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## Inclusion education: analysis of Russian teachers' expectations and important aspects of school personnel training

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### Abstract

The paper presents a conceptual framework and foundation retraining program for primary school teachers, mastering the basics of inclusive pedagogy. The program is developed on the basis of the activity approach, the concept of "reflective practice", taking into account the principle of normalization of life B. Nire.

### Key words

Inclusion Education; Retraining for teachers; Reflective Practice; Normalization.

## La educación inclusiva: análisis de las expectativas de los profesores rusos y aspectos importantes en la formación de los docentes

### Resumen

El artículo presenta un marco conceptual y un programa de reentrenamiento para el profesorado de educación primaria, que se centra en los conceptos básicos de la pedagogía inclusiva. Este programa de formación se desarrolla desde el enfoque de la actividad, el concepto de "práctica reflexiva", teniendo en cuenta el principio de normalización de la vida de B. Nire.

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## Palabras clave

Educación Inclusiva; formación del Profesorado; Práctica Reflexiva; Normalización.

## Introducción

Since the middle of 1990<sup>th</sup>, based on world-wide practices of inclusive education, training and development of a handicapped child's personal potential, Russia has set a strategy for integration of the children with special needs with modern society. However, modern society demonstrates slow movement on the road of educational and social integration of handicapped children. Most of mentally and functionally challenged child population suffers constraints of social isolation and drastic problems on interaction with other children. The children are also deprived of the opportunity for physical social contacts and accessible high-quality education.

Bengt Nirje [6] emphasizes in his felicitous manner that isolation and segregation foster ignorance and prejudice, whereas integration and normalization of life of people with disabilities who get an opportunity of living together with their parents or by themselves in conventional circumstances improve human relationships and understanding, social tolerance and integration of an individual and society.

At the same time, numerous research studies reveal that education as such is able to seriously reduce the risk of social alienation of disable children as well as, on the other hand, to increase negative social implication of intolerant attitude of society to people with special needs.

That way, we could talk about an urgent need for development and implementation of such state-supported and public-backed educational technologies that would lead to notable increase of opportunities for workable educational inclusion and social integration of children with special needs.

But despite apparent simplicity and clarity of the task, search of effective approaches, models and technologies of educational integration in Russia encounters strong barriers in the form of fixed stereotypes, old and tired educational technologies and educational players' low motivation for introducing of state-of-the-art changes.

As an example, some research findings reveal that parents of ordinary schoolchildren often express fear that inclusive education might have negative impact on the education of their 'normal offspring'. Besides, introduction of inclusive education at school requires major change in the school schemes of life in order to make the social part of pupils' everyday routine more open, engaging (at least not excluding) for children with special needs.

By now, some rare successful cases of inclusive education in Russia have underexplored which does not allow summarize the results and disseminate educational experience. Another point to be emphasized is that mass implementation of inclusive education in Russian schools require an availability of well-thought recourse-based strategy of education authorities, permanent media and communication support, and local community assistance.

Considering all the mentioned factors, the key condition of success of educational inclusion is a teacher's ownership of specific competences which enable him to effectively and smoothly manage the educational process connecting different children (the ones with learning disabilities among others) with various levels of development and socio-educational experience. The organization of specially designed and shaped in-service training should be recognized as a pre-condition of building such specific competences. A number of studies in the area of adult education show that, as a rule, short-term training

courses do not lead to significant growth of required competences and beneficial change of professional modes.

At the same time, participation in longer educational programs and courses (length of 250-800 hours) involves motivational and personal components and brings to better probability of such underlying changes.

The content of professional in-service teachers' training should be shaped in accordance with their objectively revealed competence gaps. For target-focused program's content design, we studied some professional modes of the group of teachers from Uyarsky district in Krasnoyarsky krai, with whom shortly after an approbation of in-service teachers' training started up.

Four topical clusters of teachers' assertions were taken into consideration:

1. teachers' perception of school and their work;
2. teachers' policy towards interaction with parents;
3. what they value in children;
4. what they focus on in the situation of a dynamic action of a pupil (for example, when a pupil is asking a question)

1. In the first cluster, we estimated the level of harmonic attitude of the teachers to their educational work in broad terms, in the belief that life of any person includes dozens of manifoldspheres and activities. That is why predominant devotion to work could be taken for unhealthy distortion, similar to addiction. Analysis of teachers' feedback answers showed that about a quarter of respondents chose the option "school is everything in my life", meanwhile three quarters revealed more harmonic teachers' attitude to work. They named various areas of interest and assured their lives are not limited by school and work only.

