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## ENSURING THE PERSONALITY-CENTERED APPROACH IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper analyzes urgent aspects of implementing inclusive education in the post-Soviet countries. The authors have researched the nature and peculiar features of the personality centered approach in teaching children with special educational needs. Functional principles of personality-centered teaching technologies in inclusive classrooms have been defined. The article offers the characteristics of negative aspects of inclusive education.*

**KEY WORDS:** *personality centered approach, inclusive education, humanization of educational process, children with special educational needs, inclusive educational and developmental environment, adaptation*

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## **Setting the problem**

There is a global tendency in changing public attitude towards people with disabilities considering their role and potential in multicultural global society, at the same time this movement is hindered by profound behavioral patterns differentiating the inclusive paradigm in the light of mental archetypes. To some extent ethno-psychological features of perception determine the attitude of individual communities or individuals to people with disabilities.

Post-soviet countries are able to enter Europe's educational space under provision of adhering to the principles of humanization and democratization in all spheres of life and respect for rights and freedoms of all, including persons with disabilities. The right to obtain quality education irrespective of race, gender, status or abilities is inviolable. Therefore, there appear new trends of socialization, contributing to supportive and respectful attitude towards people with functional or mental impairments.

Problem of professional training of future teacher is revealed in scientific works of scholars (H. Vasianovych, I. Ziaziun, V. Kremen, H. Filipchuk and others). Problem of inclusive education is revealed in scientific works of scholars (H. Vasianovych, O. Budnyk, N. Andriichuk, T. Skrypnyk, A. Chyz and others). Inclusive education provides for creating and maintaining such an educational environment that meets the needs and abilities of each child, regardless peculiarities of psychophysical development. Inclusive education, as stated by A. Kolupayeva, is a flexible, individualized learning system local to children with special educational needs in conditions of mainstream school (Kolupayeva, Savchuk, 2011). V. Bondar, a Ukrainian scholar considers integrated education being both a process and a result for students with special needs in an environment of comprehensive school in a special class by creatively adapted teaching methods and techniques (Bondar, 2011, p. 10 - 14).

Many developed countries (the USA, the UK, Germany, Finland, Italy, etc.) gained invaluable positive experience in ensuring successful education for people with disabilities in primary, secondary and higher school.

Ukraine has not yet had any accurate statistical survey as to how many children with special educational needs are integrated into mainstream educational institutions. This number is constantly increasing, giving not only the growth in congenital malfunctions, but also in acquired traumas (for instance,

the ongoing military conflict in the east of Ukraine has resulted in a soaring number of children with disabilities). Hence the integration is unregulated and spontaneous while inclusive education calls for more systematic development. Today, regional and local infant welfare offices (responsible for providing psychological, medical and pedagogical consultations for children and their parents) revealed a significant number of children with psychological and physical impairments, many of them go to mainstream schools (Kolupayeva, Savchuk, 2011, p. 21).

The inclusive process is dominated by the idea of a personality centered education that is grounded on the principles of western humanistic psychology: the primary value of personality, mutual respect and empathy, awareness of individual needs and demands, etc. (Bekh, 2015, p. 15). According to I. Bekh, the personality-centered educational model is aimed at inspiring a person who lives in a changing world, developing an individual as a subject of culture and his/her own life.

Humanistic principles in inclusive education are based primarily on: the *principle of natural socialization* (i.e. teaching a child locally, without separation from a family); *using additional methods of special education*, including parental choice of forms and methods of teaching; *realities of state funding* (financial allowances to be provided to a child with special needs rather than to school, thus giving an opportunity for parents to choose educational services by themselves). The personality centered principle in an inclusive process manifests itself in the transition to alternative models of psychological and educational support, free choice of forms of instructing children, levels and ranges of educational services (Kolupayeva, 2009).

*Aim of the article* is to ground the essence of inclusive education as an effective mean of pupils' socialization.

### **The personality centered approach in a social and educational interaction**

School life is multifaced, because a student establishes a variety of social relationships. Most children have no difficulties in communicating and dealing with their peers, friends, teachers whereas some need help in doing so. Students

with special needs require appropriate opportunities for comfortable interaction in an educational environment.

International pedagogical practice gives many examples of good adaptability of students with disabilities, high levels of positive interaction between participants of an inclusive process based on a psychological support and cooperation. Unfortunately, in post-Soviet countries a problem of teachers' attitude towards children with disabilities is quite acute. For example, according to N. Artyushenko, within the former Soviet Union about 60% of teachers and 67% of parents are not ready to integrate children with disabilities in mainstream schools. As a result, over 90% of children with disabilities feel moral discomfort and experience negative attitudes of students with typical development, however 93% of such students are positive and supportive of the idea of educating "special" children together with their healthy peers (Artyushenko, 2010, p. 80).

Students adapt to learning and develop social and friendly links better if they are motivated and stimulated. Hence it is essential for teachers to create conditions for formation and development of positive qualities, social relations, personal values in students. Inclusive education ensures emotional development, building self - esteem and learning to live in harmony with people. Friendship and cooperation in inclusive classrooms can awaken a number of positive feelings in students. Despite any peculiarities of physical or mental development, a teacher should respect and treat all students in class as equally valuable personalities, organize an education process on the basis of a subject-subject approach and form in them the experience a complete spiritual self-development and skills to value life, wellbeing, diversity and otherness.

