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## The Eco-Psychological Approach in the Psychological Follow-Up Program for Children with Limited Abilities

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### Abstract

This article describes the process of psychological and pedagogical follow-up of participants in an inclusive educational environment from the standpoint of the eco-psychological approach. The emphasis is placed on building a special type of interaction with students, directed to ensuring their subjective position in the educational space, taking account of the peculiarities of the environment. The following support strategies have been proposed: developing and formative ones. The developing follow-up strategy is focused on creating conditions that stimulate the child's attitude with self-analysis towards difficulties. The formative strategy includes the development and implementation of programs for the formation of social skills and skills of constructive behavior in difficult situations.

**Keywords:** ecological and eco-psychological approach, students with limited abilities, inclusive educational environment, psychological and pedagogical follow-up, adaptation resources

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### INTRODUCTION

The widespread introduction of ideas and values of inclusive education into pedagogical practice poses a number of important objectives related to the creation of a special inclusive educational environment that facilitates the social adaptation of all participants in the educational process. First of all, children with limited abilities (hereinafter referred to as LA), who have been engaged in the system of psychological and pedagogical follow-up from the start of learning are under close scrutiny in an inclusive school. The developmental and socializing effect of inclusion depends on which main objectives such follow-up is aimed at, what position each of the participants in the follow-up and support process takes.

The analysis of the practice of inclusive education implemented today in schools shows that when building a system of psychological and pedagogical follow-up for children with limited abilities, emphasis has been placed on creating the conditions for the most successful education of a child and supporting its

functioning under these conditions, including the development of individual educational programs for children with LA, assisting them in mastering educational material with the use of special tools and learning technologies, etc. conducting remedial activities connected with the development of the "weak links" of higher mental functions. Paying tribute to this work and in every way emphasizing its importance in inclusive education, we need to highlight other significant components of psychological and pedagogical follow-up, which so far have received insufficient attention in inclusive practice (Alekhina and Semago 2012, Bulgakov et al. 2018, Ganieva et al. 2015, Gilmeeva et al. 2017, Kalenik et al. 2018, Minakhmetova et al. 2017, Miroshkin et al. 2018, Salakhova et al. 2016, Shmeleva et al. 2017, Shulga et al. 2016, Yusupova et al. 2017).

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our studies that were conducted with the participation of teachers, school students and their parents in schools included in the program of inclusive

education showed that for primary school teachers, due to their professional position, the role of the “guardian” in orienting to school students’ age characteristics the organization of follow-up programs for school students with LA often means an unconscious refusal to achieve the goal of encouraging a child to unleash its adaptive potential in favor of emotional support and protection that accompany the development of emotional relations in the system “teacher – school student” (Panov 2007). Adults try to focus on the characteristics of the child, his difficulties, the “special features” of his needs in care and control, contributing to the changing requirements of the educational environment and all its participants in accordance with the child’s specific characteristics (Kuznetsova et al. 2017, Masalimova and Chibakov 2016; Salakhova et al. 2017, Shukshina et al. 2017, Zotova et al. 2016).

The essence of assistance, as teachers and parents point out themselves who are the participants of an inclusive educational environment, most often is reduced to protecting a child with special educational needs from difficulties, to reducing the work pace of the whole class, to doing educational tasks, exercises together with him (more often for him), avoiding direct participation of the child in any competitive activity, awarding him victory in any competition, provided that he merely participates. Fellow students are also involved in this type of assistance. “Mass” students as the means and methods of helping classmates with special educational needs also often choose “doing a task for a fellow student”, “taking him or her everywhere with him just to attend an event”, “giving an opportunity to perform only light tasks”, “not to distract, not to make noise or interfere with his task,” “not to make him overwork and not to overload with participation.”

With all significance of emotional support for the child, especially in the early stages of his systematic education, such support does not mean only focusing on the difficulties and problems of the child in any area. This creates the risk of emotional symbiotic attachment. A weak child, due to neurotic restrictions, is not capable of self-adaptation in the environment, he is interested in maintaining the emotional attachment with an adult. Such strong adults in a family are the parents, and at school they are teachers and psychologists. Later, the place of an adult will be taken by healthy peers. An unconscious attitude of adults towards emotional support to the detriment of the adaptation potential development of the child himself, meets “interest” in the symbiotic attachment of students with impaired development, who have difficulty in adapting to the

educational environment. The circle is closed, and instead of developing the child, we risk getting aggravated personal problems and increasing the difficulties of adaptation (Masalimova et al. 2014, Salakhova et al. 2018, Shukshina et al. 2015).

An alternative option, in our opinion, can be a system of psychological and pedagogical follow-up, based on the organization of the developing interaction of schoolchildren with the environment, which involves the child’s awareness of difficult situations in the process of adapting to the environment and using personal and social adaptation resources to overcome difficulties.

