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Perspectives of inclusive education in Russia
Перспективы инклюзивного образования в России
Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova & Pavel Romanov

This paper discusses the issues of exclusion and inclusion of children with disabilities in educational policies. The background and context for inclusion in Russia is described, with a short overview of the history of special education and with the emphasis on the current legislative conditions for inclusion. The article analyzes peculiarities of the hidden curriculum in a Russian boarding school for children with disabilities, and discusses the ways in which special education constructs the students’ identities. In particular, practices of socialization in an educational institution for children with motor impairments are considered using the qualitative methodology of ethnographic observation and interviews. In addition, the attitudes of contemporary mainstream school students towards the idea of inclusive education are explored and a case of integration of a disabled child into a regular school setting is considered. Finally, the authors outline some policy recommendations and the prospects for inclusion.

Keywords:

Статья посвящена проблеме социального исключения и интеграции детей-инвалидов в образовательных практиках. Контекст инклюзии в России представлен небольшим историческим экскурсом и обзором современной ситуации. В статье применяется понятие скрытого учебного плана к анализу повседневной жизни в школе-интернате для детей с инвалидностью, обсуждаются те способы, какими конструируются идентичность учеников. В частности, при помощи качественной методологии этнографического

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Introduction

In several countries of the world since the 1970s there has been considerable elaboration of legislation and policy to widen educational opportunities for persons with disabilities (Deno, 1970; Dyson, 1999; Salisbury et al., 1993; Will, 1986). Politicians, scholars and activists in civil society discuss the question of access by vulnerable populations to quality secondary and higher education. Such discussion is based upon a critical approach towards the politics of disablement and upon the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990). A concept of inclusive education is used nowadays as a commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It means bringing the support services to the child rather than moving the child to the services (Shea & Bauer, 1997).

More than a decade ago, the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights concluded that

In most countries, human rights violations against disabled people take the form of unconscious discrimination, including creation and maintenance of man-made barriers preventing disabled people from enjoying full social, economic and political participation in their countries. Most governments have a narrow understanding of human rights vis-à-vis disabled people and believe they need only abstain from taking measures which have a negative impact on them. (Vershbow, 2004)

The system of education in Russia is undergoing deep changes and schools are experiencing transformation through governmental reforms and market economy. Yet the philosophy of inclusion is shadowed in public policy agenda. This paper is devoted to the issues of exclusion and inclusion of children with disabilities in educational policies in today’s Russia.
Background and contemporary context for inclusive education in Russia

The Russian history of assistance for people with different impairments can be considered as including the following stages: acknowledgment of the necessity of social care (eighteenth century); discovery of the learning capabilities of deaf and blind children (eighteenth century); individual teaching and first special education settings (early nineteenth century); acknowledgment of the educational rights of so-called ‘abnormal’ children, establishing institutions of special education (late nineteenth century).

The first institutions where children with impairments could obtain an education were developed in the nineteenth century under the support of church and philanthropies. In Soviet Russia special education became the responsibility of the State. A secularized state system of education and upbringing was developing under conditions of inadequate financial resources. There was a serious lack of facilities for deaf, blind and mentally impaired children. A prominent Russian and Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotski, developed a theory of social conditioning for child development: ‘The development of a defective child is conditioned by (a) the feeling of low social value of oneself, (b) the social adjustment to the normal conditions of environment’ (Vygotski, 1929). Therefore, it was understood that a disabled child has special needs, which are to be met to prevent his/her handicap. In the 1920s a concept ‘deficient child’ was introduced by Vygotsky and a discipline ‘defektologia’ was established. During the economical growth of the 1950–60s, a wide network of special residential schools was created in the Soviet Union.

Special education in the late Soviet period may be characterized by the following developments: children were classified as ‘capable and incapable of learning’; a concept ‘disabled child’ [rebionok-invalid] was introduced in 1979 following the ratification of international legislation. In the official rhetoric of the post-Soviet period there is recognition of the necessity to move from equal rights to equal opportunities; from institutionalization to integration (1990s). During this period the terms ‘children with special educational needs’ and ‘children with limited abilities’ are discussed; a term ‘special education’ is sometimes used instead of ‘defektologia’.

