

Challenges Faced in the Field of Postsecondary Education in Russia:

Some Modest Thoughts

A presentation at Bauman Moscow State Technical University for the 75th Anniversary of the establishment of higher education for people with special needs in Russia

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3 December 2009

It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to be with you today. I want to extend my sincere appreciation to Rector Igor B. Fedorov for his gracious invitation to attend this celebration and offer my thoughts as regard the challenges being faced in meeting the educational needs of people who are 'differently abled'.

As I was contemplating how I would approach this presentation, there were several questions that continuously reappeared in my mind's eye. Since they would not leave me, I determined that these questions would form the core backbone of my presentation.

1. Are people who are deaf, blind or otherwise differently abled defective? Or, do we have defective attitudes about the abilities of these individuals?
2. Have young men and women who are deaf failed to learn? Or, have we failed to teach them properly so that they can learn?
3. Do people who are deaf have a communication deficiency? Or, have we failed to communicate with them properly?

I would like to suggest that these are questions that we must confront in the Russian Federation and around the world. I would like to proffer the opinion that each and every one of us who work with and for people who are differently abled need to continuously challenge our sensibilities by asking ourselves these questions.

There are two types of barriers that can serve to impede a person who is differently abled from achieving their full potential as a learner and, eventually, as productive members of society: attitudinal barriers and environmental barriers. First, the attitudes we hold as regards the abilities and capabilities of these citizens of the Federation. It is altogether possible that the attitudes we hold are shaping in a negative fashion what people who are differently abled believe they are capable of achieving. In effect, the 'negative' attitudes we hold may be limiting the aspirations of these individuals as they progress through the educational system and into society and the workplace. Our attitudes may result in our placing unnecessary and inappropriate limits upon these individuals.

Environmental barriers are those physical or technological impediments to full participation in education and society. Such barriers can be overcome by accommodations that serve to make it possible for people who are differently abled to utilize their strengths to accomplish a task at hand. The deployment of new and innovative technologies can serve to ameliorate or eliminate such barriers, e.g., voice recognition technologies, high tech assistive listening technologies and the like.).

The elimination of attitudinal and environmental barriers is a challenge for our field, and addressing the elimination of these barriers can help insure that a person with impairment does not become handicapped. Impairment has the effect of making it difficult or, at times, impossible for a person who is differently abled to perform certain tasks. If we provide constructive intervention, and remove

university level so that faculty understand and accommodate the teaching/learning needs of men and women who are deaf.

3. We need to assure that those who teach men and women who are deaf have available, and know how to use, educational and instructional technology that can facilitate teaching and learning. ..including, but not limited to, distance and remote learning technologies.

I would like to end by offering my heart-felt congratulations to Bauman and their PEN-Russia partners (Chelyabinsk State University, Novosibirsk State Technical University, Vladimir State University and TISBI Academy of Management of Kazan) who are making outstanding strides in addressing the issue that I have delineated in this brief presentation. I am fully confident that these outstanding educational institutions of the Russian Federation will continue to improve the educational and employment circumstances of citizen of the Federation who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.