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# Perspectives of inclusive education in Russia

## Перспективы инклюзивного образования в России

Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova & Pavel Romanov

*This paper discusses the issues of exclusion and inclusion of children with disabilities in educational policies. The background and context for inclusion in Russia is described, with a short overview of the history of special education and with the emphasis on the current legislative conditions for inclusion. The article analyzes peculiarities of the hidden curriculum in a Russian boarding school for children with disabilities, and discusses the ways in which special education constructs the students' identities. In particular, practices of socialization in an educational institution for children with motor impairments are considered using the qualitative methodology of ethnographic observation and interviews. In addition, the attitudes of contemporary mainstream school students towards the idea of inclusive education are explored and a case of integration of a disabled child into a regular school setting is considered. Finally, the authors outline some policy recommendations and the prospects for inclusion.*

**AQ1**

Keywords:

*Статья посвящена проблеме социального исключения и интеграции детей-инвалидов в образовательных практиках. Контекст инклюзии в России представлен небольшим историческим экскурсом и обзором современной ситуации. В статье применяется понятие скрытого учебного плана к анализу повседневной жизни в школе-интернате для детей с инвалидностью, обсуждаются те способы, какими конструируются идентичность учеников. В частности, при помощи качественной методологии этнографического*

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наблюдения и интервью изучаются практики социализации в образовательном учреждении для детей с нарушениями опорно-двигательного аппарата. Кроме того, представлены attitudes учащихся общеобразовательных школ в отношении к идее инклюзивного образования, а также рассматривается случай интеграции ребенка-инвалида в общеобразовательную школу. В завершение авторы приводят некоторые рекомендации и оценивают перспективы инклюзии.

*Ключевые слова:* дети-инвалиды; интеграция; инклюзия; образование; опрос школьников; скрытый учебный план; интернат; этнографические кейс-стади; интервью

## Introduction

In several countries of the world since the 1970s there has been considerable elaboration of legislation and policy to widen educational opportunities for persons with disabilities (Deno, 1970; Dyson, 1999; Salisbury *et al.*, 1993; Will, 1986). Politicians, scholars and activists in civil society discuss the question of access by vulnerable populations to quality secondary and higher education. Such discussion is based upon a critical approach towards the politics of disablement and upon the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990). A concept of inclusive education is used nowadays as a commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It means bringing the support services to the child rather than moving the child to the services (Shea & Bauer, 1997).

More than a decade ago, the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights concluded that

In most countries, human rights violations against disabled people take the form of unconscious discrimination, including creation and maintenance of man-made barriers preventing disabled people from enjoying full social, economic and political participation in their countries. Most governments have a narrow understanding of human rights vis-à-vis disabled people and believe they need only abstain from taking measures which have a negative impact on them. (Vershbow, 2004)

The system of education in Russia is undergoing deep changes and schools are experiencing transformation through governmental reforms and market economy. Yet the philosophy of inclusion is shadowed in public policy agenda. This paper is devoted to the issues of exclusion and inclusion of children with disabilities in educational policies in today's Russia.

## **Background and contemporary context for inclusive education in Russia**

The Russian history of assistance for people with different impairments can be considered as including the following stages: acknowledgment of the necessity of social care (eighteenth century); discovery of the learning capabilities of deaf and blind children (eighteenth century); individual teaching and first special education settings (early nineteenth century); acknowledgment of the educational rights of so-called 'abnormal' children, establishing institutions of special education (late nineteenth century).

The first institutions where children with impairments could obtain an education were developed in the nineteenth century under the support of church and philanthropies. In Soviet Russia special education became the responsibility of the State. A secularized state system of education and upbringing was developing under conditions of inadequate financial resources. There was a serious lack of facilities for deaf, blind and mentally impaired children. A prominent Russian and Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotski, developed a theory of social conditioning for child development: 'The development of a defective child is conditioned by (a) the feeling of low social value of oneself, (b) the social adjustment to the normal conditions of environment' (Vygotski, 1929). Therefore, it was understood that a disabled child has special needs, which are to be met to prevent his/her handicap. In the 1920s a concept 'deficient child' was introduced by Vygotsky and a discipline 'defektologia' was established. During the economical growth of the 1950–60s, a wide network of special residential schools was created in the Soviet Union.

