

**MSC 2020****International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.  
COMMUNICATION»****DESIGNING A RUSSIAN – AMERICAN TEACHERS’ TRAINING  
PROGRAM IN THE FIELD OF INCLUSION**

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**Abstract**

The project presented in the article is a unique research for Russia. It is dedicated to the poorly developed topic of improving the skills of teachers in the field of inclusive education based on international, in particular American, practical experience in working with the blind. The research is based on the materials of the Russian-American “Peer to Peer Dialogue program”, which was a long-term project focused on developing a training program for teachers working in the field of inclusion. The program's special feature was studying and using the foreign experience of working with people with disabilities, mostly the blind ones. The international project involved intensive interaction between Russian and American specialists, international visits, and practice-oriented study of Russian and American techniques. The result was a full-time blended program and a set of textbooks in Russian and English. The purpose of this article is to retrospectively reflect on the work done and evaluate the effectiveness of the program, taking into account the opinions of the target audience. The article gives an idea of the target audience, the stages of work at the program, its contents and the format of the materials included, as well as it focuses on the students' feedback collected through questionnaires and surveys. The results of the survey and questionnaire are presented in the form of tables that give an idea of the quality and effectiveness of the program, as well as the possibilities for improving it.

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*Keywords:* Inclusion, international experience, pedagogical design, professional development program, Russian-American project, teachers



## 1. Introduction

This paper introduces the problem of designing teachers' training and professional development programs in the field of inclusion. The focus of the article is Russian-American cooperation and experience exchange in teaching blind and visually impaired people. The program created as a result of this cooperation involved international perspectives and points of view on the matter and different approaches that enriched both the sides and contributed to the program.

Designing teachers' training programs focused on inclusive education both for schools and universities is currently becoming more urgent and relevant. This trend is indicated by the Russian Federation Federal law No. 273 "On education in the Russian Federation", which determines and regulates education for disabled people. The law enshrines the right for children to receive quality education due to their claims and opportunities (Federal Law "On education in the Russian Federation" of 12.29.2012 N 273-FZ, 2012).

Other important document that have become the legal basis for inclusive education in Russia is Law No. 124-FZ "On the basic guarantees of the rights of the child in the Russian Federation", which declares the basic warrantees of the rights and interests of children provided by the Russian Federation's Constitution. The law also describes minimum social standards and the main indicators of children's life quality, measures to protect children's rights for health care, recreation, vocational training, etc. Law No. 181-FZ "On social protection of disabled people in the Russian Federation", clarifies the state policy in the sphere of disabled persons' social protection. The law's goal is to guarantee their equal opportunities with other citizens in civil, economic, political and other rights and freedoms provided by the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Federal state educational standards claim that all educational institutions provided the necessary opportunities to all categories of people with disabilities to provide them with quality education. The latter includes study programs' adaptation and opportunities for professional development and socialization of handicapped people. The Russian Federation state program "Accessible environment" (Order of the Government of the Russian Federation, 2012) introduced the term "inclusion" in 2011. This program determines the main principles of inclusion development until 2025. Its purpose is to create legal, economic and other conditions to promote integrating people with disabilities into the society and improve their standard of living.

Due to these documents people with disabilities should get access to facilities, rehabilitation and habilitation services, professional development and employment as well as to quality medical help. The documents and programs listed above regulate the responsibilities of educational institution and teachers and protect the rights of students with disabilities in Russia. They also determine requirements for improving teachers' professional training in the field of inclusion and requirements for teachers training programs' design, stimulating the development of research in the field of theory and practice of inclusive education.

## 2. Problem Statement

Works in the field of teachers and educational workers' professional training, as well as researches on pedagogical and social design served a theoretical basis for this study. Let's briefly focus on the main trends that are important for our work.

The works of many scientists are devoted to teachers' professional development in general, but the problems of pedagogical design, as such, are not widely covered in the scientific literature. Sufficient attention in scientific sources is paid to the problems of inclusion in general, adaptation of educational programs for children with disabilities, legal aspects (Alekhina et al., 2019; Felizardo, 2017; Kirillova, 2017). Some works focus on visual impairment, we were particularly interested in (Cordun et al., 2015; Ranganathan, 2014). At the same time, relatively little attention is paid to the problem of inclusive education in the aspect of designing teacher training programs in Russia (Margolis, 2014) while in the international practice this question is widely discussed (Allan et al., 2013; Blanton et al., 2011; Florian, 2012; Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Kim & Lindeberg, 2012; Villalobos et al., 2017). And there are practically no works in Russian that pay their attention to the American experience in the field of inclusion. Since pedagogical design in inclusive education has a large practical part, including practice-oriented technologies for socialization and education of children with disabilities, we were interested in the works devoted to social design. In Russia in the late XX – early XXI century, a lot of researchers were engaged in theoretical and applied issues of social design and various aspects of inclusion. Some of them focus on their national specifics of teaching children and adults with disabilities (Alaluf et al., 2017; Alias et al., 2012; Bhan, 2012; Drămnescu & Enăchescu, 2016). And some researchers highlight various aspects of rehabilitation programs' design (Chitic & Rusu, 2016).

