics in accordance with the type and the level of disability (third level is the highest, first – the lowest)**

1. Level 1:

.....

2. Level 2:

.....

3. Level 3:

.....

**IX. Conclusion of the educational team:**

.....

.....

**X. Suggestions:**

.....

.....

**XI. Signatures of the members of the educational team:**

Chairman: .....

Psychologist: .....

Speech/language therapist: .....

Special education teacher(s): .....

Program aid: .....

Other specialists: .....

**XII. Parent(s)' opinion and agreement**

❖ yes, I accept the proposed IEP

❖ yes, I partially accept the proposed IEP

❖ no, I do not accept the proposed IEP

❖ I suggest the following:

.....

.....

Signature of parent(s) .....

## **Main areas of education/instruction of Visually Impaired Multiply Disabled Students**

The education of Visually Impaired Multiply Disabled Students varies drastically from the one of students without any disabilities or with one disability only. Their education is usually with a focus on functional skills and not so much on academic ones. This practically means that the educational process covers the acquisition of specific skills needed mostly for the everyday life, important for the future independence and with accent on appropriate communication and proper behavior.

Silberman (1986) & Sacks & Silberman (1998) stated that students who are visually impaired and experience additional disabilities should be educated in the following main areas:

1. Motor skills
2. Cognitive skills
3. Communication skills
4. Self-help skills (daily living skills)
5. Social skills
6. Prevocational skills
7. Leisure skills.

Bulgarian Regulation No 1 of 2009. postulates in Paragraph 34, that the IEP of a student with multiple disabilities should focus on the following main areas:

1. Motor development (fine and gross motor skills).
2. Self-help skills.
3. Cognitive skills.
4. Language-speech development and communication skills.
5. Social skills.
6. Art activities.
7. Vocational therapy.
8. Learning skills.

Both classifications overlap a lot and the areas defined in them are very similar.

## **1. Motor skills**

Visually Impaired multiply disabled students incl. those with physical or motor impairments should have proper motor activities planned in their curricula. Planning the acquisition of such skills needs to be done having in mind that:

- There is often fear in moving around in the environment or fear for tactile exploration of objects in small space. This is due to retarded balance and movement skills and is very typical for the group of Deafblind.
- Fine motor skills' development is retarded in Visually Impaired Multiply Disabled Students. Skills like reaching out, grasp etc. appear later due to the lack of visual control and the ability for imitation.
- Students who suffer motor disabilities have limited body posture and movement control and will require adapted motor activities.

When planning motor activities we should take into account the student's age. It is suitable for younger students to build with blocks, to play with Lego or with pegs, to work with beads, while for older students it would be more appropriate to work on zipping and unzipping skills, buttoning and unbuttoning skills, proper use of fork and spoon etc. (Kelley & Smith, 2000; Denziloe, 1994).

Often the Orientation and Mobility training is considered as a part of the motor skills area. The instruction in Orientation and Mobility needs to be carefully planned by the educational team in terms of safety, health issues, possible motor impairments and/or cognitive delay. While some students with multiple disabilities may learn the basic techniques of the sighted guide and the white cane, others may be able to learn only tracing a wall or basic orientation skills. Students in wheelchairs will benefit mostly of instruction in Orientation in the area of using properly the remaining senses. On the following photo there is an example of a child having a class in adapted physical activity.

*Picture 1 - Physical activity*



## **2. Cognitive skills**

A good starting point here is Jean Piaget's stages theory in the cognitive development. However, the teacher of Visually Impaired multiply disabled students should plan lots of adaptations in this regard. There is usually a significant delay in the cognitive development in the majority of the students, especially if they have any type of mental retardation. Many students do not go beyond the sensorimotor stage that usually applies to the age 0-3, and can learn on a low level functional academics:

- ❖ functional math – e.g. counting 5 fingers on one hand or  $1+1=2$ ;
- ❖ functional history – e.g. learning about yesterday, today, tomorrow;
- ❖ functional geography – e.g. to tell/sign one's native city or country.

It is to a great extent the educational team's critical thinking and creative approach to take appropriate decisions on the quality and quantity of cognitive skills and functional academic skills that should be acquired.