In Russia today special education is a complex system of different types of school, vocational colleges and institutions. It includeskindergartens for children from three to six years old, special boarding schools with 10 years of study for children aged seven and above, and vocational schools with three years of study. There are also nursing homes for children and adolescents with a diagnosis of a severe mental impairment, and ‘psycho-neurological’ nursing homes for children and adolescents with a diagnosis of severe mental disorder—both these institutions belong not to the system of education but to the system of social development. The shortcomings of the Russian education system for children with disabilities are reported by the Russian and international human rights and disability NGOs. According to many experts, disabled children and young adults face significant bureaucratic and social barriers to education: children with developmental disabilities are often marked as ‘uneducable’;
the majority of teachers and administrators have little or no understanding of disability issues or training to deal with them; there is very little accessible transportation and very few accessible school buildings (Vershbow, 2004). The institutionalization of children harks back to the Soviet era (BBC News, 2003).

Over the past 10 years, with the emergence of disability advocacy NGOs and NGOs serving parents of disabled children and the passing of new federal and regional disability legislation, some significant social changes have improved the quality of life for persons with disabilities. The bill of the Russian Federation ‘Concerning the education for people with limited abilities (special education)’, which has been waiting for approval by the President since 1996, emphasizes the opportunity for disabled children to study in regular schools. The report of the State Board of Russia, ‘Contemporary Educational Policy’ (2001), points out the priority of integrated (inclusive) education for disabled children: ‘Children with disabilities should be supplied by state medical, psychological support and special conditions for study, predominantly in secondary schools according to their living place, with rare exception in boarding schools’. At the present time integrated education could be considered as the priority of state educational policy in Russia. The transition to inclusive education is predetermined by Russia’s ratification of UN conventions on children and disability rights:

Today, occasional wheelchair ramps can be seen in Russian cities, limited assistive devices are being produced locally, employment programs for disabled people have been launched in several Russian cities, and a handful of integrated pre-school programs have been initiated in a few Russian cities. Finally, Kremlin officials have publicly acknowledged the huge problem of inaccessibility and the lack of federal support provided to the disability community. (Curtis & Roza, 2002)

Despite the promise of these small social changes, implementation mechanisms for fulfilling the promises of government services are rarely enforced. As a result:

children with disabilities, youths and their parents continue to face significant attitudinal, architectural and financial barriers to an equal education including: (1) all schools have inaccessible environments; (2) parents of children in mainstream schools are often opposed to having their children study with disabled children; (3) the majority of teachers and administrators in mainstream schools and universities have little or no understanding of disability issues; (4) parents of disabled children are afraid to enroll their children into mainstream schools and usually have little or no information about access to education; (5) there is no or very limited accessible public transportation available in cities; (6) no additional services are provided by universities for students with disabilities; and, finally, (7) old stereotypes and misconceptions about disabled people still prevail in Russian society. These are merely a few of the barriers to education which Russian disabled students encounter daily. Unfortunately, few, if any, organized efforts are being made to break down these barriers to education. (Curtis & Roza, 2002)

The 2002 State Report on Children in the Russian Federation estimates the total number of disabled children in Russia at more than 650,000. Over 70% of disabled
Russian children receive little or no formal education, relegating them to a lifetime of dependence (Vershbow, 2004).

Government statistics demonstrate that due to these barriers, the majority of disabled children in Russia aged 7–18 are isolated in their homes, segregated in specialized institutions, or receive no education at all. Almost all disabled children are at home or in specialized schools. As a result, young disabled people are not being prepared for life in the community, to say nothing of entering the university or finding a job after school. (Curtis & Roza, 2002)

Each year about 27,000 graduates leave special, correctional and residential schools. Only one in five enters a vocational educational institution for further qualification, and one in 10 gets employed. The majority of regular schools, colleges and universities are not ready to meet entrants with disabilities: there are only a few integrated educational settings that have been adjusted for use by disabled students, where special assistance is provided.

