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Training Future Specialists in Social and Pedagogical Fields for Gender Socialization of Socially Vulnerable Children

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Abstract: Today's reality demonstrates the need of the society for qualified specialists who can interact with children at a high professional level, provide them with assistance and support and promote proper gender-role socialization, taking into account their gender differences. The paper aims to verify socio-pedagogical conditions and the author's model of training future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children. The experimental group (EG) consisted of 110 respondents, whereas the control group (CG) 120 respondents. The experimental model was based on the principles of an environmental approach, which allows one to design the educational environment of a higher education institution; a gender approach, which is aimed at creating comfortable conditions for gender identification and effective socialization of the individual; a competency-based approach, which shifts the emphasis from the educational process to its results. Research methods include the following: empirical methods diagnostic methods (questionnaires, surveys, tests, interviews), observational methods (participant observation) to identify the levels of future social educators' readiness to work with preschoolers. The number of future social educators with a sufficient level of such readiness has increased from 4.8% to 23.6%; the number of future social educators with an average level has increased from 33.7% to 35.1%; the number of future social educators with a low level has decreased from 61.5% to 41.3%. The obtained results of CG and EG differ significantly, owing to the implementation of socio-pedagogical conditions of professional training for future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children in the educational process of higher educational institutions (HEIs) with education faculties.

Keywords: *gender-role socialization, pre-schoolers, social educators, social workers, pedagogical conditions.*

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Introduction

The adoption of civilized traditions of life in Ukraine, as well as its integration into the European community, is impossible without the harmonization of social relations based on gender socialization. An essential role in the transformation of the gender relations system is played by education as one of the most important social institutions capable of integrating a gender approach into the educational process of educational institutions and laying the foundations for the establishment of the social gender culture. According to the United Nations, gender relations are one of the main problems in the 21st century.

Today's reality demonstrates the need of the society for qualified specialists who can interact with children at a high professional level, provide them with assistance and support and promote proper gender-role socialization, taking into account their gender differences.

Theoretical and methodological principles of social educators' and social workers' professionalization have been justified by T. Alieksieienko (2001), S. Arkhypova, & L. Smerechak (2011), O. Bezpalko (2007), A. Kapska (2006), S. Kharchenko (2006), V. Polishchuk (2006), O. Savchenko (2010), R. Vainola (2008). The features of socio-pedagogical activities and their consideration during the professional training of students have been analyzed by Z. Falynska (2006), Yu. Galaguzova, G. V. Sorvacheva, & G. N. Shtinova, (2001), A. Kapska (2006), L. Mishchyk (1997), L. Shtefan (2003), I. Zverieva (2006). An analysis of relevant studies shows that many theoretical aspects of professional training of future social educators have been covered. Nevertheless, the problem of preparing future social educators for gender-role socialization of pre-schoolers has not fully disclosed yet.

Preschool childhood is interpreted by researchers as "a period of the initial actual development of personality" (Leontev, 1983) when the basis of the individual's gender culture is laid, the awareness of oneself as a male or female with the corresponding norms of behaviour is shaped, psychosocial identity is formed, social norms and gender-role behaviour are adopted.

The characteristics of preschool boys' and girls' socialization have been studied by T. Hovorun (2002), I. Rohalska (2009), O. Savchenko (2010); the peculiarities of sexual differentiation and interpersonal relationships in early ontogenesis have been revealed by V. Abramenkova (2003), T. Hovorun (2002), Ya. Kolominskiy, & M. Kh. Meltsas (1985), O. Kononko (2000), V. Moskalenko (2008), E. Subottskiy (1991); various aspects of gender-role socialization have been explored by V. Kagan (2000),

I. Kon (1990), V. Romanova (2002), L. Stolyarchuk (2003).

The readiness of future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children is defined as a result of professional training in HEIs, an integral professional and personal characteristics of future social educators, which allows ensuring successful gender-role socialization of preschoolers based on productive interaction with various participants in the educational process.

