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**The Project “I See the World through My Heart” as a Means of
Forming Readiness of the Young Teacher to Work with
Children with Disabilities**

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Abstract

This study is of high importance due to the need to prepare future teachers to work in an inclusive educational environment and existing underdevelopment of theoretical, scientific and methodological aspects of their preparedness to work with children with disabilities at the stage of vocational training. The purpose of the article is to develop activities that contribute to the professional (psychological, theoretical and practical) preparedness of teachers to work in an inclusive educational environment. In the study, we relied on the axiological approach which is based on the system of values that construct the content side of teacher training and their motivational, cognitive and emotional-volitional basis of preparedness to work with children with special needs. An important aspect in the development and implementation of the project is the concept of inclusive education of children with special educational needs and disabilities and the theory of vocational training. The article presents the experience of the project “I see the world through my heart” developed by the autonomous non-profit organization “Research center ‘Education. Quality. Industry’ and Saratov State University. It supported by the Presidential Grants Fund. The project activities are aimed at the formation of an inclusive educational environment in our modern society.

Keywords: inclusion; inclusive education; inclusive educational environment; educational activities.

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Introduction

One of the trends in the development of the modern Russian education is an increasing participation of students with disabilities in the educational process along with normally developing peers. The priority of support for inclusive practices is indicated in the Federal documents. For example, in the National strategy action for children 2012-2017, it is necessary to legislate to ensure equal access for children with disabilities to quality education at all levels, to the guaranteed implementation of their right to inclusive education at places of residence, as well as the right of parents to choose an educational institution and forms of education for the child (The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, 2012). Article 79 of the Federal law “On education in the Russian Federation” (2012) establishes the standard “Education of students with disabilities can be organized together with other students, and in separate classes, groups or in separate organizations engaged in educational activities”. This article also confirms the obligation of the state to provide training for teachers who have special pedagogical approaches and methods of teaching and education.

In 2013, the professional standard “Teacher” was approved in the Russian Federation. In accordance with this standard, teachers should be able to “apply special approaches to teaching students with disabilities included in the educational process”. In the implementation of developing activities: “to master and apply psychological and pedagogical technologies, including inclusive”. In our opinion, no less important are the skills to assist any child, regardless of its real educational opportunities, behavioral characteristics, physical and mental health (The Decree of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation, 2013). In the context of inclusive education, each teacher will have to solve a variety of tasks to plan and implement a specialized educational process for children with special educational needs. Psychological features and socio-psychological problems of this category of students require from the teacher not only the knowledge of special psychology and correctional pedagogy, but also the development of competencies in the field of inclusive education. To date, one of the obstacles to the development of an inclusive approach in education is unpreparedness of teachers for professional activities in an inclusive educational space. Thus, Malyarchuk (2015) notes that

“currently, there are serious obstacles to the development of inclusive activities of teachers in educational organizations: psychological, methodological and organizational teaching staff unpreparedness to implement inclusive education and schools administration, creating conditions to optimize the life quality of children with disabilities; low level of teachers competence in the

inclusion of children with disabilities in the educational process with healthy peers; distrust of parents of children with disabilities to the mass school; resistance of healthy children parents to inclusion in classes of children with disabilities; psychological barriers in communication between healthy and disabled children; the lack of living conditions in educational institutions for some categories of disabled children; the lack of special equipment for correction and rehabilitation” (p. 255).

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the article is to develop activities that contribute to the professional (psychological, theoretical and practical) preparedness of teachers to work in an inclusive educational environment.

Literature review

The theoretical basis of our study on young teachers’ vocational training to work with children with disabilities is informed by the study of Russian scholars (Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, 1991; Kobrina, 2012; Tcherkasova, 2012; Kuzmina, 2013; Ketrish & Dorozhkin, 2016) and foreign scholars (Atkinson, 2002; Boer & Pijl, 2011; Berg & Schneider, 2012). There are quite a large number of studies devoted to the improvement of teachers to work with children with special needs. However, questions concerning the readiness of teachers to work in such conditions remain relevant. According to Berg and Schneider (2012, p. 125) “the lack of material and technical resources and teachers experience in the inclusive work organization doesn’t mean for children with different nosology learning in correctional schools is more effective than in general schools” (Berg & Schneider, 2012). Boer and Pijl (2011, p. 333) believe that “the positive attitude of teachers to inclusive education, formed as a result of their experience in an inclusive educational environment, becomes a significant factor in the successful implementation of inclusive education in schools”.

