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Parity, bullying and confrontation in inclusive education

Tatyana Yu. Chetverikova[1]

[1]Omsk State Pedagogical University, Omsk, Russia
tata634518@mail.ru

Olga S. Kuzmina[2]

[2]Omsk State Pedagogical University, Omsk, Russia
osk193@mail.ru

Olga Yu. Sinevich[3]

[3]Omsk State Pedagogical University, Omsk, Russia
sinevich.olga@mail.ru

Abstract

The authors of the paper carried out a longitudinal study to characterize social and personal relations in inclusive practice among the participants of the educational process: teachers, children and parents. As a result, having to be involved in a continuous psychological struggle, each child is constantly under stress, which adversely affects their health and school performance. In conclusion, the destructive relationships between schoolchildren with and without disabilities are instigated by adults. Those are some parents of healthy children and teachers who lack theoretical, practical and personal readiness to work under inclusion.

Keywords: Children, Disabilities, Confrontation, Inclusive, Education.

Paridad, bullying y confrontación en la educación inclusiva

Resumen

Los autores del artículo llevaron a cabo un estudio longitudinal para caracterizar las relaciones sociales y personales en la práctica inclusiva entre los participantes del proceso educativo: maestros, niños

y padres. Como resultado, al tener que involucrarse en una lucha psicológica continua, cada niño está constantemente bajo estrés, lo que afecta negativamente su salud y rendimiento escolar. En conclusión, las relaciones destructivas entre escolares con y sin discapacidades son instigadas por adultos. Esos son algunos padres de niños sanos y maestros que carecen de preparación teórica, práctica y personal para trabajar bajo inclusión.

Palabras clave: Niños, Discapacidades, Confrontación, Inclusiva, Educación.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current educational system in Russia is actively embracing inclusive practices. It is increasingly common for parents of children with disabilities to exercise their right (Federal Law on Education in the Russian Federation) and opt for a regular school. Despite the government support of inclusive education, there are still a number of unresolved issues that impede developing a transparent inclusive educational space focused on enculturation and high-quality education of children with disabilities, meeting their special educational needs and providing access to all the resources required for their adequate social and personal development. A content analysis of research publications distinguished the most significant areas of research of the phenomenology of inclusive education, identified key studies and existing problems that require special attention from researchers, teachers and parents. A number of aspects of inclusive education are currently studied.

SMOLIN (2017) assessed the system of inclusive education from the legal perspective and clarified the vectors of its development in high school. In addition, this scholar and politician were one of the first to draw public attention to the problems of pseudo-inclusion and employment challenges faced by people with disabilities. DMITRIEV, GENDIN, SERGEYEV & DMITRIEVA (2008) analyzed inclusion as a social and pedagogical phenomenon, identified positive aspects and risk factors, analyzed the public attitude to co-education of children with and without disabilities. KUTEPOVA (2011) explored the techniques of professional and psychological training of teachers for working in the context of inclusive education and substantiated models and methods of inclusive education of children. DENISOVA, LEKHANOVA & PONIKAROVA (2012) scientifically substantiated tactics and defined a strategy of inclusive education.

Despite a high scientific interest in the problem of inclusion of the child with disabilities into the regular education system, its social and personal aspects are still understudied. In particular, the relationship between the participants of the inclusive educational process has not been properly assessed. Reasons and ways to prevent such negative phenomena as bullying and other types of psychological abuse of children with disabilities by their healthy peers and adults have not been sufficiently explored. This problem was most actively discussed by European scholars (COWIE & BERDONDINI, 2001). Russian researchers are only beginning to address this problem. In particular, the issue was explored by LOSHAKOVA (2002) and others.

The materials of this paper to a certain extent fill in the missing data on the reasons for effective and destructive interpersonal interaction between actors of inclusive education. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to present the key reasons for the inclusion of children with disabilities into the regular education environment and their position in the system of social and personal relations between participants of the inclusive educational process (ATES, COBAN & SENGOREN, 2018; MAGINGA, NORDEY & ALLY, 2018).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The authors of the paper carried out a longitudinal study to characterize social and personal relations in inclusive practice among the participants of the educational process: teachers, children and parents. The study included more than 500 cases of inclusion of school children with disabilities into the environment of their healthy peers.

