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### IDEAS ABOUT SOCIETY OF INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED SENIOR SCHOOLCHILDREN

**Abstract.** The article reflects current trends in the study of ideas about society of intellectually disabled senior schoolchildren and deals with the method of non-verbal semantic differential. For the first time the article presents and analyzes semantic evaluations given by intellectually disabled senior schoolchildren to situations of crisis and success in life related to the acquisition of their own homes and taking care of them, to different incomes, to maintaining a healthy lifestyle and physical fitness and to bad habits. Taking into account the obtained results the article provides recommendations for the development of the methods of semantic evaluation of intellectually disabled persons. The analysis of group semantic universals of problematic situations leads to the conclusion that the social sphere of intellectually disabled senior schoolchildren has no uniformed social opinion about critical life situations, due to which the personality in such situations is subconsciously seen in a diffused and controversial way. It may be connected with accentuation of a standard social image of a positive personality in educational practice. But the pupils hardly realize how this personality manages to overcome difficulties preserving their well-being and gaining more success. It seems that due to the variety of individual profiles of evaluation it is necessary to organize socio-psychological discussions aimed at consideration, reflection and adjusting the positions of the pupils with intellectual disabilities.

**Keywords:** social notions; nonverbal semantic differential; semantic evaluation; intellectual disability; social situation.

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Nowadays, the theory of influence of cognitive models of social interaction of subjects of activity upon behavior and social adaptation of persons with intellectual disability (ID) is gaining wide support in special psychology [1; 3; 4; 7; 8; 10, etc.]. The problems of formation of social intellect and weakened critical outlook, communicative difficulties and primitive level of reflection of current events and their own attitude to them

characteristic of such people make resolution of adaptive problems in personal or social space hard to achieve [1; 2; 3; 5; 6; 7; 9; 10; 12; 14, etc.]. Self-perception and comprehension of social situations by people with ID is weakened because of the underdevelopment of the cognitive constituent. Scholars register poor realization of response to those objects of cognition which are hard to identify oneself with and prevalence

of the coping behavioral strategy with simultaneous underdevelopment of the cognitive coping mechanisms (T. A. Kolosova, P. O. Omarova, O. I. Suvorova, Yu. V. Chirkova, etc.). On the whole, the semantic structure of their worldview is characterized by ultimate simplification and mosaic nature, and the inner world – by “original poverty makes orientation to complex systems of semantic relationships difficult (D. A. Leont'ev, V. N. Buzin; cited from: [14, p. 33]). Controversial nature and inconsistency of conscious response grows in relation to problem and crisis situations, which hampers further development of life and comprehension of social interaction practices of persons with ID. In connection with what has been said the necessity of psycho-technical support of development of social cognitions of persons with ID taking into account their qualitative specificity becomes evident. But the construction of psycho-technology of social cognition development may be realized only with reference to empirical material characterizing verbal and nonverbal representative cognitive systems constituting the worldview, everyday life environment and social concepts of persons of the given category. Inadequate knowledge of phenomenology and the tasks of amplification of social concepts of senior schoolchildren with ID by psychologists made us undertake our own empirical investigation [12; 13; 14]. Its main aim was to study social concepts of senior schoolchildren with ID about important life situations connected with inclusion into the grown

up life in the period of after school adaptation – with emergence of romantic and matrimonial relations, acquisition of acquisition of their own homes and taking care of them, to different incomes, to maintaining a healthy lifestyle and physical fitness and to bad habits (15 situation all in all). The life situations were presented in topical video fragments (from professional feature films and documentaries, trailers, and amateur footages). The study topics “Children”, “Home”, “Marriage”, “Pregnancy”, “Property”, “Well-being” and “Health” were presented in two stimulus situations each in order to demonstrate both positive and crisis variants of development of events (the given article contains empirical observations of about only 9 situations). Thus, with the purpose of modeling the way of life of homeless people, we used footage of professional location shooting at Paveletskiy Station in Moscow showing the characters both in panorama and close-up (a voice behind the screen comments on typical everyday life of such people, their relations to each other and attitude to the charity of the city dwellers).