2. Analysis of teachers' policy towards interaction with pupils' parents uncovered some interesting and impressive data. Four groups were noted in accordance with produced answers. The first group, a bit larger than the others, focus on formal measurable characteristics of pupil learning and behavior. The second group play the role of 'authorities on everything': they are aware of the parents' family problems concerning not only education, but life at large, they offer consultations on everything and try to find solutions to the problems. Teachers from the third group do their best to build trust-based relations with parents, talk to them about upbringing and education and try to turn parents into their partners and team-mates. Teachers from the fourth group try to answer parents' needs; they want to understand what pupils' parent want and fit their expectations (a teacher takes the role of the teacher-led). Quantitatively, the second, the third and fourth are approximately equal.

3. What characteristics do teachers value in children? Teachers were allowed to choose several options for this question; that is why synonymic and similar qualities were extracted and graded. The generalized sets show teachers' value priorities in respect of qualities, characteristics or peculiar properties of their pupils.

- *Immediacy, honesty, openness and sincerity* are the most frequently referred to.
- The same degree of appreciation goes to *curiosity, intellectual interest, thirst for study, and thirst for new knowledge*.
- The third set fairly lags behind: *commitment, industry, orderliness, and determination*. *Kindness* made a separate group as the least referred to.
- *Intellectual sense of humour* as an expectable and desirable distinctive characteristic is mentioned rarely if ever.

As can be seen from the above collected teachers' expectations, a role model of an ideal pupil comprises the following traits: large majority of pupils in the class should approve themselves as open, sincere, honest, curious, eager for study personality. Noticeable

amount of pupils possess such characteristics as commitment, industry, orderliness, and determination as well as kindness.

It must be recognized that no one referred to such traits as cooperativeness, ability to work in groups or in teams. On this premise, we suppose that the teachers underuse group-work activities in their work. It leads to the hypothesis that the teachers with such expectations would bear serious problems in implementation of inclusive education, because inclusion is based upon the idea of cooperation and teamwork.

4. Feedback answers on the situations of active interaction, teacher's response on pupil's spontaneous questions, and growing degree of uncertainty are exemplary indeed. We split them into four groups:

- The first group which made the majority (about 65%) focus on their own action.
- The second group (about 15%) concentrate on their own feelings and emotions, evoked by the pupil's action ("I would be surprised", "I would be glad for him", "I would be confused", etc.)
- The third group (about 15%, too) think on what is happening with the pupil, his cognitive processes, on how he is interested in or surprised by the content of the teacher's response.
- The fourth and the least group (about 5%) are deep inside the methodological side of their actions in the classroom. The representatives from this group take the situation of their own response to the pupil as a specifically built for the rest of the class case study, where the others may take a lesson from both - observation and, probably, participation in the process of interaction.

In our research, we proceed from the viewpoint on inclusion and return to the idea that the teacher should possess sensitivity and ability to transform spontaneous situations of Teacher-Pupil or Pupil-Pupil interaction in the classroom into the situations of inclusive educational process. However, the first and second groups of teachers are too much concentrated on themselves, and it can impede progress of inclusive education.

Turning to the data under our consideration, the results gained from the teachers' survey, peculiarities of their professional modes against our vision of inclusion core, we designed the curricula for in-service training in inclusive schools. At the moment, the program approbation is being piloted.

### **The model of in-service teacher training and availability principle**

One of the priority directions of Russian educational system development is quality assurance of availability of an up-to-date preschool and primary education.

An availability principle in education was first introduced in the school practice by Jan Amos Komensky (also known as John Amos Comenius). His idea of the principle implementation has not receded into the background even today. Komensky's algorithms interpreting availability as forming-up the sequence of instructions – from easy to difficult, from known to unknown, from simple to complex, from near to far – became the solid educational tool-box.

However, a number of new interpretations of the availability principle have appeared over the last forty years. M.A. Danilov and M.N. Skatkin [2] render the availability principle as a measure of feasible hardness. N.G. Kazansky and G.S. Nazarova consider the availability principle as the principle of opportuneness. This interpretation describes the essence of the principle as a necessity of building the educational process in accordance with not only up-close opportunities of children, but also with needs of cultural development of society, queries of scientific and technical development and socio-cultural requirements for the

younger generation. In that way, the principle means compliance with the requirements of scientificity, and sociocultural dependence of the educational process. Another interesting interpretation is offered by V.I. Zagvyazinsky [4] who takes an availability principle as a certain measure of challenge faced by a pupil within the process of systematic activity in the zone of proximal development.

P.N. Pidkasisty [7] considers that an availability principle in education assumes particularities of child development, material analysis, and such an educational management under which no one would suffer neither intellectual and moral, nor physical overpressure. At the same time, availability is not equal to challenge-free study, seeing that study requires efforts for achievement of the objectives. These difficulties should strengthen the pupil, support his development, increase the learning effects, but not destroy his capabilities.

In 1980<sup>th</sup>, V.V. Davydov revises some conventional didactic principles. He offers to replace an availability principle by the principle of developmental teaching, when the educational content entails the development of the child. Some new light on the availability principle was shed by V.V. Zavoloka who sees it as unanimity of the accessible and inaccessible in education. He is convinced that this definition reflects the dialectic nature of the notion *availability*.