It is noteworthy, that the pupils with disabilities were represented by various nosological groups:

- Sensory disorders (hard-of-hearing, cochlear implanted, visually impaired children);

- Speech impairment;

- Autism spectrum disorders;

- Musculoskeletal system disorders;

- Mental disorders.

The study spanned 48 schools across Russia.

The following methods were used in the study:

- Monitoring school children with and without disabilities during lessons and leisure activities;

- Surveys of parents of children with and without disabilities;

- Interviews with pupils with and without disabilities;

- Interviews with teachers, their self-assessment (using the questionnaire developed by the authors called Readiness for Inclusive Education);

- Interviews with local education authorities and school managers;

- Content analysis and assessment of school documents (curricula and programs, protocols of school psychologic, medical and pedagogical consultations, individual development programs of children with disabilities).

3. RESULTS

The study identified various parental strategies related to the choice of inclusion as an educational model for their children with disabilities. A number of key reasons can be distinguished why parents opt for the education of their son or daughter together with their healthy peers:

- Territorial proximity of a regular school to the permanent residence of the family. In this case, parents rule out the education of the child in a specialized entity that is located far from their home (for example, in the neighboring district center), they completely rule out a boarding school, even if the child needs continuous corrective support from special education teachers;

- Disagreement with the expert opinion (diagnosis). Parents may be blind to any impairment in their child or believe that their health problems are negligible and will not prevent the child from learning the same educational materials and within the same timeline as required for the rest of the pupils of the regular school. In some cases, it is a negation of the obvious: parents (mostly mothers) refuse to recognize the obvious fact of the child's impairment and to accept any recommendations related to psychological, pedagogical and medical rehabilitation support to the child;

- A belief that the child can only obtain a high-quality education and an adequate social experience among their healthy peers.

The above reasons are the most common among parents for opting for inclusive education. When explaining their decision, the families tend to both name one key reason or a number of reasons.

This study showed that currently, inclusive school practices involves three models of social and personal relations between actors of the educational activities:

- Education of children with and without disabilities on a parity basis;

- Psychological abuse of children with disabilities and their parents by other participants of educational relations;

- The confrontation between children with and without disabilities.

It should be noted that the first model indicates that the school has an inclusive culture established. Children with disabilities are trained and educated equally with other school children, have regular contacts with healthy children of the same age, interact with them and gain positive social experience. The second and third models, on the contrary, indicate the total absence of the inclusive culture, have a destructive nature and therefore are viewed as negative. Under the

conditions of psychological abuse (model 2) the child with disabilities is victimized and experiences aggression on the part of healthy children and adults. In the confrontational relationship, the child with disabilities, despite the active psychological pressure the healthy peers put on them, are not victimized but demonstrate a rough resistance to verbal or physical violence thanks to their capabilities, personal qualities, and support of individual people.

4. DISCUSSION

Interpreting and discussing the findings, this paper overviews in greater detail the models of social and personal relations among the actors of the educational process.

4.1. Education of children with and without disabilities on parity basis.

Establishing this model of social and personal interaction does not require only (and not so much) the financial and technical conditions to meet the special educational needs of the child with disabilities. The focus here is training all the actors (school employees, students, and their parents) to embrace the inclusive practice, to accept the purpose and values of the inclusive culture and to transmit the inclusive policy. This implies theoretical, practical and personal readiness of teachers and other specialists to work in the conditions of

inclusive education. The study spanning the teams of 48 schools throughout Russia showed that about 15% of teachers are fully theoretically and practically ready for inclusive education, about 50% are personally ready.

