Izabela: Pravljica o princeski, ki je jecljala (translated, Isabela: The Story about the Princess Who Stuttered) is a children's book Beata Akerman from the Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana, Slovenija. The book is in Slovenian but translated into English. The author, who is a person who stutters, won a special award in Austria for the best international children and young people literature. A hard copy of the book is available for purchase for 7.50 Euros, from the author who can be contacted at beata.akerman@fsd.uni-lj.si. This online copy of the copyrighted book, is provided here with permission of the author.
Once upon a time, a queen and a king lived in a castle. Soon after they were married, five children were born. Two of them were boys and three of them were girls. The oldest one was princess Evelina who always had the last word. Two mischievous boys followed; prince Filip and prince Jakob. A very talkative princess Luiza was born after the twins. The last one was the quiet princess Izabela. She was not quiet because she did not like to talk but because other children laughed at her. Princess Izabela stammered. In the castle, she was always reminded to speak smoothly and was scolded when she got stuck. That is why she grew more and more quiet every day.
On one spring day, all the princes and the princesses gathered at the courtyard.

"Let's go play catch! Or throw marbles! No, I got it! Let's go play with the skipping rope! I want to be first!" rushed chatty Luiza with suggestions and already started skipping.

"I want to play hide-and-seek!" shouted Filip and hid under the stone table.

"Let's go and play with the ball!" Jakob shouted even louder.

Izabela was still silent so Evelina raised her voice:

"Today we will play the theatre. We will make up a story and everyone will have his own part. When we will know the story by heart, we will show it to our father, the king and to our mother, the queen." Like always, her suggestion prevailed.

"I will be the knight, called the Brave," Filip said. "And I will be the knight, called the Rightful," said Jakob who did not want to be less important than his brother.

"You may. You will compete in the Knight's tournament where you will try to win the princess's heart," added Evelina.

"Luiza, you will be their princess and I will be the queen and I will have the main word," she divided the roles.

"W-W-What about m-m-me?" finally spoke Izabela.
"You can't perform with us," strictly replied Evelina.
"Why n-n-not?" argued Izabela?
"Listen to yourself, you can barely talk!" Filip laughed at her.
"I w-w-want to b-b-be the good fai-fai-fai ..." she could not finish the word fairy.
"You will be no fai-fai-fai!" shouted Jakob.
"Until you learn to speak like we do, you can't play with us," added Luiza.
"So go away," finally added Evelina.
In all her sadness, Izabela ran to the castle park. She hid behind the hedge of roses and cried bitter tears. Then she suddenly heard beautiful bird singing above her. She looked up and saw a tiny bird in the bushes.

"Who a-a-are you t-t-that sings so b-b-beautifully?"

"I am a nightingale and this is the only way I can sing," sang the nightingale. "And who are you?"

"I-I-Izabe-bela," replied the princess.

"And why are you so sad?" asked the nightingale.

"I-I-I'm afraid to t-t-talk. E-E-Everything I s-s-say is w-w-wrong," stammered Izabela and cried again.

"Nothing is wrong if you don't speak like others. Even each nightingale sings differently," the nightingale comforted her. And Izabela believed him.

From then on, she rushed every morning, before the sunrise, to the park and to the hedge. The nightingale waited for her to sing her a morning song. And how beautifully did he sing! He changed the voiceful sounds with the warbling ones, sad ones with the happy ones, sometimes he sang gently so you could barely hear him and sometimes he sang so loudly and proudly that his singing echoed all over the castle park.
By listening to such a master, Isabella gained courage and open her heart. She started to tell him her favourite stories. When doing so, she changed her voice in a special way: sometimes she whispered as a forest fairy, sometimes she was rude and loud as a harsh and strict queen, than she spoke charmingly as a small baby and sometimes loudly like an old dwarf. She could speak fast or slowly, with her voice being high or low. And when she impersonated these fairy tale heroes, she did not stammer for even a bit.

"You really are a born actress," said the nightingale surprisingly and was very proud of his new friend.

"T-T-Then I will al-al-always a-a-act. I-I will p-p-pre-pretend t-t-to be s-s-someone else and I won't s-s-s-stammer anymore. O-O-Other k-k-kids will love me and they w-w-will play with m-m-me," rushed her words Izabela.

"Oh, no," warbled the nightingale. "You cannot fool yourself with someone else's voice. When you borrow your voice to a fairy tale character, it is all right if you change your voice, but otherwise be who you are and speak like you speak. Your speech makes you unique like my singing makes me unique. Other children must accept you and love you for who you are."

