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P. A. Zhokina
Moscow, Russia

SELF-EVALUATION OF CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS (A REVIEW OF FOREIGN RESEARCHES)

Abstract. The author supports the existing psychological point of view on self-evaluation as one of the main components of personal development. Self-evaluation can influence the person's achievements, communication with others, quality of life, and ability to adapt to the environment. Self-evaluation can also influence the level of psychological health and the general state of personal well-being of the individual. Psychologists don't give a single universal definition of the term "self-evaluation", but most researchers agree that self-evaluation is an evaluative self-image. Self-evaluation in cases of developmental disorders is adequate only when the person realizes and accepts this disability as part of their own self. Unfortunately, works devoted to the study of children's self-evaluation in cases of dysontogenesis are dramatically scarce.

This article provides an analytical review of foreign authentic sources on the problem of self-evaluation of children with visual impairments urgent to the special psychology of the 21st century. The review was conducted on the basis of research materials by foreign authors which had not been previously translated into the Russian language. Acquaintance with their results allows one to approach the psychological understanding of self-evaluation and its role in the development of children with visual impairments and to outline the preventive work of the typhlopsychologist and typhlopedagogue, as well as the parents.

Keywords: self-image; self-evaluation of a person; dysontogenesis; children with visual impairments; visual impairments; typhlopsychology.

About the author: Zhokina Polina Aleksandrovna, Post-graduate Student; Teacher.
Place of employment: Department of Clinical and Special Psychology, Moscow City Pedagogical University; State Budgetary General Education Institution "School 15" (Moscow, Russia).

If we look back at the history of Russian special psychology we will see that from the very beginning it studied separate parameters and aspects of personality formation in the conditions of developmental

disorders. The thesis about indivisibility of 'the inner ties and the unity' between intellect and affect put forward by L. S. Vygotskiy [3, p. 256] stimulated the beginning of serious research of the child's per-

sonality and served as the basis for understanding the structure of defect by special psychologists [1; 6, etc.]. Nevertheless, as I. A. Korobeynikov wittily noted, “a postulate is not a job description” [6, p. 50]. Researchers’ interest (M. S Pevzner, 1966; M. S. Pevzner, V. I. Lubovskiy, 1963; I. A. Korobeynikov, 1982, etc.) towards personal aspects of development of children with disabilities was shown in a lesser degree than towards cognitive sphere, though peculiar personal properties were noted while they were about it, and separate components of the personality were studied in a limited way, for example, self-evaluation and the level of ambitions [6; 7; 8; 9]. Taking this fact into account, it is necessary to admit that the situation was brought about by the then demands of the home special pedagogy. The situation abroad developed in a similar way, and E. Zigler (2001) noted that “preoccupation with the cognitive approach to the problem of intellectual disability stems from little experimental empirical data of researches dealing with the personality of intellectually disabled individuals” [5, p. 144]. The same idea was expressed earlier by W. I. Gardner and R. Heber [24; 26].

Realization of importance of the personal aspects of the child with developmental disabilities found its direct or indirect reflection both in psycho-pedagogical and clinical sci-

entific paradigms. It is worth mentioning that the classical works by L. I. Bozhovich, V. S. Mukhina, N. I. Nepomnyashchaya, D. B. El'konin and many others come out in the Russian developmental psychology at this time.

The late 20th century saw a considerable growth of the number of researches devoted to the study of personality. But only a few of them look at the formation of preconditions of personality formation in childhood. The situation is even more dramatic in the sphere of developmental disorders. Foreign researchers contradict each other; and home investigations are scarce. Still, on the basis of empirical data (observations and indirect experimental results), Zh. I. Shif (1965), developing the ideas of G. Ya. Troshin and L. S. Vygotskiy about the specificity of psychological activity and psychological development of children with disability, come to the conclusion that developmental disorders of a person present a regularity common to all children with disabilities. In spite of deficiency of researches of childhood and only sporadic data about early childhood we can make a supposition that self-evaluation and gender and age identification as entities preceding self-image are the origins of development of all personality manifestations [12]. Our point of view coincides with the opinion of other researchers who recognize the fact that self-evaluation takes

the central position in psychology of personality (e.g. such scholars as D. Balla and E. Zigler [12]). S. Stahl (2014) expresses a similar opinion and even argues that “self-evaluation is the epicenter of the psyche” [34, p. 13]. Thus, the process of personal development should be regarded, first of all, through the prism of self-evaluation and gender and age identification. It is only natural that we should take into account the differences in the interpretation of these terms [2]. As long as self-evaluation has been studied better, it seems preferable to study its formation and development in the first place.