Reconstruction of semantic content of attitudes to the above mentioned situations was carried out with the help of the method of non-verbal semantic differential (NSD). Attitude to the way of life with different incomes (financially secure *vs* low income way of life), in different living conditions (renting a flat *vs* living in one's own house), with different attitude to living conditions (taking care of one's home in the form of refurbishing *vs* living conditions of a

homeless person) were reconstructed with the specialized SD "Way of life" [11]. Personal features of a man yielding to invitations to drink for company were reconstructed with the help of the personal SD, and the semantic assessment of the situation of running in the company of sportsmen – with the help of the standard SD [11].

The study was carried out on the basis of the State Education Institution "Special Education Boarding School # 5 for Children-Orphans and Children Left without Parental Care" and "Special Education School # 6, Class VIII" in 2012 – 2013. The sample included 25 senior schoolchildren at the ages between 15 and 17 with the diagnosis "mild intellectual disability". The pilot stage of the experiment was conducted in accordance with principles and recommendations by I. A. Koneva tested in the process of repertory grid application [8]. Observation was first strictly individual, then after satisfactory memory consolidation of the meanings of the words-descriptors of the NSD – in tested pairs with direct contact with each member of the pair. The results were processed according to the incremental algorithm of distinction of group semantic evaluation universals by E. Yu. Artem'eva [11]. We shall now consider the group universals of the above given situations – semantic "experience coordinators" similarly evaluated by the majority of those tested [11, p. 259].

*Situation "Mother and son are redecorating the room" n = 20.*

With a 10% tolerance interval, we made up a long list of 28 de-

scriptors characterizing the semantic universal of evaluation of the idea of the way of life of a family trying to redecorate their room by replacing the wallpaper: *veselyy* (3.00), *otvetstvennyy*, *interesnyy*, *druzheskiy* (2.95), *dobryy*, *bodryy*, *mirolyubivyy* (2.90), *aktivnyy*, *osmyslennyy*, *uvazhitel'nyy* (2.85), *dostoynyy*, *sytyy*, *otkrytyy*, *obespechennyy* (2.80), *smelyy*, *privlekatel'nyy* (2.75), *ponimayushchiy*, *podvizhnyy* (2.65), *tvorcheskiy*, *nastoyashchiy* (2.60), *uporyadochennyy*, *komfortnyy*, *al'truistichnyy*, *spokoynyy*, *istinnyy* (2.55), *schastlivyy* (2.50), *uverennyy*, *polozhitel'nyy* (2.45). All descriptors give a positive characteristic to the image. The evaluations are diverse and high, which shows a considerable degree of expression of the named properties in the evaluated way of life and the unanimity of those tested.

*Situation "Homeless people", n = 20.*

With a 10% tolerance interval, a list of 8 descriptors was compiled characterizing the semantic universal of evaluation of the image of the way of life of homeless people: *besporядochnyy* (2.6), *neprivlekatel'nyy*, *neschastnyy* (2.5), *golodnyy* (2.45), *bezotvetstvennyy* (2.3), *neobespechennyy* (2.25), *staryy* (2.15), *beznravstvennyy* (2.1). The given nomenclature includes two negative personal properties – *bezotvetstvennyy* (irresponsible) and *beznravstvennyy* (immoral). The other descriptors characterize age, material and financial aspects of way of life and provide its general (negative) evaluation. It is worthy of note that in the evaluation

of such a shocking and for the majority of people repulsive social phenomenon, the number of properties of the evaluated object shared by the majority of those tested was one third as many as in the previous situation, i.e. semantic evaluation is characterized by the absence of unanimity of opinion. The analysis of individual profiles revealed evaluations directly opposite to the typical ones. Thus, in spite of the shocking realism of the footage, the depicted way of life was considered comfortable by three children, three other children called it least uncomfortable. Five out of twenty of those tested evaluated such way of life as real; another four defined it as true. The evaluations of the given social phenomenon were rather varied in the pair of descriptors “*uvazhitel'nyy* (respected) – *neuvazhitel'nyy* (unrespected)” – eight children believe this way of life to be respected; three more children took a neutral position. Only nine of those tested defined the given social status of a person – a social homeless dependant without socially useful occupation, having no one to care about, no safe source of income, and, finally, without purpose in life and social recognition – as unrespected. We may come to the conclusion that the discovered tolerance of a part of senior schoolchildren with ID to the given social phenomenon reflects their humanistic attitude to the fallen and outcast members of society. This tendency may be a sign of other peculiarities of social development, and, in particular, of diffusion of the social ideal of those tested.

