

The International Experience of Inclusive Education: Resources for Introduction

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Abstract. The present article raises the issue of organizing special education within the scope of the inclusive education system; consideration is given to the issue of integrating inclusive education into the Russian educational context. The authors conclude that there is a legal framework to tackle this problem. The authors examine the history of inclusive education; four specific integrational periods are identified. The article also highlights the basic steps in introducing inclusive education in the Russian Federation and challenges associated with this process.

The main steps in the implementation of inclusive education in Russia include: the legal framework (international conventions, federal laws, professional standards), the choice of an inclusive educational model, the practical implementation of inclusive education in educational institutions.

The authors point out a number of difficulties associated with the implementation of inclusive education in the Russian Federation: the lack of an All-Russian program for the social integration of children with disabilities, the lack of a proper model for the integration of inclusive education, the lack of a continuity principle for organizing effective lifelong learning at all stages of education.

1. Introduction

The human right to education is one of the most important human rights in the modern world. In this context, access to education for all categories of people, including those with special health needs, becomes increasingly obvious [10, C. 6].

At all times, lives of people with disabilities, their successful social rehabilitation directly depended on social status of this category of people. As we study the international experience of special training through the prism of social attitude towards problems of people with disabilities, we may trace public attitudes at different time periods and their impact on the development of integrational processes in education.

2. Materials and methods

In order to grasp the essence of inclusive education let us look back at the history of integration, numbering several centuries. Here four specific periods could be identified.

The first period covered the Stone Age, the Bronze Age and the early Middle Ages. During this period social attitudes towards people with disabilities were ambivalent due to mythological, religious and regulatory backgrounds of the society. Barely any precedents were created in inclusive training. The efforts to integrate disabled people were inefficient due to the lack of scientific basis. We are

familiar with Kiev Russ experience - the Statute of the Orthodox Church enforced the churches to take care of the poor and holy fools establishing specialized schools, in which “among orphans, beggars and other people there were children both with impairments or without” [9, p.11].

The beginning of the second period could be attributed to the Renaissance. Humanistic ideas changed public attitudes towards people with disabilities but in education itself those changes were reflected only in the early 18th century with the growing interest of the scientific community in educational problems of disabled children. At that time, integration, as a branch of education science, stemmed from experiments, conducted by I.G. Pestalozzi, which were connected with joint child-care of orphans and disabled children (1746-1827).

The key feature of the third period was the enhancement of knowledge in Defectology. That period was characterized by finalizing the national systems of special education. The right to universal primary education was proclaimed, in particular for disabled people. Unsuccessful attempts to organize joint training preceded final exclusion of special education from mass education. The educational policy was subjugated to the interests of society, which often excluded people with specific educational needs. The value of their education consisted in participation in socially useful work so that people with special health needs could support themselves and would not be a burden to others. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, an idea took root in Europe and in the USA, according to which the disabled were useless, which was not beneficial to the development of special pedagogy. The discrimination peculiar to the midtwentieth century, led to desolation of special institutions.

The fourth period in developing integrational education started in the mid1940s. Having experienced the atrocities of the WWII, the world took a new look at individuality and originality. A number of major laws, which enforced the right of disabled children to education and full participation in social life, were introduced. Many developed countries started actively introducing principles of integrational pedagogy. Curriculum modification became a necessity alongside training for teachers to work with special children, development of methodological approaches that took into account interests of all the stakeholders involved in the educational process, which resulted in clarification of terminology and origin of a new term – inclusion – a wider integration process which implied equal access to education and development of general education in terms of adapting to the needs of all children.

Thus, over a long period changes in the attitudes of state and society towards the rights of disabled people could be observed in many countries: from the mere acknowledgment of the possibility to teach special children successfully to the awareness of the need for their training and social protection.

