

**Dr. Alla Kolupayeva,**  
Scientific Secretary of the Institute of  
Special Pedagogy, Academy of Pedagogical  
Sciences of Ukraine

### **Trends in the Integration of Special Education in Ukraine**

Ukraine's independence brought fresh advances in the use of the new country's intellectual leaders. It sped up changes in social life, which inevitably called up complicated psychological and pedagogical problems in the development of the national education system.

The education system of Ukraine is considered by many to be the foundation for the national and spiritual rebirth of Ukrainian society. At present, the world community is using a new paradigm in its work – a "united society that includes people with varied challenges". According to United Nations regulations and the World Declaration of Human Rights, disabled children must have rights and opportunities equal to those of all other people.

The UN Convention on Childrens Rights requires every country to bring their national legislation in accord with this "world constitution of childrens rights". As it advances towards becoming a more democratic country, Ukraine has chosen to deal with these problems. Indeed, Ukraine's objectives are clearly declared in the Constitution of Ukraine (Article 53) and the following laws of Ukraine: "On Education", "On Social Protection of Disabled People in Ukraine" and "On Childhood Protection". In addition, certain legal documents, such as the national program "Education" (Ukraine in the 21st century) and the state program "Children of Ukraine", are aimed at creating the social and economic conditions necessary for integrating adults and children with special needs into society.

In Ukraine the process of integration began developing steadily in the 1990s. At first the process was somewhat chaotic, as it was initiated from the grassroots by parents of children with special needs. Today, mainstreaming of disabled children is becoming more popular in the educational system.

However, having identified mainstreaming as one of our primary objectives, it should be pointed out that this process presupposes both preserving existing special schools, which continue to successfully function on the territory of Ukraine, and opening of new schools that use innovative educational models. Currently in Ukraine there are 8 different types of special schools that teach more than 60,000 children. In addition, some 40,000 are mainstreamed.

Guiding principles in the development of special education take into consideration the facts that the widespread introduction of integrated education in Ukraine currently lacks necessary legislative and economic frameworks, as well as skilled personnel. It is also important to mention that mainstreaming is by no means less costly than traditional special education; in fact, it is more expensive. Only an economically stable and developed country can afford to mainstream the majority of its children with special needs. Naturally, it is necessary to do everything possible to adopt international standards of special education; but at the same time, we are careful not to ruin foundations from the past in the process of building a house for the future.

The Institute of Special Pedagogy, Ministry of Education and Science, and the Ministry of Health Protection are in charge of shaping state policy on special education. At present, we are going through a change in our philosophical orientation. The definition of each child has been changed in accordance with an educational paradigm shift to a more humanistic model – “education for everybody, school for everybody”. Thus, at the initiative of the All-Ukrainian Foundation ‘Step by Step’, we are carrying out a broad-scale scientific pedagogical experiment called the “Social adaptation and integration of children with special needs through mainstreaming”. The participants of the experiment are schools from 16 regions of Ukraine, including the cities of Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Poltava, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Bila Tserkva. The scientific bases for this integrated education project are outlined in documents such as: “The Conception of Rehabilitation of Disabled Children and Children with Limited Physical or Mental Opportunities”, “National Standards for Public Elementary Schools”, “The

Concept of National Standards of Special Education” and “Draft document on National Special Education”.

This is the first time that Ukraine has launched a scientifically based, integrated education project for children with special needs. It is an initiative supported by necessary legislation, methodological resources, corrective tools and appropriate conditions. The strategic objectives of the experiment are aimed at forming a philosophy that supports children with special needs; establishing a model of integrated education in regular schools; and spreading the lessons learned by means of legislation and methodological support in accord with the UN Convention on Childrens Rights.

The objectives of the experiment are to develop and establish mainstreaming procedures for children with exceptional needs, and to integrate them earlier into social environments that are responsive to their typology and individual uniqueness.

The first stage of the experiment determined the attitude of the community to the idea of mainstreaming. The research showed that the attitude of parents, teachers, students of special and regular schools towards these problems is by no means simple. About 90% of parents, whose children were integrated, supported the project, as did 58% of teachers from regular schools. However, fewer than 10% of special schoolteachers were supportive, with some 75 % of them thinking the idea does not hold value. According to the research results, it is predominantly parents who see the importance and necessity of integrated education; teachers see it as something they *have* to do. In addition, about 35% of regular school teachers and 15% of special schoolteachers have not yet made up their minds concerning their attitude towards such education. Thus, the research suggests that teachers may well be thwarting the initiative of parents.

According to teachers from special education boarding schools, their special schools have more opportunities to provide educational services (including correction and rehabilitation) for children with special needs. Mindful of the need to change this attitude towards integrated education among teachers as one of its goals, the experiment set out to train teachers

for work with disabled students in public schools. Special workshops and teachers' skills improvement courses were organized. Coordinators of the project developed a 72-hour course for elementary school teachers and kindergarten tutors, and offered it in several regions of Ukraine. Participants have the opportunity to improve their knowledge on the subject and acquire practical skills of work with special needs children. Another way of training teaching staff for work with such students is the 24-hour training workshop.

Integrated education presupposes that parents are equal and active participants in the educational process. They take part directly in teaching, by assisting teachers. That is why a certain number of the experimental activities (some of which have already been held) are aimed at preparing parents for effective participation in the educational process.

One of the key problems of this experiment is bringing public opinion inside . The public needs to be persuaded about the necessity of providing equal access to qualitative education for students with disabilities and the need to desegregate schools for children with special needs. International and all-Ukrainian conferences, round tables, and other activities are organized with this purpose in mind.

The absence of necessary legislation dealing with children with exceptional needs forced the coordinators of this undertaking to develop a separate project entitled "Regulations on the Organization of Integrated Education of Children with Special Needs in Comprehensive (Pre-school) Programs".

Experimental work requires developing and selecting the most effective methods of work with disabled persons. There is an urgent need for Ukrainian scholars to become acquainted with the experience of integrated education in western countries, such as that in Canada, since analysis should precede any further research. One of the most difficult problems turned out to be the publication of methodological literature about work with disabled children. Some literature was edited with the help of the All-Ukrainian Foundation "Step by Step", however a lack of money for the publication and

development of scholarly and methodological papers has hindered the process.

In summation we can say that the experiment is well underway. Although it may be too early to draw general conclusions, a brief synopsis nevertheless can be given. The newness, social importance and complexity of the problems to be solved in the framework of integrated education, require that the organization of fundamental and applied research should start from what is already known on global basis. Second, the realization of integrated education requires coordinated and urgent action by several national Ministries in Ukraine, including Education and Science, Health Protection, and Social Policy.

Third, establishing integrated education in everyday practice requires cultivating a sympathetic public attitude to individuals with special needs. With that purpose in mind, it is very important to unite the efforts of community, charitable, non-profit, religious, and commercial organizations. Finally, basic forms of cooperation and mutual understanding should include joint thematic publications and regularly held international scholarly conferences and seminars in order to exchange experiences.