Research: methods and findings

The research project ‘Creating a future together? Perspectives of inclusive education in Russia’ was conducted during 2001–2003 in a large industrial city, Saratov, located in the European part of Russia and representative of the country as a whole by its demographic structure. The research design represents a multi-methodological model and includes three types of studies: ethnographic case studies (case study in a residential school for disabled children, case study of a disabled child in a regular school); a series of in-depth interviews with school administrators and officials of the department of education; and a survey of three types of social actors: school students, parents and teachers. These were the different stages of a single research project with the overarching aim to explore the current social and cultural context for the policy of special education and inclusion, in order to outline some policy recommendations and prospects for inclusion. The research belongs to the pragmatic tradition (Giarelli, 1988), trying to influence the widening educational chances of children with disabilities.

The ethnographic case studies (see, for example, Bassey, 1999) were undertaken during 2001–2003 by two researchers. The first researcher undertook a residential school case study exploring practices of socialization for children with motor impairments during one academic year, 2001–2002, at a special school for children with motor impairments. The second researcher explored the attitudes of contemporary mainstream school students towards the idea of inclusive education and considered the integration of a disabled child, conducting her study at a regular school during several months in 2003. The researchers spent between three and four hours several days a week at the educational settings. They sat in class, observed various activities during the breaks, talked to students, parents, teachers and administrators, and took part in other activities, such as parents’ conferences and
school festivals. They studied different texts and artifacts, including bulletin boards and students’ performance diaries. Each of the researchers was trying to get into the school life of one group of students. This type of research design uses multiple sources of evidence (see Yin, 1993, pp. 90–99), i.e. observation, interviews, documentary sources. It helps to study an institution within the framework of the concept of ‘hidden curriculum’ that is understood as verbal and non-verbal communication practices in education (Hall & Sandler, 1982), meta-communication as a means of social control (Stubbs, 1976). Hidden curriculum includes the following elements (Wood, 1994): (i) organizational culture of an institution; (ii) content of subjects; and (iii) teaching style. These three dimensions of hidden curriculum do not just reflect stereotypes of gender and disability, but also reinforce social inequality by constructing identities according to symbolic classifications of feminine and masculine, disabled and able-bodied.

The second aspect of the study involved five in-depth interviews conducted in 2003 at four schools with school principals and their deputies and two interviews conducted at the City Department of Education and Regional Ministry of Education sought the opinion of experts about inclusive education.

The third aspect, the survey, focused on public attitudes towards inclusive education. In March–September 2003 questionnaires were distributed among the pupils and parents from two city schools. We used parents’ conferences (in Russia parents from the whole class are present simultaneously at the conference, i.e. 20–30 people) and student group meetings. Teachers were surveyed through the assistance of the body responsible for the further qualification of teachers. In total the answers of 289 school students, 276 teachers and 260 parents were collected.

Children with disabilities in residential school

The boarding school in our study included both elementary and secondary levels. The school was founded in 1960 as a residential educational facility for children who were affected by polio disease. (A polio epidemic happened in Russia in the early 1950s.) Today the school accepts children from age seven who have motor impairments of different kinds—mainly polio and cerebral palsy. The school building is inappropriate for special needs so that children with severe motor impairments, those in wheelchairs, cannot study here; also they are denied access to public activity in a wider context due to physical barriers, such as unadjusted transportation, buildings, toilets and elevators.

Among the students today there are orphans and children whose parents have lost parental rights, as well as those from well-to-do families. There are two groups: ‘A’ and ‘B’. The ‘A’ group is for children with developmental delays (intellectual disabilities). The ‘B’ group is for children without intellectual delays. There may also be cases of speech-language, hearing and visual impairments. In such cases children will be placed into the ‘A’ or ‘B’ group according to their intellectual ability, a diagnosis which is often questioned by parents and professionals, so we discovered at
least one case when a child had been transferred from one group to another a few times.

Some children stay over the weekend, some overnight several days per week, while others are here only during the day. Those who stay overnight are more likely to come from lower income families. The orphans stay in the boarding school up to the age of 18. The population of students at this school is very diverse in terms of social class. The families with higher income often invest additional money into home tutoring and they also use their social capital in order to gain access to higher education for their child.

Gender and disability at the school

Hidden curriculum is analyzed in aspects of organizational structure and culture, the content of lessons, and methods of communication. Gender and disability are embedded into organizational structure and culture. All staff except for the principal, electrician and mechanic, are female. An authoritarian style of management and discourse of power contributes to creating a sense of hierarchy, discipline and military-like institution. We discovered the absence of big mirrors in bedrooms and toilets. The girls’ bedrooms are located on the second floor with the classrooms located between them, which contributes to the lack of privacy. In the girls’ rooms, but not the boys’, there are toys—one doll or one stuffed animal to the right high corner, very identically located on each bed.

