

TOLERANT ATTITUDES TOWARDS PERSONS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AS A COMPONENT OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING FOR TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. *One of the priorities of the modern educational process is the formation and creation of an inclusive space, which includes all components of universal design and, in particular, issues of staff preparedness. Thus, the basic training of specialists in this sphere includes not only the competence of teachers and professionals of helping professions in inclusion, but also the development of established personal attitudes and judgments in accordance with the values of the modern world. Of particular importance is the development of tolerance in future teachers in all aspects of its manifestation - both in the process of learning in higher educational institutions, during the internship, and in the process of professional activity itself, in particular during communication and interaction with persons with special educational needs.*

The importance of this aspect in a teacher's professional profile prompted us to study this quality and determine the level of tolerant attitude of future specialists to children with special educational needs. To solve this problem, we used a number of methods that allowed us to comprehensively study the personal qualities of students in academic groups where students with special educational needs or who received experience in communicating with children with special educational needs during internship in specialized educational institutions or social welfare institutions. Thus, to analyze the qualitative aspects of tolerance (ethnic, social, personal), we used the express questionnaire "Tolerance Index" (Soldatova, Kravtsova, Khukhlaev, Shaigerova, 2002); In order to study the value and semantic component of students' tolerant attitudes we used the "Tolerance Diagnostics. Incomplete sentences" (Kuhareva, 2013); in research of the emotional-volitional component - the method "The Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale. BEES" (Mehrabian, Epstein, 2000); for the analysis of the communicative component – the test of communicative tolerance (Boyko, 2009).

Besides, the listed methods and test were supplemented with the inclusive education questionnaire and the author's art-therapy techniques on the perception of persons with

special educational needs and understanding of the importance of tolerant communication within professional activities.

This approach in the research has allowed us to review essentially the basic educational components for the formation of professional and inclusive competences on the basis of tolerant attitude, to form and briefly outline in this scientific review our own methodological proposal for the introduction of training and other innovative forms of building interaction in academic groups.

Keywords: *inclusion, methodology of inclusive competence formation, teachers' training, tolerance, tolerant attitude.*

Introduction

As the scientists note, “the system of higher education requires continuous updating of the theoretical and methodological basis, development of applied aspects of the educational process... inclusion of special training and rehabilitation technologies, the latest techniques for students with disabilities into the pedagogical system of higher education... because a young person with poor health, but who has received a higher education has a better chance to be employed and integrated into society” (Maliienko, 2021). This format of inclusion, as a strategy that includes and at the same time excludes the “differences” of each individual, is the basic contradiction of the Ukrainian realities of perception, understanding and technology of implementation of inclusive education from the “broad” understanding of the term adopted in Europe and the world.

Since international scholars, practitioners and lawmakers consider the following categories of persons with special educational needs: children with learning problems; children from families in crisis or from families in difficult circumstances; children from families of a different faith, nationality, ethnicity, with other cultural values and traditions, different from the traditions and culture of the territorial community; children of migrants, internally displaced persons; gifted children; children with disabilities, etc. Which is very different from our education system and accepted norms of inclusive education.

Thus, if we take as a basis the “International classification of functioning, disability and health: children & youth version: ICF-CY”, we have a significant expansion of the possibilities of organizing an inclusive educational environment. For which we can use “a conceptual framework and a common language and terminology for recording problems manifested in infancy, childhood and adolescence involving functions and structures of the body, activity limitations and participation restrictions, and environmental factors important for children and youth ... that we can use in different disciplines, government sectors and national boundaries to define and document the health, functioning and development of children and youth”, proposed by the World Health Organization (Nakaz, 2018; Organization, 2007).

Therefore, this document has been declared at the international level as one that can be used for “clinicians, educators, policy-makers, family members, consumers and researchers to document characteristics of health and functioning in children and youth” (Nakaz, 2018; Organization, 2007) and through the proposed classification to improve educational services and the concept of interaction between professionals who can support children at different educational levels and taking into account their differences (Organization, 2007).

This means that specialists in the “helping” professions, which we can include educators, social workers, representatives of psychological services and specialists in special education, are faced with a difficult set of questions:

- willingness to accept the “diversity” and special educational needs of the child with whom they are working;
- the need to understand the root causes of the child's special educational needs, interests, hobbies, passions, family traditions and motives for their behavior;
- a constant search for approaches, pedagogical technologies, technologies of psycho-pedagogical and socio-pedagogical support for the child in accordance with his or her needs and abilities;
- a high level of motivation of the specialist himself and the ability to “pass on” his personal motivation to the children with whom he works to achieve educational goals, promote socialization and adaptation of each participant in the educational process for further self-realization;
- and, probably, the main thing is the established system of values of the specialist, which is based on a tolerant attitude to each participant of the educational process and is manifested in a “careful” attitude to the person with whom he/she interacts.

