

L. V. GODOVNIKOVA

The Conditions for the Integrated Education of Children with Impaired Development

A study of the ways in which special-needs children in Russia can be mainstreamed shows that there are diverse attitudes in regard to the issue of integration, with a slight tendency toward a positive attitude in regard to integration. A great deal of educational work will be needed, requiring mutual interaction with parents and children with special needs in order to overcome any fears and barriers.

At the present time, the idea of integrated education is one of the most widely discussed issues, in the pages of specialized publications, and among specialists who are involved in the teaching and upbringing of children with impaired development, and in the mass schools and special schools. Integration is seen as a way to enable a child with limited health abilities to attend a general education school with ordinary children.

Many mass schools have taken in the first schoolchildren with developmental disabilities, and in many such schools (especially in

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rural areas), having ordinary and handicapped children attend school together is viewed as normal. The systematic practical adoption of specially organized integrated instruction in mass schools requires preparation; ideally, integrated education should begin as early as preschool and should be conducted along the following lines:

(1) preparing public opinion in regard to the necessity of inclusive (joint, integrated) education as a natural process and as part of the democratization and humanization of all of society;

(2) preparing the pedagogical community of the mass schools to take in the special child;

(3) educating the parents of ordinary children in regard to the possibilities of integrated education;

(4) ensuring that schoolteachers are prepared in terms of methodology to work with various categories of special children;

(5) providing the schools with material preparation for the teaching of the special child;

(6) as far as possible, staffing the mass schools with enough specialists for special education. Every school that teaches impaired children should employ a minimum of a speech therapist and a special education teacher;

(7) organizing cooperation between specialists of the mass schools that are working with special children and specialists of the system of specialized education with respect to the profile relevant to the impairment;

(8) stepping up the activity of the psychological-medical pedagogical commission involved in detecting cases of hidden integration, and drawing up specific recommendations for working with special children under the conditions of the mass schools.

Effective organization of integrated education must necessarily include comprehensive work on the part of all specialists involved in the accommodation of special students, and moreover the coordination of the activity of the psychological, pedagogical, medical, and social services involved in helping children with limited abilities has to be implemented on a centralized basis. With this purpose in mind a Coordination Council was created under the Office of Education of the Administration of the City of Belgorod; in addition to providing organizational, methodological, and consultation

Table 1

Presence of Classes or Groups for Children with Limited Health Abilities in an Educational Institution (%)

Category of respondents	Reported the presence of special classes or groups	Reported the presence of children with limited abilities
Principals of city schools	34	69
Principals of low-enrollment schools	—	53
Vice principals of city schools	41	76
Heads of preschools	69	76
Senior preschool teachers	77	80

assistance to accommodation specialists, the council facilitates the implementation of interdepartmental interaction relating to the comprehensive rehabilitation of these children.

However, the key role in processes of integration is played by educational institutions that have accepted impaired children. Our survey studied attitudes of administrators of educational institutions toward integration, as well as their readiness and resource potential for organizing the necessary accommodation of impaired students. The survey was participated in by administrators of mass schools and preschool educational institutions in the city of Belgorod, and also administrators of rural schools in Belgorod oblast that have small enrollments. A total of twenty-nine principals and thirty-seven vice principals of the city's schools were surveyed, along with fifteen principals of low-enrollment schools, and sixty-two heads and forty senior teachers in preschools of the city of Belgorod.

In Table 1 we present the distribution of answers to questions as to whether the educational institution has special classes or groups for children with limited abilities and whether such children are being taught in the educational institution regardless of whether the institution has such classes or groups.

As can be seen from Table 1, about twice as many respondents reported that their educational institutions had children with limited health abilities compared to having classes or groups for such

students. This may provide evidence either that such children are completely integrated in the mass class or group or (the prevalent variant) or that hidden integration processes are going on in the educational institutions at random, regardless of the level of education. In preschools, hidden integration is less obvious owing to various objective factors: the system of preschool education in the city of Belgorod includes various types of special groups for children with limited abilities. At the present time, twenty-seven out of sixty-three preschool age educational institutions are the combination type, with specialized groups; one is the remedial type for children who are mentally retarded or have delayed mental development.

