



Preparing would-be specialists to work with families of children with special educational needs

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Keywords:

children with special educational needs, working with families, professionals' collaboration with families, special needs teacher, family education

Abstract:

Collaboration with families raising a child with special educational needs, is part of the professional activities of special needs teacher and one of the conditions of its efficiency as a whole. The partnership of teachers and families provides effective psycho-pedagogical support of development of the pupils. Accordingly, experts of special and inclusive institutions shall be professionally competent in matters of such interaction. The study revealed certain gaps in the training of students to work with parents, the insufficiency of their practical readiness to work in partnership. Formation of readiness of future special needs teachers to work

with families should be implemented in stages throughout the training period. Preparation tasks should gradually become more complex: from development of initial ideas about family education to master the creative experience in working with families. The implement of the underlying interdisciplinary linkages between disciplines of different cycles, practice of students, their independent and research work should be carried out. The technique of formation of readiness of future specialists to work with families of children with special educational needs requires significant changes as well. Development of modern content, methods of complete continuous training of future special needs teachers to work with families of students is the prospect of further scientific studies.

1. Introduction

One of the integral components of professional activity of special needs teacher is to work with the pupils' families. The importance of this work, especially the cooperation with the pupils' parents, and its content is the actual direction of psychological and pedagogical studies. Various aspects of this problem have been studied in special pedagogics in Ukraine, namely: the participation of parents in complex rehabilitation of children with special educational needs (Dehtyarenko, 2005; Shevcov, 2009), elaboration of methodological advice for parents, raising children with peculiarities of psychophysical development (Illyashenko, Bastun, & Sak, 1997; Ribcun, 2006; Stadnik, 2006; Vysocka & Mytko, 2006; Shevcov, Romanenko, Xanzeruk, & Chebotarova, 2013); parenting children with intellectual disabilities (Kravchenko, Honchar, Majorova & Chernyshevskaya, 2004); psychological assistance to the family (Kisarchuk, 2006); working professionals with families raising children with mental and physical disabilities (Myronova, 2010; Shulzhenko & Andryeyeva, 2011; Matvyeyeva & Koval, 2014; Kyslychenko & Konoplyasta, 2016), etc. However, the problem of future special needs teachers' training to work with families raising children with peculiarities of psychophysical development in national science has not been a subject of any special study. Insufficient knowledge of the problem, its expressive urgency predetermine the choice of our research topic. The aim of this article is to define the tasks and content of training students to work with families of children with special educational needs.



2. Methodology of the study

In the course of the study, such different techniques were used, as: analysis of the regulatory framework of special and inclusive education; analysis of literary sources on problems of family education and training to work with families; exploration of the educational programs and curricula for major 016 Special education (2016 Correctional education); questioning (polling) the students and solving their teaching problems; quantitative and qualitative analysis of the research results. Analysis of the regulatory framework of special and inclusive education was carried out to determine the objectives of the institutions collaboration with families; the role of specialists in working with children. When studying the documentation of the high schools we analyzed the existence of competencies for work with parents in educational programs; the curriculum content of individual disciplines and their compliance with professional competencies; teaching practice programs. Questioning of the students was aimed at the study of such aspects, as: understanding of the concept of «work with parents»; knowledge about the contents and methods of working with parents; the ability to choose the most appropriate forms of work with families in various types of educational institutions; the choice of the most urgent problems of family education and collaboration with families. Accordingly, the questionnaire contained the following questions:

1. How do you understand the concept «work of specialists with the pupils' parents»?
2. What is the work of a special needs teacher with the pupils' parents, in your opinion?
3. What are the methods of work of the special needs teacher with parents of pupils?
4. What forms of work with families should be used in special schools?
5. What do you think, does the choice of forms and methods of work with parents depend on the type of institution and nosology of the child? Give your reasons.
6. What are the problems that, in your opinion, are relevant in the work of the special needs teacher with pupils' families?

Students were as well offered teaching tasks that required knowledge of the basic functions of family education, the principles of cooperation of the teacher with the families, contents and methods of work with parents. A holistic analysis of the results of ascertaining research allowed to conclude the readiness of future special needs teachers to work with families of children with special educational needs.

3. The analysis of the received results of theoretical and empirical research

The study of the legislative and normative base of the education of children with special educational needs certifies the importance of the cooperation of specialists with children's families. In particular, in the Regulation on Special School (boarding school) for Children with Special Educational Needs (2011), the Regulation for the Training and Rehabilitation Center (2012) one of the tasks of the special institutions is defined by providing psychological and pedagogical assistance to parents to ensure their active participation in the complex educational, correctional work and rehabilitation process. The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on the organization of inclusive education (2011) called the team interaction of specialists with the child's parents one of the conditions of effectiveness of inclusive education.