Special education in the late Soviet period may be characterized by the following developments: children were classified as 'capable and incapable of learning'; a concept 'disabled child' [rebionok-invalid] was introduced in 1979 following the ratification of international legislation. In the official rhetoric of the post-Soviet period there is recognition of the necessity to move from equal rights to equal opportunities; from institutionalization to integration (1990s). During this period the terms 'children with special educational needs' and 'children with limited abilities' are discussed; a term 'special education' is sometimes used instead of 'defektologia'.

In Russia today special education is a complex system of different types of school, vocational colleges and institutions. It includes kindergartens for children from three to six years old, special boarding schools with 10 years of study for children aged seven and above, and vocational schools with three years of study. There are also nursing homes for children and adolescents with a diagnosis of a severe mental impairment, and 'psycho-neurological' nursing homes for children and adolescents with a diagnosis of severe mental disorder—both these institutions belong not to the system of education but to the system of social development. The shortcomings of the Russian education system for children with disabilities are reported by the Russian and international human rights and disability NGOs. According to many experts, disabled children and young adults face significant bureaucratic and social barriers to education: children with developmental disabilities are often marked as 'uneducable';

90 the majority of teachers and administrators have little or no understanding of disability issues or training to deal with them; there is very little accessible transportation and very few accessible school buildings (Vershbow, 2004). The institutionalization of children harks back to the Soviet era (*BBC News, 2003*).

95 Over the past 10 years, with the emergence of disability advocacy NGOs and NGOs serving parents of disabled children and the passing of new federal and regional disability legislation, some significant social changes have improved the quality of life for persons with disabilities. The bill of the Russian Federation 'Concerning the education for people with limited abilities (special education)', which has been waiting for approval by the President since 1996, emphasizes the opportunity for  
100 disabled children to study in regular schools. The report of the State Board of Russia, 'Contemporary Educational Policy' (2001), points out the priority of integrated (inclusive) education for disabled children: 'Children with disabilities should be supplied by state medical, psychological support and special conditions for study, predominantly in secondary schools according to their living place, with rare exception in boarding schools'. At the present time integrated education could  
105 be considered as the priority of state educational policy in Russia. The transition to inclusive education is predetermined by Russia's ratification of UN conventions on children and disability rights:

110 Today, occasional wheelchair ramps can be seen in Russian cities, limited assistive devices are being produced locally, employment programs for disabled people have been launched in several Russian cities, and a handful of integrated pre-school programs have been initiated in a few Russian cities. Finally, Kremlin officials have publicly acknowledged the huge problem of inaccessibility and the lack of federal support provided to the disability community. (Curtis & Roza, 2002)

115 Despite the promise of these small social changes, implementation mechanisms for fulfilling the promises of government services are rarely enforced. As a result:

120 children with disabilities, youths and their parents continue to face significant attitudinal, architectural and financial barriers to an equal education including: (1) all schools have inaccessible environments; (2) parents of children in mainstream schools are often opposed to having their children study with disabled children; (3) the majority of teachers and administrators in mainstream schools and universities have little or no understanding of disability issues; (4) parents of disabled children are afraid to enroll their children into mainstream schools and usually have little or no information about access to education; (5) there is no or very limited accessible public transportation available in cities; (6) no additional services are provided by universities for students with disabilities; and, finally, (7) old stereotypes and misconceptions about disabled people still prevail in Russian society. These are merely a few of the barriers to education which Russian disabled students  
125 encounter daily. Unfortunately, few, if any, organized efforts are being made to break down these barriers to education. (Curtis & Roza, 2002)

130 The 2002 State Report on Children in the Russian Federation estimates the total number of disabled children in Russia at more than 650,000. Over 70% of disabled

Russian children receive little or no formal education, relegating them to a lifetime of dependence (Vershbow, 2004).