The greater part of a large number of foreign studies of self-evaluation deal with its investigation in the conditions of visual impairments. Unfortunately, we have no access to the full text of the majority of them, and we can judge about their scientific value only via reviews in non-authentic works by Greek and Spanish psychologists. They are mostly devoted to the study of self-evaluation in adults and teenagers. Only some researches deal with children’s age.

In all accessible works, the experimental part is preceded by a review. Thus, K. Papadopoulos presents in his paper the material which shows that **children with visual impairments** may demonstrate various levels of self-evaluation including both adequate and low or high self evaluation. According to R. Martinez and K.

Sewell, this fact helps to realize that children and teenagers with visual impairments have a chance to develop their self-image [31].

F. Alexander (1996) studied self-esteem of partially blind children and J. Pierce, J. Wardle (1996) limited their research to totally blind children only. The scholars argue that children with visual impairments do not demonstrate low self-esteem [20]. But E. Ponchillia and V. Ponchillia (1996), and D. Tuttle and N. Tuttle (2004) state that visual impairment seriously affects the formation of self-image and brings about children’s low self-evaluation [33].

S. Soulis and P. Christodoulou (2010) studied self-esteem of children with visual impairments and without them at the ages 8-12. The data obtained for this age group showed that children with visual impairments had lower self-esteem in comparison with typical vision peers. The results of the latest research in this field (E. Fotiadou, M. Mousouli, 2014¹; S.-G. Soulis, G. Andreou, P. Xristodoulou, 2012; S.-G. Soulis, P. Christodoulou, 2010; D. H. Warren, 2004; D. Tuttle, 2004; A. Webster, J. Roe, 1998; E. Ponchillia, V. Ponchillia, 1996) testify to the fact that the self-

¹ Empirical data have been obtained via the method of «Self-evaluation Inventory» (Coopersmith, 1987). Unfortunately, the methods used are not identified in the following review mentioning other scholars as well.

esteem of children with visual impairments aged 5 to 11 was lower compared with the typically developing peers. What is more, analysis of the data obtained showed that lower self-esteem was observed as a result of visual impairments [20; 33]. According to N. Angelopoulou-Sakantami (2002) loss of vision calls forth affective fluctuations thus causing lower situation-bound self-esteem [20].

The Spanish authors M. Lopez-Justicia, M. Pichardo, J. Amezcua, and E. Fernandez (2001) report that the study of children ages 4-7, 8-11 on the whole demonstrates lower results in several aspects of self-image for children with visual impairments in comparison to the group of peers with typical eyesight. The authors suggest that the children with poor sight sowed such results under the influence of difficulties arising in their school and social life situations [28] (a number of Spanish psychologists note that the methods of learning and teaching children with visual impairments should be based on a different strategy of cooperation which can help raise self-esteem and the level of academic standing of children with poor eyesight). Concern about certain aspects of self-image at education institutions was expressed as far back as 1950s when the pedagogues began to realize that academic success could not be separated from other aspects of devel-

opment of a personality. A. W. Combs (1965), T. Jersild (1951) and D. W. Staines (1958) were the first to study the problems of self-image and self-evaluation and to make an important contribution to education institutions curricula. In Spain, the most significant works in the given sphere were written by J. Gimeno (1976) and E. J. Rodríguez (1982) who studied the correlation between self-image and the child's school academic standing; J. Garanto (1984) and M. P. Oñate (1989) explored and adapted the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (W. Fitts, 1965); J. A. Alcántara (1989), J. Machargo (1991) and I. Elexpuru, A. Garma, M. Marroquin, and A. Villa (1992) dealt with improvement of concrete programs of rehabilitation and formation of self-evaluation and self-image of children [28].

