

**SOCIAL AND PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING FOR  
TEACHERS WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE VORONEZH  
REGION**

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**ABSTRACT**

The article considers the social and pedagogical aspects of professional training for teachers who are to work with children with disabilities. This kind of training is performed taking into account the education environment in the Voronezh Region, which is characterized by interaction and partnership between professional and further education institutions, public organizations, rehabilitation and social service organizations, and parents' communities. The authors present a theoretical analysis of the social and pedagogical factors that impact the quality of education for children with disabilities and emphasize the need for teachers to be properly trained in order to provide high-quality support and education to these students.

**Keywords:** teacher training, working with children with disabilities, inclusive education, educational environment, professional teacher training, study.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND ANALYSES**

Considering the current tendencies in the development of inclusive education, at the moment of great importance is the training for teachers who should be ready to work with children with disabilities (CWD). Such readiness implies that teachers should be able to organize the learning and education process as well as to provide some other social and pedagogical services. It is now becoming more urgent to model the training system and determine the conceptual basis, the main ideas, and the key instruments of professional teacher training.

The purpose of our study was to analyse the social and pedagogical aspects of the training for teachers who are going to work with children with disabilities in the Voronezh Region.

Approaches to teacher training and development of the ability to work with CDW may vary in different regions depending on how well-developed the system of inclusive education is in the region, the number of CDW, the activeness of the parent's community, the degree of inclusiveness of the society as a whole, etc. Training programmers can also be divided into several categories: training for students, training (retraining) for teachers, and training (retraining) for teachers who are to work specifically on inclusion programs (tutors, experts in applied behaviour analysis, etc.).

Inclusive education is a part of the general social policy of the country and a part of the regional education policy. Therefore, the implementation of inclusive approaches demonstrates specific features determined by the social and cultural environment of a particular region.

The Voronezh Region is characterized by a strong influence of organizations and the community of parents of children with disabilities who form a major public demand for inclusive education for their children. Proactive public organizations in the region include a powerful legal community, which has been providing strong support for the demand for inclusive education and has helped to find solutions in particular cases of violation of the right of CWD for education.

Parents of children with disabilities are also assisted by funds that provide expert support of inclusive education and financial help, arrange for facilities and required didactic and methodological provision for the education of CWD and organize supervision of inclusive education by international experts through offline workshops and regular online consultations), assist in the training of teachers, tutors, and psychologists for inclusive schools, which includes learning about the methods of teaching CWD and applied behaviour analysis method in particular.

The Department of Education and the government of the Voronezh Region also work on the implementation of the inclusive education system in the region. They organize innovative platforms, adopt legislative acts and provide financing for the education of CWD.

Another feature characteristic of the Voronezh Region is efficient inter-departmental cooperation. Various departments participate actively in joint projects. One such project is an inter-departmental programme "Autism. Routes of Help", which aims to create an integrated assistance system for people with autism. The project has seen significant improvements in both preschool and school-inclusive education for children with autism.

In 2015-2016, education organizations in Voronezh and the Voronezh Region started to introduce the "Resource room" - a model for teaching children with autism and other mental disorders. The model is based on the applied behaviour analysis approach and the idea of organizing a resource area, i.e. remedial and educational classroom, for individual students and small groups. The room is

meant for children who are not able to attend regular school classes due to their behavioural and communication issues.

Resource rooms are staffed by a teacher, a psychologist, and tutors (most commonly one tutor for each child). Each staff member is skilled in applied behavioural analysis (they complete advanced training courses). They are coordinated by the teacher of the resource room, who works in close cooperation with the psychologist and develops an individualized education programme for each student, a remedial programme, and a behaviour programme for tackling undesirable behaviour. Students in such rooms are primary school children of different ages, and their education programmes may vary.

At resource rooms, children practice social interaction, correct their behavioural patterns, learn about acceptable behaviour, and acquire necessary verbal and nonverbal communication skills (those who are not able to speak use alternative means of communication). In this way, children get ready to attend regular school classes. This is how the inclusion programme commences. The psychologist at the resource room recommends beginning the inclusion of a student in the regular education process based on the following criteria: the student does not demonstrate undesirable behaviour in class for 15 minutes; the student can adequately formulate a request, rejection, and agreement; the student is able to wait and manages to follow the instructions of the teacher/tutor in 80% of cases. The main purpose of the resource room is to ensure the complete inclusion of students in the education process and help children study in regular classes without a tutor's support.