It must be noted that many modern researchers have devoted their studies to the problem of organizing of social pedagogical activity (Bakhmat, 2019; Behas, 2019; Bezliudnyi, 2019; Galaguzova, 1998; Gerasymova, 2019; Maksymchuk, 2018; Melnyk, 2019; Mishchyk, 1997; Nerubasska, 2020; Kapska, 2006; Sheremet, 2019; Shtefan, 2003; Zverieva, 2006). Despite a wide range of the areas under study, the problem of professional training for future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children has not been properly analyzed yet.

The paper aims to theoretically justify and experimentally verify socio-pedagogical conditions and the author's model of training future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children

Materials and methods

Criteria and indicators for assessing the levels of future social educators' readiness for gender-role socialization of preschoolers were determined at the ascertaining stage of the experiment. The cognition and information criterion includes the following indicators: the awareness of preschoolers' age characteristics; the knowledge about the specifics of the individual's socialization in preschool childhood; the understanding of the peculiarities of preschoolers' gender-role socialization. The personality and motivation criterion involves a steady interest in working with preschoolers; a positive motivation to interact with preschoolers; the need for professional development. The creative activity criterion covers the presence of creative potential, the ability to provide socio-pedagogical support for children's socialization, taking into account their gender; the ability to evaluate one's results of professional activities objectively. These criteria and indicators serve as a basis for both the selection and qualitative description of the following levels of future social educators' readiness for gender-role socialization of preschoolers: sufficient, average, low.

A sufficient level. Students demonstrate profound knowledge about age characteristics of preschoolers and the specifics of children's socialization

and the features of preschoolers' gender -role socialization. They are interested in working with preschoolers in the process of their gender-role socialization and show a positive motivation to interact with preschoolers in the process of their socialization and readiness to provide timely assistance, taking into account the gender of each child. Besides, they feel the need for professional development, have creative potential, can provide socio-pedagogical support for children's socialization, taking into account their gender, and evaluate the results of their professional activities objectively (4.8% in EG; 5.4% in CG).

An average level. Students have insufficient knowledge about age characteristics of preschoolers, fragmentary knowledge about the specifics of children's socialization and superficial knowledge about the peculiarities of preschoolers' gender-role socialization. They demonstrate an insufficient interest in working with preschoolers in the process of their gender-role socialization, average readiness to communicate with children, as well as uncertain priorities and unstable motivation to interact with preschoolers. They are quite ready for professional development. Also, they show a partially creative attitude towards professional activity, do not have sufficient skills in terms of socio-pedagogical support for children's socialization, taking into account their gender, and cannot evaluate the results of their professional activities objectively enough (33.7% in EG; 32.8% in CG).

A low level. Students have only fragmentary knowledge about the age characteristics of preschoolers. They are not aware of the specifics of children's socialization and the features of preschoolers' gender-role socialization. They are not interested in working with preschoolers in the process of their socialization and lack the motivation to interact with them during their gender-role socialization. They demonstrate a low level of professional development, insufficient creative potential and lack skills required to implement the technologies of socio-pedagogical support of children's socialization, taking into account their gender. They cannot evaluate the results of their professional activities impartially (61.5 % in EG; 61.8 % in CG).

The author's experimental model of training future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children covers the following blocks: the methodology and goals block: the aim, objectives, approaches and principles; the organization and procedures block: the stages and socio-pedagogical conditions of professional training for future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children; the monitoring and evaluation block: the criteria, indicators, levels of readiness and diagnostic tools. The proper

functioning of these interconnected blocks of the experimental model has made it possible to achieve the expected pedagogical results.

The experimental model was based on the principles of an environmental approach, which allows one to design the educational environment of a higher education institution; a gender approach, which is aimed at creating comfortable conditions for gender identification and effective socialization of the individual; a competency-based approach, which shifts the emphasis from the educational process to its results – developing a system of competences in the participants in the educational process, as well as taking into account such principles as conscious and active learning, integrity, expediency, predictability, freedom of choice and cooperation in the gender-role socialization of preschoolers.

