

## **Psychological and Pedagogical Support of Inclusion in Higher School as an Aspect of Supplementary Professional Education of Academic Staff**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper deals with the issues of psychological and pedagogical support of the academic staff working with students with disabilities in the context of inclusive education. The relevance of the research is due to the difficulties in implementing the inclusive approach in Russian higher schools and need to train academic staff in working with students with special needs. Interviewing and rating academic staff members, (120 persons,) have revealed difficulties (philosophic-worldview, project-technological, and psychological-pedagogic) they face when teaching students with disabilities. The resource of further education can be used to overcome the revealed obstacles. Based on the example of teaching according to a specially designed program for further training, it has been shown that it helps to form relevant*

*competencies and preparedness to work with students with disabilities.. The paper may be useful for higher school managers and academic staff and teachers in intermediate vocational education establishments who work in a climate of inclusion as well as for specialists engaged in supplementary professional education.*

**Keywords:** *academic staff; inclusion; further training; psychological-pedagogical support; inclusive environment; inclusive education; inclusive approach; professional competences*

## **Introduction**

The equity of all people implies, among other things, equal educational opportunities. In this respect, one of the priorities of Russia's social policy is to modernize education to raise its quality and make it available for all the citizens. This goal can be achieved by enlarging the inclusive practice, which promises variability and flexibility in teaching people, (The decree of the RF government, 2012), who have disabilities or special needs. The higher school education of these students is particularly challenging, since few universities in Russia have created special conditions, and the experience of such education is limited.

At the same time, the RF President V. V. Putin assumes that the higher school can make a significant contribution to the establishment of inclusive practice. In the National Performance Strategy of the Actions for Children for the period of 2012–2017 (The decree of the RF President, 2012), he stressed the need for creation of the training and retraining system for the specialists working with children with disabilities and people with special needs on the basis of the higher school.

Correct understanding of the meaningful content of psychological and pedagogical support of all the participants. This important social task determined the relevance of the study. It aims, on the

one hand, at summarizing difficulties in teaching special students (students with disabilities and students with special needs) and finding ways to overcome them, and, on the other hand, at presenting the experience of the psychological and pedagogical support of the academic staff under the conditions of inclusion to provide that would ensure the quality of the inclusive education.

The hypothesis of the study is as follows: the academic staff can develop its professional competences for psychological-pedagogical support of students with special educational needs after the further training within the framework of supplementary professional education based on their experience. The methodological bases for the study were key principles of humanism and humanistic psychology (people's equity and intrinsic value, recognition of the right of every person for the development, self-realization, meeting socio-cultural needs, and a full life in society). Note that the notion of inclusion has various interpretations in both foreign and Russian literature.

Foreign studies by R. Jackson (2008), A. Renzaglia (1997), D. L. Ryndak (Ryndak et al., 2000), Y. Shemesh (2009), D. Voltz (2001), and others view the inclusion in different ways:

- as a recognition of the idea that every child is unique and valuable to society and educational establishments (A World Bank Report, 2003; Jackson, 2008);
- as a common educational environment (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992; Renzaglia, 1997; Ryndak et al., 2000);
- as a process and practice of training, education, and support of people with special needs (Sugrue, 1997; Voltz, 2001; Mujis et al., 2004; Shemesh, 2009).

Among the Russian authors thoroughly dealing with the issues of inclusive education are L. I. Aksenova, S. V. Alekhina (Alekhina et al., 2011), I. M. Bgazhnokova, L. N. Blinova (Blinova and Karynbaeva, 2014; Blinova, 2015), N. N. Malofeev (2009), N. M. Nazarova (2010),

M. M. Semago, N. Ya. Semago, M. L. Semenovich (Semago et al., 2011), and others. Based on their investigations, one should treat inclusion as the educational process taking place in a common space and providing an opportunity for obtaining a degree for various students, including these with special educational needs if special conditions for their education are created.