"But h-h-how do I t-t-tell them that? They h-h-hear only my sta-sta-stammering!"

"You will think of something. It is not important how you speak but what you speak. Remember that!" the nightingale warbled for the last time and flew to the warmer places with other migratory birds. "I'll see you the next spring," echoed while the nightingale was disappearing in the distance.

"I will re-re-remember that," whispered Izabela to herself and waved goodbye to the nightingale.
Izabela’s seventh birthday was near. Her father, the king and her mother, the queen, had the habit to fulfil one wish for each child on their birthday and that day there were no exceptions, too. On the night before her birthday, Izabela tirelessly thought of what to wish for her birthday. A new doll? Building blocks? New crayons maybe? She thought of it the whole night and at dawn, she thought of the right idea. She ran to the castle bedroom and declared to her father, the king and her mother, the queen: "I want for my b-b-b-birthday that E-E-Evelina, Luiza, Jakob and F-F-Filip would s-s-stammer the entire day." Her father, the king and her mother, the queen found this wish very unusual but her father, the king still ordered that Izabela’s brothers and sisters must stammer from morning till evening. And they did because it was the order of the king and no one dared to break it.
Izabela watched closely and quietly. First problems appeared already at breakfast. "I-I-I w-w-want s-s-some more sh-sh-sh..." before Evelina could finish the word shortbread, Jakob gave her a big spoon of sugar into already sweet tea. "W-w-what are you d-d-doing?" Evelina asked angrily. "I thought y-y-you w-w-w-want more su-su-su," Filip tried to stammer out the sentence. "You should s-s-s-say s-sooner. D-D-D ..." tried to help Filip. "D-D-Donkey? D-D-Drum? D-D-Doll?" Luiza tried to guess the word. "D-D-Dummy!" Filip finally called her after long effort and added angrily: "And d-d-don't guess the wo-wo-words i-i-if you don't know w-w-w-what I am t-t-trying to say!" "I th-th-thought that I was he-he-helping you," said his sister in defence, and Filip added: "W-W-Well, you weren't."
After the afternoon nap, the party began. All the cousins, along with children from the nearest kingdom came to congratulate Izabela. "Why do you all speak so strangely?" little guests were wondering. "T-t-that was I-I-Izab-b-bela's w-w-wish for her b-b-b ..." Luiza tried to reply while stammering. In that moment, one of the cousins hit her on her back. "Now will you speak normally?" "N-N-No..." Luiza moved away. She didn't expect that her cousin would hit her on her back. "Do you have something stuck in your throat? Maybe it will help if you cough it out!" another cousin tried to help. Everyone started to cough. When this didn't help, the little visitors have had enough. "You are alright, you are just too lazy to talk," they said in an offended manner and went away. "L-L-Let's go p-p-play h-h-hide-and-s-s-seek!" shouted Filip after them. "L-L-Let's go to the p-p-pond and th-th-throw s-s-stones!" Jakob tried to be louder than his brother. The invited children started laughing. The more they laughed, the more the twins stammered and the more they stammered, the more other children laughed at them. "W-w-why are you la-la-laughing?" Evelina tried to scold them. "Did you hear that? W-w-why ..." the invited children repeated Evelina's words and couldn't stop laughing. Evelina, Jakob, Filip and Luiza stopped talking. There were no games and only the invited children ate the cake.
When Evelina, Luiza, Jakob and Filip waved goodbye, they couldn't hide their anger.

"Everyone i-i-is laughing and is i-i-imitating us," said Luiza. "I want to talk but no one listens," she added.

"A-A-And no-no-no one w-wants to play with us," Filip and Jakob complained.

"This i-is horrible!" they all shouted.

"C-C-Couldn't y-y-you w-wish for something e-e-else?" asked Evelina angrily.

"I have enough of t-t-toys but I d-d-don't h-h-have a-a-a-anyone to p-play with. I wanted to sh-sh-show how sad I-I-I-listens," answered Izabela.

Suddenly, with nothing else to say, Evelina, Luiza, Filip in Jakob started to cry. Only now they understood Izabela's wish for her birthday. Izabela also had tears in her eyes. She said quietly: "I-I-I want that you w-w-would l-l-love me," she covered her face with her hands and cried. Then she suddenly felt someone hugging her. It was Evelina.