Disability is interpreted here as a tolerated and ordinary identity. Children are taught to live with disability, to adjust to it. However, as mentioned by McIntosh (2002), this does not necessarily help to develop highly culturally sensitive and valued social identities for students. The content of lessons affects the construction of a gendered and dis-abled identity. Gender is learned through manifest and latent translation of stereotypes during and beyond the lessons. As we have found during the ethnographical observations, science and math classes demonstrate a clear tendency to gendered teacher–student communication. The occupational skills class is taught separately for older boys and girls and by different teachers. It is assumed the girls will go on to vocational school for seamstresses or training for typing (computer word processing), while the boys will get training in shoemaking, carpentry, TV or radio repair. The importance of open discussions of disability and gender, sexuality, rights and supportive networks is obvious as the graduates of this school are not prepared to live in society after they have for years been nurtured and protected by the institution.

Gender stereotypes are expressed in everyday communication and in our interviews. According to teachers, the girls must be obedient, assiduous, accurate, not intellectual: ‘Boys are more active, more intelligent, they have more humour. The girls unlikely will propose you something worthy’; ‘In her situation [meaning disability], she must be even more accurate’; ‘a boy can find somebody to take care for him, while the girls—they must be clean, neat!’
The disability discourse is hidden. A teacher never says to a child ‘you are disabled’. The words ‘disability or disabled’ are never sounded in this school. However, disability is being communicated, taught and learned through the micro-practices of everyday life in this school. For example, although every teacher encourages children to do the job, their attitude is not a demand: if children do not prepare homework (which happens all the time), teachers do not insist. The level of academic demand is rather low. As a result the curriculum does not correspond to the program of mainstream school, which makes it very difficult for the student to catch up if (s)he would like to transfer to a mainstream school in order to continue towards higher education. The standards of education in this school have been lowered even more than in previous years according to teachers who have worked here for a long time.

In an interview with a female student, aged 17, we see the effect of the stigma (Goffman, 1986) of a disabled identity which is imposed on children not just by the institution and the system of special education but also by societal attitudes towards disability in Russian society: ‘What are you saying? An institute? I won’t be able to go there. Why? Why should I? I sew very good!’ Teachers in the interviews are focused on the impossibility or improbability of personal lives or professional careers for the children in the future.

While in education research throughout the world the issues of inclusive education are debated and different experiences of inclusion are discussed (Daniels & Garner, 2000; Shevlin et al., 2002), in Russia the majority of children with a disability are taught in segregated schools. Poor development of the special school system in post-socialist countries has been depicted in international studies (Moore & Dunn, 1999). The transition from socialism to the market has worsened the conditions of the special school system due to a significant decrease in public financing for boarding schools, lack of specialists entering special education on graduation because of inappropriate salary and alternative possibilities of employment in the private sector.

We observed cultural forms which support positive identities and friendships but at the same time nurture patriarchal and disabling structures of communication and socialization. One cultural form is the inside world of the boarding school with its features of isolation, power hierarchy and social segregation. Sometimes this segregation is reinforced through a stronger social control, through the hidden curriculum. Close and familial relations within the classroom are joined by a strong social control, lack of privacy and deficit of parental involvement into children’s education. While the classroom ‘babysits’, school polices (Hurst, 1991, p. 187) and the separation of the family from the classroom and school reflect wider processes of isolating disabled people from society. Another cultural form is reproduced among the students: the differences in social class, urban/rural background, presence or absence of a family, different plans for careers. It is likely that such differences cause conflicts. Conflicts exist between parents and teachers, teachers and children, and among the teachers, as well as in violent relations among the children.
The peculiarities of special education have both positive and negative effects on children. As is seen at the boarding school, centralization of services—educational and medical services in one place—means cost-effectiveness for the state, as well as time and energy savings for children and parents. At the same time it leads to medicalization of special education (Bart, 1984), and all problems in the children’s academic development are considered from the point of view of powerful medical experts. The physical environment at the school is not adjusted to the needs of children with severe motor impairments who are getting home-based educational services. Compared to mainstream school, the number of students is less, the boarding school is not overcrowded, and the student–staff ratio here provides greater possibilities for individualized teacher–student interactions. At the same time a paternalistic attitude is fostered here towards children with disabilities, and leads to low demands on the academic side of the school program, while everyday skills and occupational skills are also taught insufficiently. Social interactions are limited here to contacts among the disabled children and their tutors and teachers; friendships with non-disabled peers are very rare.