The issues of inclusive practice receive sufficient attention. In their works, O. A. Zinevich, V. V. Degtyareva, and T. N. Degtyareva consider self-identity of people with special educational needs as a condition for successful professional orientation and choice of a field of study in higher school (Zinevich et al., 2016). The development of the inclusive environment in higher school is the subject of the researches by E. V. Golub and I. S. Saprykin (Golub and Saprykin, 2015). Yu. A. Kalgin (2011) discusses modern issues of psychological and pedagogical support of disabled persons in higher school. The issues of the creation of inclusive educational environment are considered in the works of R. V. Andreeva (2016), E. I. Konanova (2015), and E. A. Martynova (2015). They analyse the approaches to elaboration of adapted educational programs for students with special needs and disabled students. The experience of development of the inclusion in higher school in Russia and abroad is represented in the publications of M. V. Bersenev, V. I. Zinovyeva, M. Yu. Kim, O. E. Radchenko (Zinovyeva and Bersenev, 2012; Zinovyeva et al., 2010). However, the issues of the readiness of higher school academic staff for working with special students are still ignored by researchers. A preliminary pilot study has shown that the academic staff of higher school and teachers of secondary education establishments are less ready to implement inclusion as compared to pedagogues from general education organizations (Chernysheva and Denisova (Eds.), 2013; Makarova, 2013; Blinova and Karynbaeva, 2014; Blinova, 2015; Platonova et al., 2016). Besides, it is important to evaluate not only potential and readiness of academic staff to work in a climate of inclusion, but also possible

resources of the higher school from the viewpoint of psychological and pedagogical support of special students. In this regard, the Amur State University (Blagoveshchensk, Russia) became a basis for the research.

### **Materials and methods**

Pursuant to the hypothesis of the study, the goals and stages (I, II, III) were defined.

Stage I (diagnostic). At this stage, we have set the following goals: a) to reveal (systematize) difficulties and barriers emerging in the interaction with students with special educational needs within a framework of inclusive educational process; b) to generalize the experience of psychological and pedagogic support of special students in the climate of the higher school and intermediate vocational education.

To achieve this goal, the method of qualitative survey in focus groups consisting of academic staff was applied. The method was chosen because a focus group enables to reveal a range of opinions on the issue under study, analyse the behaviour of educational process participants, and interpret it. The scenario involved the discussion of three thematic groups: difficulties faced by the members of a focus group in the interaction with the students with special needs students with disabilities (1); barriers of teaching in a climate of inclusion (2); degree of success in teaching students with special educational needs, evaluation of the level of one's competence in teaching them (3).

The terms of survey:

- (1) The survey involved several respondents gathered in one place.
- (2) The members of the focus group were encouraged to interact.
- (3) A professional moderator followed the scenario and supported the discussion in compliance with the goals defined at the preliminary stage. However, the participants

were given an opportunity to speak spontaneously, and thus group dynamics were provided. The academic staff (n=120) was divided into 12 groups. The sessions lasted for 1–1.5 hours.

The scenario consisted of the following components:

- (1) Presentation of the goals of the meeting and the group structure.
- (2) Brief introductory remarks (topic of the discussion, its time limit and instructions for participants).
- (3) Initial stage. Acquaintance with each respondent and outlining of the general points.
- (4) Discussion on the main subject.
- (5) Specific discussion on the inclusion in Amur State University.
- (6) Final part. A review of the expressed opinions, supplementary investigation of opinions on some topics. Gratitude for the work.
- (7) In addition to the above elements of scenario, appropriate stimuli were used: videos, interviews, and analysis of statistics.

Stage II (development of professional competences). At this stage, the academic staff training was organized using the resource of supplementary (corporate) further training aimed at developing professionalism in the field of organization and realization of inclusive education.

The topic of the first training program was defined as “Psychological and pedagogical support of the inclusive educational process (in a climate of higher education and intermediate vocational education)” (program manager I. A. Makarova). The goal of the further training program was to elaborate the system of scientific representations of inclusive education in trainees and develop professional competences of psychological and pedagogical support of students in case of inclusion. The training curriculum of this program is represented in Table 1.