When developing the project “I see the world through my heart” we relied on the axiological approach based on the value orientations system that makes up the content side of training teachers and their motivational, cognitive, emotional and volitional basis of readiness to work with children with special needs (Slastenin, Isaev, Mishchenko, & Shiyanov, 1997). An important aspect in the development and implementation of the project is the concept of inclusive education for children with special educational needs (Malofeev & Shmatko, 2008); theory of vocational training (Belyaeva, 2003; Bordovsky, 2010); the concept of professional competence of teachers (Kozyreva, 2015).

Based on the above research, we have selected the most important characteristics of readiness as a holistic phenomenon: psychological, theoretical and practical readiness for professional activity.

Students' psychological readiness for the professional activity is determined by a set of mental components that provide motivational and semantic readiness and the ability of the student to carry out professional activities. At the same time, Shipilova (2007) in her research notes, the system-forming factors of psychological readiness formation for professional activity are: the nature of the need-motivational sphere of the student, readiness for self-development, focus on the realization of the individual creative potential, socially significant activity (Emelyanova, 2013).

Theoretical readiness implies knowledge of methodological and analytical skills: monitoring of the pedagogical process (the ability to analyze and identify its components, as well as to establish a relationship between them), predictive skills (the ability to foresee results of an action), projective skills (the ability to independently choose the necessary means of training and the most effective work methods), reflective skills (correct assessment of the pedagogical process as a whole, and adequate self-assessment of their own activities) (Katrich, 2018).

Practical readiness includes organizational skills (organization of the educational process) and information skills (ability to present educational information).

Methodology

We are convinced that the teacher's preparation for work in the system of inclusive education includes not only equipping him/her with the necessary special knowledge, but also positive attitude formation to the inclusion of a special student in the educational process. It is important that already at the stage of vocational training the future teacher has the opportunity to “dive” into situations related to the understanding and acceptance of children with disabilities. To solve these problems, the research center “Education. Quality. Industry” together with Saratov State University developed the project “I see the world through my heart”. The project is implemented with the support of a grant for the civil society development provided by the presidential grant Fund.

Within the project on formation of the young teacher's readiness to professional activity in inclusive educational space of school the following actions are realized:

- Seminar for students, school teachers, university professors “Computer technologies for visually impaired people in an inclusive school space”. The seminar was organized within the 10th All-

Russian Scientific and Practical Conference “Information Technologies in Education ITO – Saratov – 2018”.

- Meetings with students to prepare social videos about the problems of people with visual impairment. The head of the Training center of Information and communication technologies in the training of the SSU, methodologist of the project, advised the students of the faculty of Computer science and information technologies and the faculty of Pedagogical and special needs education on the creation of videos.
- Visit to the tactile books exhibition with students, organized by the Pokrovskiy temple of Saratov together with the Zonal scientific library of the SSU.
- Inclusive educational games. December 4, 2018 ANO “RC “EQI” together with the SSU inclusive education laboratory held an inclusive game “Plasticine theater” for students of the faculty of Computer science and information technologies and the faculty of Pedagogical and special needs education. The purpose of this event dedicated to the International day of disabled people was to attract participants to mutual cooperation, mutual assistance and support, confidential communication, the establishment of a favorable emotional climate in the group.
- Training seminars for student volunteers on inclusive technologies in education.