In this context, this practice-oriented research and study of American technologies and the possibility of their application in Russia has occupied a worthy place in this collection. This international project has continued the social project "BVI: Equal opportunities: training blind and visually impaired English language" and also can be qualified as educational (due to the activity), innovation (due to the nature of projected changes), volunteer (due to the nature of activities), grant (due to financing), small (due to scale) medium (due to its length – 1 to 5 years). It is a unique research for Russia, dedicated to the poorly developed topic of improving teachers' skills in the field of inclusive education. In this research we will focus on the experience of Russian-American cooperation in the field of inclusive education, which was initiated by the authors in 2015, lasted for 3 years (as the Russian-American "Peer to Peer Dialogue" program) and resulted in a professional development program for teachers who work with disabled students.

## 3. Research Questions

While conducting the research we focused on the following main aspects:

- getting acquainted and analyzing the experience of American educational institutions working with the blind and visually impaired people and describing it as fully as possible
- organizing the collected material into a training program for teachers and specialists working in inclusive education.

All these tasks were successfully implemented in practice.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

*The purpose* of the research was designing a practice-oriented training program for teachers working with the blind and visually impaired people in various types of educational institutions, both for Russian and American specialists. To do this we were:

- to collect and summarize available Russian technologies in this area and describe them;
- to structure it in the format of full-time offline and online courses;
- to test the program on the basis of Pitirim Sorokin Syktyvkar State University and get feedback from the target audience;
- to analyze the efficiency of the program, taking into account the opinion of the target audience, that is, teachers and specialists working in inclusive education.

#### **5. Research Methods**

*Research methods* included: general philosophical methods of analysis and synthesis, content analysis, case studies, observation, questionnaires and graphical representation of research results.

#### **6. Findings**

The experience of American educational institutions working with the blind and visually impaired people was studied in detail in the process of face to face communication with specialists. A group of authors and program developers visited educational institutions and resource centers in New York and San Francisco and described their observations and analysis.

Russian authors-practitioners who directly conduct research or work with children and adults with disabilities, including the blind ones, were involved in the project. They summarized and described their experience, as well as created video recordings of lessons and instructions for teachers and specialists.

The collected material was arranged and structured into a blended training program for teachers and specialists who work in inclusive education, and tested (88 people were trained).

The training program included the following 4 sections and 25 topics:

- International Project —Equal Opportunities: Teaching English to Blind and Visually Impaired Students in Russia (BVI-Project)
- 1) EARLY STAGE OF EDUCATING AND REHABILITATING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES:
- Early Correction Assistance to Visually Impaired Children
  - Peculiarities of Education of the Tender Age Blind Child in the Family (Parent's experience)

## 2) ORGANIZATIONAL AND LEGAL BASIS OF WORK WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

- Legal Basis of Work with Disabled Children in Russia
- Management and Financing of Educational Programs for Work with Handicapped People in the USA
- Russian Organizations Serving Blind and Visually Impaired
- Organizations Working with Disabled People at the Regional Level (in the Republic of Komi)
- Experience of Physically Disabled People Socialization in the USA
- Interaction between the All Russia Association for the Blind in the Republic of Komi and Organizations Working with Visually Impaired Children and Youth
- Organizing the System Service to Readers in the Special Library for the Blind of the Republic of Komi Named after Louis Braille
- Working with Disabled People in San Francisco, United States

## 3) TEACHING AND SOCIALIZING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AT RUSSIAN AND AMERICAN SCHOOLS OF VARIOUS TYPES

- Conditions for Successful and Effective Work with Visual Impaired Children (Best Practices and Recommendations)
- Blind Child Socialization at a Boarding School. Education as Socialization
- Inclusive Education: Secondary School № 53, Izhevsk, the Republic of Udmurtia (case study)
- Tutor's Functions: Working with Parents, Children and School Administration
- Opportunities for Distant Education in Hadley School for the Blind (case study)
- Working with Disabled Children in Montana School for the Blind and Deaf (case study)