**Table 1. The topical education plan of the further training program**

No.	Name of sections (models) and topics	TOTAL, hours	Including		
			Lectures	Practical classes / laboratory work	Students' individual work
<b>1.</b>	<b>Regulatory and axiological foundations of the inclusive education</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>
1.1.	The inclusive education in a modern world. The framework of categories and concepts of the inclusive education	12	2	4	6
1.2.	Regulatory base of inclusive education in the context of international and Russian norms	10	2	2	6
1.3.	A sociocultural aspect of establishment and development of national systems of special education. Analysis of integration models	12	2	4	6
1.4.	Socialization of people with special needs as a goal of inclusive education. The uniform concept of the Special Federal State Standard for People with Special Needs: basic provisions	10	2	2	6
<b>2.</b>	<b>Psychological and pedagogical characteristics and support of the subjects of inclusive education</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>26</b>
2.1.	Theoretical bases of arranging the psychological-	10	4	2	4

	pedagogical support of people with special needs				
2.2.	Psychological and pedagogical peculiarities of children, adolescents, and youth with special needs. General and specific peculiarities of children with deviations in development. Pedagogical characteristics of students in the inclusive educational environment. The peculiarities of the worldview of persons with impaired development	16	4	4	8
2.3.	Requirements for the resource provision (conditions) of inclusive education	14	4	4	6
2.4.	Creation of conditions for supporting and enforcing health of students with special needs in process of training	10	2	2	6
2.5.	Conflict prevention in the inclusive educational environment	6	2	2	2
<b>3.</b>	<b>Projecting of individual educational programs and routes for people with special needs in the inclusive education</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>
3.1.	Projecting of individual educational routes and professional careers of people with special needs	12	2	4	6
3.2.	Individual approach in	12	2	4	6

	working with special students				
<b>4.</b>	<b>Psychological and pedagogical bases of elaborating the professional culture of a pedagogue of inclusive education</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>
4.1.	Axiological priorities in the activity of pedagogues of inclusive education	10	2	2	6
4.2.	Professional competence of a pedagogue of inclusive education	10	2	2	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>74</b>

The program contains four sections, each of which implies the combination of various forms of work. As evaluation funds, abstracts, inclusive environment modelling, presentations of the experience in the inclusive education of special students, and essays writing were used.

Efficiency of the mastering of the further training program content and elaboration of the competences of academic staff in psychological and pedagogical support were evaluated during defending project works on the following topics:

- (1) Modelling of the educational space of a university: inclusive approach.
- (2) Models of psychological and pedagogical support of students with special needs in a higher education establishment.
- (3) Modelling of psychological and pedagogical support of students with special needs in an intermediate vocational education establishment.
- (4) Utilization of the resource of upbringing work in the educational inclusion in higher education and intermediate vocal education.

- (5) Tutor support of inclusion: approaches, resources, areas of activities.
- (6) Evaluation of the efficiency of inclusive educational process of a university (college).
- (7) Strategy of elaborating individual educational routes for students with special needs.
- (8) Evaluation of social adaptation of students with special needs in the educational environment of a university (college).
- (9) Individual tasks and methods of their use to control residual knowledge and current performance of students with special needs.
- (10) Students' group work under conditions of inclusion: discipline case study.
- (11) Introduction of inclusive education in the educational system of the higher school and intermediate vocational education.
- (12) Job profile diagram of a pedagogue of inclusive education.
- (13) Consulting parents on the adaptation of a special student to the conditions of inclusive education.
- (14) Risks of inclusive education and ways to overcome them.

Stage III (control). The goal of this stage was to evaluate effectiveness of the work on the development of scientific representations of the inclusive education and development of professional competences of students' psychological and pedagogical support in the context of inclusion.

The final questioning involved all the members of focus groups who attended further training (n=120). It consisted of two parts and implied: a) CASE-interview consisting of 10 questions; b) self-evaluation of the developed competences.