The low-enrollment schools in rural areas do not open special classes for children with limited abilities; for such schools, inclusive education is ubiquitous. In the city, on the other hand, there are a large number of such children; more important, as regular classes tend to be full, it is not always possible to do individual remedial work. Thus there is still a great need for special classes of remedial developmental instruction that make it possible to implement the model of temporary, partial, and combined integration.

In the responses about how educational administrators see the purpose of integration, both positive and negative aspects were mentioned. A positive aspect had to do with the need to enable children with impaired development to adapt among their peers, and establishing productive collaboration between ordinary and impaired students; it is useful for healthy classmates to associate with impaired children to teach tolerance and have good will toward others. Negative aspects included the fact that ordinary educational institutions, especially schools, are not adequately prepared to take in such children owing to lack of necessary material conditions, the difficulty that the teacher experiences in trying to teach them together, and the fear that children in the mass schools will have a negative attitude toward impaired classmates.

We looked at the educational institution's level of preparedness to implement the integration of impaired children, first and foremost, in terms of the school's or the preschool's organizing of services that provide assistance to a child with limited abilities: psychological, speech therapy, and social rehabilitation services,

Table 2

Presence of Services Providing Assistance to Children with Limited Health Abilities in an Educational Institution (%)

Category of respondents	Assistance services			Psychological-medical pedagogical commission
	Psychological	Speech therapy	Social rehabilitation	
Principals of city schools	90	72	48	90
Principals of low-enrollment schools	33	—	20	53
Vice principals of city schools	86	79	14	59
Heads of preschools	47	27	—	84
Senior preschool teachers	62	37	—	87

and a psychological-medical pedagogical council. The generalized survey results are presented in Table 2.

Our survey showed once more that rural schools are not adequately staffed with specialists providing psychological and pedagogical accommodation, even though integrated processes are an everyday reality specifically in those schools. However, just having the corresponding services in an educational institution does not ensure that children with limited abilities are getting effective help. Educational administrators were asked to rate the effectiveness of the service in regard to a number of criteria:

—the use of diagnostic, remedial, and developmental programs and methods that have been adapted to meet the conditions of our country and have been approved by the professional community;

—the presence of the necessary conditions, the state of the material-technical base, and the methodological and didactic tools that are necessary for working with all categories of children;

—measures to ensure that the children's individual charts reflect the work done with them, with a rating of results;

—cadre staffing—a school's staff of specialists providing psychological, pedagogical, medical, and social accommodation; col-

laboration with specialists of special remedial schools (in the city of Belgorod these are represented by special remedial schools No. 23, types II, IV, and VI; No. 26, type I; and No. 30, type VIII);

—collaboration with scientific-research organizations to improve the scientific and methodological support necessary for the activity (in Belgorod these are represented by Belgorod State University and the Belgorod Regional Institute for the Upgrading of Qualifications and Professional Retraining of Specialists).

The results that were obtained are presented in Table 3.

Our analysis of the results of the survey provides evidence that the assistance services are not sufficiently in compliance with the current requirements with respect to the psychological, pedagogical, medical, and social accommodation of children with limited abilities. The school services are experiencing more problems in this regard than their counterpart services in preschools. Most preschools have the material, technical, organizational, and methodological conditions necessary for working with such children, and they are better staffed with cadres. The biggest problems of general education schools have to do with material and technical conditions (for example, not a single city school is equipped with ramps; even children using wheelchairs who are sufficiently intelligent and cognitively active are forced to be schooled at home). It is astonishing that even though there is a felt need to collaborate with specialists of special remedial schools, no one is doing anything about this aspect. According to one experienced teacher of deaf children, who has transferred more than ten such students out of the primary grades of a special remedial school and into an ordinary mass school, her offer to continue working with the children and develop their speech did not get the response that it should have. Teachers in the ordinary school reacted rather formally to the recommendations of this volunteer teacher of the deaf, who, despite the difficulties, is still an outspoken advocate of integration.