The stages of training for future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children are as follows: the motivation and stimulation stage, the cognition and reflection stage, the creativity and practice stage. The following socio-pedagogical conditions were implemented at each of them: boosting a positive motivation of future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children and making them more aware of its importance for developing gender culture in children; improving the content and methodological support for professional training of future social educators; using the potential of teaching placement with the aim of providing students with practical experience in working with preschoolers in the process of their gender-role socialization.

Stage 1 (*the motivation and stimulation stage)* involved developing students' steady motivation to acquire the knowledge necessary for the development, education and socialization of preschoolers children and cultivating their awareness of the importance of children's gender-role socialization at the stage of preschool childhood.

At this stage, the following socio-pedagogical condition was implemented: boosting a positive motivation of future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children and making them more aware of its importance for developing gender culture in children. Taking into account the interdisciplinary links, the content-related modules have been introduced in such professional subjects as "The Basics of Personality Socialization", "Social Pedagogy", "Age and Pedagogical Psychology", "Socio-Pedagogical Counseling", "Pedagogy of Family Education", "Social Support of Families", "Socio-Pedagogical Work in Educational Institutions". The implementation of this socio-pedagogical condition has contributed to developing the motivational sphere of future

social educators, highlighting the basic theoretical knowledge about the peculiarities of preschoolers' social development and their primary socialization.

Stage 2 (*the cognition and reflection stage*) aimed to highlight the knowledge about the process and features of children's gender-role socialization at the stage of preschool childhood and ensure a stable interest in gender-responsive pedagogy; to determine the main tasks of professional-pedagogical activity in the context of preschoolers' gender-role socialization. To this end, the following socio-pedagogical condition was implemented: improving the content and methodological support for professional training of future social educators. The content of professional training of future social educators started to include a specialized course *"The Gender-Role Socialization of Preschoolers: the Essence, Specifics and Support"*, which contributed to enhancing students' holistic understanding of the essence of such concepts as "gender-role socialization", "gender role", "gender differentiation", "gender-role identification", "gender-role behaviour" and their awareness of the psychology of gender differences; determining gender characteristics of the individual and the peculiarities of the child's gender-role behaviour; mastering socio-pedagogical support for children's gender-role socialization in the interaction of preschools and families. The programme of the specialized course consisted of two modules: module 1 *"Theoretical Aspects in the Study of the Individual's Gender-Role Socialization"* covered the following topics: "The Individual's Gender-Role socialization as a Pedagogical Problem"; "Gender Identity and Its Components"; "Sex and Gender Roles: the Psychological Aspect"; module 2 "The Peculiarities of Preschoolers' Gender-Role Socialization" involved such topics as "Preschoolers' Socialization in the Context of Pedagogical Issues"; "The Structure and Specifics of Preschoolers' Gender-Role Socialization"; "The Peculiarities of Social Pedagogical Activity of Social Educators with Children during Their Gender-Role Socialization in Preschools". The practical part of the specialized course was implemented using interactive forms and methods aimed at discovering effective techniques and ways to solve the problems: debates, round table discussions, business game, brainstorming, solving professional situations, training sessions. According to the specialized course, students were instructed to prepare socio-pedagogical projects on the topic "Socio-Pedagogical Activities of Social Educators in Preschools", which were implemented during socio-pedagogical practice in preschools.

Stage 3 *(the creativity and practice stage)* lay in students' practical mastering the technology of social and pedagogical support for children's

gender-role socialization, applying theoretical knowledge and acquired skills during teaching placement in preschools. At this stage, the third socio-pedagogical condition was implemented: using the potential of teaching placement with the aim of providing students with practical experience in working with preschoolers in the process of their gender-role socialization. The activities of students during socio-pedagogical practice were aimed at analyzing the real conditions and potential of the educational environment in preschools; studying social conditions of preschoolers' development; evaluating the activities of specialists from preschools in terms of social and pedagogical support for children's gender-role socialization; identifying the features of parent-child relationships as a priority determinant of the child's mental development and gender-role socialization; organizing productive interaction between preschools and social partners to increase the number of agents of children's gender-role socialization; providing conditions for social development of those children who do not attend the institution; preparing a comprehensive programme for working with children and employees of preschools regarding the organization of preschoolers' effective gender-role socialization.