135 Government statistics demonstrate that due to these barriers, the majority of  
disabled children in Russia aged 7–18 are isolated in their homes, segregated in  
specialized institutions, or receive no education at all. Almost all disabled children  
140 are at home or in specialized schools. As a result, young disabled people are not  
being prepared for life in the community, to say nothing of entering the university  
or finding a job after school. (Curtis & Roza, 2002)

Each year about 27,000 graduates leave special, correctional and residential schools.  
Only one in five enters a vocational educational institution for further qualification,  
and one in 10 gets employed. The majority of regular schools, colleges and  
145 universities are not ready to meet entrants with disabilities: there are only a few  
integrated educational settings that have been adjusted for use by disabled students,  
where special assistance is provided.

### **Research: methods and findings**

The research project 'Creating a future together? Perspectives of inclusive education  
in Russia'<sup>1</sup> was conducted during 2001–2003 in a large industrial city, Saratov,  
150 located in the European part of Russia and representative of the country as a whole by  
its demographic structure. The research design represents a multi-methodological  
model and includes three types of studies: ethnographic case studies (case study in a  
residential school for disabled children, case study of a disabled child in a regular  
school); a series of in-depth interviews with school administrators and officials of the  
155 department of education; and a survey of three types of social actors: school students,  
parents and teachers. These were the different stages of a single research project with  
the overarching aim to explore the current social and cultural context for the policy  
of special education and inclusion, in order to outline some policy recommendations  
and prospects for inclusion. The research belongs to the pragmatic tradition (Giarelli,  
160 **AQ3** 1988), trying to influence the widening educational chances of children with  
disabilities.

The ethnographic case studies (see, for example, Bassey, 1999) were undertaken  
during 2001–2003 by two researchers. The first researcher undertook a residential  
165 school case study exploring practices of socialization for children with motor  
impairments during one academic year, 2001–2002, at a special school for children  
with motor impairments. The second researcher explored the attitudes of con-  
temporary mainstream school students towards the idea of inclusive education and  
considered the integration of a disabled child, conducting her study at a regular  
school during several months in 2003. The researchers spent between three and four  
170 hours several days a week at the educational settings. They sat in class, observed  
various activities during the breaks, talked to students, parents, teachers and  
administrators, and took part in other activities, such as parents' conferences and

175 school festivals. They studied different texts and artifacts, including bulletin boards  
and students' performance diaries. Each of the researchers was trying to get into the  
180 school life of one group of students. This type of research design uses multiple  
AQ4 sources of evidence (see Yin, 1993, pp. 90–99), i.e. observation, interviews,  
documentary sources. It helps to study an institution within the framework of the  
concept of 'hidden curriculum' that is understood as verbal and non-verbal  
185 communication practices in education (Hall & Sandler, 1982), meta-communication  
as a means of social control (Stubbs, 1976). Hidden curriculum includes the  
following elements (Wood, 1994): (i) organizational culture of an institution; (ii)  
content of subjects; and (iii) teaching style. These three dimensions of hidden  
curriculum do not just reflect stereotypes of gender and disability, but also reinforce  
social inequality by constructing identities according to symbolic classifications of  
190 feminine and masculine, disabled and able-bodied.

The second aspect of the study involved five in-depth interviews conducted in 2003  
at four schools with school principals and their deputies and two interviews  
conducted at the City Department of Education and Regional Ministry of Education  
sought the opinion of experts about inclusive education.

195 The third aspect, the survey, focused on public attitudes towards inclusive  
education. In March–September 2003 questionnaires were distributed among the  
pupils and parents from two city schools. We used parents' conferences (in Russia  
parents from the whole class are present simultaneously at the conference, i.e. 20–30  
people) and student group meetings. Teachers were surveyed through the assistance  
of the body responsible for the further qualification of teachers. In total the answers  
of 289 school students, 276 teachers and 260 parents were collected.