Simultaneously, it is important to focus on some psychological aspects. For example, establishing friendly contacts between children should be done naturally. It is not a good idea to force students to display exaggerated attention and treatment of particular individuals. If a teacher excessively emphasizes that there is a student with special needs, who desperately requires help, friendship, positive and emotional atmosphere, such actions can fix and strengthen negative stereotypes towards establishing equal and mutually beneficial social relationships. The personality centered approach in an educational process relies primarily on maintaining respectful attitudes. The excessive attention to children with special needs can form in students with typical development the idea

of treating them as "big, living dolls." It is important to teach children to respect dignity of their classmates with disabilities. Therefore, it is necessary to respect dignity of every child, regardless of characteristics of physical, intellectual or mental development.

Psychological and pedagogical science has proved that children with special needs while communicating with their healthy peers improve their social, cognitive, emotional and behavioral skills, whereas a presence of students with disabilities in a classroom positively effects a formation of human values and empathic abilities in healthy children, etc. The only negative factor is a dissonance between cognitive abilities of healthy children and children with disabilities (Davydenko, 2015, p. 122). At the same time the personality centered approach in the inclusive educational process is an effective factor in improving not only a social and emotional communication, it also promotes differentiation and individualization of learning.

*A personality of a teacher* as a role model for students is very important in forming a comfortable learning environment in an inclusive classroom. A teacher is a key organizer of a children group. Therefore, he or she should strive to create such an environment where all students have equal rights as well as opportunities for development. A favorable educational and developmental environment enables students' initiative, creativity and ensures successful learning. The authority of a teacher is also manifested in an innovative professional activity which provides opportunities to realize creative potential. Inclusive education requires relevant approaches, interactive teaching methods, various forms of group work combined with an active cooperation of all students.

It is advisable for a teacher to create educational conditions that ensure "such level of consciousness development that will motivate a child to self-knowledge and self - activity in order to become a creator of its own rich spiritual life" (Bekh, 2015, p. 42). Thus an inclusive classroom should be a place to cultivate such situations where relationships with pupils are built on the respect of their dignity and the right to be a personality; the first indisputable right of children is to express their

While communicating with students with psychophysical impairments it is important to maintain their freedom and willpower. The most important thing is to do so honestly and openly. Hidden emotions and hypocrisy should

be avoided as these students are extremely sensitive to immoral, sometimes cruel society.

Another equally important aspect of the personality centered approach in an inclusive classroom is using *acceptable terminology and its semantic and pragmatic analysis*. There can be situations when a teacher should explain to students a content and appropriate use of certain concepts that are present in an active vocabulary of participants of an inclusive process.

For example, the use of certain words should be avoided and abolished such as: *handicapped, disabled, crippled, defective, invalid, confined to a wheelchair, etc.* Instead, it is worth saying: a person (child) who has a disability; people with disabilities; a student with disabilities; a child who uses a wheelchair, a person with a mental health condition, people with visual impairments (...). The offensive and politically incorrect language spontaneously provokes negative associations and reinforces stereotypes that discriminate and isolate people with disabilities from society. Such words as “invalid (...)”, “confined (...)” evoke an image of helplessness and uselessness. They hurt students making it impossible to believe in themselves (Budnyk, 2015, p. 38 - 39). It is reasonable to stimulate tolerant, free and creative cooperation in learning and establish a united emotional and sensory range of educational interaction.

Recent international pedagogy and sociology apply a term *tolerance* as a factor of optimizing relationships between teachers and students on the one hand and students with disabilities on the other. This term differs from *toleration*. According to Y. Kleptsova, *toleration* involves increase of sensitivity towards an object (increased tension, irritability) and *tolerance* implies reduction. T. Margolina, for example, notes that earlier tolerance implied a passive attitude to the object or subject against one's benefit, while in recent years it has become a conscious active position of a person (Davydenko, 2015, p. 118).

### **The personality centered technologies of education in an inclusive process**

The personality centered technologies are based on a developmental effect of learning and optimization of a student's cognitive activity taking into consideration reflexive and volitional mechanisms of a pedagogical interaction.

I. Bekh distinguishes the following principles of the personality-centered technologies:

1. conscious creation of emotionally enriched educational situations;
2. personality developing communication;
3. use of empathy as a psychological mechanism in educating a personality;
4. student's systematic analysis of own and others' actions (Bekh, 2015, p. 127 - 131).

These principles are fundamental in inclusive education as they primarily involve elements of psychological influence on a developing personality.

International experience proves that people with physical impairments often display incomparable abilities in other areas (in arts, for example). They may show aptness to activities that require concentration, perseverance, processing a significant amount of information, scientific research, ICT and so on. As the results obtained by the study of H. Davydenko show, "people with mental impairments (within certain nosological parameters) display abilities to certain cognitive activities – memorizing, researching, processing data and so on.