*Situation “One’s own home”, n=20.*

The following list of 20 descriptors with a 10% tolerance interval was found to represent the group semantic universal of evaluation of the image of having one’s own home: *dostoyunnyy* (2.85); *uverennyy* (2.7); *ponimayushchiy, dobryy, smellyy, sytyy* (2.55); *otkrytyy, obespechennyy* (2.4), *aktivnyy, otvetstvennyy, podvizhnyy* (2.35); *nasyshchennyy, polozhitel'nyy, nastoyashchiy, mirolyubivyy, veselyy* (2.3); *druzheskiy* (2.25); *nravstvennyy, bezopasnyy* (2.2); *bodryy* (2.15). The same as in the situation of house repair, those tested are unanimous and versatile in their positive evaluations; they state a high degree of expression of the named properties in the evaluated way of life. This picture turned out to be typical of making statements about various successful social situations, thus reflecting the tendency towards “attachment” of highly positive personal properties of successful people to the concept of well-being in the social thinking of senior schoolchildren with ID. Our findings corroborate the previously registered low ability of teenagers with ID to distinguish an image from the true essence of the person, and material circumstances of life from spiritual and internal properties of a person [9].

*Situation “A person is renting a home”, n = 20.*

We made up the following list of 4 descriptors with a 10% tolerance interval to represent the group semantic universal of evaluation of the image of life in an uncomfortable rented

flat: *druzheskiy* (2.15), *obychnyy* (1.7), *mirolyubivyy* (1.6), *aktivnyy* (1.55). The small number of group universals of evaluation testifies to the fact that the image of this situation is inadequately differentiated in the minds of senior schoolchildren with ID. In case of widening the tolerance interval, the list will be enlarged by the following universals: *bodryy* (1.7), *smelyy* (1.65), *opravdannyy*, *uvazhitel'nyy* (1.05). They are not attributed to the discussed way of life unanimously enough, but they show the way in which its understanding is progressing. A considerable part of those tested tend to define this way of life as respected and to excuse this way of life associating it with manifestation of properties of an active, lively and courageous character. We believe that this tendency should be encouraged and developed in order to form the cognitive experience of reforming the attitude to a frustrating situation as a barrier one to treating it an acceptable, resourcing, and etc. situation.

*Situation "Poverty and money saving", n = 19.*

The group semantic universal of evaluation of the image of a poverty and money saving way of life with a 10% tolerance interval reveals a discouragingly short list of 4 descriptors: *ratsional'nyy* (2.21), *neobespechenny* (1.95), *napryazhenny* (1.84), *podvizhnyy* (1.79). Taking into account the fact that senior schoolchildren with ID must be prepared to the policy of saving money on their everyday expenses such scarce verbal representation of possible practical

life demonstrates absence of psychological preparation to it, and shows how negative motivation can oust the corresponding positive images. It is necessary to note that the respondents believe this way of life to have a rational character; in this connection a further study of the personal properties, actions and deeds facilitating a rational attitude to the money saving way of life would be welcome.