#### *Children with disabilities in residential school*

200 The boarding school in our study included both elementary and secondary levels. The  
school was founded in 1960 as a residential educational facility for children who were  
affected by polio disease. (A polio epidemic happened in Russia in the early 1950s.)  
Today the school accepts children from age seven who have motor impairments of  
different kinds—mainly polio and cerebral palsy. The school building is inappropriate  
for special needs so that children with severe motor impairments, those in wheel-  
205 chairs, cannot study here; also they are denied access to public activity in a wider  
context due to physical barriers, such as unadjusted transportation, buildings, toilets  
and elevators.

Among the students today there are orphans and children whose parents have lost  
parental rights, as well as those from well-to-do families. There are two groups: 'A'  
and 'B'. The 'A' group is for children with developmental delays (intellectual  
disabilities). The 'B' group is for children without intellectual delays. There may  
also be cases of speech-language, hearing and visual impairments. In such cases  
210 children will be placed into the 'A' or 'B' group according to their intellectual ability, a  
diagnosis which is often questioned by parents and professionals, so we discovered at

215 least one case when a child had been transferred from one group to another a few times.

220 Some children stay over the weekend, some overnight several days per week, while others are here only during the day. Those who stay overnight are more likely to come from lower income families. The orphans stay in the boarding school up to the age of 18. The population of students at this school is very diverse in terms of social class. The families with higher income often invest additional money into home tutoring and they also use their social capital in order to gain access to higher education for their child.

### *Gender and disability at the school*

225 Hidden curriculum is analyzed in aspects of organizational structure and culture, the content of lessons, and methods of communication. Gender and disability are embedded into organizational structure and culture. All staff except for the principal, electrician and mechanic, are female. An authoritarian style of management and discourse of power contributes to creating a sense of hierarchy, discipline and military-like institution. We discovered the absence of big mirrors in bedrooms and toilets. The girls' bedrooms are located on the second floor with the classrooms located between them, which contributes to the lack of privacy. In the girls' rooms, but not the boys', there are toys—one doll or one stuffed animal to the right high corner, very identically located on each bed.

235 Disability is interpreted here as a tolerated and ordinary identity. Children are taught to live with disability, to adjust to it. However, as mentioned by McIntosh (2002), this does not necessarily help to develop highly culturally sensitive and valued social identities for students. The content of lessons affects the construction of a gendered and dis-abled identity. Gender is learned through manifest and latent translation of stereotypes during and beyond the lessons. As we have found during the ethnographical observations, science and math classes demonstrate a clear tendency to gendered teacher–student communication. The occupational skills class is taught separately for older boys and girls and by different teachers. It is assumed the girls will go on to vocational school for seamstresses or training for typing (computer word processing), while the boys will get training in shoemaking, carpentry, TV or radio repair. The importance of open discussions of disability and gender, sexuality, rights and supportive networks is obvious as the graduates of this school are not prepared to live in society after they have for years been nurtured and protected by the institution.

245 Gender stereotypes are expressed in everyday communication and in our interviews. According to teachers, the girls must be obedient, assiduous, accurate, not intellectual: 'Boys are more active, more intelligent, they have more humour. The girls unlikely will propose you something worthy'; 'In her situation [meaning disability], she must be even more accurate'; 'a boy can find somebody to take care for him, while the girls—they must be clean, neat!'

255 The disability discourse is hidden. A teacher never says to a child 'you are disabled'.  
The words 'disability or disabled' are never sounded in this school. However,  
260 disability is being communicated, taught and learned through the micro-practices of  
everyday life in this school. For example, although every teacher encourages children  
to do the job, their attitude is not a demand: if children do not prepare homework  
(which happens all the time), teachers do not insist. The level of academic demand is  
rather low. As a result the curriculum does not correspond to the program of  
mainstream school, which makes it very difficult for the student to catch up if (s)he  
would like to transfer to a mainstream school in order to continue towards higher  
education. The standards of education in this school have been lowered even more  
265 than in previous years according to teachers who have worked here for a long time.