On the following photo there is an example:

*Picture 2 - Making choices*



### **3. Communication skills**

When talking about communication, a differentiating between communication skills and language, should be made. Communication is basically every way of connecting with people, of passing and receiving a message. Language is the formal and structured system of communication. Communication effects many other areas of development and plays significant role in the „social world” (Rogow, 1977, 1983). Many multiply impaired students will never master language but will be still able to communicate through other alternative ways or modes. The publications of Rowland et al. (1987, 1995, 1998) describe well the alternative modes of communications. Some of them are:

- sign language,
- tangible symbols,
- gestures,
- pictures and photos,
- body language,
- electronic devices going through the range of low-tech till high-tech devices etc.

It is very important to choose for each student a communication mode, that is accessible, possible and significant for him/her. The

calendar system is in this regard a good way to support and encourage communication in multiply impaired students by giving them a daily routine, by introducing them a topic to communicate about – the time and how different activities are placed in time.

On the next photograph an example is shown:

*Picture 3 - Working with a calendar system*



#### **4. Daily living skills (self-help skills)**

The activities of daily living can be divided into two main areas or parts:

1. Personal management.
2. Home management.

Personal management includes:

- ❖ Feeding and eating.
- ❖ Dressing.
- ❖ Hygiene: toileting, grooming, feminine needs.

Home management includes:

- Meal preparation.
- Shopping.
- Fire alarm management.
- Health and safety issues.
- Using transportation.
- Money management.
- Telephone skills.



The Daily living skills for visually impaired students only are very well presented by Kelley & Smith (2000), but are applicable to multiply disabled students. A great extend of Kelley & Smith's ideas will be described below. This topic is covered by Tzvetkova-Arsova (2007).

### **Feeding and eating skills**

Feeding follows a developmental sequence. Students can start with soft foods, gradually try a variety of textures and work up to solid foods. At the beginning students may be allowed to do finger feeding and gradually to be introduced to spoon, fork and knife. Necessary components for proper feeding are:

- blowing,
- sucking,
- swallowing,
- chewing.

Many adaptations may me made in order to help the student achieve the desired feeding and eating skills – e.g. drinking from a glass with a straw, using special plates and utensil etc. Feeding skills can be related later with cooking. On the next photo there is an example given:

*Picture 4 - Practicing eating and cooking skills*



## **Dressing skills**

Dressing involves many skills. A child must have a good knowledge of his physical self first, and how body parts are related (a body scheme). He/she must know where his/her body is in space, understand and describe his/her own position in space (front, back, right and left side, top and bottom). In addition, dressing skills must be taught at appropriate times rather than during simulated activities. Students should learn to take off coats after entering a building; to put on shoes or to tie a shoe when changing sneakers for gym; to zip when putting on a jacket prior to going outside etc. It is always better to start teaching dressing skills using simple clothes – trousers and skirts on elastic rather than with zippers and buttons, shoes with Velcro rather than with laces etc. An example follows:

*Picture 5 - Hanging a jacket*



## **Hygiene: toileting, grooming, feminine needs.**

Grooming and hygiene are essential for both health and social reasons. Grooming and hygiene include skills as washing and drying, shampooing, toothbrushing. Many adaptations can be made as for example: using a washing mitt instead of a washcloth, using pump soap instead of a bar, using pump toothpaste.

Hair care skills include shampooing, brushing hair. Good idea is students to have short hair that is easy to wash, dry and does not need to be put into braids.

Toilet training process will be different for each student. A consultation with a medical specialist should be made at first, as there are often medical issues that could interfere with independent toileting and should be explored. Toileting must be taught in a consistent, systematic manner. It is critical for parents and educators to plan together and communicate on the implementation of the toileting program:

- ❖ some students will be on a toileting schedule in which the child is taken to the bathroom at regular intervals during the day,
- ❖ other students will have the ability to know when they have to go to the bathroom and may be able to communicate the need,
- ❖ other students may be able to go to the bathroom independently at the appropriate times, but may have physical limitations which necessitate assistance in transferring to the toilet or pulling pants down.