The theoretical background

So, if we take the issues of values as the basis for training specialists in the “helping” professions, and put “tolerance” on the first step, then we should clearly understand that the issue of tolerant attitudes is considered in various aspects of interaction. If we take the proposed concept of “tolerant consciousness” as the basis, we should focus on its structural components such as (Dmitrieva et al., 2018):

- Perceptual component, which is expressed in a positive perception of the surrounding people, representatives of the socio-cultural environment, regardless of nationality, religion, education, age, attitudes, individual differences;
- The cognitive component is a kind of information “field” that determines the level of awareness of the uniqueness of cultural codes,

traditions, individual-psychological and ethnic features of people's behavior;

- The emotional component implies awareness of the emotional state of other people, empathy, the ability to objectively assess people around;
- Behavioral component means common behavioral attitude to the peculiarities of different ethnic groups and cultures, aimed at establishing trust and equal communication.

The proposed components of tolerance allowed us to formulate our own vision and structure of a tolerant attitude, which formed the basis of our research. For example, we have to do next steps:

- we need to understand the scale of values and value orientations of student youth, which represent them as part of society, allow us to project patterns of behavior (models of automatic reactions to “stimuli” of the surrounding world). What we have noted in previous studies in view of the relevance of this topic for the formation of an active civic and professional position of a specialist, ensuring the implementation of the principles of inclusive education (Sarancha et al., 2021).
- The next step, in our opinion, is the need to determine the level of “emotional response”, i.e. the level of empathy and the ability to manage one's emotional state, because both the mental health of the specialist and his mentees will depend on it. Besides, by determining the level of “emotional response” we can foresee and understand those behavioral manifestations that may arise in students and future specialists when interacting under conditions of the educational process, specially created situations and prevent “emotional outbursts” during practical acquisition of experience in teaching and interaction in the team of supporting a child with special educational needs.
- It is also important at this stage to determine the level of students' tolerant attitude, which will confirm the information already available about the patterns of behavior, interaction, emotional reactions to situations of success or stress while working in an environment of diversity. That, in turn, will allow the teacher to find those pedagogical technologies that will reduce the psychological load on the future specialists, will promote the correction of emotional and behavioral reactions, will allow to cope with stress and atypical reactions of children with whom students will work as specialists of the “helping” professions. And also it will help in the further work with relatives and family members of children with special educational needs, team members accompanying this child in the environment of diversity and inclusion, while “not losing themselves”.

Methodology of Research

The aim of our research is to study the level of tolerant attitudes in communication and behavior of students in academic groups where students with special educational needs learn and the influence of the obtained data on further professional self-realization of young professionals in conditions of inclusion and diversity. In particular, the search for the most effective technologies of forming relevant competences of future professionals of “helping” professions, which will promote emotional and psychological stability, stress resistance and highly skilled actions of a specialist in the situation of choosing the strategy for interaction with a child with SEN based on the formed tolerant attitude to each participant of interaction.

The intended audience for our research was students in three academic groups in 012 Preschool Education (20 respondents), 013 Primary Education (23 respondents), and 231 Social Work (15 respondents). Each of the selected groups after training will work in the areas most often in contact with the environment of diversity and inclusion. It is worth noting that one of the groups has an officially confirmed status of a person with special educational needs, the other two groups have “invisible inclusion” (the presence of a disability that is not documented).

We used a number of techniques to study the level of tolerant attitudes. In particular:

- Express questionnaire “Tolerance index” by G. Soldatova, O. Kravtsova, O. Khukhlaeva, L. Shaigerova (Bugueva, 2012);
- Diagnostic of Tolerance. Incomplete sentences (Kuhareva, 2013);
- Emotional Response Scale (Mehrabian, 1996);
- Communicative tolerance test (Bojko, 1998).

Each of which complemented and revealed the details of personal attitudes, manifestations of tolerance and a set of values that have already been formed and are the basis in the formation of the future specialist of “helping” professions.

Results of the research

Thus, examining the level of each student from the groups allocated within the experiment, we could observe the changes that took place in the academic groups. These changes were caused by several specially created situations of interaction and alternated by factors of high stress and emotional discharge.

So, to work with the groups, we conducted a survey and testing in accordance with the previously stated methods, as well as an interview with each group member who showed a high level of tolerant attitude and communication. In this way, combining and comparing the data of our

respondents, we distinguished among them three groups: with a high, intermediate, and low level of tolerant attitude, taking into account all the suggested components to be considered (emotional response, tolerance index). Besides, during the interview we had an opportunity to make an additional division in these groups into those who had already worked with children with special educational needs, engaged in volunteering or participated in charitable actions (“direct interaction”) and those who had no such experience. Further it has allowed us to define the essential difference in readiness to accompany and work in a team for improvement of rendering of educational services to the child with special educational needs.

