

# FROM SCHOLARS TO PRACTICAL WORKERS

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## INCLUSION: A DEAD END FOR EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

**Abstract.** The article characterizes the development of the system of special schools and kindergartens in our country in the direction of enhancing differentiation in accordance with an important principle of the modern domestic pedagogy – achievement of the highest possible individualization of education.

Actively propagated in recent years, the integration of disabled children in general education institutions, particularly in the form of inclusion, is directly contrary to this principle of pedagogy and ignores of the laws of psychological activity of children with disabilities. It is also amazing that non-specialists were engaged in realization of integration, showing absolute ignorance of what they were doing: by implementing inclusion they ruined the inclusive education of children with speech impairments who received logopedic assistance at speech therapy units while studying at a regular school.

Information about 35 years of experience of implementation of integration in the US and about 30 years of similar activity in the UK is available. But in both countries there is controversy among experts on the feasibility of integration, especially in the form of inclusion. A child with disability at a general education school loses the greater part of the funds and conditions which are provided by the system of special training, but wherever he studies, he remains the object of special education. There is no conclusive research that would prove that at least one of the claimed benefits of inclusion has been achieved. Moreover, increasing attention to adaptation of textbooks convinces us that the basic idea of inclusion — the education of the child with disability in the same class with typically developing children, along the same curriculum and by the same teacher – is untenable for most children with disabilities.

**Keywords:** children with disabilities; inclusion; individualization of education; inclusive education; differentiated education.

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The most important principle of pedagogy consists in the highest possible individualization of education. In order to realize this principle in the

education of children with developmental disorders (disabilities) our home defectologists (pedagogues and psychologists) have undertaken re-

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search since early last century aimed at creation of organization of teaching children with every type of developmental disorders, optimal content and methods and the highest possible level of knowledge.

Since the mid 50s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such studies have also covered preschool children with disabilities, and beginning with the 80s they have also included the pre-preschool period [2; 3; 8; 9].

The development of special schools was completed in 1981 by introduction of schools for children with disorders of psychological development. It was the final stage of the 13 years of experimental work which convincingly showed high effectiveness of differentiated education of children even with mild disabilities. This work was conducted in accordance with the government-approved topic "Diagnostics and Compensation of Mild Disabilities" which was delegated by the Government Committee on Science and Technology to the Institute of Defectology of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the USSR as the leading institution in 1968. Apart from the Institute of Defectology, the Institute of Preschool Education and the Institute of General and Pedagogical Psychology of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the USSR, as well as the Moscow Institute of Psychiatry of the Ministry of Health Protection of the Russian Federation were also involved in the work on the problem. The author of the given article was appointed responsible for the project.

It was necessary to prove in the

course of experiments that children with mild developmental disorders (disorders of psychological development) were the most numerous among the schoolchildren of general schools and experiencing considerable difficulties, and some of them fell out of school after repeated study at one or two (or even three) primary school grades and gave it up altogether. On losing control, they were recruited by asocial and criminal elements. Stable non-achievers in one, two or more subjects at transition from one grade to another were studied over three years. Observation was carried out in all schools of a Moscow City District (32 schools). It was actually the first population study (though it was a rather narrow one) in the field of investigation of children with disabilities. Before it, statistics in the given sphere had been limited to the data about how many children with developmental disorders attended special schools. The percent of stable non-achievers at the primary school was fairly high – 4.5%. A part of these children (from a half to one third) at a general education school could not master the primary school program. It was they that needed special education.

One more innovation first used in the research was experimental comparison of children of three types of development – disorders of psychological development, intellectual disability and typically developing children. It did not only allow deeper understanding of the specificity of mild disorders of psychological development but also contributed to the development of special psychology in

general and brought us to further elaboration of L. S. Vygotskiy's ideas about specific regularities of abnormal development [4; 10].

An experimental check-up initiated in the process of working out new system of education in 1968 on the basis of one experimental class of pupils was by 1980 expanded to the observation of the system of new organization, programs and methodological approaches in nine experimental schools situated in different regions of the USSR. Important and convincing catamnestic data were collected: 203 school leavers of the first three experimental schools had been examined. The following results had been obtained: on leaving school (i.e. on receiving incomplete secondary education) all of them continued education and got secondary education using different ways (technical school, vocational school, evening school and senior grades of a general school). All of them were employed: some of them worked in the specialty received at school, others – according to qualification obtained during further education. One school leaver entered a teacher training higher education institution.