In the Voronezh Region, the “Resource room” education model was at first considered to be an innovative platform. The Department of Education of the Voronezh Region arranged for the financing of special education facilities for students with autism and adopted rules and regulations enabling tutors to support their students in the process of education.

The model is actively developing in the Voronezh Region. Up to date, it has been adopted by 38 education organizations, including 10 kindergartens and 28 schools. The model is to be propagated to other nosologies of children with disabilities.

At the moment, the regional model of inclusive education in the Voronezh Region comprises the following: resources of education institutions, namely academic support from universities, and organizational and methodological support from the Institute of Education Development; social security institutions: a rehabilitation centre for children and teenagers provides remedial help to school students and young children based on networking cooperation agreements; the Department of Health opened Centres for Mental Health which help children with potential developmental problems and their parents. Further education centres also provide a wider range of services now, opening new clubs, associations, and studios for children with disabilities. The partners of the Department of Education and some particular education institutions include public organizations, charity foundations, parents' communities,

and commercial enterprises and organizations (Povetkina, 2013).

The development of inclusive education requires scientific and methodological support of the education process, training of specialists, and development of the legal framework regulating inclusive education. In order to do this, Voronezh State Pedagogical University opened a Resource Centre for the Support of Inclusive Education.

The aim of the centre is to provide resource support for events aiming to promote and introduce modern inclusive education technologies at the education institutions in the region.

The centre regularly organizes video conferences and webinars with experts in inclusive education who work with people with disabilities.

The centre runs a permanent methodology association for teachers specializing in inclusive education. It organizes workshops on inclusive education, master classes and consultations by the staff of the centre.

Indeed, to arrange for education and remedial assistance to students with disabilities an educational institution has to employ all of its human, educational, organizational, and financial resources. In this regard, it is reasonable for education institutions to cooperate and combine their resources, i.e. to create education networks.

The new law “On Education in the Russian Federation” (Federal Law №273 On Education in the Russian Federation, 2014) introduces the idea of networking education programmes, which can be used to design effective education programmes and provide remedial help to children using the necessary resources of various education organizations.

The Resource Centre for the Support of Inclusive Education of Voronezh State Pedagogical University is working in cooperation with several education organizations, which have become resource centres for inclusive education as a result of their cooperation. These organizations share their experience and best practices in inclusive education. Another resource is presented by special (remedial) education institutions which provide consultations on the organization of remedial programmes for children with disabilities in schools and kindergartens and provide remedial services.

The Resource Centre for the Support of Inclusive Education of Voronezh State Pedagogical University engages students to organize events for children with disabilities, develop volunteer movements, organize educational work in education institutions introducing inclusive education, and assist in the social and cultural rehabilitation of children with disabilities. Every year the university's students organize the following events.

1. “Kindness lessons” in schools (lessons on awareness of disability).
2. Inclusive creativity festival for children and young people “Among friends” with up to 900 participants every year.

3. A photo competition “The world through your eyes”.
4. Inclusive sports event “Non-Olympic Games”.
5. Inclusive creative marathon “We are together”.
6. A film festival dedicated to the life of people with disabilities “Cinema without boundaries - Voronezh echo”.
7. A school of self-advocates for young people with disabilities.
8. Youth student forum “Different but equal” dedicated the World Down Syndrome Day, etc.

These events are organized by students from the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Psychology and Pedagogics, and the Faculty of Art and Artistic Education, who act as volunteers, moderators, animators, etc.

Let's now focus on the training for teachers who are going to work with CWD in education organizations.

The above-described specifics of the education environment in the Voronezh Region determine the requirements for the training of teachers who will implement inclusive approaches at education organizations. In 2015, Voronezh State Pedagogical University opened a master's degree programme "Pedagogy and psychology of inclusive education" as part of the "Psychological and Pedagogical Education" academic field.

Following the education policy of the Voronezh Region and the framework of the programme “Autism. Routes of Help”, the master’s degree programme includes a separate module “Inclusive education for children with autism spectrum conditions”. This module includes the following courses: “Differential diagnostics of mental disorders”, “Peculiarities of guidance and education for children with autism spectrum conditions”, and “Applied behaviour analysis basics”.