Since the organization of psychological and pedagogical accommodation for children with limited abilities under conditions of an educational institution necessitates specific activity on the part of specialists of accommodation, we presented a questionnaire to psychologists and speech therapists of mass schools and preschool

Table 3

Distribution of Respondents' Opinions on the Extent to Which Assistance Services for Children with Limited Health Abilities Are in Compliance with the Necessary Requirements (%)

Parameters of assistance services' compliance with necessary requirements	Principals of city schools	Principals of low-enrollment schools	Vice principals of city schools	Heads of preschools	Senior preschool teachers
Use of diagnostic, remedial, and developmental programs and methods that have been adapted to the conditions of our country and approved by the professional community	17	—	14	58	40
Presence of necessary conditions (compliance with "Rules and Norms of Sanitation"), condition of material technical base, and also methodological and didactic tools necessary for working with all categories of children	10	—	10	63	17
Extent to which the individual charts of children reflect work being done with them, and evaluation of its results	17	13	24	63	45
Quality of the cadre support	45	—	24	55	42
Collaboration with scientific research organizations for the purpose of improving the scientific and methodological support of the activity	17	—	—	27	17
Cooperation with specialists of special remedial schools	—	—	—	—	—

institutions. Participants were thirty-nine school psychologists, twenty-six school speech therapists, nine teachers of classes of type VII remedial developmental instruction, and thirty-four psychologists and thirty-four speech therapists at preschool institutions.

The programs by which specialists work with children represent an important issue in organizing remedial work. It is our opinion that such programs ought to be selected or drawn up individually in accordance with the abilities and needs of the specific child. Most preschool specialists use programs recommended by the city's psychological-medical pedagogical commission based on results of a comprehensive examination of the child (35 percent of the speech therapists and 52 percent of the preschool psychologists pointed out the necessity of using special developmental programs), but many specialists think it is possible to work with the ordinary programs that have been recommended in an educational institution of the general developmental type (26 percent of the speech therapists and 24 percent of the psychologists, respectively).

The situation is different in the primary grades. Specialists give preference to ordinary programs used with the main contingent of students in primary school. For example, a preference for general developmental programs is expressed by 44 percent of school psychologists and 41 percent of speech therapists, while 25 percent of school psychologists and 23 percent of speech therapists adapt developmental programs to meet the needs of problem students. It is our opinion that the fact that preschool educational specialists are more oriented toward a child's specific characteristics is due to the characteristics of the educational process in a preschool institution, the fact that it is much more individualized, and the ability to depart from the general programs without experiencing the typical school fear of "not being in compliance with the syllabus."

In connection with the established practice of the statistically average approach to the child, it seems that the individualization of instruction in remedial developmental education is extremely important. But just what variants of the individualized approach are used in the course of accommodating children with limited abilities? The preschool psychologists pointed out the necessity of working out individual programs (53 percent of the respondents) and the

compilation of programs for the development of the preschool child (26 percent); school psychologists also think it necessary to draw up individual programs (36 percent). The speech therapists think that it is sufficient to have a plan of individual work for every child—56 percent of answers by preschool speech therapists and 47 percent of those by school speech therapists. The survey brought to light a very important methodological problem: the accommodation specialists are not putting together unified programs for the development of problem children; all variants of individual work are of an isolated character, and at times do not add up to a system of remedial developmental assistance but to one-time measures from one case to another. With things handled this way, the effectiveness of the whole remedial developmental process is diminished.