Thus, we see that the state stimulated and supported intensification of differentiation in the system of teaching children with special educational needs. The current changes in the system of special education are directly opposite and contradict the pedagogical principles and psychological data about the specificity of children with disorders. A friend of mine, Vladimir Petrovich Zinchenko who did much

for the psychology of education used to say: “The course is the same, but the progress is in reverse”. Generally, the impression is that neither the leadership that took the decision about total implementation of inclusion in our system of special education, nor the people who were invited to realize the action and received the grants (God knows why they were neither scholars from the Institute of Special Pedagogy nor specialists from the special faculties of pedagogical universities) knew anything about either the specificity of teaching children with disabilities or about their psychological peculiarities. Many things speak in favor of this impression: for example, the designers did not know that we had long organized real, well-founded and properly provided for inclusive education; only thing, it was for the children with mild speech underdevelopment only who could get logopedic assistance at logopedic units while learning at the same school [11]. Having done away with these units, supporters of innovations deprived the children of special support [5]. Nor did they know that experiments with integration of special schools pupils in the general education schools had been carried out even before the October revolution. The experiments led to the conclusion that such integration was inadvisable and useless. In Soviet times, experiments on general school integration in the form of inclusion which also failed to yield positive results were organized for the deaf (the 50s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and the blind (the 80s).

It is time now to consider the rea-

sons why the general school conditions are not suitable for teaching children with disabilities. The main reason is that these conditions do not fit the special educational needs of children with disabilities. Special educational needs arise out of deficiencies which are reflected in the cognitive activity of such children and are results of specific regularities of development and psychological activity of persons with disabilities first singled out by us in 1971 [2; 10]. In this paper, we will refer to only those of them which play the most important role in emergence of special educational needs.

First, these are slower reception and procession of information and significantly lower volume and a shorter time of its storage in comparison with typically developing children. In other words, these are reception and memory deficiencies. Speech underdevelopment specific for each kind of disability is also important; lower working capacity and fast fatigability are significant as well. All these peculiarities were revealed in experimental studies carried out in the 1970-1980s (see, for example, "Children with disorders of Psychological Development", 1984). Poor formation of mental operations is also rather important.

All these manifestations are more significantly expressed by the beginning of school age and are gradually smoothed over in the process of mastering the developing program and getting individual assistance at a special school. But experiments showed that even by the end of learning at a special school (the program of which

corresponds to the basic general education school, i.e. school for pupils of the senior teenage or junior youth age level) these deficiencies are still present, though they are more or less done away with. Similar experiments with older persons have not been carried out.

These peculiarities of mental activity and the absence of cognitive interest characteristic of typically developing preschoolers lead to the fact that children with disabilities do not accumulate the knowledge about the surrounding world by the beginning of schooling which, according to some psychologists, constitutes more than half of the knowledge acquired by the person during their whole life and is the "procession object" of the primary school program, which contains actually nothing new for the preschooler apart from multiplication and division and knowledge of history.

What is it that happens at the beginning of primary school education? It is systematization, categorization and "terminologization" of the material already known to the child. But the child with disabilities does not possess such knowledge; the things the teacher speaks about are obscure and dull for him. It is for this reason that such children need propedeutic parts in the programs of all subjects and special work on the formation of cognitive interests. It needs time and is one of the reasons of prolonging the period of primary education in all special schools.

The peculiarities of mental activity described above lie at the basis of special cognitive needs of children

with disabilities. We suggest the following definition of these needs: *Special educational needs are the needs of conditions necessary for the optimal realization of urgent and potential capabilities (cognitive, energetical and emotional-volitional, including motivational ones) which a child with developmental disabilities may manifest in the process of learning.*

What lies beneath the realization of these conditions in the process of primary education?

1. Preparation of children for the school program acquisition by means of propedeutic classes (i.e. formation of the necessary knowledge).

2. Formation of their cognitive motivation and positive attitude to learning.

3. Slow tempo of presentation of new knowledge.

4. Lower volume of the “portions” of presented knowledge and all instructions and utterances of the teachers keeping in mind the fact that the “magical number  $7 \pm 2$ ” is invalid for children with disabilities, i.e. that their volume of perceived and remembered information is lower.

5. Use of more efficient teaching methods (including enhancement of visual aids in all their forms including practical activity, and application of the problem-based approach).

6. Organization of instruction which would not fatigue children.

7. Maximum limitation of stimulation not directly relating to the process of learning.

8. Control of proper understanding of everything, especially of the verbal learning material.

9. And, naturally, the learning environment should be built on the basis of sensory capabilities of the child, which includes proper lighting of the work place, provision of sound amplifying devices, etc.

These requirements to the education process are realized at special schools in relation to each type of developmental disability and level of education. It is beyond doubt that these requirements are impossible to guarantee in general education schools where the pupils, with the exception of 1-2 “included” children do not need them. What is the “included” first grader to do in this case?

It is important to know how successfully integration of children with disabilities is implemented in the countries which have practiced it over several decades.

Initiative in introduction of integration embracing inclusion as its most radical form belongs to the USA and has no psycho-pedagogical foundation sort of desire to improve the system of education of children with disabilities. The only reason was the demand of freedom of choice of the school and opportunity to send the child to the school nearest to the home. The further development of the foundations pursued a socio-political course up to comparing the system of differentiated education of children with disabilities to racial segregation, which was labeled by the American defectologist E. Zigler [1] as an unacceptable approach, because racial distinctions have no impact upon mental development and cognitive potential as different from psychophysiological peculiarities.

Though the law now known as the *Education for all Handicapped Children Act* was adopted in 1975 but integration of children with disabilities in general education schools began only in 1980.