A thorough analysis of the literature shows that the theory of special pedagogy also does not separate helping the child with mental and physical disabilities from interaction with their parents, because the partnership between teachers and families provides effective psychological and pedagogical support. Accordingly, experts of special and inclusive institutions should be professionally competent in matters of such interaction.

Educational-professional program of specialists training specialty 016 Special education (2016 Correctional Education) contain the competency required to work with parents of pupils, namely: the ability to communicate with parents of children with special educational needs; ability to collaborate with children's parents by persons who replace them. However, detailed knowledge and skills in these programs are not itemized. Qualification characteristics of a teacher determines the following tasks in working with parents: liaising with parents, providing them with pedagogical consultative assistance on issues of education, physical and mental development of their children.

Thus, the analysis of the regulatory framework of special and inclusive education, literary sources allows to formulate the purpose and objectives of special needs teachers in working with the families of the pupils.



The aim is to provide the parents with skilled assistance in the upbringing the child with special educational needs.

Objectives in working with parents:

- to help establish an adequate relationship between the parents, other family members and the child with special needs;
- to help adults to create a family-friendly atmosphere – comfortable for a child's development;
- to expand awareness among parents about child's prospects in various aspects of life;
- to create conditions for active participation of parents in the work of the team of psychological and pedagogical support of the child;
- to teach parents the methods of the organization of various activities of the child's leisure activities;
- to help parents to establish relationships with public organizations, institutions, aimed at protecting the rights of children with special educational needs;
- to increase the level of mental health of the parents.

Accordingly, in the process of training students must learn the forms and methods of realization of these tasks in work with parents.

Analysis of the curricula and training programmes of training specialists in oligophrenopedagogics shows that some issues on working with parents are highlighted in the teaching different disciplines. For example:

- Correctional psychopedagogics – topic: «The education of children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities in the family»;
- Pedagogy of inclusive education – topic: «The cooperation with parents as team members of inclusive institutions».

Also in the curriculum one can find the discipline «The special school work with the pupils' parents», which introduces students to the typology of families raising children with mental disorders; generates knowledge and skills on content and methods of work of special schools with parents. However, the analysis of the results of polling students of 1-3 courses (37 persons), their practical tasks performance showed that they are not practically prepared to collaborate with families. Let us focus on the process.

All respondents consider work with pupils' families of very significant need. Students correctly note that such work should be conducted with all members of the family and is aimed at the comprehensive development of the child's well-being. Synonymous with «work with parents» the majority of respondents referred to as «collaboration with families». However, only 50% of students state the directions of the correctional work of the special needs teacher with pupils' parents; 30% – differentiate the forms and methods of such work. The majority of respondents think that the following pedagogical methods called clichés are appropriate to work with parents: parent meetings, lectures, discussion, questioning. Some students suggested trainings, round tables, discussion clubs. Superficial answers called outspoken bewilderment, because in the process of training students get acquainted with modern methods of cooperation with families. To understand the reasons for such answers, the respondents were asked to explain why the methods they named were considered appropriate. As it turned out, such methods were used in institutions where the students were having their teaching practice. Definitely, this may indicate the formality in working with families.

The question about the dependence of the choice of forms and methods in working with parents on the type of institution and nosology of the child contained a hidden problem that 95% of respondents failed to understand. Only 5% of students understand that the forms and methods depend, first and foremost, on features of the family, the willingness of parents to cooperate; the rest replied affirmatively that the disability of the child and type of institution are decisive in determining the content and methods of work with families.

Students answered questions about issues that are relevant in the work of the special needs teacher with pupils' families quite vastly. They correctly identified both objective and subjective factors, which make the work of professionals with families more and more complicated. Thus, the respondents named the following issues in working with families:

- parents' misunderstanding of the seriousness and nature of disorders in psychophysical development of children;
- unwillingness to understand the problems of the child, his needs, interests;
- paying a very few time to the upbringing of the child, as well as to communication;



- unwillingness to cooperate with special needs teachers;
- sky-high requirements to the special needs teacher in combination with low activity of the family proper;
- imperception of the importance of cooperation with teachers for the development of the child;
- negative influence of the family upon the child;
- the difference in the requirements of the school and the family;
- the shift of responsibility in the upbringing of the child upon teachers;
- formal implementation of advice and recommendations of special needs teacher;
- deficiency of systematic education of the child;
- the formality of cooperation.

The vast majority of these issues definitely relate to parents. Only 1 student said that the problems of cooperation can be attributed to the inability of a specialist in establishing contact with the family. Such arguments certainly demonstrate the one-sidedness of students' perception of the issues of cooperation with families.