The final questioning, part a). In the evaluation of the CASE-interview results, a type of reference was assessed. It shows how professors' opinion correlates to their behaviour in case of decision making and choosing a strategy of actions (Baws et al., 2009). The inclusive type of

reference is associated with the rights and freedoms of students with special needs. It is based on a clear-cut system of value references of a professor's axiological sphere in the worldview aspect. Anti-inclusive orientation implies a purely formal approach to teaching. It focuses on his or her own attitude, which is usually intolerant and discriminative. Possible orientation on socially approved variants of an answer and mixed reference were also taken into account.

### **The questions of the CASE-interview**

A student chooses an individual training schedule if he or she needs more time for learning material and fulfilling tasks, more time for filing individual accounts, more individual consultations, and an opportunity to take his examinations individually. Which factor is the most significant for you as a professor? Provide your arguments.

How do you know that it is difficult for a student to communicate and overcome communicative barriers? Provide your arguments.

What is more important in communication with special students — verbal or non-verbal behaviour? Provide your arguments.

How do you know that there are students with special educational needs in the group? Provide your arguments.

How do you make sure that all the information you give to students within the framework of teaching your discipline is available for special students and given in convenient mediums?

What will you do if a student addresses to the dean's office complaining of the discriminative attitude in your classes? Justify the sequence of your actions.

Respond to the complaint of a student with special needs: "You are unreasonably prejudicial to me..."

Give as many ways to stimulate students with special educational needs to get rid of fear of individual report in the learning group as possible.

Performance of a student with special educational needs has fallen off badly, not only in your classes. How will you explain the reasons? Provide your arguments.

Provide as many ways for professors to promote the idea of tolerance to special students (disabled, people with special health needs) as possible.

The final questioning, part b). Self-evaluation was associated only with the professional competences that would determine implementation of the educational process. Professors evaluated their competence in creating an individual training schedule and its implementation, comprehending the tasks of rehabilitation registered in the individual rehabilitation card of a disabled student, involving students in various learning and extra-curricular activities, etc.

## **Results**

Based on the results, three groups of difficulties have been revealed: philosophic-worldview (30%), projective-technological (40%), and psychological and pedagogical (30%). These difficulties, which actually are barriers for introducing inclusion from professors as organizers of the education process, have been most thoroughly worked on within the further training program. It is impossible to use the model of the complete inclusion without addressing them.

Further questioning of the professors and their evaluation of their competences at the third stage of the study made it possible to conclude that the professors' competence for psychological and pedagogical support of inclusive education had been essentially developed. The trainees reported that they were ready to account for students' special educational needs during the organization of educational process (70%); they understood how to adapt educational process (educational programs, academic load, schedule of classes' attendance, procedure of passing exams) (80%); they were ready to create or provide compensatory conditions of study to meet special educational needs (60 %); they were going to provide adequate participation of students

in the educational process and extra-curriculum activities (50%), and provide a corporate interaction in the psychological and pedagogical support of students with special needs (55%).

The types of references evaluated as scales, have been identified: inclusive (85%); anti-inclusive (10%); mixed (5%).

## **Discussion**

The philosophic-worldview difficulties of professors (40%) are associated with the failure to understand the very essence of inclusive approach, its philosophy, and key differences of inclusion from the traditional forms of education. For 19.2% of pedagogues, a student with special needs is associated with a special social status of a student with disability and inability or extremely poor ability to follow the programs of intermediate professional or higher education.

Particularly noteworthy are the professors' difficulties associated with the lack of skills of projecting education material in the context of inclusion, didactic projecting of education process for co-education of ordinary students and students with special needs, using special technologies in education and technologies of building pedagogical interaction with all the subjects of inclusive educational process (75%).