The survey showed that specialists are experiencing substantial difficulties in arranging collaboration with specialists in related fields. For example, 47 percent of the preschool psychologists and 56 percent of the school psychologists reported that there is a lack of well-organized models of interaction, and 54 percent of the school speech therapists stated that shortcomings afflicting collaborative work include the lack of a unified data bank on problem children. Specialists in educational institutions need the assistance of special education specialists (ranking in first place), special psychologists (second place), and specialists in adaptive physical education (third place). While it is possible for preschool institutions to have such specialists provided that there are staff slots, it is unlikely that special education specialists and special psychologists will be added to school staffs. Consequently, the organization of remedial developmental education for problem students has to be carried out utilizing the available specialists, with the help of outside specialists in related fields. For this purpose, there ought to be functioning Centers for Assistance to Children in the cities and raions. The necessity of opening such a center in Belgorod was mentioned by 76 percent of preschool psychologists, 59 percent of preschool speech therapists, 87 percent of school psychologists, and 77 percent of school speech therapists. In the opinion of specialists, the centers that are the most needed are those for psychological and social accommodation and centers for remediation and rehabilita-

tion. The Office of Education of the Administration of the City of Belgorod is taking steps to set up such a center.

Another problem area has to do with maintaining continuity between the work of the kindergarten and the school in regard to enabling children with limited abilities to become adapted to the new social conditions. It was found that only rarely is use made of a potential variant of collaborative work between the preschool and the school: conducting special classes of the "School of the Future First-Grade Student" type. The form of collaboration used the most often is psychological and pedagogical observation, followed by subsequent recommendations to parents on how to prepare their child to go to school (65 percent of the preschool psychologists and 41 percent of the preschool speech therapists, and 74 percent of the school psychologists and 73 percent of the school speech therapists). All too often, the purpose of the evaluation is not to figure out why a child is having difficulty mastering the program of the preschool education but rather determining whether he is ready to go to school. For the most part, children who have gone to a preschool are prepared for this experience, but it is not clear why children who are at risk at also entered into preschool classes without some kind of intervention. The diagnosis that is carried out ought to be of a comprehensive character; it ought to bring out the latent potential of the future students and help them to overcome difficulties in the beginning stages. The way to solve this problem is to combine the efforts of preschool and school specialists and to develop unified psychodiagnostic programs.

The survey has made it possible to study the opinions of specialists of the mass educational institutions in regard to the possibilities of the remedial developmental instruction of problem children. At the present time, integrated education of children with limited abilities is more widely practiced in preschools; the general education institutions have substantially more material, technical, organizational, and methodological problems. In connection with the rising number of such students in the mass school, it is essential to create special conditions everywhere that will make it possible to facilitate the integral development of these children, and the most essential condition is cooperative work on the part of all specialists who are

involved in the psychological, pedagogical, medical, and social accommodation of the students and are helping teachers accomplish the ideas of remedial developmental instruction.

Effective accommodation is possible only on the basis of the concerted efforts of all specialists interacting with each other and properly organizing collaboration with the teacher. The first line of interaction—that of “psychologist and teacher”—calls for adapting the syllabi and apportioning the teaching and learning load in accordance with psychophysical abilities, structuring class lessons in ways that are psychologically appropriate, taking account of the structure of the impairments and preventing possible gaps in the mastery of the knowledge, organizing interpersonal interactions within the class collective, removing barriers to communication, developing and implementing joint developmental programs, and diagnosing the effectiveness of the developmental work.

The next line of interaction is that of “social educator and teacher”: how to involve the parents in working with the child, how to ensure that the child is able to participate in life outside of school as well as in school, and how to structure the educational space appropriately, in accordance with all psychological and pedagogical recommendations. These matters are to be handled with the help of the social educator, and moreover the sphere of competence of that specialist includes that of providing social assistance for the special child. The interaction between the teacher and the speech therapist includes designing joint remedial work and carrying out all the specialist’s recommendations in activity in and outside of class. The lines of interaction “teacher and therapeutic physical training specialist” and “teacher and medical worker” have to do with the utilization of health promoting technologies and taking account of the physiological abilities of the special child.

Since integrating a child with limited abilities into a mass school environment involves inclusion in full-fledged interaction with his classmates, we studied the opinions of ordinary school students and their parents in regard to integrated instruction. Our survey covered 1,378 school students in the city of Belgorod and Belgorod oblast and 1,276 parents of ordinary school students (see Table 4).