A lot of attention is paid to tutor training within the course “Tutor support for students with developmental disorders” and internship programmes.

Professional development requires teachers to maintain a social partnership with organizations involved in inclusive education (Shakurova & Netsenko,2016). Communication with organizations, institutions, and ministries allows experts to identify the public demand for the training of professionals in inclusive education and adjust the education programme for master's degree students. Master's degree students complete their internships throughout their first year. The internships take place at schools running inclusive education programmes twice every year.

There are also master's and bachelor's degree programmes in "Psychology and social pedagogy".

Back in the 1990s, the university's teachers determined the major conceptual principles which are still implemented in the training of social counsellors. These principles are listed below.

- Training is based on the theory of social education developed by A.V. Mudrik (2000). The theory

made it possible to consider a broader definition of the social and pedagogical services and include a wide range of courses in the education programme (“Formation of the social experience of an individual”, “Social and pedagogic function of education”, “Game technologies practice”, as well as courses in cultural leisure activities, pedagogical animation, etc.).

- The university used an integration approach when developing the curriculum and determining the order of the courses. The courses were combined in such a way that while some of them teach students the basics of social education technologies, others provide more detailed and specific knowledge of social security activities ("Pedagogical rehabilitology", "Social security services for children in a difficult life situation", etc.).
- Active use of open and contextual learning makes it possible to teach theoretical aspects and study the actual cases, as well as to watch and participate in the work of social counsellors, social services, education and other organizations in the city.
- Focus on the development of the personal and professional position of teachers. The bachelor's degree programme for social counsellors begins with a socio-pedagogical laboratory and a course on "Assessment of personal and professional resources of social counsellors". It aims to develop a professional mindset and provide students with the knowledge they can use to assess their own personal and professional resources as a key condition for effective work as a social counsellor.
- The education process, internships, and volunteer activities are organized taking into account the specifics of socio-pedagogical work in the region. Students acquire experience working at social and psychological service organizations and other socio-pedagogical agencies. They organize socially relevant events at educational institutions as well as on the municipal and regional levels.
- Space and environment are used as study objects and instruments for professional education. Space and environment are studied within several education courses. We should point out that "space" and "environment" are viewed as different notions, "space" is a more general one. Thus, education space determines the education environment (Shakurova & Netsenko, 2016).

It should be also considered that the interaction of the university's departments with social and education institutions when training students for working with children with disabilities.

Departments cooperate with regional methodological associations of social counsellors. Senior students participate in methodological workshops on the most urgent issues of social pedagogy. These workshops often discuss the issues of legal support of inclusive education, educational activities for CWD, interaction with parents or guardians of CWD, arranging for the favourable environment for the introduction of inclusive education at schools, etc.

During open environment training, students work with children with disabilities at the Voronezh Rehabilitation Centre for Children and teenagers “Parus Nadezhdy” and public organizations for

disabled children. Within the courses "Pedagogical rehabilitology", "Tutor support", and "Methods of development of social activeness" students learn how to work with different groups of CWD. The main purpose is to create an environment that will help to determine whether students are ready to work with CWD. Working with children, students also have to interact with their parents, which allows them to practice professional interaction with families.

Volunteer activities also play an important role in the personal and professional development of a teacher working with CWD. These activities are implemented together with public organizations including Voronezh regional organization for the disabled "Iskra nadezhdy" and Voronezh regional organization for the disabled "Iskra". Volunteer work can also be divided into several stages.

It starts on the 1-2-year. Students attend inclusive cultural and sports events held in the city and the region first as spectators.

3-4-year Bachelor's degree students and master's degree students participate in these events as volunteers.

Another stage is the participation of students in social projects, for instance, the "Ourselves" project aimed to develop social skills in children and teenagers with mental disabilities. Volunteers support young people with mental disabilities and try to arrange a safe and friendly environment for the development of social skills (going to the cinema, shopping, going to the rehabilitation center, etc.).

Stagewise involvement of students in volunteer activities prepares them mentally and psychologically for their work with CWD.

It can be thus stated that training for teachers who are going to work with children with disabilities is implemented within the regional inclusive education environment. It involves teachers and researchers from Voronezh State Pedagogical University and other education organizations, as well as human, financial, and methodological resources of further education institutions and public organizations. Another important aspect is the promotion of best practices and volunteer activities.

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