"I am sorry that I hurt you so many times. I never showed that I love you," and she held her little sister even more tightly, saying the words which Izabela waited for so long: "I love you."

"I am also sorry for everything," wept Luiza. Izabela reached with her hand to Luiza and she also hugged her. "I love you too," she whispered and Izabela smiled at her.
"Is there any room for us?" asked the twins at the same time. Every one of them embraced Izabela so that they were joined in a big hug.

"From now on, we will all play together and none of us will laugh at you because you stammer. What you want us to do when you stammer again?" asked Jakob "And how you want to play so that we can all play together?" Filip also rushed to ask.

Izabela spoke and the other children listened carefully for the first time. She told them everything that came to her mind. Evelina took a piece of paper and wrote everything that her sister has told them, and so that they would never forget what she told them.

Before the end of her seventh birthday, Izabela's seven rules were written on the paper.
Seven rules of our Izabela, the princess who stammers:

1. If you hear someone stammering, do not laugh at him/her because s/he will be sad.
2. Listen to him/her.
3. Do not send him/her away just because s/he stammers.
4. Do not interfere when s/he is talking.
5. Do not guess the words s/he is trying to say because you don’t know what s/he wants to say.
6. If you tell him/her not to stammer, you will not make things better. S/he will still stammer.
7. Playing is for everyone and that is why everyone can play.

The next morning, the children put the paper on the castle gates so that everyone in the kingdom could read it. From then on, no one ever laughed at people who stammered.
KNJIGI NA POT


Temeljni razlog za posmehanje otrokom, ki jecijo, je predstava, da obstaja nekaj, kar je »normalni govor«, najrazličnejše posebnosti posameznikovega govora – človeška raznovrstnost – pa so videne kot »skvare«. Otrok, ki jecja, postane v očeh drugih »družačen« in s tem tudi. S tistim, ki je zaznamovan kot »družačen«, se človek ne more identificirati, zato ga hote ali nehote odzive od sebe. »Družačen« ne sodi zrazen, ne domač, je tuj. Družačnost postane zaznamovano, ki prekrije tisto, kar je enako in podobno. Tako nastane socialna razdalja. Človekove posebnosti, na primer, da otrok ne vidi ali ne sliši, postanejo stereotipi sinonimi za nesrečo, neuspešnost, tragedijo in slabo usodo. Vprašati se je treba, kakšen je interes tistega, ki oznaci neko osebo ali skupino kot »družačno«.

Zelo majhen otrok najprej dojema kot tuje vse, česar ne pozna. Ko postane malo večji, pa se spozna s »kulturno tuješčjo«, ki jo ustvarjajo stereotipi starejših otrok in odraslih, ki mu razlagajo svet. Svet ni več nekaj nevtralnega, nekaj, kar se olipa, preizkuša in vonja, temveč postane zapleten sistem socialnih kod in vrednostnih sodb. Otok razvlje »socijalno-statični zemljevid« dovoljenega, zaželenega in prepovedanega, torej tega, kje naj se giblje in česa naj se izogiba.

Takšno ustvarjanje normalnosti se zdi na prvi pogled družbeno funkcionalno, vendar je uničujoče. Skupnosti, ki poudarjajo »drugačnost«, da bi v resnici reproducirale predstave o normalnosti, so uniformne, izključevalske in diskriminatorске. Nasprotno pa so skupnosti, ki temeljijo na razumevanju tega, da imajo ljudje različne govorje in načine komunikacije, različno dojemanje sveta zaradi telesnih ovir, ne da bi bila zato njihova kakovost življenja a priori slabša, odpornejše, kompleksnejše in v njih ljudje živijo daje.

Etika oviranih nas zato uči, kako razviti načine enakega obravnavanja vseh ljudi in vseh otrok ne glede na njihove posebnosti. Še več, pomeni, da jemljemo jecljanje kot eno od oblik človeškega govora in slepoto kot eno od oblik človeškega bivanja in dojemanja sveta. Zato nikoli ne recite otroku, ki vas vpraša, zakaj deklica »tako govor« in zakaj ga deček »ne vidi«, da so takšni otroci »drugačni«! Recite mu raje, da je jecljanje govor, ki traja nekaj daje časa kot ne-jecljanje in da imajo slepi otroci pisavo sestavljeno iz osmih pik, ki je prav tako imenitna kot tista iz črk.

Prof. dr. Darja Zaviršek