## 4) TECHNOLOGIES OF TEACHING AND SOCIALIZING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

- Forming Grammar Skills of Blind Students
- Teaching Blind Students to Read in English
- Perception of Children with Disabilities and Including them in the Educational Process in the Framework of Inclusion
- Teaching BVI Students: Basics
- Game-playing Technologies in Teaching the Young Visually Impaired Learners
- Using Tactile Materials and Books in Educative Process Possibilities of Independent Creation of Tactile Books
- Teaching English to BVI Students via Listening
- "My joy" Theatre for Special People (case study)

According to the format of educational materials, the program included: lectures, practical classes, round tables, laboratories (field trips), consultations, videos, tests, including interactive colloquiums. The target audience included: teachers and administrators of inclusive and regular schools planning to introduce inclusion, teachers and administrators of secondary special educational institutions in Syktyvkar and the Komi Republic, teachers of psychology and pedagogy departments of Pitirim Sorokin Syktyvkar State University, specialists of the Ministry of education of the Komi Republic, specialists and Heads of additional education institutions. Leading Russian practitioners from Moscow, Izhevsk, Saint Petersburg, Saratov and San Francisco, representing boarding schools for children with disabilities, inclusive schools, the Perspektiva Center, the center for orientation and mobility in the USA were invited as speakers. At the end of the program, participants of full-time training were asked to fill in a questionnaire, on the basis of which the main evaluation statements about the efficiency of the program were formulated.

Students' feedback. As a result of the survey, it was possible to collect opinions and ratings of the participants of the program, which are presented in the following tables (Tables 01-03) as a percentage of the total number of participants (88):

**Table 1.** Assessment of the course material novelty level

Topic	Totally new information	Much new information	I knew much of it	Totally known information
International Russian-American project "Social adaptation and education of children with disabilities»	43%	39%	13%	5%
Inclusive education: history, principles and advantages.	5%	40%	42%	12%
Legal basis for working with children with disabilities in Russia.	11%	32%	42%	11%
Professional communities and organizations working with blind people in Russia	14%	55%	26%	4%
Inclusive education in Russia on the example of school No. 53 of Izhevsk Udmurt Republic	48%	38%	12%	3%
Conditions for successful and effective work with children with visual impairment. K. Grota school)	57%	35,5%	7%	1%
Organizing work with children with disabilities at the Montana school for the blind and deaf	66%	21%	6,5%	6,5%
Resource center and programs for students with disabilities at San Francisco State University.	65%	27%	5%	3%
Forming orientation and mobility skills for the blind	36%	47%	16%	1%
Functions of a tutor, his work with parents, children and the administration of an inclusive school	27%	37%	29%	7%
Hatlen Center and its work with blind students	68%	24%	5%	3%

A school for the blind and a library in Fremont. Special library services for people with disabilities in San Francisco.	68%	24%	5%	3%
Adaptive technologies in teaching the blind	35%	44%	18%	3%
Distance learning opportunities.	22%	33%	41%	4%
Activities of "Perspektiva"	47%	30%	19%	4%
Lessons of kindness	7%	29%	41%	23%

**Table 2.** General assessment of the course

Question	Yes	No	Difficult to answer
The program "Organization of inclusive education of children with disabilities in the conditions of the Federal state educational system " is very important for teachers working in inclusion	97%	0	3%
Online format is a convenient form of professional development for this program	54%	25%	21%
The project "Social adaptation and education of children with disabilities" is an opportunity to design a new educational environment	88.5%	3%	9%
I would like to participate in other seminars on this topic	68.5%	11%	20%
I will recommend this program to my colleagues	82%	2.5%	15%

Participants were also asked to evaluate the structure and organization of the program. The responses were distributed as follows:

**Table 3.** Evaluating the structure and organization of the program

Question	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Bad
The content of the program	59%	29%	12%	0%
Order of materials submitted	54%	37%	9%	0%
Diversity of materials	51%	35%	14%	0%
The quality of the presentations	39%	44%	17%	0%
The quality of the handouts	59%	31%	10%	0%
Program logistics	61%	35%	4%	0%

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, we can see that we have created a unique program with a high level of novelty and relevance, including information blocks and materials that were developed only due to the fact that the project was international. Using the experience of the United States in teaching children with disabilities, in particular vision, is extremely effective and promising for the Russian reality, and much of it can be adapted. At the same time, the testing of the course showed that such aspects as practical models and technologies for adapting educational materials to specific pathologies and individual characteristics are particularly in demand. These aspects are currently not developed either in Russia or the United States. They should be considered as a further perspective for research in this area.

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