In spite of absence of true realization of special educational needs (as a result of inadequate level of development of special pedagogy and special psychology) this law presupposed a number of important measures, and namely, “early intervention”, i.e. starting rehabilitation work between the ages of 3 and 5, i.e. before school, and, consequently, the developmental deficiencies diagnostics at the age of 3.

As far as results of inclusion are concerned, there are no convincing data about its advantages over differentiated education, i.e. learning at a special school. Specialists have divided: the staunch supporters and the ardent opponents. The latter say that being in need of special learning, the pupil with disability at a general education school is deprived of all special means offered by special schools – specialists-defectologists, special methods of teaching all subjects and visual aids, and, in the long run, special education conditions in general.

Experts in the field of study and education of children with disabilities express doubts about effectiveness of inclusion. E. Zigler and J. Kaufman whose meaning we are going to quote may serve as proponents of such an opinion: “Changes are taking place in how, where and who teaches children with disabilities. But one question remains open, whether these changes are going to bring appropriate and more

effective education to such children or, as a result, we will return to the earlier period when developmental disorders were not revealed at all, and such children found themselves out of place in the system of general education which was believed suitable for all children” [14, p. 417].

In Great Britain, the beginning of implementation of inclusion goes back to 1985 and is connected with the preceding study of the situation in the field of special education presented to the Department for Education in Warnock Report in 1981. After the study of the Report materials, much was done for early developmental disorders diagnosis and their rehabilitation in case they were diagnosed. Children undergo obligatory diagnostic examination at the age of 2, after which the necessary measures supervised by specialists are taken. Diagnostic observation is carried out each year up to the age of 5 in order to examine the effectiveness of the prescribed rehabilitation activities and the child’s progress. The mechanism of control of the whole procedure is of certain interest [13].

This remarkable system was created only on the basis of empirical data without understanding the essence and significance of special educational needs. What is more, while these needs (in contrast to the USA, the term “special educational needs” is used in Britain) are considered to be a socio-economic product, it turns out that wherever the child is placed for learning, it will be the place of satisfaction of his special educational needs.

As well as in the USA, there are

two opinions about inclusion among specialists-pedagogues and there are also no concrete data about its advantages.

It is interesting how implementation of integration goes on in Slovakia where this process began more than 20 years ago. We would like to refer the readers to the article of a wonderful Slovak psychologist Ladislav Pozhar published in Russian in the journal “Korreksionnaya pedagogika: teoriya i praktika (Special Pedagogy: Theory and Practice)” [7].

Our visits of one of the high schools of Wisconsin which was a “model” state in integration implementation allowed us to make a number of important observations. Out of the total number of pupils (800 persons) there were 16 children with disabilities and a rehabilitation unit (called Recourse room) with 8 defectologists of different specialties. There were 3 persons with disabilities in the class we observed during the whole school day: one blind girl and two boys with intellectual disability. In addition to the regular teacher, a tiflopedagogue worked with the girl and one more pedagogue-defectologist helped the boys with intellectual disability, i.e. individual learning was organized. However, at the lesson of reading all pupils read one and the same text. But at the math lesson the boys with intellectual disability worked along a different program. We cannot fail to note that we did not see such abundance of specialists in any other school of the same “model” state.

For over 30 odd years since the

beginning of integration there has been not a single work that would prove convincingly enough the advantages of the integrative approach and of inclusion in the first place.

A regular international Congress on the problems of education of children with disabilities was held in Vancouver (Canada) in 2000. About 15 out of the total number of sittings (40 sittings in various sections) were devoted to the problem of adaptation of mainstream school programs and adapted textbooks for first and second grades of school education. Has any leader of the system of education or any of those who got grants for implementation of inclusion in Russia ever thought about the inevitability of such a prospect? And if they have not, they had better realize that it is simply ridiculous to talk about equality in education after all this. By the way, not a single comparative study of education effectiveness under the conditions of inclusion and differentiation was presented at the Congress!

By way of conclusion, we would like to ask a rhetoric question: What goal did the initiators of this “innovative” – a hundred years back – measure set in the country with the best system of education institutions for children with special educational needs? (The best one not according to the principle “Russia is a birthplace of elephants”, I am far from propagating false patriotism; there are definite reasons for such assessment: 1) the highest level of education in all types of special schools, and the censored one at that, i.e. the kind of education corresponding to a certain stage of the

general education school by the volume and content of the programs; 2) availability of special textbooks for special school grades in all subjects; 3) labor and pre-vocational (sometimes even vocational) training; 4) the censored character of education presupposes opportunity to continue education at a general education institution on leaving special school, i.e. it gives a chance of integration into secondary and higher education institutions).

So what was the goal? To make education of children with disabilities cheaper? To improve it? To facilitate integration in society? To ensure faster and effective socialization – adoption by special children of skills and habits of typically developing ones? All these are the myths of integration, as the leading American specialists in this field, such as E. Zigler and J. Kaufman say. And perhaps this goal

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