The formative stage of the experiment was followed by pre-final follow-up tests based on the determined criteria and indicators. A comparison of empirical data obtained in EG and CG at the ascertaining stage with those of the formative experiment has made it possible to assess the dynamics behind the levels of students' readiness for preschoolers' gender-role socialization.

The experimental work was conducted at the premises of Bohdan Khmelnytskyi Melitopol State Pedagogical University, Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, Bohdan Khmelnytskyi Cherkasy National University, V. O. Sukhomlynskyi Mykolaiv National University, Rivne State University of Humanities, Pavlo Tychyna State Pedagogical University.

At different stages, the experiment involved 230 students, 55 social educators, 30 university teachers. The EG consisted of 110 respondents and the CG – 120 respondents.

Research methods include the following: theoretical methods – analysis of documentation, systematic analysis and generalization of psychological and socio-pedagogical literature with the aim of justifying the essence and features of preschoolers' gender-role socialization and socio-pedagogical work with them; theoretical modelling used to develop the experimental model of training future social educators for preschoolers' gender-role socialization; empirical methods – diagnostic methods

(questionnaires, surveys, tests, interviews), observational methods (participant observation) used to identify the levels of future social educators' readiness to work with pre-schoolers; pedagogical experiment (ascertaining and formative) used to verify the effectiveness of socio-pedagogical conditions of training future social educators for preschoolers' gender-role socialization; statistical methods – methods of mathematical statistics (primary data processing, calculation of elementary statistics, variational analysis of data, testing of statistical hypotheses, Student's t-test) used to obtain quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the research results.

Results

The results of the formative experiment demonstrate some positive changes in the percentage distribution of students by their levels of readiness for preschoolers' gender-role socialization (see Table 1).

The number of future social educators with a sufficient level of such readiness has increased from 4.8% to 23.6%; the number of future social educators with an average level has increased from 33.7% to 35.1%; the number of future social educators with a low level has decreased from 61.5% to 41.3%. Some positive dynamics is observed in CG, although these changes are not so significant: the dynamics of a sufficient level is +2.4; the dynamics of an average level is +2.1%; the dynamics of a low level is -4.5%.

Table 1. *The levels of future social educators' readiness based on the results from ascertaining and formative stages of the experiment (%)*

Levels	EG				Dynamics	CG				Dynamics
	Ascertaining experiment		Formative experiment			Ascertaining experiment		Formative experiment		
	Absolute numbers	%	Absolute numbers	%		Absolute numbers	%	Absolute numbers	%	
Sufficient	5	4.8	26	23.6	+18.8	7	5.4	9	7.8	+2.4
Average	37	33.7	39	35.1	+1.4	39	32.8	42	34.9	+2.1
Low	68	61.5	45	41.3	–20.2	74	61.8	69	57.3	–4.5

The obtained results were mathematically and statistically processed

using Student's t-test. The statistical analysis of the obtained experimental data on all criteria of readiness can serve as sufficient proof of the effectiveness of the justified experimental model and socio-pedagogical conditions for training future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children.

Thus, the factual data obtained after the formative experiment show that the implementation of the experimental model and socio-pedagogical conditions for training future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children in HEIs can help to increase future social educators' readiness to work with children during their gender-role socialization. The results of the research prove the research hypothesis and confirm the research aim is achieved and the research objectives are realized.

Discussion and Conclusions

The process of conducting this study is based on appropriate ethical rules. First of all, all ethical conditions were considered prior to this study. Then the authors of the study obtained the consent of the ethics committees of educational institutions. After that, the participants were informed about the goals and objectives of the research. They were also informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to refuse to participate in it at any time.

According to the criteria and their indicators, the levels of readiness of future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children (sufficient, average, low) were characterized. The results of the ascertaining experiment show that the majority of future social educators are at a low level of such readiness – 61.5% (EG) and 61.8% (CG), whereas 33.7% of EG respondents and 32.8% of CG respondents are at an average level and 4.8% of EG respondents and 5.4% of CG of respondents – at a sufficient level.