*Children with disability in a regular school*

In several countries in Eastern Europe policy towards the integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools has been successful (Education for All, 1998), while in the others such a strategy is not yet recognized as a feature of democracy, nor have the economic effects of integration been studied. Research into the inside world of special schools may not only provide educators and policy makers with a critical assessment of the segregated school system, it may also help better understand the special educational needs of the students if an official policy of integration is to take place. Nowadays there are a few students with motor disabilities in Russian mainstream schools, however, more research is needed on such cases of inclusion. Such research could be stimulating tools for teachers as well as for students with and without disabilities in developing effective strategies of learning and positive communication (see for example Kershner & Chaplain, 2001).

In Russia there are several inclusive pre-school and school settings, mainly in Moscow and in some other regions. Some are developing as pilot projects with the support of the Soros foundation. However, this is only an exception, and our hypothesis is that, as a rule, children with disabilities who study at regular schools are enrolled in typical school settings that are not adjusted to the special conditions of an inclusive environment and the principles of inclusion are not recognized by the staff.

A case study was conducted at a regular school where Masha, aged 10, with slightly visible motor impairment (caused by cerebral palsy) was enrolled. She had previously studied for one year at a residential school for motor impaired children and her mother was dissatisfied with the level of academic success her daughter could achieve due to a very relaxed educational program at the special school. After a year, the mother decided to send her child to a school which was located the closest distance
from their home. Masha, whose documents contained a medical record prescribing
her to study at a special institution, failed the entrance test. Despite all her efforts the
mother received only the following explanation: ‘she has a narrow worldview’. At a
private meeting the school principle told the mother: ‘I do not want your child at my
school because this school is a very good one and is often visited by the Governor.
What if he would see a cripple here?’

The mother decided to change tactics and falsified documents with the help of her
friend, a doctor. Now Masha did not have a prescription that prevented her from
entering a regular school. In the same year, the mother took her to another school,
which was far away from their home but was also a good one. She kept secret that
Masha had already finished first grade in a special school.

In 2001 we filmed this case and made a TV program on the problems and
perspectives of inclusive education. The mother, the child, the class tutor and the
principle seemed to be in support of each other and of the situation itself. Masha was
playing with other children in her class, she was considered to be a good student. Two
two years later the situation had changed. Rigidity and a selective approach in the
organization of primary education, a lack of teachers’ reflexivity and of professional
advice and support, the huge workload of the teachers and big sizes of the classes all
lessened the chances of inclusion. A class tutor in an interview told us about the
difficulties of teaching this child. She focused not just on her own inability to cope
but rather on the behavior or intellectual development of Masha, which she classified
as abnormal. As an illustration, she explained to us why we did not see Masha’s
drawings among the other children’s works at an exhibition on a wall in the school
corridor:

Drawing an illustration for a fable (10 yrs):
‘Her drawing will be removed from exhibition. She should have focused on a crow
and not on a pine-tree!’

Such a situation when the child and the teacher are left without any supervision
and without adequate resources to fulfill educational goals, leads to abuses of power
and practices of semi-corruption:

Mother: Our class tutor told me: ‘Not only your daughter. We have a few students
with low scores. I am going to expel them from the class. Administration said to
me, it is up to me. You see?’

After a couple of months of making observations, collecting interviews and
participating in classes, permission was withdrawn by the school principal for our
research assistant to continue the study. Unfortunately, we had to leave the field. In
the meanwhile, we have been collecting interviews with school administrators at such
schools where we found a disabled child integrated into a regular classroom. The
process of data collection was hindered by refusal to talk with us at many settings.
However, we managed to conduct interviews with several experts in this field.
Public and experts’ attitudes

Parents and teachers have somewhat similar opinions towards inclusion, although in general parents are more tolerant than the teachers. Answering the question ‘Is integration possible?’, the parents demonstrated a greater positive attitude towards inclusion of children with all types of impairments (Table 1).

