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THE FOUNDATIONS OF AN INCLUSIVE PARADIGM FOR CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

The aim of the article is a theoretical modeling of the inclusive paradigm of contemporary education. The study was based on a literature study and secondary data analysis. The article presents the data collected in Russia in 2014-2017. Based on an analysis of the inclusive paradigm conceptual framework, the statements of cultural-historical theory and system-activity methodology as well as the results of empirical studies on inclusive education, the authors come to conclusions on the conditions of an inclusive paradigm development. The evolution of the inclusive paradigm in contemporary education requires the implementation of various models of professional cooperation, as well as new technologies and methods based on the theory of joint activities.

Keywords: *inclusion, inclusive education, special educational needs, methodology, cultural-historical theory, individualization of education.*

Introduction

Today´s world pursues openness and diversity. The idea of an inclusive society and democratic culture defines new strategies and models in the development of social institutions. The fundamental principle of inclusion resides in the freedom of choice and in the individual right of any person to be different from the others. Education must meet the challenges of contemporary society and carry out a broad reform that will allow the principles of openness and cultural diversity to be realised in the educational process. This paper focuses on the theoretical modeling of the inclusive paradigm of contemporary education. The study was based on a literature study and secondary data analysis. The article presents the data collected in Russia in 2014-2017.

Conceptual foundations of the inclusive paradigm

The influence of the idea of inclusion in education has been of such a system character, that one can actually speak of changes not only in the organisational program and content field, but also in the axiological area where contemporary education is developing. The withdrawal of the idea of "unteachability" from the legislation of various countries along with the institutionally guaranteed right for the joint education of children with special needs[1], results in a deep transformation of the basis of psychological and pedagogical contemporary education. They also bring forward new activity models and the forms of their implementation. This process is giving a form to a new inclusive paradigm in the educational system.

International researchers from the countries where the concept of inclusion in education is put into practice, repeatedly looked into the idea or development of a methodology of an inclusive process and into the analysis of its dynamics and content. Many of them have different opinions regarding the philosophical and empirical study of inclusion. Political adherents of human rights (Farrell, 2000; Lindsay, 2003, 2007) claim that inclusion is a matter of human rights, and it is not up for debate as it does not need any scientific proof. Others think that there is a necessity for scientific research and empirical proof for the evaluation of the efficiency of inclusive practice. The results and efficiency of inclusive education can vary significantly depending on the definition of inclusion (Gruner-Gandhi, 2007). Many researchers regard inclusion as a completely different educational process compared to special teaching and integration (Anderson, Klassen, & Georgiou, 2007; Lindsay, 2003, 2007).

According to a great number of researchers in inclusive education, methodological and ethical problems in this area require a flexible interdisciplinary approach, both to research methods, and the definition of the phenomenon of inclusion itself (Odom et al., 2004; Schwartz et al., 1995; Stoneman, 2007). In the aggregate, we can distinguish four major methodological and ethical problems in the research area of inclusive education, as follows: 1) criteria under which a school can be called inclusive, and who sets them; 2) how to identify inclusion in a school; 3) how to document changes in students' development; 4) how to make sure that the students take part in the study (Nind et al., 2004).

British researchers, the authors of "Inclusion rates" a practical guide, introduce three interconnected aspects of inclusion development: creating an inclusive culture, the development of inclusive policy, and the implementation of inclusive practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2007, p. 15). Inclusive policy is embodied in the mission of an educational organisation, and its specific priorities, i.e.

[1] According to the Salamanca statement, the term 'special educational needs' refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties.

general approaches to the organisation of the educational process, and to the establishment and development of external connections. It also affects the selection of clear priorities for the distribution of resources and setting stages and terms for completing tasks of inclusive education in information, HR and organisational policy. Inclusive practices are brought to life in the area of the most important functions of inclusive activity, as well as scales and levels of its implementation, in the optimal structure of the educational process, integration of its functions (educational, formative, collecting, developing, creative and health-related), and their resourcing. Inclusive culture supposes the defining and implementation of a special philosophy of inclusive education and a system of its essential and professional values (Booth, Ainscow, 2007).

The problem of creating an inclusive culture is one of the crucial topics for contemporary inclusion studies. Kugelmass (2004) undertook a study in three inclusive schools in USA, UK and Portugal in order to define inclusive characteristics of the culture in those schools (Kugelmass, 2004). The outcome showed that the inclusive approach in those schools was not a result of a mechanical processes of restructuration of various elements of educational institution, or the introduction of new instructive procedures. On the contrary, all three schools put the emphasis on joint processes involving everyone in the group. In each institution the practice of joint work and participation was based on (and supported by) common values shared both by the students and the staff, in accordance with which, the special features of every child and adult were recognised.