3. Discussion

Modern Russian society is characterized by a controversy towards educational problems of disabled children. Stereotypes that prevail in our country describe disabled people as defective and inferior, which results in developing children’s dependency attitudes. This group of people becomes artificially isolated from the society. Frequently enough the idea of inclusive education is negatively assessed, in particular, by parents of able-bodied children. Such a position is fairly reasonable since being perfect in theory, the idea of inclusive education acquires a twisted look in practice. Principles of humanity and democracy are substituted by the only principle – “Do no harm”. Thus we could agree with Professor R. Ziegler, the famous specialist of inclusive education, who considers such a response of a society to joint teaching of children with diverse learning needs to be a manifestation of “fear of the unknown” [3], the very unknown, which, on the one hand, could result in quality changes in educational processes and eventually in the whole social life, when “integration is considered to be a form of being, co - existence of ordinary people and disabled ones” [5], but on the other hand, could seriously destabilize an already vulnerable Russian educational system. Everything depends on how the programme would be implemented, whether the mistakes of other countries, the Russian mentality and many other factors, which have a direct impact on the success of inclusive programmes, would be taken into account.

4. Results

Let us review the basic steps of implementing inclusive education in the Russian educational context. Special attention is drawn to creating conditions for disabled people to meet their rights in the sphere of education at both federal and regional levels. Inclusive education has been developing actively since the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and introduction of the Federal Education Act of the Russian Federation of December 29, 2012, no.273-FA, where for the first time the legislator formalized the concept of inclusive education in article 2, paragraph 27 [7].

It is worthy of note that children with special health needs start being integrated into the system of continuous education at a very early age. As noted by the researcher E. Anufrieva, there are specific conditions for implementing inclusive education in kindergartens. She provides the following statistics – in 2016-2017 the number of disabled children in kindergartens increased by 13%, and in secondary schools 171064 children with special health needs studied inclusively, as well as 154507 children with disabilities. Compared to 2015, the number of disabled children in inclusive classes increased by 9338 kids [1].

These statistics demonstrate that Russian kindergartens and schools still have conditions to integrate inclusive education. Moreover, professional standards, which set qualification requirements for specialists working with this category of children, have been introduced at the legislative level.

In fact, there are a number of professional standards to be met in inclusive educational institutions, such as a psychologist, a tutor, a speech therapist, a teacher of the deaf, a teacher of the blind, a teacher of the mentally defective, a disability specialist, etc. Annually, about 150 million rubles is spent from the budget on teacher training courses [2].

We do believe that all preconditions are created in Russia for introducing the concept of inclusive education at the organizational level.

Russian inclusive education is highly promising in terms of becoming a new educational system with the idea of continuous sustainable development from kindergartens to higher educational institutions.

At present, a number of foreign inclusive models exist in the educational area. However, the mere import of a foreign model into the Russian reality could be obviously inefficient without proper comprehension of its didactic values [6].

While the integration of individual learners with special health needs into the general educational system is no longer a big issue, the question of transforming the entire system so that all stakeholders would be able to realize their individual needs remains open. The development of inclusive education should carry the paradigm shift of mass and special training. At this stage of development one should speak about moving from theory to implementation of rules, postulates and models concerning people with special health needs so that inclusion would not become an illusion. Inclusive educational system should serve as a platform for children and young people to provide answers to all their expectations and needs. The shift towards an integrated and holistic approach, based on individual needs of learners with a view to their educational needs, is required [8].

5. Conclusion

During the recent 20-25 years a wide range of innovations has taken place in the education system as such. This significant transformation has not spared the special education sector, namely individuals with physical limitations. At the state level, tangible steps in inclusive education started being implemented only in the first decade of the 21st century. New Federal Education Standards have become the first productive steps which recognized the needs of disabled children. Prior to that, they were taken into account only in the system of special education.

In fact, numerous difficulties should be noted, arising from the introduction of inclusive education in Russia. Thus, the researchers N. Malafeev and N. Shmatko consider the lack of an All – Russian programme for social integration of children with limited capabilities to be a key challenge for introducing inclusive education in Russia. Without creation and approbation of such a programme, the introduction of inclusive education might face serious challenges which involve combining the pace of

instruction and quantitative knowledge for children with physical limitations and able-bodied ones, as well as manifestation of intolerance and aggression [4].

The analysis of challenges stemming from introduction of inclusive education in the context of the Russian reality is not exhaustive. Researchers still have to find out the content and place of inclusive education within the entire educational system. The modern pedagogy faces a major challenge - to develop the model of inclusive education at different levels – from kindergartens to higher educational institutions in strict compliance with the principles of continuity to ensure an efficient continuous educational process.

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