*Situation "High income", n = 20.*

The group semantic universal of evaluation of the images of a high income way of life with a 10% tolerance interval is represented by a long list of 24 descriptors: *bezopasnyy* (2.8), *ponimayushchiy* (2.7), *aktivnyy*, *dostoynyy*, *obespechenny*, *sytyy* (2.65), *tvorcheskiy*, *uverenny*, *nasyshchenny*, *privlekatel'nyy*, *otvetstvennyy*, *dobryy*, *novyy* (2.6), *druzheskiy*, *schastlivyy*, *uvazhitel'nyy* (2.55), *komfortnyy* (2.5), *veselyy* (2.4), *nastoyashchiy*, *bodryy* (2.25), *polozhitel'nyy* (2.2), *ratsional'nyy*, *otkrytyy*, *soglasovanny* (2.15). In case of widening the tolerance interval, the list tends to be enlarged by the following universals: *spokoynyy* (2.2), *npravstvennyy*, *istinnyy*, *mirolyubivyy* (2.1), *smelyy* (2.05), *osmyslenny*, *uporyadochenny* (1.75), *kompromissnyy*, *opravdannyy* (1.7), *tselostnyy* (1.65). It is evident that senior schoolchildren with ID associate this way of life with the most complete self-realization of a person in the best manifestations of spirit and soul.

*Situation "Physical exercise, jogging", n = 20.*

The following list of 15 de-

scriptors with a 10% tolerance interval represents the group semantic universal of evaluation of the image of a physical exercise in the form of jogging: *bystryy* (3.0), *radostnyy*, *aktivnyy* (2.95), *umnyy* (2.9), *dobryy* (2.85), *lyubimyy*, *svezhiy* (2.8), *gladkiy*, *ostryy* (2.7), *khoroshiy*, *bol'shoy* (2.75), *sil'nyy*, *zhizneradostnyy* (2.65), *chistyy* (2.6), *goryachiy* (2.5). Analysis of oral commentaries during filling in the NSD protocol made us doubt that the given characteristics were associated by those tested exclusively with the personal properties of the "runner" but not with his/her bodily appearance. We believe that it is necessary to study the relationship of the efforts to keep fit not only with the physical properties of the body but also with the corresponding spiritual qualities of personality.

*Situation "Unhealthy way of life", n = 20.*

The group semantic universal of evaluation of the idea of unhealthy way of life (drug abuse, attending night clubs with bad reputation) with a 20% tolerance interval is represented by a list of 10 descriptors: *bezotvetstvennyy* (1.8), *opasnyy* (1.7), *bessmyslennyy* (1.65), *obespechennyy* (1.6), *irratsional'nyy* (1.55), *lozhnyy* (1.45), *nedostoynyy* (1.4), *podvizhnyy* (1.25), *profannyy* (1.2), *aktivnyy* (1.1). In spite of certain difficulties in understanding certain attributes, those tested had chosen the evaluations expressed by them, which does not obviate the necessity of further semantization of the corresponding notions about the given way of life. We believe that the given semantic content

is a result of systematic work of the teaching staff of special education schools of Class VIII in drug abuse prevention.

*Situation "Making somebody drunk", n = 20.*

The group semantic universal of evaluation of the images of the situation of making somebody drunk through manipulations of an inveterate drunkard with a 10% tolerance interval reveals the following list of 8 descriptors: *irratsional'nyy* (1.7), *otritsatel'nyy* (1.55), *kompromissnyy*, *opasnyy* (1.35), *diskomfortnyy* (1.25), *obespechennyy* (1.2), *otkrytyy*, *bessmyslennyy* (1.05). In case of widening the tolerance interval, the list is enlarged by the following attributes: *zavisimyy*, *neprivilekatel'nyy* (1.25), *avtoritarnyy* (1.15), *podvizhnyy* (1.1), *mirolyubivyy* (0.9), *obychnyy* (0.85), *sotsial'nyy* (0.8), *konservativnyy*, *veselyy* (0.75), which reflect the tendency to understanding the given situation by a considerable part of those tested. A large number of evaluations demonstrate understanding and cognitive differentiation of ideas about such situation. But some inconsistency and ambivalence of the situation interpretation needs removal of contradictions through the definition of the semantic core of evaluations in the process of group discussion of the logic of the given nature.