The research determines and experimentally verifies the socio-pedagogical conditions of training future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children: boosting a positive motivation of future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children and making them more aware of its importance for developing gender culture in children; improving the content and methodological support for professional training of future social educators; using the potential of teaching placement with the aim of

providing students with practical experience in working with preschoolers in the process of their gender-role socialization.

It is vital that students should be engaged in socio-pedagogical practice in preschools to realize the aim of the creativity and practice stage.

The obtained results of CG and EG differ significantly, owing to the implementation of the socio-pedagogical conditions of training future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children in the educational process of HEIs with education faculties rather than the influence of random factors.

A theoretical pedagogical analysis of modern studies (Bohinska, 2004; Bohush, 2003; Havrysh, 2000; Golovanova, 2004; Kurinna, 2004) convincingly proves the relevance of the individual's socialization in childhood, whose tasks are to assist the child in mastering socio-cultural achievements of society, comprehending his pr her role of the subject of social life, developing his or her ability to interact with the social environment. Given the importance of the individual's socialization in preschool, one should consider its versatility, multi-levelness and dynamism in the development of children's self-awareness, which is impossible without the interaction of society and personal involvement in social life, resulting in certain knowledge and skills, crucial changes in social status and social role, the creation of one's spiritual world and individuality.

The research specifies the peculiarities of training future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children. It is defined as an integral part of professional training, which involves developing future specialists' professional knowledge about gender characteristics of preschoolers and skills necessary for effective socio-pedagogical support for preschoolers' gender-role socialization. Such training results in *the readiness of future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children*, which is interpreted as an integral professional and personal characteristic of future social educators, which ensures successful gender-role socialization of preschoolers, taking into account their psycho-pedagogical features based on productive interaction with various participants in the educational process.

Gender-role socialization is a thorny and significant aspect of socialization at the stage of preschool childhood. In the context of modern psychological and pedagogical research, it becomes especially relevant concerning developing modern civil society since gender consciousness allows not only shaping gender behaviour and personality. It also develops the concept of male and female psychology.

The gender of the individual is a prerequisite for developing his or her psychological gender, which is determined neither by genetic, nor hormonal, internal or external morphological gender. It develops in the process of the individual's socialization. In modern social science, the concept of "sex" is identified with the concept of "gender", where "sex" is only the anatomical and biological structure of the individual, namely of men and women, whereas "gender" characterizes a set of norms of male or female behaviour in society, which emphasizes the cultural and social significance of the cultural influence of society, rather than focusing on physical and biological differences between men and women. Gender is a complex sociocultural concept which reflects differences in the roles, behaviours, as well as mental and emotional characteristics of men and women. It is understood as an organized model of social relations between women and men, which not only characterizes their communication and interaction in the family but also determines their social relations in the main institutions of society. *A social role* combines a wide range of behaviours, namely, from situational roles to life ones with sustainable forms of behaviour and activity of the individual, which is an important part of his or her socialization and helps him or her to adjust to social standards of behaviour.

The concept of *"gender-role socialization of preschoolers"* means the process of spontaneous and intentional influences on the child's personality, which contribute to his or her development as a representative of a particular gender, taking into account relevant physiological and psychosocial characteristics. The specifics of pr-schoolers' gender-role socialization is determined by the processes of gender differentiation, which occurs under the influence of social environment and is associated with the anatomical and physiological characteristics of boys and girls; gender-role identification, which involves developing the child's gender perceptions of himself or herself, as well as cultivating gender-role behaviour as a system of actions aimed at asserting their gender identity and adequate position as a representative of a particular gender.

A generalization of scientific approaches (Ablitarova, 2010; Hovorun, 2002; Kravets, 2005; Kagan, 2000) to solving the problem of gender-role socialization shows that it reveals a multifaceted socio-cultural aspect of developing males and females in the process of their socialization. The structure of preschoolers' gender-role socialization consists of such interrelated components as gender differentiation, gender-role identification and gender-role behaviour.