Students with sensory impairments show intensification of compensatory functions: students with visual impairments show high sensitivity to acoustic phenomena (music, listening comprehension, communication), students hard on hearing are skilled in visual and tactile areas (artistic and factual detail, computer graphics, design, infographics)" (Davydenko, 2015, p. 23).

Hence in the personality centered approach is important to identify creative abilities, talents and preferences of a child with special needs and their conscious application in an educational process of comprehensive school

The personality centered approach in inclusion enables a teacher to meet diverse needs of students determined by their development levels, abilities, interests and other features. To do so it is important to adapt methods and forms of learning, school environment, teaching materials and so on. These changes can be carried out keeping in mind special needs of students via adaptation (changing a nature of training without changing a content of educational objectives) or modification (changing both a nature of instruction and a level of learning objectives) (Budnyk, 2015, p. 45 - 46).

A prerequisite for ensuring efficient teaching of a child with special needs in schools is the *individualization of the educational process*. This is reflected

in planning an individual development program which aims at: 1) elaborating a comprehensive program for development of a child with special educational needs; 2) adapting an environment to the needs of a child; 3) providing additional services and forms of support in a learning process; 4) monitoring the dynamics of a student's development (Zayerkova, Treytyak, 2016, p. 24).

The personality centered approach in an inclusive process is also present in composing individual plans and teaching curriculum for students with special needs by a teacher.

*Portfolio* as a way of accumulation and evaluation of student's achievements over a certain period of study is an effective means of the personality centered approach in evaluating educational achievements of a child with disabilities. Independent gathering and composing a portfolio in a particular research topic creates a situation of success, builds student's self-esteem and self-confidence, develops educational interests and willingness to independent learning. On the other hand, portfolio facilitates self-evaluation and mutual evaluation of study results. Consequently, children develop abilities to analyze their own interests, inclinations, needs and abilities to relate them with present opportunities. It is extremely important that a child with special educational needs can build an adequate self-esteem to help develop positive personality traits.

Modern Ukrainian scholars (I. Bilozerska, V. Bondar, O. Budnyk, A. Kolupayeva, Z. Leniv, L. Savchuk, O. Taranchenko) define advantages and disadvantages of an inclusive learning model. The former comprises the fact that children with special educational needs undergo better socialization in society, they enjoy more opportunities to participate in various activities, their self-esteem increases and the range of interaction expands, which means a stable self-development.

However, there are some negative trends in inclusive education, especially concerning children with special needs. They are not always positively perceived in a school community, usually they experience insufficient rehabilitation and other special services and often suffer because of their self-awareness of differences in development. If inclusive school has a position of a teacher's assistant, the parents usually are content that their child develops intellectually, spiritually and socially.



But some parents are too sensitive to perceive unacceptance of their children by their healthy peers or inadequately treat students with typical development and their significant differences in obtaining education (Kolupayeva, Savchuk, 2011, p. 34 - 35).

Poor financing of inclusive schools is another negative aspect in post-Soviet countries. Today's Ukraine faces closures of small schools and consequent creation of so-called hub-schools in educational districts. From 2016 and onward, the government is to provide financial support to local communities to equip hub - schools with modern educational and material resources. To some extent this applies to inclusive school as its important task is to ensure quality education and equal access to it. It is primarily about adapting hub - school for people with special needs as the personality centered approach in an inclusive process involves both human resources and appropriate financial support.

Obviously, these positive and negative aspects of inclusive education are typical of many countries. Progressing towards innovative inclusion, one should focus primarily on a personality in training and educating children with special needs. We are certain that the individual approach in a development of skills and talents, culture of professional pedagogical communication, tolerance among students and teachers will enable an effective implementation of inclusive education in Ukraine as well as in other post-Soviet countries.

## **Conclusions**

In the pedagogical process we seek to humanize the relationship between a teacher and students, including those with special needs, so it is worth to overcome social stereotypes and work to improve teacher's professional culture. Let us remember about pedagogy of good (I. Zyazyun), a concept of humanocentrism (V. Kremen), child - centered pedagogy (O. Kvas), teaching ethics (H. Vasianovych) and other conceptual trends in modern science and practice (Dubkovetska, Budnyk, Sydoriv, 2016, p. 99-105).

The personality centered education is based on respect for each student (irrespective of the peculiarities of development) as the highest values of society and we consider it to be a cornerstone of inclusive education. This approach employs humanization of social and educational interaction in teaching, including children with disabilities. Recent psychological and pedagogical studies

show that mutual communication and interaction of children with special needs with their healthy peers promote effective socialization in the educational environment. Children with disabilities establish and maintain social contacts and form cognitive, emotional and behavioral skills. Simultaneously, the presence of students with disabilities in mainstream schools has a positive effect on cherishing human values: mutual empathy, kindness, tolerance, compassion.

Based on the fact that children with special needs are often gifted in peculiar activities (arts, sports, etc.) it is essential to practise personality centered technologies in inclusive classrooms. They are to be based on personalization and differentiation in teaching and evaluating of all students.

*Prospects of future researches* we see in grounding and working out theoretical and methodical, and organizational assistance for implementation of inclusive education; training future specialists to the help children with special educational needs adjust in educational establishments of different types.

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