

TRAINING OF SOCIAL WORK SPECIALISTS IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: PRACTICAL ASPECT

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The article describes the features of the practical training of future specialists of social sphere on the example of the Institute of social education, aimed at the development of personal, social and vocational traits, the acquisition of knowledge and skills, forming common cultural and professional competencies.

Keywords: social sphere, personal, social and vocational traits, common cultural and professional competencies, Institute of Social Education

Practical training is one of the most important parts of professional training of any specialist. However, for future social work specialists, the stage of practical education is of crucial importance, as students learn how to work with various population categories, to solve social, psychological, economic problems, and to implement various social techniques.

We regard practical training of future social work specialists as continuous, sequential, independent, academic, research-related and extracurricular activity of students in fully functional environment of an institution of higher education, aimed at development of personal, socially and professionally important qualities, acquisition of knowledge and skills, building of cultural and professional competence.

Training of social work specialists started in the Institute of Social Education at the Ural State Pedagogical University in 1991. The Institute exploits a variety of supplementary opportunities for development of students' professional expertise, in particular, involvement of students in preparation for and holding of practical research conferences, academic and methodological seminars, round tables, etc. In order to improve efficiency of students' practical training, the Institute has developed an integral concept of, as well as learning and teaching resources for students' practical training in the context of multilevel education.

Practical training in the Institute of Social Education at the Ural State Pedagogical University is provided on the following aspects:

- theoretical (studying of subjects comprising basic and variable components of standard);
- practical (organization of practical trainings of various kinds);
- research (research supervised by tutors, participation in conferences, round tables – activities implying participation of

students in scientific events in the institution of higher education, writing of thesis statements and articles, carrying out of research as a part of term papers and graduation qualification papers, participation in project competitions, such as “Joint Activity,” “My Education Initiative”, “Professional Debut”, “Pedagogical Debut” etc.)

– cultural (extracurricular activities, organization of extended education, etc. – supervision of teams participating in events organized by the Institute and the student's academy of sciences, such as “Rough Diamonds of the Urals”; participation in volunteer movement, for example, Festival of Ten Thousand Good Deeds, etc.)

Within the framework of theoretical aspect, all units and models of professional training content are implemented, being a part of the Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Professional Education.

Practical aspect manifests itself in practical training of various kinds: introductory, academic, vocational, internship programs of the respective kinds of practical training differ from one another in the degree of complexity of objectives set for students. Thus, a first year student acts as a volunteer during his practical training, a second year student acts as a counselor, supervising an interim group of children during their summer holidays, a third year student is a specialist's assistant, a fourth year student is a specialist's alternate, and a fifth year student is an intern. Thus, every year a future social work specialist or social care teacher assumes more and more responsibilities, duties and functions.

Thus, during practical training, first year students *acquire* new knowledge, skills and competences, whereas second, third, fourth and fifth year students *not only acquire but also master* once gained knowledge and skills, acquired competences are verified in practical activity. Where, during their practical,

training first year students *participate* in work with a specialist, second, third, fourth and fifth year students *perform their independent professional activity* under supervision of tutors and specialists from the staff of institutions where practical training is done.

During their practical training, junior students *master* modern technologies, various forms and methods of social and socio-pedagogical work with various population categories, whereas third, fourth and fifth year students already independently find their way around social environment, knowledgeably perform social diagnostics and participate in development and implementation of various techniques, forms and methods of social and socio-pedagogical work.

It is also important that during practical training third, fourth and fifth year students develop creative and research approaches to professional work, carry out scientific research, which results are presented as term papers and final qualification papers. While they do practical training, it is important not only to develop professional expertise but also, as one of the principles of social work says, to “do no harm” to clients.

Practical training of fourth and fifth year students creates conditions for integrated application of knowledge, skills and competences, acquired by students in studying of Psychology, Pedagogy, Social Pedagogy, Theory and Techniques of Social Work, etc.

Practical training promotes self-determination of students, enables performance of experiment and exploration work in research topic in social institutions in their final year, prepares students for practical activity of social care teacher and social work specialist, facilitates adaptation of graduations of institutions of higher education at their work place, securing of position of young specialists, encourages professional self-improvement and self-development.

A number of problems are singled out in modern educational environment that are connected with organization of practical training:

- lack of a steady connection between institutions of higher education, social institutions and public authorities;
- lack of a clear funding system;
- practical training is not governed by the State Educational Standard, containing the following provisions: “...every institution of higher education should have its own system of practical training developed that includes its own program and principles for carrying out of practical training.”

All kinds of practical training are aimed at introduction of students to the most important kinds and means of practical psycho-pedagogical and socio-pedagogical work with children, adolescents and families, acquisition of new skills.

Practical training targets students at professional and personal development in order to solve their own inner problems and activate their personal resources, form their professional attitude and key competences.

The underlying aim of practical education is formation of specialist’s professional skills and personal qualities of moral and humanistic nature and mastering of all kinds of professional activity corresponding to qualification on the basis thereof.

There are a number of problems related to organization of students’ practical training that we are trying to mitigate. First, the duration of practical training (for social work specialists it is 24 weeks) is by far less than in western training models, where practical training of future social workers takes up to 50% of all time spent in institutions of higher education.

In the view of the foregoing, the Institute exploits a variety of supplementary opportunities to develop students’ professional competence, namely, involvement of students in preparation for and holding of practical research conferences, academic and methodological seminars, round tables, etc. In order to improve efficiency of students’ practical training, the Institute has developed an integral concept of, as well as learning and teaching resources for students’ practical training in the context of multilevel education. The topics of diploma work now include current projects that are socially important for the region. Monitoring of efficiently of senior students’ vocational practical training has been initiated in collaboration with representatives of practical training sites.

An innovative form of practical training was introduced by the Institute: the so-called voluntary practical training aimed at formation of voluntary and charitable work experience in future specialists.

The most important aspect of practical training is that during this period students may show themselves at their best, which often results in a job offer.

Such diversification enables research of the most topical issues related to social problems of our region: social security, health protection, socialization, social and socio-pedagogical rehabilitation, abilitation, adaptation of most vulnerable categories of citizens, prevention of social exclusion, and social integration, on the basis of dialogue of cultures.

Every kind of practical training sets and solves specific aims and objectives; year by year, practical training becomes more complex and embraces more functions, a set of roles of a future specialist becomes more sophisticated.

As a result of vocational training and internship, a student gets an idea of methodological and theoretical basis for work of social care teacher and social work specialist in real practical activity, familiarizes himself with regulatory and legal documentation of specific institution where he does his practical training.

Research aspect reveals the organizational basis of research work in professional training, in compliance with which it may be integrated in educational process, complement it or be concurrent with it.

Cultural aspect is represented by various kinds of organizational activity: culture and leisure, vocationally oriented, civil law, patriotic, informational and cognitive, as well as health saving.

Our more than 20 year experience of training of social work specialists proves that during students' practical professional

activity, interaction and spiritual communication develops between those involved in educational process, along with enrichment of system of values, reorganization of needs, interests, revision of aims of joint activity. Creative activity of practicing students and, consequently, the results of students' practical training essentially depend on the choice of priorities and formation of skills of students' independent work, on personalization of educational process, on reliance on personal and professional experience of every student.

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