The respondents blame only the children's parents in low efficiency of cooperation. This can be confirmed from solving teaching problems, which were proposed to students. Their contents contained the problematic situation of interaction between teachers and family members. Choosing ways to overcome conflicts, dealing with difficult situations, most students justified their decisions by authoritarian pedagogy; only 25% of them have proposed solutions on the basis of partnership with parents. The generalization of the results of pedagogical tasks showed that the students often relied not on knowledge in special subjects, but on their own experience of family life, relations with their parents were more authoritarian than democratic.

Summing up the results of the study revealed the insufficient level of practical readiness of students to work with pupils' families, showed the need to develop transparent content, stages, to improve methods of future specialists teaching this component of professional activity.

4. The results of the study with the theoretical element of the discussion

Theoretical and practical analysis of the research problem permits to determine *the content of the special needs teacher works with families* of children with special educational needs, namely: the establishment of pedagogical competence of the family and the willingness of family members to cooperate with the institution; involvement of parents in the educational and correctional work with the child; disclosure of peculiarities of development and possibilities of the child, showing the influence of learning problems, behavior and communication; informing parents about child's performance, showing them achievements in child development; informing parents about the prospects of the child in different aspects of life; teaching the parents methods of the organization of the various activities of the child's leisure.

Training of future special needs teachers to work with families of children with special educational needs should be assessed by the appropriate levels of preparation:

The main components of readiness for work with parents:

- personal component* (positive attitude towards interaction with parents; understanding of cooperation with families as means of child's education and development; readiness to improve their professional competence);
- *cognitive component* (knowledge about the work of teachers with the families, the specifics of working with families of children with special educational needs);
- *activity component* (ability to work with parents; using traditional and innovative methods of cooperation based on the partnership principle).

The levels of preparing to work with parents

High level – is a positive attitude to cooperation with the parents of future pupils is based on the belief in the optimistic prospects of correctional work; the presence of comprehensive knowledge about the specifics of special needs teacher cooperation with parents; formed skills for working with parents; using traditional and innovative methods of cooperation; creativity and independence in performing professional tasks; adequate professional self-assessment; readiness for self-education in matters of cooperation.

Middle level – is a positive attitude towards cooperation with the parents of future pupils; knowledge about the specifics of working with parents of children with special educational needs is mainly formed; the

ability to work with parents is generated insufficiently (incomplete, of low degree); the use of only traditional methods of cooperation; while performing professional tasks only the elements of creativity and independence are manifested; self-assessment of professional readiness is mostly adequate; willingness to self-educate is not distinct enough.

Low level – is an apathetic attitude to cooperate with the parents of future pupils; knowledge of specificity of work with parents of children with special educational needs is characterised by significant gaps; only individual skills for working with parents are formed; the use of single authoritarian methods of cooperation; creativity in the performance of tasks is not provided; self-assessment of readiness to work with parents is overstated; the need for self-education is missing.

Formation of readiness of students to cooperate with families should be carried out consistently throughout the period of study.

The stages of preparation for working with parents of children with special educational needs:

Stage I- Theoretical and scientific training

Objectives: formation of primary notions about family education; the work of teachers with the families of the pupils, developing positive attitudes to this component of professional pedagogical activity.

Stage II– Methodology of the work of the special needs teacher with the parents

Objectives: formation of the system of professionally significant knowledge of peculiarities of work with families of children with special educational needs; mastering of principles of work with families; supply of the methodology to solve problems in working with such families; formation of professional thinking, characteristic qualities and the primary skills for future collaboration with families.

Stage III – Methodological and technological training

Objectives: formation of skills for working with parents; mastery of traditional and innovative methods of cooperation; the development of creativity in the choice of methods of working with families in acquisition of self-experience; the formation of the self and other professionally significant qualities of personality.

Stage IV – Improvement of professional competencies

Objectives: the integration of theoretical knowledge and improvement of skills of working with families; development of a creative approach to solving the problem of working with parents; development of readiness for self-education.

The implementation of such training should be carried out on the basis of synergetic approach among all elements of learning in higher education. One must realize the underlying interdisciplinary linkages between disciplines of different cycles, teaching practice of students, their independent and research work. Techniques of readiness formation of future specialists to work with families of children with special educational needs requires significant changes. It is likely that the efficiency of solving objectives of the stage IV will require the introduction of a special discipline.

5. Conclusions

Theoretical analysis of the problem of research, its practical state allows us to conclude about the validity of an interaction between special needs teachers with parents who are raising children with special educational needs. Personality-oriented approach in contemporary special and inclusive education requires new professional competences of the specialists of different levels of cooperation between the institutions and families. Development of modern content, methods of complete continuous training of future special needs teachers to work with pupils' families is the prospect of further scientific research.

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