In an interview with a female student, aged 17, we see the effect of the stigma  
(Goffman, 1986) of a disabled identity which is imposed on children not just by the  
institution and the system of special education but also by societal attitudes towards  
disability in Russian society: 'What are you saying? An institute? I won't be able to go  
270 there. Why? Why should I? I sew very good!'. Teachers in the interviews are focused  
on the impossibility or improbability of personal lives or professional careers for the  
children in the future.

While in education research throughout the world the issues of inclusive education  
are debated and different experiences of inclusion are discussed (Daniels & Garner,  
275 2000; Shevlin *et al.*, 2002), in Russia the majority of children with a disability are  
taught in segregated schools. Poor development of the special school system in post-  
socialist countries has been depicted in international studies (Moore & Dunn, 1999).  
The transition from socialism to the market has worsened the conditions of  
the special school system due to a significant decrease in public financing for  
boarding schools, lack of specialists entering special education on graduation because  
280 of inappropriate salary and alternative possibilities of employment in the private  
sector.

We observed cultural forms which support positive identities and friendships but  
at the same time nurture patriarchal and disabling structures of communication and  
socialization. One cultural form is the inside world of the boarding school with its  
285 features of isolation, power hierarchy and social segregation. Sometimes this  
segregation is reinforced through a stronger social control, through the hidden  
curriculum. Close and familial relations within the classroom are joined by a strong  
social control, lack of privacy and deficit of parental involvement into children's  
education. While the classroom 'babysits', school polices (Hurst, 1991, p. 187) and the  
separation of the family from the classroom and school reflect wider processes of  
isolating disabled people from society. Another cultural form is reproduced among  
the students: the differences in social class, urban/rural background, presence or  
absence of a family, different plans for careers. It is likely that such differences cause  
290 conflicts. Conflicts exist between parents and teachers, teachers and children, and  
among the teachers, as well as in violent relations among the children.

300 The peculiarities of special education have both positive and negative effects on  
children. As is seen at the boarding school, centralization of services—educational  
and medical services in one place—means cost-effectiveness for the state, as well as  
time and energy savings for children and parents. At the same time it leads to  
305 medicalization of special education (Bart, 1984), and all problems in the children's  
academic development are considered from the point of view of powerful medical  
experts. The physical environment at the school is not adjusted to the needs of  
children with severe motor impairments who are getting home-based educational  
services. Compared to mainstream school, the number of students is less, the  
310 boarding school is not overcrowded, and the student–staff ratio here provides greater  
possibilities for individualized teacher–student interactions. At the same time a  
paternalistic attitude is fostered here towards children with disabilities, and leads to  
low demands on the academic side of the school program, while everyday skills and  
occupational skills are also taught insufficiently. Social interactions are limited here to  
contacts among the disabled children and their tutors and teachers; friendships with  
non-disabled peers are very rare.

#### *Children with disability in a regular school*

315 In several countries in Eastern Europe policy towards the integration of children with  
special needs into mainstream schools has been successful (Education for All, 1998),  
while in the others such a strategy is not yet recognized as a feature of democracy, nor  
have the economic effects of integration been studied. Research into the inside world  
of special schools may not only provide educators and policy makers with a critical  
assessment of the segregated school system, it may also help better understand the  
320 special educational needs of the students if an official policy of integration is to take  
place. Nowadays there are a few students with motor disabilities in Russian  
mainstream schools, however, more research is needed on such cases of inclusion.  
Such research could be stimulating tools for teachers as well as for students with and  
without disabilities in developing effective strategies of learning and positive  
325 communication (see for example Kershner & Chaplain, 2001).

In Russia there are several inclusive pre-school and school settings, mainly in  
Moscow and in some other regions. Some are developing as pilot projects with the  
support of the Soros foundation. However, this is only an exception, and our  
hypothesis is that, as a rule, children with disabilities who study at regular schools are  
330 enrolled in typical school settings that are not adjusted to the special conditions of an  
inclusive environment and the principles of inclusion are not recognized by the staff.