Analysis of research in the field of educational inclusion demonstrates the unclear and often controversial character of the concept of interpretations of "inclusive education". It determines the relevance of the theoretical modeling of the inclusive paradigm of contemporary education, which is the purpose of this study. The proposed model allows for the development of approaches to empirical studies, examples of which are given in the second part of this article.

In this article we suggest to consider the following conceptual foundations of an inclusive paradigm of contemporary education:

1. The cornerstone of inclusion is formed by the values of acceptance of diversity overcoming the borders dividing people into "normal" and "special" ones (handicapped, migrants, others in general, etc.). From the perspective of social constructivism, any categorisations of such kind entails potential risk of their usage for discrimination of a person, including when such help is offered which presupposes only the helper's active position (Keil, Miller, & Cobb, 2006). Social institutions are gradually breaking away from the average statistical norm invalidation of all differences. It is the recognition of diversity of people that is becoming a new norm governing

social interaction (UNESCO, 2007). Paliocosta and Blandford (2010) see inclusion as the acceptance of learners' diversity within common groups, and the responsibility for it.

2. The individualisation of education, taking into account the special needs of each student, his/her educational needs and limitations, becomes the key principle of inclusive education focused on the demonstration of the subject position, initiative and activity by the child. A subject position permits the child to be completely included both in education and social life (Rubinshtein, 2002). Comprehending a subject as a "reason for oneself" and explaining the subjectivity as his/her ability to be the source and the results of his/her own activity at the same time (Petrovsky, 2015), we come to the core essence of inclusive education as a support for a person in the process of active acquirement of his/her own capacities and opportunities provided by the environment, a transition to the level of "con-sistency" and self-dependence, finding oneself as a personality and taking the responsibility for that. "Opportunities never become reality just by themselves, it happens only through the activity of a subject who perceives them as opportunities for him/herself, chooses some of them and places the "bet", investing him/herself and certain resources into bringing this opportunity into life. The subject takes the responsibility for converting this opportunity taking an internal obligation to make efforts to bring it into action" (Leontyev, 2011, p. 27).

3. The value of development as a main idea of L. S. Vygotsky's cultural historical theory is reflected in the changing goals of contemporary education. They are noticeably different from previous ones, and apart from academic performance also cover the formation of competences (personal, communicative, cognitive and creative) which are vital for a child in the current world. As an alternative to academic performances, federal state education standards introduce non-eligible development outcomes, such as personal results and life competences, which discards the application of the learning disability principle that was limiting access to education in recent times.

4. Inclusion is both inter-psychological in nature, and has an intra-psychological component. Inclusion into social relations supposes personal changes, and mostly depends on them. An individual inclusion process is based on the overcoming of internal personal contradictions, on the formation of personal and social identity, and of recognising one's own special features and needs. Personal educational needs are developing under the influence of group norms and sociocultural environmental factors, on one hand, and are determined by the system of internal attitudes and values, on another

hand. In other words, they become the way for individual, personal self-actualisation in a specific sociocultural context. The principle of subjectivity in an inclusion context is directly linked to the concept of need as a necessity that a person experiences at both objective and subjective levels, which becomes a source of his/her activity, and development of his/her own personality and society in general (Kodzhaspirovy, 2005). Herewith, if a biological need is an internal and homeostatic one, then a social need, including an educational one, is not belonging exclusively to the person, in it a person interacts with the society getting involved in social connections with other people and communities.

5. The foundation of inclusive education resides in the concept of "overcoming the barriers on the learning path and full-scale participation in school life" (Booth & Ainscow, 2007). This social model is completely opposite to the medical model linking learning difficulties to medical diagnosis or the handicapped state of a child. An approach allowing an understanding of the barriers on the way to education (Booth & Ainscow, 2007), is associated with system-activity methodology (Leontyev, 2011; Rubinshtein, 2002, and others) which makes the modification of the educational environment possible in accordance with the educational needs of children.

6. Design and organisation of the educational environment. The environmental approach is a theory and a technology of a mediated (via the environment) management of educational process where the main focus is on the stimulation of internal activity of a child, his/her self-education, self-nurturing and self-development (Petrovsky, 2015; Rubinshtein, 2002). An educational environment is understood as a complex of influences, conditions and opportunities of the development of a child's personality. Whilst these influences are the source of various cultural experience (knowledge, skills, relations), the conditions are the guarantee of a successful acquirement of the above mentioned experience (feelings, empathyand multiple repetitions), and the opportunities become the symbol of the active principle not only of the environment, but on the child him/herself who can perform the selection of objects for his/her "own" activity in the environment as well as the way, form, pace and intensity of interaction with them (Gaidukevich, 2007). Practical implementation of the environmental approach in inclusive education allows for the provision of a "personal position" for every child where he/she is accepted as he/she is and where he/she can reveal and realise personal capacities on the maximal scale.