Thus, the psycho-semantic experiment has demonstrated the fact that the ideas of senior schoolchildren with ID about ways of life connected with different incomes and living conditions and presence of good or bad habits vary greatly in complete-

ness and quality, degree of social maturity and realism. Semantic evaluations of crisis situations are characterized by a small number of group universals and low average values, which demonstrates absence of unity, penury and inadequate differentiation of the semantic content of evaluations of such situations. The study of group semantic universals of difficult situations makes it possible to come to the conclusion that in the social development environment of senior schoolchildren with ID there has not yet formed a universal social opinion about critical circumstances of life; and that is why the personality of man in such circumstances is subconsciously perceived in a diffused and controversial way. We believe it is connected with emphasizing the standard social image of a positive personality in education practice. Meanwhile the pupils hardly realize how this personality manages to overcome predicaments at the same time preserving their well-being and succeeding. In connection with diversity of individual profiles of evaluations it seems necessary to organize socio-psychological discussions aimed at interpretation, reflection and specification of positions of those tested.

On the other hand, high unanimity of evaluations, their considerable number, qualitative diversity and comparatively high average values are characteristic of evaluation of positive social situations by senior schoolchildren with ID. On the basis of the obtained data and the verbal commentaries to the NSD protocols we may assume that positive social situations

and social roles bring about more active social thinking and are connected with more differentiated social concepts. To a large degree this may be attributed to the active translation of ideology of the consumer society in the modern Russian socio-cultural situation. Comparative analysis of distribution of the quantity of group universals of evaluation of crisis and positive situations shows that the social environment influencing senior schoolchildren with ID is dominated by discourse cultivating the positive image of financial well-being and private success. It seems that better understanding of various aspects of material well-being by senior schoolchildren with ID – be it financially prosperous way of life, expensive wedding party or possession of one's own enthusiastically decorated house – might have been facilitated by active discussions of the corresponding aspects of life in the social sphere of development of those tested. Active translation and propaganda through mass media and social means of communication of the corresponding values attracts schoolchildren with ID without laying any limitations connected with their diagnosis, personal abilities and capabilities and educational background. This process may result in too high, often unreal expectations, poor preparation for problem resolution and reluctance to look for reasonable compromises in resolving predicaments.

A large number of group universals of semantic evaluation of a situation expressing in discursive practices dominant attributes of the corresponding real life phenomena seem to

demonstrate orientation to similar popular values and identification with the propagated social ideal rather than common life experience of those tested. The interpretation of the social ideal is biased in this case, which is manifested in vesting positive personal properties only in the characters and images which correspond to the standard of well-being and/or successful life. At the same time, true understanding of the secrets of success cannot be based only on propagating an idealized image; it needs rational evaluation of the whole sequence of all stages of the process of work and fight of the hero for his “place in the sun”.

In this respect, positive experience is accumulated in special methods of analysis of socially relevant images of fiction and cinema drama [9; 15 etc.]. The process of acquaintance with the types of social ideals by senior schoolchildren with ID is not limited to the choice of the relevant features of a social icon, but necessarily presupposes critical evaluation of the character's actions [9]. We shall now dwell on the drama experience as a process closest in its goal-setting and procedural aspects to rational socio-psychological education. The process of rehearsing is targeted on the consideration of “the logic of the character's existence under the suggested circumstances” and the choice of actions and deeds relevant for the image; it is based on matching the “ideal” image to the chain of events and situations, which allows specifying its active characteristics. In the process of discussion of the character's personal properties and ac-

tions, of construction and consolidation of the scenes, the ideal image gets definite properties and is defined from the point of view of his/her goals, motives, personal properties and the way of life. Thus, amateur dramatical activity of a special education school, class VIII may employ a principle used in active socio-psychological education of schoolchildren with ID – involvement in revealing essential and diverse aspects of the social life of a character, in modeling certain facts from his/her biography which are not included in the actual life situation but are part of its history – a kind of “biography prior to curtain” [9, p. 148]. Formation of a cognitive model of a “life” image of a social ideal presupposes the enrichment of social experience in the process of modeling resolution of controversies in problem situations which, according to N. Kh. Knyaz'kina, could help children of a special education school, class VIII “to save themselves from making errors in life and to overcome the existing spiritually painful problems” [9, p. 70].

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