Bityanova (2010), developing the theory and technologies of follow-up, defines follow-up as a certain work ideology. Its essence lies in supporting and following a child up during the whole schooling process, which makes it possible to combine the goals of educational and psychological practice and their focus on the main thing - the child’s personality.

The main essential characteristic of follow-up is reliance on the subject’s internal potential of development, on his ability to independently act and be responsible for his actions, his free choice of development alternatives. Social adaptability of a person is based on the ability of the subject to independently make a choice and take responsibility for it. To make a choice of different development alternatives, it is necessary to teach a person to choose, help him to understand the essence of a problem situation, work out a plan for a decision and take the first steps. This help is the essence of follow-up. Getting into the world of school, the child is faced with a variety of different choices that are connected with all aspects of life: how to communicate, how to interact, how to regard norms and requirements. Adults can help him in making his own choice. First of all, this person is a teacher, a parent, a psychologist. The role of a teacher is reduced to a clear and consistent orientation of the student on certain paths. It is the teacher who sets most of the parameters and properties of the school environment. Parents play the role of a carrier and disseminator of certain values, and their impact bears a regulatory character. The task of a psychologist is to create conditions for the productive movement of the child along the paths that he himself chose, influenced by the teacher and parents, to help him make conscious personal choices. Thus, psychological and pedagogical follow-up implies the system of professional activity, aimed at creating the conditions for the child’s optimal development in a

situation of school interaction. Follow-up is the interaction between a person who is supporting and a person who is being supported that is directed to resolving situations of life choices. The key figures, in the process of supporting the child in the educational environment, are the teacher and psychologist who create the conditions for the subject to become aware of the situations of choice and orient them in alternatives, influencing the development of not only children but also parents.

A follow-up program is the activity aimed at creating a system of psychological and pedagogical conditions conducive to the successful development of each child in an inclusive educational environment. That is why, psychological and pedagogical follow-up as an ideology that provides the conditions for making optimal decisions in various situations of life choice is more consonant with the main idea of inclusive education – the idea of promoting social adaptation of schoolchildren.

In the context of the development of participants' adaptive resources in an inclusive educational environment, building a system of psychological and pedagogical follow-up, in our opinion, should be based on the eco-psychological approach (Panov 2009). An emphasis in this approach is placed on ensuring the possibility of socialization of students in accordance with the age stages of childhood development and residence, with individual needs, with the values of life in society; on the development of students' subjective qualities; to include children and adults in various types of joint activities; development of all aspects of the psyche: not only cognitive, but also physical, emotional, personal, spiritual, including the ability to regulate their actions and states; on nature conformity (ecological friendliness) of educational technologies. In the course of such a follow-up program, attention is paid primarily to the creation of a special educational environment with an emphasis on the types of types of communicative interaction between its participants. There are different types of interaction that determine the quality of conditions for children's development: the subject-object type that provides pedagogical impact; the subject-subject type, providing interaction and the subject-generating, providing pedagogical assistance to development, its facilitation. The implementation of the subject-generating type of interaction assumes the creation of conditions to detect hidden and develop displayed interests of children, the formation of the ability to be a subject of the educational environment, a shift in focus on the jointly-distributed

activities of the participants of the environment, the formation of child-adult communities as aggregate subjects of the environment, the creation of conditions for the formation of a self-analysis position when an individual acquires the ability to look at and analyze himself from the outside (Panov 2007).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From these positions, psychological and pedagogical follow-up as a process is the holistic activity of all subjects in the educational process should be organized by the following two main interrelated strategies:

1. Developing, including creating developing interaction of teachers and peers with a child with limited abilities, the provision of special socio-psychological and educational conditions for support and assistance in teaching and developing children with limited abilities.

2. Formative, involving the development of social skills of the participants, providing analysis and development of their own resources to resolve difficult life situations.

The first strategy assumes the implementation of developing psychological and educational support for children with limited abilities from teachers, parents, and peers. The second strategy includes the implementation of special programs for the formation of the communicative positions of the participants in the educational environment, the inclusion of children with disabilities in the "event community" (Slobodchikov and Isaev 2013) of the class and school, training in constructive ways to overcome difficult situations.

Developing psychological and pedagogical support is directed towards the development of the child's independence. It ensures the process of his self-development, while not allowing him to experience the persistent failure, insures against uncertainty in his abilities to achieve success.

It is this kind of support, according to Mikhailova and Yusfin's (2001) experience, that occupies a special place in an inclusive educational environment and implies "not only the recognition of an adult of the child's right to be different, but also help him find the strength to build relationships with others, being who you are". A child with limited abilities feels his "specialness", his weakness, his inability to accomplish what others easily do and, when building relationships with the environment and with others, he begins to feel

“weak”, he has a great temptation to break out of the community, hide, take the position of a weak person who asks for protection from a strong person. An adult has a great temptation to take the position of a strong person, protect the weak from problems and difficulties, and, often, the adult himself takes this position and puts peers of his child with disabilities into it. A teacher who has realized the ineffectiveness of his position and who could change it can overcome the contradiction.