On February 27, Saratov University held a training seminar for student volunteers on inclusive technologies in education. It was devoted to the work of future teachers in the inclusive educational space of the modern school. It was attended by the head of the SSU, CSIT and PSNE faculties, university staff and students (more than 90 people (4 of them with visual impairment) from 7 faculties of the SSU). The seminar included lectures for future teachers studying in the areas of training “Pedagogical education” (profiles “Informatics”, “Primary education”, “Preschool education”, “Foreign language (English, German)”, “Philological education”) and “Psychological and pedagogical education” (profiles “Psychology of education”, “Psychology and social pedagogy”). The head of the laboratory of inclusive education PSNE faculty, associate professor of special education M. D. Konovalova spoke about psychological peculiarities of working with children with visual impairments. The lecture discussed the main categories of students with visual impairment: blind, visually impaired, children with functional visual impairment; comparative characteristics of visual perception of the visually impaired and tactile perception of the blind; visual loads mode; Braille tactile writing system; audio recording; relief images and visual aids; ways to compensate for the visual deficiency; overcoming specific psychological difficulties associated with accepting oneself;

socialization of children with visual impairment.

Senior lecturer of the ISET department E. A. Gavrilova introduced the audience to the special features of Windows, screen access and zoom programs, software for creating digital talking books and mobile applications for IOS and Android that can make life easier for people with visual impairment. In particular, the special features of Windows, Zoom Text Magnifier/Reader and MAGic screen magnification programs were presented. They considered the interface of Zoom Text Fusion and SuperNova multifunctional programs. Among the apps for IOS was submitted to VoiceOver – driven gestures voice support interface, Banknotes 2017 (recognition of banknotes), assistant Siri (voice control unit).

During the seminar, students of various educational departments of the University were able to get acquainted with modern devices necessary for people with disabilities both in everyday life and in education. Exhibition areas were organized in various areas of development of children with disabilities. At the exhibition area “Development of algorithmic thinking of visually impaired” teachers were able to get acquainted with robotic technologies created specifically for visually impaired children, with a programmable Botley robot for preschoolers, Kid KNEK building set and LEGO robotics. Students were able to blindfold the algorithm for the robot and control it.

The exhibition area “Development of visual thinking, modeling” was presented by data visualization technologies and technical tools: 3D printer, 3D pen. Students with blindfolds created 3D objects (glasses, butterfly, watches, etc.), took part in the creation and 3d printing tic-tac-toe game adapted for people with visual impairment.

The platform “Software and mobile technologies to help the teacher” was focused on a series of practical tasks for the development of screen access programs ZoomText Fusion 11.0 Pro, software for creating digital talking books in DAISY format Easy Converter, free software and mobile applications for IOS and Android.

At the exhibition of tactile games and specialized equipment for people with visually impaired students were able to work with an acoustic wall tactile panel, tactile cells, to get acquainted with the Braille alphabet, and to test the digital marker recorder PennyTalks.

Sports inclusive games were presented on the appropriate site by means of a football sound ball, checkers for the visually impaired.

Results and Discussion

At the end of the seminar, a survey of participants was conducted to identify the area of interest of future volunteers for the effective organization of further work on the project. The majority of 80 students of various faculties surveyed assessed the novelty and relevance of the information presented at the seminar as quite high.

Students noted the most interesting sections of the program practical part: portable auxiliary devices for the blind and visually impaired – 69.7%, 3D modeling and mobile technologies for people with visual impairment – 60.6%, special sports equipment – 51.5 %, robots and educational building set, software for the visually impaired – 45.5 %.

To the question “Would you like to learn more about one or more areas of practical assistance to children with visual impairment?” about a third of the participants responded positively, the rest have not yet made a decision.

The question “Do you have any ideas and suggestions on the use of knowledge and practical skills in working with children with visual impairment?” was answered positively by 15.2% of the respondents. As a result of the seminar it is possible to observe the interest of students in the education of children with visual impairment; therefore our project has every chance of successful continuation in the field of training future teachers to work in an inclusive education.

According to the results of the survey, 10% of students expressed their desire and psychological readiness to be volunteers of the project and to further implement the theoretical knowledge in practice in general education schools in Saratov and Saratov region.

The next stage of the project will be focused on the theoretical training of students-volunteers on the basics for working with special children, the development of innovative pedagogical technologies focused on personalized learning, the development of correctional pedagogy techniques and the specialized software study.

Conclusion

The implementation of the project “I see the world through my heart” not only forms a future teacher’s positive attitude towards joint inclusive education of healthy and disabled children, but also contributes to the professional (psychological, theoretical and practical) readiness of teachers to work in an inclusive educational space of the school.

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