A case study was conducted at a regular school where Masha, aged 10, with slightly  
visible motor impairment (caused by cerebral palsy) was enrolled. She had previously  
studied for one year at a residential school for motor impaired children and her  
mother was dissatisfied with the level of academic success her daughter could achieve  
335 due to a very relaxed educational program at the special school. After a year, the  
mother decided to send her child to a school which was located the closest distance

340 from their home. Masha, whose documents contained a medical record prescribing  
her to study at a special institution, failed the entrance test. Despite all her efforts the  
mother received only the following explanation: 'she has a narrow worldview'. At a  
private meeting the school principle told the mother: 'I do not want your child at my  
school because this school is a very good one and is often visited by the Governor.  
What if he would see a cripple here?'

345 The mother decided to change tactics and falsified documents with the help of her  
friend, a doctor. Now Masha did not have a prescription that prevented her from  
entering a regular school. In the same year, the mother took her to another school,  
which was far away from their home but was also a good one. She kept secret that  
Masha had already finished first grade in a special school.

350 In 2001 we filmed this case and made a TV program on the problems and  
perspectives of inclusive education. The mother, the child, the class tutor and the  
principle seemed to be in support of each other and of the situation itself. Masha was  
playing with other children in her class, she was considered to be a good student. Two  
years later the situation had changed. Rigidity and a selective approach in the  
organization of primary education, a lack of teachers' reflexivity and of professional  
355 advice and support, the huge workload of the teachers and big sizes of the classes all  
lessened the chances of inclusion. A class tutor in an interview told us about the  
difficulties of teaching this child. She focused not just on her own inability to cope  
but rather on the behavior or intellectual development of Masha, which she classified  
as abnormal. As an illustration, she explained to us why we did not see Masha's  
360 drawings among the other children's works at an exhibition on a wall in the school  
corridor:

Drawing an illustration for a fable (10 yrs):

'Her drawing will be removed from exhibition. She should have focused on a crow  
and not on a pine-tree!'

365 Such a situation when the child and the teacher are left without any supervision  
and without adequate resources to fulfill educational goals, leads to abuses of power  
and practices of semi-corruption:

Mother: Our class tutor told me: 'Not only your daughter. We have a few students  
with low scores. I am going to expel them from the class. Administration said to  
370 me, it is up to me. You see?'

375 After a couple of months of making observations, collecting interviews and  
participating in classes, permission was withdrawn by the school principal for our  
research assistant to continue the study. Unfortunately, we had to leave the field. In  
the meanwhile, we have been collecting interviews with school administrators at such  
schools where we found a disabled child integrated into a regular classroom. The  
process of data collection was hindered by refusal to talk with us at many settings.  
However, we managed to conduct interviews with several experts in this field.

**Table 1** Is integration possible? (Parents  $N = 260$  and teachers  $N = 276$ )

	Children with motor impairments	Children with speech-language, hearing and visual impairments	Children with mental delay
Parents	69.6	35.7	6.3
Teachers	37.6	20.4	2

*Public and experts' attitudes*

Parents and teachers have somewhat similar opinions towards inclusion, although in general parents are more tolerant than the teachers. Answering the question 'Is integration possible?', the parents demonstrated a greater positive attitude towards inclusion of children with all types of impairments (Table 1).

We asked both parents and teachers for their personal agreement about inclusion, and about 80% of parents answered positively to a question 'Would you personally agree if a child with motor disability studied alongside your child?' (Table 2). At the same time, only 16% of teachers answered 'yes' to the question, 'Would you personally like to see children with motor impairments in the groups you work with?', while 31.8% said 'No' and 51.3% had difficulty answering this question.

This may be explained through the fact that inclusionary policy would obviously have an impact on a teacher's professional position (Table 3).

Both parents and teachers answered similarly to the question 'What prevents inclusion?', ranking the obstacles from the unadjusted physical environment and inadequate financing of the schools, to the quality of teaching, lack of specially adjusted educational programs, social inequality within a society, and lack of a legislative base. Such factors as negative social attitude and parental preferences were ranked with the lowest scores.