The survey showed that very often parents and students do not

Table 4

Quantitative Breakdown of Respondents

	Total	Representatives in city of Belgorod		Representatives in Belgorod oblast	
		Schools	Lyceums, gymnasiums	Schools	Low-enrollment schools
Students	1,378	520	407	404	47
Parents	1,276	489	387	354	46

have information about children with limited abilities and about specialized classes for assisting such students under the conditions of an ordinary school. For example, 17.5 percent of students surveyed did not know that their school had remedial developmental instruction, and 24.8 percent did not know whether children with limited abilities were being taught in their school. Parents were even less well informed: 25.7 percent did not know about remedial developmental instruction, and 32.6 percent did not know about children with limited abilities. We attribute this to the fact that the respondents are not interested in an issue that does not immediately concern them. The least-well-informed respondents are the students and parents in the city schools, while the ones who are the best informed are the students and their parents in small schools, which is understandable. In a small educational institution, all the children are in full view, and this is especially true of problem students.

The fact that respondents do not know whether there are children with impaired development in a school does not constitute evidence of their attitudes toward integration. Instead, it is a sign of insufficient knowledge about the matter and a low level of information about the life of the school. To determine personal attitudes toward the problem we asked students and parents: "What is your personal attitude toward the idea of teaching ordinary children and children with impaired development together in the same educational institution?" At the end of the survey we asked students whether they were personally prepared to go to school with special students (see Table 5).

Table 5

Distribution of Respondents with Respect to Attitudes Toward Integrated Instruction (%)

Category of respondents	Representatives of city of Belgorod		Representatives of Belgorod oblast	
	Schools	Lyceums, gymnasiums	Schools	Low-enrollment schools
Students				
positive	37.88	32.18	44.30	27.65
indifferent	39.23	44.22	33.17	53.19
negative	22.88	23.58	22.52	19.14
personally willing to accept integration	45.19	44.22	58.41	42.55
Parents				
positive	41.92	44.18	51.13	36.96
indifferent	24.95	21.18	20.62	41.30
negative	33.13	34.62	28.25	21.74

The students in small-enrollment schools are the most indifferent about integration: for them, processes of integration are an everyday reality. In the case of students in city schools, on the basic and higher levels, their attitude is approximately the same: one-third of all the children in city schools take a positive and understanding attitude toward processes of integration, and they think it is necessary in order to provide all children with equal opportunities to get an education. It is instructive that about half the respondents are willing to accept integrated instruction in the same class as impaired students. Among the parents, more take a negative attitude toward integration: they are apprehensive about the quality of the education for their children and worry how comfortable an impaired child will feel in an ordinary class.

On the whole, the results revealed diverse attitudes to integration, with a slight tendency toward a positive attitude to this complex and ambivalent problem. A great deal of educational work will be needed, requiring mutual interaction with parents and children with limited abilities, in order to overcome any fears and barriers.

The survey results have been taken into account in formulating and organizing a municipal system of integrated education for children with limited abilities in the city of Belgorod. In order to ensure the optimal functioning of the municipal model, the following conditions are being implemented:

- a clear-cut policy has been worked out in the field of integration on the local level: a child who has special developmental characteristics is given not only the right but also the opportunity to go to an educational institution that has been chosen by his parents in accordance with his psychophysiological abilities;

- a unified coordinating body has been created on the level of the office of education of the administration of the city of Belgorod;

- there is a functioning city commission of interdepartmental interaction to deal with matters of the comprehensive rehabilitation of children with limited abilities;

- on the local level a multidisciplinary team for the support of children who have been integrated into the mass schools has been formed, represented by specialists of the city psychological-medical pedagogical commission.

The following areas of activity are in the stage of formulation:

- determination of the liaison between school and kindergarten;

- promotion of working contacts between the special schools and the mass schools;

- development of auxiliary personnel (ideally, having a second adult in the classroom to improve the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process for everyone. Measures to ensure access to other specialists such as speech therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, special educators, and medical personnel);

- formulation of a clear-cut strategy for the training and support of teachers;

- establishment of partnership with parents immediately after problems in development have been detected; parents' participation in evaluation and decision making;

- cooperation with organizations for those with special needs.