Some basic suggestions include:

- to keep a schedule of when the child usually urinates and defecates. There may be a consistent pattern that develops.
- to make the child participate in cleaning up. The trainer should never show anger or a negative attitude toward the child if he/she is wet.

## **Meal preparation**

Cooking activities incorporate all skill areas including social, language, fine motor, and cognition. Students with severe disabilities should concentrate on preparing simple foods as: popcorn, cereals, sandwiches, soups, salads and frozen foods. Later students may learn to prepare simple nutrition meals – e.g. omelets.

Not all students will be able to prepare a meal independently or be able to participate in all aspects of the activity. It is important for these students to be given certain assignments and responsibilities according to their individual needs and abilities.

On the next photo there is an example:

*Picture 6 - Preparing a drink*



## **Shopping**

Shopping is directly connected with money management. A good start may be the school cafeteria where the students can buy a snack or a drink. Later students shall go on field trips to different stores in the community – supermarket, clothes store, toy store etc.

Organization skills when shopping are of importance. Shopping does not mean wandering in the store and wasting time.

## **Health and safety issues**

Because of their severe disabilities many students will be more prone to accidents. There are two important aspects to health and safety awareness:

- prevention,
- intervention.

Teaching the students how to prevent accidents and health problems is of great importance. It is also crucial to teach them what needs to be done if an accident or illness occurs. They can learn how to avoid hazardous substances including those they are allergic to. Many students can memorize some important telephone numbers that should be dialed in case of emergency.

### **Using transportation**

Students should be taught how to use variety of modes of transportation including bus, taxi, train, subway. Most of the students with severe disabilities may never use public transportation independently. It is still important to expose them to different forms of transportation. A good opportunity for this are again the field trips.

### **Money management**

This is very important but also very difficult skill to learn. If the student is having the cognitive ability, he/she can learn:

- money identification,
- money value,
- organization of money.

Appropriate field trips may be planned in order to encourage activities including money management skills, like: to a store, restaurant, movie theater, post office, vending machine to buy snack or a drink etc.

### **Telephone skills**

Students that use oral speech for their expressive mode of communication may be taught the following telephone skills:

- have a telephone conversation,
- answering the phone,
- taking a message,
- call the operator,
- emergency numbers: police, fire department, ambulance,
- pay phones.

For visually impaired large button phone or Braille labels can support and encourage the development of telephone skills. It is also important to present the student with the idea of what is appropriate to say when making a phone call.

## 5. Social skills

Acquisition of social skills is of great importance for each individual. For multiply impaired students these skills are even more important as they mean a better social acceptance in the community and society. However, many multiply disabled students demonstrate a variety of problem behaviors (O'Neill et al., 1997). Some of these include:

- aggressive behavior towards others,
- self-aggressive behavior,
- self-stimulatory behavior,
- social-sexual issues in behavior etc.

Silberman (1986) described 4 basic levels of social interaction of multiply impaired students:

1. Initiation of social interaction by the student.
2. Reply to an attempt for social interaction by another person.
3. Choosing the way of interaction.
4. Termination of the interaction.

An important part of the social interaction is the ability of the multiply disabled student to describe to others his/her own situation, disabilities and specific needs. Asking and searching for help is also of great value. On the following photo there is an example:

*Picture 7 - Morning circle to encourage social skills*



## 6. Prevocational skills

Prevocational skills are important part of the IEP for all students, especially the older ones. However, they have to be in correspondence with the students' age and his/her motor and/or cognitive abilities.

Prevocational skills can be acquired in many places and at different times – in the classroom, in the dormitory, at meal time etc. Generally prevocational skills are the basis for future profession' acquisition and career development. Appropriate prevocational skills for multiply impaired students are (Kelley, & Smith, 2000):

- sorting,
- packaging,
- assembling,
- folding paper,
- counting a number of items (e.g. to 10),
- delivering school mail,
- washing dishes,
- basic knowledge of money,
- gardening skills – flowers arranging, watering, planting etc.,
- work with clay,
- wood work etc.