We asked both parents and teachers for their personal agreement about inclusion, and about 80% of parents answered positively to a question ‘Would you personally agree if a child with motor disability studied alongside your child?’ (Table 2). At the same time, only 16% of teachers answered ‘yes’ to the question, ‘Would you personally like to see children with motor impairments in the groups you work with?’, while 31.8% said ‘No’ and 51.3% had difficulty answering this question.

This may be explained through the fact that inclusionary policy would obviously have an impact on a teacher’s professional position (Table 3).

Both parents and teachers answered similarly to the question ‘What prevents inclusion?’, ranking the obstacles from the unadjusted physical environment and inadequate financing of the schools, to the quality of teaching, lack of specially adjusted educational programs, social inequality within a society, and lack of a legislative base. Such factors as negative social attitude and parental preferences were ranked with the lowest scores.

It is necessary to notice that only a small number of the students never mentioned children with disabilities in our society. Approximately 40% have seen them in the street, 20% have been acquainted without any communications, and 10% have been in touch with them (Table 4).

The analysis shows that the closest contacts, characterizing relations between good friends and relatives, are between respondents and children with motor impairments (12.4%) and mental disorder (12.9%). Contacts between respondents and children with speech, hearing and vision impairments occur rarely (9.1%). Children with a visible disability are among those who have been seen in the street by pupils (40.5%). So, approximately 70% of questioned school students demonstrate different

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Is integration possible? (Parents N = 260 and teachers N = 276)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children with motor impairments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Parents about inclusion. Would you personally agree if a child with motor disability would study together with your child?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental agreement</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferences of teachers</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
experiences of disability. The fact that only a small proportion of the school students could make acquaintance with disabled children shows the limitations imposed by institutional frames, especially by the structure of the educational system.

The dilemma of segregated special education is two-sided: on the one hand it helps to combine medical and teaching skills, on the other it prevents social integration of disabled children and promotes their segregation and limitation in their life chances. Children and their parents are dissatisfied with this situation, which is not in accordance with the reformative intentions of the modern educational system in Russia. But as a whole, one can see the importance of a new approach to social policy, which replaces the technocratic discourse. Inclusive education provides the humanistic alternative and decreases the process of marginalization of disabled children.

Inclusive education during the process of introduction may run into the organizational difficulties of physical barriers (ramps, one-storied school buildings, availability of sign language interpreters, reconstructing of public places), and with such social obstacles as stereotypes and prejudices, refusal to admit differing children into the group of peers.

The school students feel the most tolerance towards children with motor impairments, and less to children with speech, hearing and vision impairments (Table 5). The lowest level of tolerance concerns children with mental impairment—almost half of the pupils wish them to study separately, at another school. It is evident that we are dealing with deeply rooted stereotypes and the stigma of mental retardation, which form serious barriers for integration of these children and adults.

Table 3 How would inclusion affect a teacher’s professional position? (Teachers $N=276$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect on teachers</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would require retraining</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will experience no change</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would easily adjust</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not adjust</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to say</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Are there persons with disabilities among your friends or relatives? (School students $N=289$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relation to child</th>
<th>Children with motor impairments</th>
<th>Children with speech-language, hearing and visual impairments</th>
<th>Children with mental delay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have/had a good friend, relative</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knew one person, but did not communicate closely</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw in the street, in the yard</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
into society. This is illustrated by the distribution of answers to the question about the possibility of communication with disabled children. There are groups with negative attitudes towards disability (up to 5.9%) regarding children with motor activity, speech, hearing, vision impairment, but the deepest intolerance is mentioned toward children with mental delay (Table 6).

The research shows gender differences in attitudes towards disabled children. Girls notice children with disabilities more often, and they show a positive attitude, including towards studying together and communicating. Different factors of tolerance include age, gender, social economic status of the family, type of impairment, and experience. The character of this attitude depends on several factors, the most significant being the experience of contacts with disabled people in everyday life. The essential differences in opinion are between those who haven’t seen disabled people in the street, and those who have got relatives or friends with disability. About 35% of children who have experience of contacts with disabled people are ready to study together in the same class.