7. An interdisciplinary approach provides for an efficiency in solving professional problems faced by the specialists involved in inclusive processes. Owing to interdisciplinary connections the team approach to specialists'

work can be applied, which is extremely necessary in the organisation of the educational process taking into account the whole variety of educational needs of children.

8. An inclusive educational model can be characterised by the focus both on the diversity of individual interests, and fast changes in social and economic development. This model solves the task of consistency of education through planning of variable educational trajectories capable of dynamic formation and answering the demands of the new times. This continuity should in its turn, be implemented through the consistency of the tasks of psychological and pedagogical support, achieved educational results and the technologies of such an achievement.

As far as a paradigm is an aggregate of certain ideas, principles, methodological foundations and value attitudes which are accepted and shared within community, then the transition to an inclusive paradigm consequently requires system changes in education.

Take notice that if a state educational policy is based on a dominant category of "health limitations", it enters into a serious polemic not only with the social model of inclusion but with the psychological comprehension of the humanistic character of the idea itself. Thereby, an artificial limitation of development of an inclusive process in education takes place together with the reduction of the meaning and essence of inclusion as a social concept centered on the acknowledgment of subject activity of any person independently from his/her state of health.

Empirical studies of teachers' readiness for the acceptation of inclusive paradigm

The primary factor of successful implementations of inclusive paradigms in contemporary education is the extent of readiness of the teachers to the changes connected with the bringing of inclusion principles into life within educational process. It is the teacher who plays the crucial role in the creation of a tolerant and accepting environment in the group which is appropriate for inclusive education.

Some researchers (Bond & Castagnera, 2006; Yudina & Alekhina, 2015) point out the "transformation experience" discovered by the specialists that became inclusive teachers. Professional transformation is driven by the acquirement of new professional skills, with a changing of their attributions regarding "special" students, as well as of the axiological aspect of professional tasks (Alekhina, 2012).

During the studies undertaken by the Institute for Inclusive Education Problems of MSUPE (Samsonova & Melnikova 2016; Samsonova, Semago, & Gorbunova, 2017) the specifics of the psychological readiness of teachers for the implementation of inclusive practice was analysed. Three hundred and thirty two teachers from 12 Moscow educational complexes took part in the research. The questionnaire consisted of 2 question pools. One section focused on the diagnostics of teachers' personal readiness and allowed for a revealing of certain values, beliefs, and psychological barriers (including professional stereotypes). The second question pool served to examine teachers' "activity readiness" as instrumental to working in an inclusive environment which consisted of information and knowledge components.

The majority of teachers (86%) comprehend inclusive education as the "inclusion of children with "health limitations" in the general education process", while the Law of the Russian Federation on Education defines inclusive education as provision of equal access to the education for all learners taking into consideration their special educational needs and individual capabilities. A significant part of respondents (33%) believed that only handicapped children with developmental problems needed inclusive education. Moreover, the research outcome revealed the existence of a psychological (emotional) barrier when it came to work with children with disabilities and health limitations. For some teachers (54%) that barrier was associated with the rejection of joint education of such children in the school group, and for others (46%) was connected with the recognition of their own professional deficiencies.

It can be suggested that one of the reasons why some teachers reject the idea of inclusion is their incorrect understanding of the concept itself. Transformation of such an understanding is an important goal in the framework of enhancing teachers' professional competence.

Thus wise, one of the studies organised by the Institute for Inclusive Education Problems of MSUPE (Alekhina, & Kostina, 2014) was dedicated to exposure of the fact that special educational needs were intrinsic not only to children with health limitations but also to their typically developing peers. One hundred and ninety nine first year school students and 202 fifth year students from inclusive Moscow schools answered the questionnaire designed by British researchers (D. Porter, G. Daniels). The results showed that special educational needs of a school student did not necessarily result from health limitations. Even though the percentage of children with such limitations was under 8% of the sample, 83% of the first school year and 76% of the fifth year students reported difficulties they experienced in the school. The most challenging of the difficulties were linked to educational activity by the first year students (7%), communication with peers (65%) and teachers (32%). Sixty five percent of fifth

year students mentioned difficulties with educational activity, 28% of them – with communication with peers, and 35% had problems in communication with teachers. Therefore, this study demonstrated that various categories of children needed support, not only the ones with health limitations. Besides, young learners needed such support not only to acquire academic knowledge but to build relations with their classmates and adults. The acquaintance of teachers with the results of this study enables a switching of their professional vision from a contradistinction of students with health limitations and other children in the group to the dimension of observation and analysis of educational needs common for different children from their group, and looking for a way to meet them.