The goal of the support provided to the child with LA should be to ensure the process of maturation, which implies socially responsible social life and psychological perception of oneself capable of making decisions and taking responsibility. It should be directed to helping the child to understand and overcome his own difficulties of social adaptation, to help in finding and enriching adaptation resources to cope with difficulties.

“Cultivating” the subjective position of the child can be mentioned as a way of support (Alekhina and Kutepova 2013). The subject position assumes the development of self-awareness, the ability to independent choice, the development of volitional mechanisms, the focus on activities and efforts to perform chosen actions, the development of design skills and planning one’s own activity. All this is achievable, provided that the child, when finding himself in a situation of difficulty, which he himself evaluates as a hindrance, he has the desire to overcome it. The formation of the idea in the child’s mind that in order to gain independence it is necessary to learn how to solve one’s own problems and understand why they occur serves as the support mechanism.

To provide support, it is effective to use the method of self-analysis: to teach not to act spontaneously in a situation of a problem, but to reflect: “why the problem arose; what I want to get as a result of actions to change the situation; what I can do while implementing to get the desired; what prevents me from achieving the desired outcome; how to cope with interference; how my actions will affect other participants in the situation.” To do this, the teacher must identify the fact of difficulty, help the child realize what does not suit in the situation, realize what behavior led to it, what the child himself can do to reduce or overcome the difficulty, what he cannot do for himself and where to seek help, how to get it. The key questions to discuss with the child are “what do I want?” and “what can I do?”

The main areas of support include the following:

- to provide the conditions under which the child has an opportunity to transform his attitude towards difficulty as an unpleasant fact that someone must put away changing it for a problem, an obstacle that must be overcome;

- to show and discuss options for resolving a problem (what you wanted, what you can do yourself, what kind of help you need, who you can turn to for it);

- to plan and stimulate action;

- to analyze the result of actions and factors leading to the result.

Another strategy that implements psychological and pedagogical follow-up, enhancing students’ adaptation resources, can be the development of social skills and the accumulation of resources to overcome difficult situations. This strategy assumes the development and implementation of special programs in which children with limited abilities, their healthy fellow students, the parents of the students and teachers working in inclusive classes are involved. The programs are directed to building communication between participants of an inclusive educational environment, the children’s team cohesion, involving children with disabilities in reference peer groups, organizing jointly-distributed activities of children with disabilities with adults and peers, and teaching skills to overcome difficulties. We made an attempt to develop and implement a program of extracurricular activities for primary school children, providing an opportunity for students who have difficulty adapting and other subjects of the educational process to meet with a special “space” of the educational environment and organizing developing interaction in joint studies of adults and children in various fields of knowledge. To organize research in school, a special educational space has been created – a research psychological laboratory where difficult situations and the ways to overcome them are studied among children and adults and where junior school students are invited. The basic form of the organization of children’s cognitive activity in the psychological laboratory is jointly-distributed activity in the systems “child-adult” and “child-peer”. For this purpose, “temporary research groups” are organized to solve a specific problem, to conduct a specific study. The research groups include high school students, primary school students (including a child with limited abilities), a psychologist, a teacher, and parents.

Research projects are conducted in the laboratory on various topics that are interesting for children: “Why is

it difficult to learn?”, “How do we communicate?”, “Which friend is the best?”, “Is it possible to control memory?”, “How to be attentive?”, “How to measure success?” and others.

The laboratory participants are a school psychologist, parents or their representatives, students. They develop survey questionnaires, conduct surveys, process and discuss the results, prepare their presentation. For example, researchers in one group study and typologies the difficulties faced by children and adults in school, put forward hypotheses about their causes, look for ways to overcome them, participate in testing sessions and compare different coping options, make reports on research results, present them at the meetings of the children and adults community “Small Academy”. The interaction with the educational environment, organized through the participation of each child in research activities contribute to the

awareness, analysis of difficult situations and the development of resources to overcome them.

### CONCLUSION

The ideas of the eco-psychological approach in psychological and pedagogical follow-up make it possible to concentrate the attention of all participants of an inclusive educational environment on the activation of social adaptation resources. The eco-psychological approach ensures the possibility of students' socialization in accordance with the age stages of development and life in childhood, with individual needs, with the values of life in society; the development of subjective qualities in students; the inclusion of children and adults in various types of joint activities; the development of all aspects of the psyche: not only cognitive, but also physical, emotional, personal, spiritual, including the ability to regulate their actions and states; of nature conformity (ecological friendliness) of educational technologies.

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