Psychological and pedagogical difficulties are caused by insufficient psychological and pedagogical competence. The professors admit that they are not well aware of the physical and mental abilities of the students with special needs (53.3%) and are out of touch with special methods of work with students with impaired hearing, vision, speech, locomotor apparatus, emotional-volitional sphere, and more complicated combined defects (81.6%). Generally, this results in a situation when the pedagogical technologies and organizational-methodical provision of educational process obviously do not meet the biological, social, and psychological peculiarities of people with special needs and their special educational needs. Almost 25% of

professors underestimate the resource of inclusive environment in the development of personality and social behaviour of both special and ordinary students.

The knowledge of pedagogues in both special and developmental psychology appeared to be insufficient (45%). This limits the ability of special students in satisfying their basic need for open personal communication between students and pedagogues and causes the feeling of psychological insecurity in their interpersonal relations. Thus, the strategy of interpersonal interrelations cannot have a positive impact on the worldview positions of the student as participants of the educational process, change their mind-sets, and reduce the level of personal victimhood in the “person — environment” system (Fominykh, 2012).

Generalized experience of working with special students has shown that most professors rely on their intuition and try to find the best ways to include the students in the education process themselves (60%). The professors offered such students individual tasks and often gave more time for preparation. Still, the situation when the impairment in students’ development did not become a reason for changing the structure of tasks or periods for performing the tasks was widespread, too. Besides, conflict situations were registered. It is telling that sometimes the professor took an acoustic apparatus for a prohibited earbud, or deterioration of health during the examination for attempts to seek pity and thus heighten examination score. Moreover, the interaction with students was not quite correct, which affected their self-esteem and psychological state.

In the light of the foregoing, one can conclude that the academic staff needs psychological and pedagogical support in its professional activity and specialized training based on the resources of supplementary professional education at a corporate level. Some phenomena have been discovered: the effective experience of teaching does not guarantee that a professor will find necessary technologies in teaching special students himself and apply the technologies

successfully; professors' attitudes often make it difficult for them to communicate with special students, which leads to their discrimination and underestimation. When organizing an educational process for special students, their opportunities and abilities should be taken into account. The positive experience of creating an educational process indicates that such practice should be extended and special competences should be developed. Taking into account peculiarities of the post-technocratic model of supplementary professional education, the educational process within the further training program was arranged with a focus on the current professional difficulties (Shafranova, 2014). In this regard, much attention was given to the development of general professional activities of professors, such as ability to exercise students' rights in practice; create conditions for their proper learning as well as interaction and communication with all the other subjects of educational process; participate in creating psychologically comfortable and secure educational environment in the professional educational organization; raise the level of psychological competence of the participants of the educational process; apply health saving technologies in the professional activities; observe the compliance with the ethical rules of the profession, etc.

Specific attention was given to the development of special professional activities through elaborating tolerant attitude to special students and reflection on empathic interaction with them; improved awareness of theoretical-methodological bases of inclusive education and its conceptual and categorical framework; elaboration of individual education plans, adapted programs and learning kits for students with special needs; organization of various forms of training sessions. The skills of interaction with all the participants of inclusive environment and creation of psychologically comfortable conditions for them to optimize social-rehabilitation events are important too (Zeer, 2003). It should be noted that similar views on the development

of general and special professional activities of pedagogues associated with professional training are described in the works of other authors (Slyusarev, 1992; Martynova, 2015).

During theoretical training within the further training program, the following theoretical methods were applied: systematization of scientific notions and provisions to determine the essence of the problem; empirical methods of collecting information about the state of the object under study (pedagogical supervision, investigational interview, psychological tests, sociometric methods, techniques focused on studying social position, analysis of documents) (Bordovskiy , et al. , (Eds.), 2005).