The peculiar feature for the current school development is improving of practical-orientation, interactivity, scientific education which develops simultaneously with the opening of numerous profiled schools and classes, creation of a new type of educational institutions (high schools, lyceums, colleges and so on). The increasing in number of schools implementing the various options of individual approach to the pupils also requires clarification of the principle of availability for education. That's why under present conditions the problem of education availability is actual.

In our view inclusive education is another productive interpretation of the principle of availability. Thus, summing up the abovementioned various interpretations of the concept of the "principle of availability", the following essential characteristics of this principle can be picked out:

- is a criterion for the selection of educational material, mentioning its difficulty level;
- reflects the relevance of content, methods, forms, resources, scope of educational material and age characteristics of pupils and specified education results;
- requires taking into account the overall average level of pupils education;
- allows to build a map of pupils overcoming various cognitive difficulties;
- determines the extent for feasible difficulties in the development of educational content
- takes into account the individual differences and characteristics of pupils
- sets the pace and nature of group forms of educational activity organization
- determines the measure of interactivity for used tasks.

Retraining program is intended to support the activities of teachers of educational institutions for the development of technologies of inclusion, enabling the children with typical and developmental disabilities to incorporate into a single educational process.

The program purpose is to prepare teachers, teams of institutions for the development and implementation of educational programs enabling the children with typical and developmental disabilities to fully incorporate into a single educational process.

Program objectives:

- to ensure the studying of the conceptual foundations of inclusion and integration.
- to ensure the studying of methodological tools of additional learning and teaching materials development permitting the teachers to implement effective training and educational processes for the children with different capabilities.
- to develop additional educational and methodic materials based on the ideas of inclusion and integration, approvals experience.
- to ensure the development of package of normative and methodological materials required to implement effective training and educational process [3].

Distinctive features of the retraining program are met in its didactic, methodological and organizational bases.

The didactic foundation for the program is the activity approach, according to which the development of the necessary competencies of its participants is carried out during the practical work of teachers themselves [3]. This means that the program participants master the content of the program in the process of development of additional educational and methodological materials letting the teachers to implement the effective training and educational processes involving children with different capabilities. A distinctive feature of this method of organization for the development program content is a mandatory requirement to create the own variations of additional educational and methodological materials by the program participants and testing of the materials in their educational institution.

The methodological concept which is put in the base of qualification training program, is the concept of "reflective practice", according to which the training and educational activities of the program participants are built according to the formula "orienting ideas and concepts – actions, testing - identifying problems - reflection activities, reformulation of the original idea / representations - remodeled, more perfect action". Thus, the retraining program is a repetitive cycle of the following types of work:

- The development of orienting ideas and concepts;
- Carrying out the professional testing;
- Identification of the problem and the organization of professional reflection;
- Realization of a better piece of studied activities;
- Methodical design of studied activities.

The principles of accessibility and command training are used as the organizing principle of the program, which means the realization of the program of retraining for the team of educational institution [1]. In the framework of the program those forms and methods of classes are used that allow the institution team to study new methods of organization, cooperation and self-organization, a new culture of pedagogical labor.

Taking into account the current views on the nature of competence we, after a number of authors, identify three of its main structural components: value, cognitive and instrumental components. We believe that the retraining program will only be more likely effective if sufficient attention is given to all three structural components of competencies within the

particular group of competent humanistic-oriented teacher competencies that enable him to effectively conduct the educational process with the participation of children, with different levels of development, cultural and educational experience (including the participation of children with disabilities).

Implemented within the framework of the program of retraining primary school teachers consists of three main topic blocks. Within each of the blocks is proposed to implement the following set of modules.

### **Cognitive component- the theoretical oriented module**

Typology of deviant development; Methodological foundations of inclusive pedagogy; the content of education in an inclusive model; Concepts, models and support practices.

### **Technological (instrumental) component - the module "Methods of work of the teacher in the inclusive education process"**

Methods of training sessions subject in inclusive educational process; Organization of the educational process in an inclusive model of education; Working tools for the inclusive class teacher (anthropological observation practices, method of analysis of a particular case, the practice of critical thinking in the implementation of inclusion, coaching techniques to the educational process, teaching design).

### **Practices for personal growth (value-emotional component) - The "Professional and personal competence" module**

Personal psychotherapy program participants (group training); Art practices (workshops on areas); Body practices (presentations on areas or trial classes at the recommended sections and studios); Demonstration coaching sessions; Practices for critical thinking for personal growth (training).

### **Module "Professional Workshop"**

Professional workshop is an implementation of professional trial for program participants under supervision of colleagues (the other participants in the program or one of the leading training program courses) followed by a discussion and analysis of the event.

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