This fact is confirmed by another study dedicated to revealing the relation between the socio-psychological status of children with Down syndrome attending inclusive groups and the attitude of teachers towards them (Yudina, & Alekhina, 2016). The choice of the category of included children with special needs was determined by the visible differences between them and their peers.

This research was held in a Moscow mainstream school with an over 10 year experience of inclusive practice involving children with special needs, children with Down syndrome among them. The sample consisted of 117 students of 2-4th year 7-11 years old and 6 primary school teachers with professional experience varying from 1 to 25 years. At least one student with Down syndrome was included in each of six investigated classes. The following research methods were used for data collection: criterion-oriented observation, interview and psychodiagnostic techniques (the sociometric technique, the Relations color test, and the projective drawing technique).

Statistical analysis demonstrated a significant correlation ($p = 0.038$) between the variability of repertoire of teacher's actions during the lesson focused on the inclusion of children with Down syndrome into general educational process and the amount of classmates accepting such children. Thus, the activity-related component of teachers' readiness for inclusive education, the ability to create constructive relations within the group and various strategies of inclusion of children into educational process allowed for the successful implementation of the principles of inclusion.

Conclusions

Based on an analysis of the conceptual basis of the inclusive paradigm and the results of empirical research, several important conclusions can be drawn.

1. The practical implementation of the principles of inclusion requires profound scientific analysis. The results of the cited studies make it possible to solve

contradictions in the organisation of inclusive practices that are influenced by political declarations, often one-sidedly understanding inclusion as the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education.

2. This sociocultural gap leads to difficulties in didactics, programs and in the organisation of the educational process, and requires both wide educational field and open professional discussions. This sets serious tasks not only for the services of psychological support in education, but also for the leaders of educational organisations, who have an influence on the formation of an inclusive culture of an educational organisation.

3. All educational process participants (administration, teachers, specialists, children, and their parents) are in need of an extensive discussion concerning the value basis for the inclusive paradigm. The next step after discussing and understanding inclusion would be to master new ways of building relations and interaction within inclusive educational process, covering people with different capabilities and educational needs.

4. The evolution of the inclusive paradigm in contemporary education requires the development and implementation of various models of professional cooperation and interaction of teachers and psychological and pedagogical support specialists, as well as the development of new technologies and methods based on the theory of joint activities and related to the inclusion of all its participants.

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Summary

The article describes the inclusive paradigm as a methodological basis for research as well as for transformation of inclusive policy, practice and culture. The article emphasizes the contradiction between the social model of inclusion and the use of the category "health limitations" in Russian educational policy. This approach creates the barriers to inclusive education development because

it reduces the meaning of inclusion as a social model which admits the freedom of everyone's subject activity despite the health conditions.

The authors consider following the conceptual foundations of an inclusive paradigm: the value of students diversity; the individualisation of educational process that is oriented to a child's subject position, initiative and activity; the value of development; the principle of sociocultural interaction; the system-activity methodology that presumes the transformation of educational environment according to different educational needs; the environmental and the interdisciplinary approaches; the principle of continuity in the individual student's trajectory implementation.

The inclusive paradigm allows for the development of approaches to empirical research. The article analyses the results of empirical studies realised by the Institute for inclusive education research team in several regions of the Russian Federation.

One of the studies considers the specifics of psychological readiness of 332 Moscow teachers for the implementation of inclusive practice. The majority of teachers (86%) comprehend inclusive education as "inclusion of children with "health limitations" in the general education process", while the Law of the Russian Federation on Education defines inclusive education as provision of equal access to the education for all learners taking into consideration their special educational needs and individual capabilities. A significant part of respondents (33%) believed that only handicapped children with developmental problems needed inclusive education. Besides, the research revealed the existence of a psychological (emotional) barrier to teaching children with disabilities and health limitations.

Another study examined the statement that not only children with health limitations have special educational needs but also their typically developing peers do. Even though the percentage of children with such limitations was under 8% of the sample, 83% of the first school year and 76% of the fifth year students reported difficulties they experienced in the school. The study demonstrated that various categories of children needed support to acquire academic knowledge as well as to build relations with their classmates and adults. This fact is confirmed by another study dedicated to revealing the relationship between the socio-psychological status of children with Down syndrome attending inclusive groups and the attitude of teachers towards them. Statistical analysis demonstrated a significant correlation between the variability of repertoire of teacher's actions during the lesson focused on the inclusion of children with Down syndrome into general educational process and the amount of classmates accepting the children.

To conclude the article demonstrates the influence of the inclusive paradigm on an empirical research design and data interpretation as well as transformations of inclusive policy and practice.