Thus, at the beginning of the experiment we had 17 respondents (29%) with a high level of tolerant attitude (three of them from the “direct interaction” group and fourteen who had no such experience), and 41 members of the experimental group (71%) showed an intermediate level of tolerant attitude (of them eight respondents from the “direct interaction” group). There was no low level in the academic groups, which we attributed to students' high motivation for mastering this group of professions, which they reported during the interviews.

But our aim was not just to investigate the qualities and capabilities of each of the participants in the experiment. We had to understand whether they had the competencies needed to work in an inclusive educational environment, the necessary skills for creative thinking, pedagogical transformation, and stress-resistance.

Thus, in order to explore the full range of reactions to information, stressful situations and the actual interaction with children with special educational needs, as well as to form relevant competencies, we developed a step-by-step program within the disciplines of the inclusive cycle, which included a number of activities:

- using video clips from the YouTube database, some of which are collected in a video collection of cartoons for children and parents in order to develop a tolerant attitude towards children with special educational needs and their challenges (Subashkevych et al., 2020);
- online or extramural journeys by specially created museums for understanding people with disabilities, as well as for remote acquaintance with the features of socio-psychological support for children with disabilities in social protection institutions. (Khyliya, 2018; Maliienko, 2021). During the offline training such journeys were not virtual, they were real, where students had the opportunity to engage in communication with specialists from social protection institutions, or public organizations, to interact directly with children;
- especially for students who had the most motivation, we offered participation in activities within the framework of social projects,

during which students had the opportunity to go through all stages of communication with children with special educational needs and learn to interact with the child's family, members of society, activists, as well as specialists who organized and provided socio-pedagogical support for children. (Sarancha & Khilya, 2020);

- and also, the organization of the educational process in the format of interactive learning, which provides for “the involvement of training participants in the educational process, which allows them to see, hear and apply their knowledge in practice. Students are actively involved in the learning process, and the trainer's tasks are to plan and facilitate the educational process (Naida, 2018).

Considering the peculiarities of each group, we had an opportunity to adjust the level of stress for the student youth and the sequence of activities. Besides, our goal was not just to check their level of tolerant attitude, emotional response, but in the process of step-by-step training work, discussions and dialogues concerning their participation in direct work with children with special educational needs, watching a video sequence, to form skills and competencies which future specialists lacked to solve problems related to the offered interaction situations. Therefore, we obligatorily addressed such element of pedagogical interaction as pedagogical cooperation provided and achieved in the following way (Perminova, 2019):

- emotional support, especially at the stages when it is necessary to show persistence, purposefulness and creativity;
- Introduction of elements of mutual aid into the system of students' independent activity (between the participants of the group as well as between the participants of other groups);
- creation of a communication system oriented to a polylogue with a high level of consciousness and self-esteem of the student (Perminova, 2019).

All the above was provided with the help of elements of art-therapy (“minutes of creativity”) which helped to remove the psychoemotional and psychophysical tension arising while watching videos, during absentee trips and meetings with children with special educational needs. Group interaction took place during joint interdisciplinary meetings - supervisions, as a result of volunteer activities and socially significant projects and actions. In rare cases it was replaced by competitions on the results of the received experience, practical recommendations on use of theoretical knowledge in work.

Such “fluctuations” during the organization of classes with students in this experimental group showed that the initial level of tolerant attitude is not “stable” and depending on the situation experienced by each of the participants in this or that event influenced their further choice. Although, at the same time,

it fluctuated insufficiently, which can confirm our previous research related to motivation.