It is necessary to notice that only a small number of the students never mentioned children with disabilities in our society. Approximately 40% have seen them in the street, 20% have been acquainted without any communications, and 10% have been in touch with them (Table 4).

The analysis shows that the closest contacts, characterizing relations between good friends and relatives, are between respondents and children with motor impairments (12.4%) and mental disorder (12.9%). Contacts between respondents and children with speech, hearing and vision impairments occur rarely (9.1%). Children with a visible disability are among those who have been seen in the street by pupils (40.5%). So, approximately 70% of questioned school students demonstrate different

**Table 2** Parents about inclusion. Would you personally agree if a child with motor disability would study together with your child?

	Yes	No	Hard to say
Parental agreement	78.5	9.7	11.7
Preferences of teachers	16.1	31.8	51.3

**Table 3** How would inclusion affect a teacher's professional position? (Teachers  $N = 276$ )

	Effect on teachers
Would require retraining	49.4
Will experience no change	20.1
Would easily adjust	14.5
Would not adjust	6
Hard to say	10

experiences of disability. The fact that only a small proportion of the school students could make acquaintance with disabled children shows the limitations imposed by institutional frames, especially by the structure of the educational system.

The dilemma of segregated special education is two-sided: on the one hand it helps to combine medical and teaching skills, on the other it prevents social integration of disabled children and promotes their segregation and limitation in their life chances. Children and their parents are dissatisfied with this situation, which is not in accordance with the reformative intentions of the modern educational system in Russia. But as a whole, one can see the importance of a new approach to social policy, which replaces the technocratic discourse. Inclusive education provides the humanistic alternative and decreases the process of marginalization of disabled children.

Inclusive education during the process of introduction may run into the organizational difficulties of physical barriers (ramps, one-storied school buildings, availability of sign language interpreters, reconstructing of public places), and with such social obstacles as stereotypes and prejudices, refusal to admit differing children into the group of peers.

The school students feel the most tolerance towards children with motor impairments, and less to children with speech, hearing and vision impairments (Table 5). The lowest level of tolerance concerns children with mental impairment—almost half of the pupils wish them to study separately, at another school. It is evident that we are dealing with deeply rooted stereotypes and the stigma of mental retardation, which form serious barriers for integration of these children and adults

**Table 4** Are there persons with disabilities among your friends or relatives? (School students  $N = 289$ )

	Children with motor impairments	Children with speech-language, hearing and visual impairments	Children with mental delay
I have/had a good friend, relative	12.2	9.1	12.9
Knew one person, but did not communicate closely	18.1	19.9	20.3
Saw in the street, in the yard	40.5	35.9	37.1
No	29.1	35.1	29.7

**Table 5** What do you think of integration with disabled children in the same school? ( $N = 289$ )

	Children with motor impairments	Children with speech-language, hearing and visual impairments	Children with mental delay
Agree to study together in the same class	65.3	58.2	18.4
Agree to study together in the same school but not in the same class	19.4	25.8	33.2
Let them study in a separate school	15.3	16	48.4

into society. This is illustrated by the distribution of answers to the question about the possibility of communication with disabled children. There are groups with negative attitudes towards disability (up to 5.9%) regarding children with motor activity, speech, hearing, vision impairment, but the deepest intolerance is mentioned toward children with mental delay (Table 6).

The research shows gender differences in attitudes towards disabled children. Girls notice children with disabilities more often, and they show a positive attitude, including towards studying together and communicating. Different factors of tolerance include age, gender, social economic status of the family, type of impairment, and experience. The character of this attitude depends on several factors, the most significant being the experience of contacts with disabled people in everyday life. The essential differences in opinion are between those who haven't seen disabled people in the street, and those who have got relatives or friends with disability. About 35% of children who have experience of contacts with disabled people are ready to study together in the same class.