These findings indicate that most school teams, while accepting ideas of inclusive education and understanding it as a natural process, are unable to provide rehabilitation of children with disabilities at a high professional level by means of education, ensure their systematic inclusion in the environment of healthy peers and adults, provide them with psychological and pedagogical support, where, according to the fair observation of KOBRINA & DENISOVA (2016), universality should be ruled out. The support should be special, comprehensive, remedial, developing, differentiated and individualized. Despite a large number of problematic issues associated with the inclusion of a child with disabilities into the environment of healthy peers, a number of schools do have and successfully disseminate their positive experience of inclusive education. Such organizations, apart from creating the conditions set out in the federal regulations, carried out the following:

> - Internal training of all the specialists of the school to work in the conditions of inclusive education. It should be noted that there are active on-going discussions on the contents and methods of training the teachers to work in the context of inclusive education. In the authors' opinion, an original professional development program for teachers was offered by KE, BORAKOVA & VALIULLINA (2017);

- An optimal population of inclusive classes: reduced number of students and inclusion of no more than two children with disabilities of the same nosological group;

- Continuous psychological and pedagogical work with healthy children, preparing them for co-education and interaction with peers with health limitations;

- Instructing parents of healthy children that the school is an inclusive organization, it is open to all children without exception and protects the legitimate interests of each student, regardless of their health condition;

- Primary counseling services for families with children with disabilities to assist them in choosing an education model acceptable for the child, and subsequent continuous psychological and pedagogical support for full inclusion in the complex and unique system of educational relations;

- Psychological preparation of the child with disabilities to studying together with their healthy peers, flexible inclusion into the mainstream class with prior meeting future classmates outside the classroom.

All the above components were researched by the authors in previous research papers. Below are examples of statements of participants of educational relations, which demonstrate their

satisfaction with inclusive practice. These examples supplement materials that were published earlier.

In general, co-education of children with and without disabilities is carried out on the parity basis by the specialists who are theoretically, practically and personally ready to work in the conditions of the inclusive environment. It allows exercising the right of the child with disabilities to high-quality education and ensures positive social experience.

4.2. Psychological abuse of children with disabilities and their parents by other participants of educational relations.

Researchers mostly refer to psychological abuse as bullying. This phenomenon is often designated as mobbing. Currently, the terms bullying and mobbing are both well established in science and practice. These concepts are not interchangeable, although their semantic similarity is obvious: each of them describes psychological violence from a person or a group over a weaker person. However, unlike bullying, where the initiator of psychological abuse is an individual person or a small group, mobbing involves a large number of participants that actively support the conflict and aggression. It should be noted that the phenomenon of psychological violence in the school environment was first studied by Scandinavian researchers in the early 20th century. Later on, this problem attracted the attention of the

British and then American scholars, and now it is actively discussed throughout the world.

Contemporary international studies COWIE & BERDONDINI (2001) describe psychological portraits of bullies and mobbers, the typology of psychological violence in the form of direct physical or verbal aggression, as well as indirect abuse of the victim. The studies also present and substantiate viewpoints (sometimes opposite to each other) as to who and under what circumstances might be victimized, become the victimizer or a bystander in bullying at school (COWIE & BERDONDINI, 2001). In national science, the phenomenology of bullying and partly similar types of psychological violence in the form of cyberbullying, mobbing, hazing, was studied by KON (2010) and other authors. Researchers distinguished a number of characteristics of psychological abuse in school. First, the behavior of bullies and mobbers is aggressive by nature and therefore is negative behavior. Second, aggressive actions towards the victim have an on-going nature and are purposeful. Third, they are unequal power relationship, where the victimizer has more power than the victim.

In Russian regular schools, psychological violence is mostly represented by direct verbal aggression, rather than physical aggression. This takes the form of rude pejorative statements using colloquial attitudinal vocabulary, jargon and special terminology (including outdated) to indicate the disorder, even if the child does not have it.

As noted above, the root causes of psychological abuse over school children with disabilities should not be narrowed down to the children's appearance and the use of specific devices like hearing aids, glasses with thick lenses, etc. Neither is the quality of speech a decisive factor. For example, the speech of non-native speaker children is very specific. However, the bilingual child can still be successfully integrated into the society, although, undoubtedly, it complicates their adaptation to the educational environment and leads to communication difficulties, which is substantiated in a scientific work of (VIKZHANOVICH, 2016). In this case, non-native speaker children, despite the communicative barriers, do not become outsiders or victims of abuse at school more often than other children. Sometimes they are not at all treated negatively by other children because of physical vigor, adequate or inflated self-esteem and continuous support from speakers of their native language – adults and peers.