It is often difficult to plan what are the most appropriate prevocational skills to be developed in a particular student. For that reason usually more than only one or two prevocational skills are trained. Their number depends also on the student's cognitive and motor abilities. On the next photo an example is shown:

*Picture 8 - Work with clay*





## **7. Leisure time skills**

For quite long time leisure skills were not considered a part of the school curriculum and were in this regard not covered during the educational process. Students who have only one disability may plan and organize their leisure time on their own. However, visually impaired multiply disabled students will not understand in many cases the concept of free or leisure time and will not get involved in significant and appropriate activities. If left alone, these students will often fall asleep, do nothing or will engage in mannerisms (Kelley, & Smith, 2000).

When selecting appropriate leisure time activities we shall take into consideration the student's age, his/her motor and/or cognitive disabilities and the parents' preferences. In addition, we have to keep in mind that leisure time activities may be performed in many places – both in the school or out of it.

Because the majority of visually impaired multiply disabled students may not be able to express their preferences and desires for leisure time activities clearly, we shall offer them at least few possibilities. Leisure skills may be divided into two main groups (Kelley, & Smith, 2000; Denziloe, 1994).

1. Individual skills – e.g. watching TV, listening to music, playing an electronic game, engaging with a collection of items, playing with toys etc.
2. Group skills – playing cards and other games, visits to different places – movie theaters, museums etc., sport activities, field trips etc.

A very good resource is the book of Judy Denziloe „Fun and Games: Practical Leisure Ideas for People with Profound Disabilities” of 1994, as well as the book of Roma Lear „More Play helps: Play ideas for children with special needs” of 1990.

On the next photo an example is shown:



*Picture 9 - Playing dominos*



### **In conclusion**

There are no uneducable students. Every child has the right for education and every child has the potential to learn something.

Planning the educational process and the instruction itself for the unique group of students with visual and multiple disabilities require a creative, team-based, dynamic and individualized approach.

\* All photographs used in the text are taken in the two special schools for Visually Impaired Students in Bulgaria – in Sofia and in Varna, with the permission of the families of the students and of the school authorities.

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## **KREIRANJE I PRIMENA INDIVIDUALNOG OBRAZOVNOG PLANA (IOP) ZA POTREBE VIŠESTRUKO OMETENE DECE SA OŠTEĆENJEM VIDA U BUGARSKOJ**

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### Sažetak

Obrazovanje višestruko ometene dece sa oštećenjem vida zahteva kreativan, timski, dinamičan i individualizovan pristup. U skladu s tim, za svakog učenika se kreira Individualni obrazovni plan (IOP), kako bi se zadovoljile njegove jedinstvene potrebe, interesovanja, sposobnosti, itd. Zakonom o obrazovanju svake zemlje propisani su standardi u vezi sa kreiranjem IOP. U Bugarskoj su takve smernice i okviri propisani Pravilnikom br. 1, Ministarstva Obrazovanja (МОМН на България, 2009), čiji su opis i delovi teksta prikazani u ovom radu. Osim toga, u radu je akcenat stavljen i na proces obrazovnog planiranja (Lewis & Allman, 2000). Objašnjene su sve etape ovog procesa, kao i njihovi uslovi. U prilogu se nalazi originalna verzija okvira bugarskog IOP, koncipirana u skladu sa Pravilnikom br.1.

U radu se takođe detaljno opisuju glavne oblasti vezane za obrazovanje višestruko ometene dece sa oštećenjem vida, koje treba da budu obuhvaćene Individualnim obrazovnim planom (Silberman, 1986; Sacks & Silberman, 1998): motoričke veštine, kognitivne veštine, veštine komunikacije, veštine samopomoći (sposobnosti potrebne za svakodnevni život), socijalne veštine, preprofesionalne veštine i veštine organizovanja slobodnog vremena.

Napravljeno je kratko poređenje između karakteristika ovih oblasti u Americi i Bugarskoj i opisane diskretne razlike među njima. Osim toga, svaka od oblasti je objašnjena i opisana, a uključene su i fotografije koje ilustruju rad na njihovom razvoju.

**Ključne reči:** Individualni obrazovni plan, višestruko ometena deca sa oštećenjem vida

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