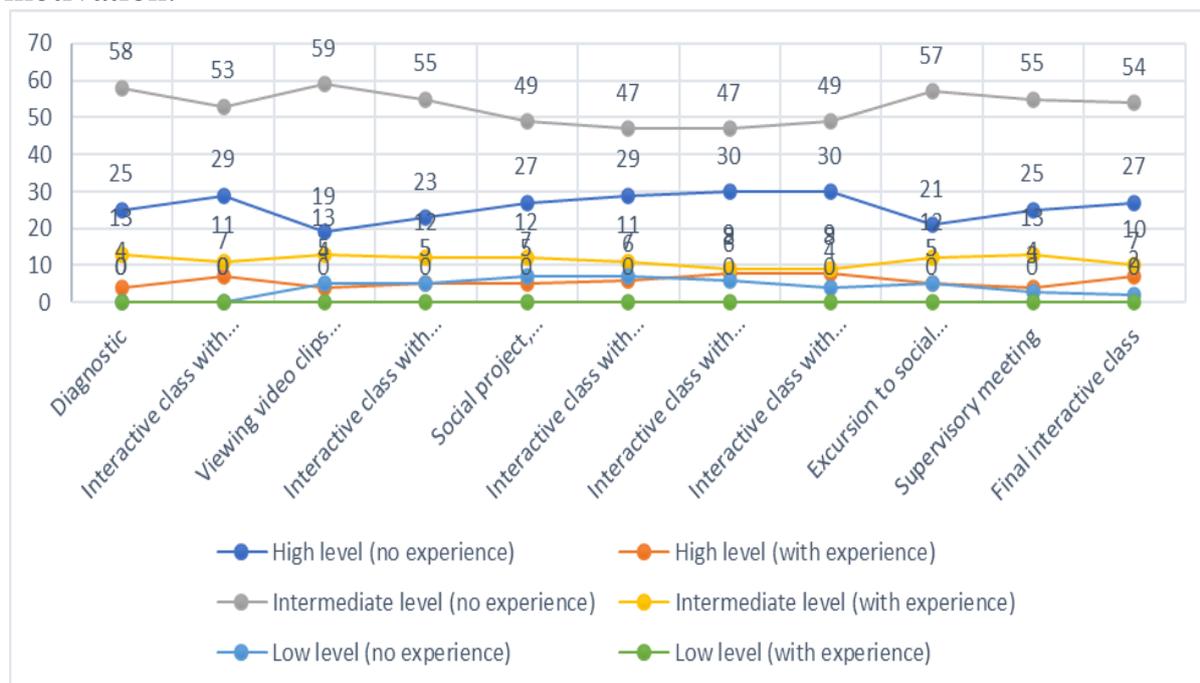


Figure 1. *Quantitative changes in the level of tolerance in the academic groups as a result of participation in the ten events (created by the authors)*

If we look at the “variations” presented in Figure 1, first, we can see the results of the first diagnostics by means of a complex questionnaire and the results of the cross-section after ten classes held in the following sequence: 1. an interactive class with emotional inclusion; 2. watching video clips from the life of children with SEN; 3. an interactive class with emotional inclusion; 4. a social project, volunteering with non-complex categories of children with SEN; 5-7. an interactive class with emotional inclusion; 8. excursion to social care institutions, meeting with difficult categories of children with SEN; 9. supervisory meeting of three groups; 10. final interactive session. Thus, we will have a rather qualitative picture, which is the most stressful and brings “serious” changes in the initial level of tolerance attitudes in all groups. Among such activities we can note first of all those which are connected with mediated (extramural journeys, videos) or direct (when participating in excursions to special institutions / organizations, social projects) acquaintance with children with special educational needs. And the decrease in the level of tolerant attitude among students occurs in the absence of pedagogical support by the teacher of the relevant event. Namely, if there was no step-by-step discussion of the event or video in the process of watching / getting acquainted, and it was delayed for several hours or days.

Also, on the basis of the curves of the diagram we can observe that “variations” in the level of tolerant attitudes among student youth who already had experience of “direct interaction”, i.e. communicated and engaged in

accompanying difficult categories of children with SEN, are much smaller and, they never equaled a low level of tolerant attitudes.

Discussion

Of course, the small number of involved students did not allow us to conduct a large-scale experiment. In addition, the peculiarities of the territorial community, within which the interaction of students and children with SEN, their families and partners took place, which in some cases gave “an impulse” to a positive change in attitudes, values and relationships of future professionals, had an impact. After all, it is the state and public organizations, working with the community well enough, involving everyone in communication or at least in accepting the “diversity”, teaching and showing an example of how to respond adequately, how to properly provide assistance, etc. But at the same time, the data we obtained have a rather specific picture of “fluctuations” in the process of preparation through the inclusion of our own emotional personal experience. Therefore, we will be able to observe the “real image of a “ready” specialist” in two or three years, when the student youth who participated in the proposed courses and volunteer socially significant projects reach the professional level and begin to realize their potential as a specialist in education or in the social sphere.

Consequently, we achieved the goal of this scientific review of the conducted research. As we were able to study the level of tolerant attitude of the involved academic groups as well as traced some aspects of the influence on the formation of the future specialist's personality, his/her motivation for professional self-realization in the conditions of inclusion and diversity. But at the same time we were convinced that there is no single standardized mechanism in selecting the most effective technologies for forming relevant competencies of future professionals of “helping” professions, because each student, each personality is a unique participant of the educational process and these very features require a constant creative search of technologies that will fit exactly this academic group, which creates the need for further search of universal solutions in this direction.

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