An analysis of the studies devoted to the essence of future social educators' professional training (Arkhypova, & Smerechak, 2011; Bezpalko,

2007; Kapska, 2006; Mishchyk, 1997; Polishchuk, 2006) proves that social educators are engaged in socio-pedagogical work or educational activities and organize socio-pedagogical activities with people of different ages in different socio-cultural environments to create favourable conditions for their socialization. Taking into account general provisions of social pedagogy on the essence and functions of social educators, one can state that social educators of preschools are full-time or part-time subjects of social and pedagogical activities, who activate and integrate socio-cultural functions of the social environment and various social institutions for preschoolers' socialization.

The training of future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children should be considered as an integral part of their professional training, which involves developing future specialists' professional knowledge about gender characteristics of preschoolers and skills necessary for effective socio-pedagogical support of their gender-role socialization.

The scientific value of the obtained results is as follows:

– *for the first time,* the socio-pedagogical conditions of training future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children (boosting a positive motivation of future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender socialization of socially vulnerable children and making them more aware of its importance for developing gender culture in children; improving the content and methodological support for professional training of future social educators; using the potential of teaching placement with the aim of providing students with practical experience in working with preschoolers in the process of their gender-role socialization) have been determined; the experimental model, covering methodological approaches (environmental, gender, competency-based), principles (conscious and active learning, integrity, expediency, predictability, freedom of choice and cooperation), stages (the motivation and stimulation stage, the cognition and reflection stage, the creativity and practice stage), content, forms, methods, criteria (cognition and information, personality and motivation, creativity and activity), indicators and levels (sufficient, average, low) of future social educators' readiness for gender-role socialization of preschoolers, has been justified; the pedagogical essence of the concept of *"the readiness of future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender-role socialization of socially vulnerable children"* (the result of professional training in HEIs; an integral professional and personal characteristic of future social educators, which ensures successful gender-role socialization of preschoolers, taking into account their psycho-pedagogical features based on

productive interaction with various participants in the educational process) has been defined;

– the essence of such concepts as "social gender", "gender", "gender role", "gender differentiation", "gender-role identification", "gender-role behaviour", "gender-role socialization of preschoolers" and *"training future specialists in social and pedagogical fields for gender-role socialization of socially vulnerable children"* (an integral part of their professional training, which involves developing future specialists' professional knowledge about gender characteristics of preschoolers and skills necessary for effective socio-pedagogical support of their gender-role socialization) has been *clarified*;

– the scientific views on the process of primary socialization of children at the stage of preschool childhood, as well as on the content and forms of training future social educators as the leading agents of primary socialization, have been *further developed*.

The practical value of the obtained results lies in developing and implementing the methodology of pedagogical diagnostics of the levels of students' readiness for preschoolers' gender-role socialization in professional training of future social educators; developing the specialized course "The Gender-Role Socialization of Preschoolers: the Essence, Specifics and Support", including relevant methodological support; compiling the methodical textbook "The Gender-Role Socialization of Preschoolers: the Essence, Specifics and Support"; elaborating programmes of socio-pedagogical practice in preschools and implementing them in the process of training students majoring in Social Pedagogy (a bachelor's degree); systematizing educational material and reinforcing it with such modules as "The Fundamentals of Personality Socialization", "Social Pedagogy", "Developmental and Pedagogical Psychology", "Social and Pedagogical Counselling", "The Pedagogy of Family Education", "Social Support of Families", "Socio-Pedagogical Work in Educational Institutions", which realize interdisciplinary links to ensure that students are ready for gender-role socialization of preschoolers.

The main provisions and conclusions can be used in professional training of students majoring in different fields; in the elaboration of textbooks and guidelines for developing gender culture in the individual; in practical activities of preschool teachers and social educators, as well as in the system of graduate teacher training.

Given the relevance of the research topic, it is *essential* to introduce the course "The Gender-Role Socialization of Preschoolers: the Essence, Specifics and Support" in the system of professional training for future social educators and socio-pedagogical practice in preschools to teach future

specialists to use the technology of socio-pedagogical support and ensure advanced training of social educators.

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