Though intolerance to disability is demonstrated, the majority of respondents are certain about the necessity of undertaking special measures for equality (85%). Just as the answers point to the importance of experience of contacts with disabled people, more than a half of respondents consider that there is a need to assist in perceiving children with disabilities without prejudice, and approximately 40% are sure that it is

**Table 6** What about your communication with disabled children? ( $N = 289$ )

	Children with motor impairments	Children with speech-language and visual impairments	Children with mental delay
I'd come up, speak and do things together	63.8	57.7	22.9
I prefer to stand aside, but if necessary, I'll communicate	30	37.4	51.1
I don't want to deal with	5.6	5.9	25.5

necessary to help disabled children to live and work without limitation in their movements—sound traffic lights, ramps for wheelchairs, facilities in public places and transport.

The officials and administrators in the interviews supported integration in principle but exclude children with mental impairment from inclusion policies. They stress the necessity for special education to remain for children with severe disabilities and for orphans. The main difficulties of transition to inclusion, according to those interviewed, include lack of a legislative base for the implementation of inclusive education as well as an inadequate financial base for the educational system, which prevents proper staffing and technical development.

School administrators and officials of education believe that children with motor impairments are to be integrated first—they can ‘normally’ keep up with the curriculum, however, they think that those in wheel-chairs will not be capable as they are limited in mobility. To introduce inclusion, according to the experts, the state budget for the overall educational system needs to increase and non-state funds need to be raised.

## Conclusions

In the context of the social and economic transformation of the last 10 years in Russia, the system of education for children with motor impairments has experienced changes but at the same time it reproduces Soviet stereotypes and educational discourses. The latent goal of this system is to educate individuals who can survive on an everyday basis, who can cope with daily needs. However, the politics of special education for children with disabilities marginalize children and limit their social orientations and perspectives. The opinions of the key actors of the educational system—teachers, parents and children—are favorable towards the idea of inclusion as a project. At the same time, when it comes to real life situations, very practical concerns arise, which hinder the true inclusion of children. The most important concern is that the education system remains unchangeable when it integrates a child with special needs who succeeds in graduating to a regular school only due to enormous energy spent by parents and teachers. This often leads to burnout effects, to abuses of power and to withdrawal of the child from the regular school setting.

Successful inclusion practices depend on restructured schools that allow for flexible learning environments, with flexible curricula and instruction. Sufficient support staff, helping professionals, should be employed to address the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of all students. To reduce class sizes and/or increase the numbers of teachers is necessary (Stout, 2001). Many experts believe the greatest obstacle preventing disabled Russian children and young adults from fully integrating into society is discrimination in equal access to education. The Russian system of working with children with disabilities would benefit from an interdisciplinary and interagency model of service delivery (see Pervova, 1998).

490 We have arranged a number of PR events concerning the issue of inclusion. One  
such event was a conference 'Education for All: Ways to Integration', which took place  
in 2003 in Saratov. At this conference different stakeholders in special/inclusive  
495 education were present, including adults with disabilities, teachers from a special  
residential school, parents of disabled children, representatives of the Ministry of  
Education and Ministry of Labor and Social Development. Some of the recommen-  
dations that came out of this conference and are in concert with contemporary  
500 research on inclusion, are as follows: (i) early intervention to identify appropriate  
services for a child; (ii) individualized decisions to include any disabled student in  
regular education; (iii) work toward unifying the special education and regular  
educational systems; there should be one system for evaluation of special and regular  
505 program and requires constant assessment of practices and results; (iv) a restructured  
system that merges special and regular education must also employ practices that  
focus on high expectations for all and rejects the prescriptive teaching, remedial  
approach that leads to lower achievement (Guess & Thompson, 1989, cited in Stout,  
2001).

While planning policy measures for social integration, the wider context of  
inclusion has to be taken into account, with regards to family issues, employment  
510 opportunities, availability of natural supportive networks such as circles of relatives,  
friends and neighbors and networks of professional helpers. Mass media have a role  
to play also in regards to social inclusion, as the predominant image portrayed of  
disabled people is associated with weakness and misery.

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