The number of traditional lectures and seminars was minimal; most practical classes were devoted to project works. Such reflexive-active form of organizing practical classes allowed participants to “live” a certain stage of projecting psychological-pedagogical support in the framework of each section and work on the project independently at their own pace and according to their own individual educational trajectory. Mastering each section of the program implies obtaining a certain product, which is, on the one hand, a component of a final product, and on the other hand, the result of the development of competences, which indicate the processes of professors’ self-development and self-education. The arrangement of the education process as a way to produce sense and understanding acts as a kind of guarantee for the transformation of another person’s into “one’s own another person’s” (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 381–393, 429–432) to provide the understanding of the essence of psychological and pedagogical support of inclusion. In order to ensure the understanding of educational process by an organizer, one should work not only with the meaning of some element of the education content, but also with its sense, linking it with the social experience of a learner — his or her knowledge, skills, emotions, values, etc. (Kraevskiy, 2009). Thus, the accents were intentionally shifted to self-

education activities and more intensive workout of scientific-methodical provision on inclusive practice.

It is noteworthy that the offered program of further education is based on the idea of psychological and pedagogical support being a comprehensive and system activity, which involves the creation of social-psychological and pedagogical conditions for successful education and development of each student in the educational environment. The practice shows that special students need assistance in independent coping with difficulties during their professional development (Piskun, 2009). In this sense, the psychological and pedagogical support is an applied area in training specialists. It provides and facilitates the process of learning fundamental theoretic and applied competences; besides, it ensures their better mastering. In this context, the understanding of support offered by E. F. Zeer seems to be the most appropriate; here, it is treated as the assistance to an individual in elaborating orientation field of development, where he or she takes the responsibility for his or her actions (Zeer, 2003; Zeer and Popova, 2015). However, it is important to understand that the professors that conduct psychological and pedagogical support are not obliged to give a supported person a readymade solution of problems, or make a choice for him or her, etc. This leads to the stimulation of individual responsibility for the quality of one's academic and practical training, while responsible attitude to one's self-development enables special students to adopt an active subject position more quickly. Using the terms of T. V. Meng, educational space becomes "subjectized" (Meng, 2011). Still, the environmental approach plays an important role in the inclusive practice. Its main methodological line is the management of establishment and development of a student's personality mediated by the environment. A positive (from pedagogical viewpoint) environment creates conditions for elaborating and fixing a certain positive lifestyle (Manuylov, 2002; Plugina et al., 2012; Makarova, 2013). The inclusive educational environment gives a special student

necessary information, data, knowledge, etc., while the ability to get and transform information is acquired during learning. Potentials of the environment determine the evaluation of its qualities. Therefore, the inclusive educational environment can be evaluated from the positions of completeness and variety of the means (potential, resources) that it offers for education, research, organization, and scientific-methodical activities.

Therefore, psychological and pedagogical support unfolds within a framework of a person-centred and environmental approach.

This study confirmed the proposed hypothesis about the successful development of professional competences necessary in psychological and pedagogical support of students with special educational needs using the further training of academic staff within a framework of supplementary professional education with account for their working experience.

The program offered for further training can be applied in the practical activity of higher or intermediate vocational education to enlarge the competences of academic staff in the psychological and pedagogical support of students with special needs.

## **Conclusions**

1. The difficulties revealed and barriers encountered by academic staff can be provisionally classified into three groups: philosophic and worldview, projective and technological, and psychological and pedagogical. They make the integration with special students much more difficult and reduce the quality of education. The condition of inclusive referencing is the acceptance of inclusive education ideas.

2. Various teaching experience does not guarantee that the required technologies and approaches to teaching special students will be applied efficiently. Besides, it does not guarantee that the educational needs of special students will be met. The academic staff needs its professional competences aimed at providing the inclusive educational process to be

supplemented and developed. In fact, academic staff needs psychological and pedagogic support in the transition to working in new situation of inclusion. They face difficulties mostly in the adaptation of educational programs, planning of individual educational routes, application of special technologies for teaching and creation of efficient education.

3. The resource of supplementary professional education is efficient for the development of academic staff competences, if a further training program focuses on addressing basic difficulties at the stage of inclusion introduction. Various forms of work within a framework of corporate further training contribute to the creation of an inclusive education environment and development of the inclusive educational process. The resource of supplementary professional education makes it possible to have a subtle perception of the development of academic staff competences, ensuring specialists' readiness to work in the situation of inclusion.

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