Though intolerance to disability is demonstrated, the majority of respondents are certain about the necessity of undertaking special measures for equality (85%). Just as the answers point to the importance of experience of contacts with disabled people, more than a half of respondents consider that there is a need to assist in perceiving children with disabilities without prejudice, and approximately 40% are sure that it is

### Table 5 What do you think of integration with disabled children in the same school? (N = 289)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Children with motor impairments</th>
<th>Children with speech-language, hearing and visual impairments</th>
<th>Children with mental delay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree to study together in the same class</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree to study together in the same school but not in the same class</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let them study in a separate school</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6 What about your communication with disabled children? (N = 289)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Children with motor impairments</th>
<th>Children with speech-language and visual impairments</th>
<th>Children with mental delay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’d come up, speak and do things together</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to stand aside, but if necessary, I’ll communicate</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>51.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t want to deal with</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
necessary to help disabled children to live and work without limitation in their movements—sound traffic lights, ramps for wheelchairs, facilities in public places and transport.

The officials and administrators in the interviews supported integration in principle but exclude children with mental impairment from inclusion policies. They stress the necessity for special education to remain for children with severe disabilities and for orphans. The main difficulties of transition to inclusion, according to those interviewed, include lack of a legislative base for the implementation of inclusive education as well as an inadequate financial base for the educational system, which prevents proper staffing and technical development.

School administrators and officials of education believe that children with motor impairments are to be integrated first—they can ‘normally’ keep up with the curriculum, however, they think that those in wheel-chairs will not be capable as they are limited in mobility. To introduce inclusion, according to the experts, the state budget for the overall educational system needs to increase and non-state funds need to be raised.

Conclusions

In the context of the social and economic transformation of the last 10 years in Russia, the system of education for children with motor impairments has experienced changes but at the same time it reproduces Soviet stereotypes and educational discourses. The latent goal of this system is to educate individuals who can survive on an everyday basis, who can cope with daily needs. However, the politics of special education for children with disabilities marginalize children and limit their social orientations and perspectives. The opinions of the key actors of the educational system—teachers, parents and children—are favorable towards the idea of inclusion as a project. At the same time, when it comes to real life situations, very practical concerns arise, which hinder the true inclusion of children. The most important concern is that the education system remains unchangeable when it integrates a child with special needs who succeeds in graduating to a regular school only due to enormous energy spent by parents and teachers. This often leads to burnout effects, to abuses of power and to withdrawal of the child from the regular school setting.

Successful inclusion practices depend on restructured schools that allow for flexible learning environments, with flexible curricula and instruction. Sufficient support staff, helping professionals, should be employed to address the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of all students. To reduce class sizes and/or increase the numbers of teachers is necessary (Stout, 2001). Many experts believe the greatest obstacle preventing disabled Russian children and young adults from fully integrating into society is discrimination in equal access to education. The Russian system of working with children with disabilities would benefit from an interdisciplinary and interagency model of service delivery (see Pervova, 1998).
We have arranged a number of PR events concerning the issue of inclusion. One such event was a conference ‘Education for All: Ways to Integration’, which took place in 2003 in Saratov. At this conference different stakeholders in special/inclusive education were present, including adults with disabilities, teachers from a special residential school, parents of disabled children, representatives of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labor and Social Development. Some of the recommendations that came out of this conference and are in concert with contemporary research on inclusion, are as follows: (i) early intervention to identify appropriate services for a child; (ii) individualized decisions to include any disabled student in regular education; (iii) work toward unifying the special education and regular education systems, there should be one system for evaluation of special and regular educational systems; and real inclusion involves the restructuring of a school’s entire program and requires constant assessment of practices and results; (iv) a restructured system that merges special and regular education must also employ practices that focus on high expectations for all and rejects the prescriptive teaching, remedial approach that leads to lower achievement (Guess & Thompson, 1989, cited in Stout, 2001).

While planning policy measures for social integration, the wider context of inclusion has to be taken into account, with regards to family issues, employment opportunities, availability of natural supportive networks such as circles of relatives, friends and neighbors and networks of professional helpers. Mass media have a role to play also in regards to social inclusion, as the predominant image portrayed of disabled people is associated with weakness and misery.

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References