The roots of bullying and mobbing as a phenomenon of inclusive education must be sought deeper. It is noteworthy that historically school children with disabilities in Russia with rare exceptions were educated in special (correctional) schools, which mostly were boarding schools. Healthy children almost never interacted with peers with disabilities, or the interaction was sporadic and mostly incidental, for example, during events, contests, exhibition tours, etc. In fact, the children with and without disabilities were nearby, but not together, had no contact points and mostly were in different educational systems. Fostering a socially active individual was substituted with social neutralization of the special needs child,

which was heavily criticized by the prominent Russian Psychologist VYGOTSKY (2003), who saw social dislocation as the main cause for child defectivity.

The mostly natural expansion of inclusive practices in Russia in late 20th – early 21st centuries in an unprepared educational environment led to bullying and mobbing of children with disabilities. Negative inclusive practices, accompanied by psychological pressure, destroy the very foundation of psychological and pedagogical correction, which is focused on enculturation of the child and overcoming their secondary disorders. It is important to note that psychological abuse in school is mostly instigated by adults. Those are individual parents of healthy children and teachers who lack theoretical, practical and personal readiness to work in the conditions of inclusive education. Below the roles of those participants of educational relations as instigators of bullying and mobbing are described.

The dissatisfaction of some parents with inclusive practices cannot be concealed from their children. This issue is discussed in the family, and the child with disabilities and their family are assessed negatively. The parents' weighty opinion is shared by children and shapes a negative attitude to people with disabilities. Healthy children continue to discuss those issues when they meet at school. This triggers bullying and similar phenomena. Instigation of psychological abuse by individual teachers is explained by their incompetence in the education

of children with disabilities and the lack of psychological readiness to work in the environment of inclusive education.

4.3. Confrontation between children with and without disabilities

This model is less common than the other two. It is similar to the psychological abuse described above, but is not identical to it. The third model implies an implicit or overt conflict between school children. It arises between approximately equally strong groups. One of the groups includes only healthy children, and the other group includes healthy children and a child with disabilities. Each party demonstrates the negation of the other. The first (healthy children) do not accept and reject peers with disabilities and those who support them psychologically. The reason for the confrontation on the party is countering this discrimination and the desire to preserve their rights and dignity. Basically, this is failed bullying: the instigators failed to victimize a peer with a disability. In fact, the failed victims due to certain circumstances, personal qualities or abilities develop a kind of immunity to psychological pressure.

Students with disabilities, whom healthy peers could not psychologically abuse, tend to be successful academically, to have an adequate or even inflated self-esteem, physical vigour, friends and supporters within the school. This model of social and personal relations is negative and indicates the absence of the inclusive culture among the participants of educational relations. Having to be involved in a continuous psychological struggle, each child is constantly under stress, which adversely affects their health and school performance.

5. CONCLUSION

The following conclusions can be made from the above.

1. Three key models of social and personal relationships among the participants of the educational process can be distinguished in inclusive school education of children with disabilities. Those models are parity, psychological abuse of children with disabilities in the form of bullying, mobbing or contiguous phenomena, and confrontation. The last two models, unlike the first one, are negative and indicate the lack of inclusive culture;

2. The destructive relations between school children with and without disabilities are instigated by adults. Those are individual parents of healthy children, directly or indirectly promoting discrimination based on a medical condition, or teachers with lack of theoretical, practical and personal readiness to work in conditions of inclusive education;

3. Education of children with and without disabilities on a parity basis is implemented through complex and multidimensional activities aimed at creating a fully inclusive space in the school by all the participants of educational relations. In such conditions, the child with disabilities exercises their legal right to quality education among healthy peers and acquire social competencies, which ensures successful enculturation.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the study can be recommended to clinical and school psychologists, educational authorities, teachers and school managers to ensure timely detection and prevention of destructive social and personal relations between actors of the educational process. The research materials are of interest for researchers in the field of psychology, pedagogy and defectology and can be used for further development of scientific and methodical support of inclusive practices and development of inclusion in modern schools.

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