E. Ponchillia, V. Ponchillia (1996), A. Webster and J. Roe (1998) agree that many persons with visual impairments aged 4-16 are characterized by low self-esteem, passivity, low academic standing, limited self-confidence, poor social adaptation and learned helplessness [20; 33]. The above-mentioned personal traits subdue the development of positive self-evaluation and self-image in cases of visual impairments. Loss of vision which makes even the simplest daily living activities hard to perform leads to devaluation of one's own personality, while sympathy

and well-intended actions of the surrounding people bring down self-evaluation [20; 33]. According to D. Tuttle and N. Tuttle (2004), psychological laws of personality development determining formation of self-evaluation and self-image in a person with typical vision can be equally applied to the blind. And the authors also note that they have revealed lowered self-evaluation in children with visual impairments in comparison with typical children [33]. Thus, the majority of authors believe that visual impairments lead to lower self-evaluation in comparison with the typical one.

There are investigations arguing that persons with visual impairments have higher self-esteem in childhood (ages 6-11) than children with typical eyesight. A number of scholars relate it to the feeling of the person's own independence (D. Tuttle, 1984) and practicing some kind of sport received by the blind and poor vision persons at preschool institutions and at schools (P. E. Ponchillia, B. Strause, S. V. Ponchillia, 2002) [see: 33]. Several researchers at once (S.-G. Soulis, P. Christodoulou, 2010; S.-G. Soulis, G. Andreou, P. Xristodoulou, 2012; E. Fotiadou, M. Mousouli, 2014) [see: 20] report about absence of correlation between self-evaluation of children and teenagers with visual impairments and the degree of loss or degradation of vision. The results of their research contradict

the data provided in another work (J. Bowen, 2010) about the children with visual impairments. The author argues that the level of visual impairment may seriously affect self-esteem [20].

Several scholars at once state interconnection of self-evaluation with chronologic health of children with visual impairments (E. Fotiadou, M. Mousouli, 2014; S.-G. Soulis, G. Andreou, P. Xristodoulou, 2012), but their conclusions contradict the results of other authors (R. W. Robins, K. H. Trzesniewski, J. L. Tracy, S. D. Gosling, J. Potter, 2002). The latter express an opinion that self-evaluation lowers at the ages of 9-12 and 13-17. H. W. Marsh, J. Parker, and J. Barnes (1985) also believe that self-esteem lowers at the individual's transition from childhood to adolescence [20].

It is well known that deficit in one of the spheres of psychological and physical child activity necessarily affects the development of other spheres. As analysis of the data of various researches shows, children with visual impairments often display specific personality traits (for instance, egocentrism, egoism, etc.) when they come across difficulties in everyday and social life connected with different spheres, such as cognitive, social and motor ones, which does not stimulate the development of positive self-evaluation. This means that it is not only the degree of decline

of visual acuity that matters but also the conditions of development.

The study of self-esteem of the blind by D. Jervis (1960) show that the blind are apt to correlate themselves with the extremely positive or extremely negative values on the self-assessment scale. They either believe themselves to be incapable of accomplishing their life tasks, or their evaluation is too high which is manifested in ignoring the fact of blindness and its consequences. High or low level of self-evaluation are connected with the success of adaptation to one's state and with the fact that in the process of their development children with visual impairments live through several psychological crises based on realization of the fact that they are different from their peers [5].

Unfortunately, the process of formation of self-evaluation has not received due reflection in the modern Russian typhlopsychology. It is believed that awareness of the self and formation of self-image in children with visual impairments take place later than in typical children and in a peculiar enough way – as a result of absence of experience of comparison with well-sighted children and criteria of self-evaluation [8].

Thus, we may observe incessant interest towards the problem of self-evaluation in special psychology on the basis of available foreign research. Still, the majority of modern research, especially in recent years,

has empirical character; it hardly ever looks at the content characteristics of this phenomenon. The modern scientific data allow speaking about different levels of self-evaluation of children with visual impairments depending on the level of manifestation of developmental disorder, social situation of development, success of adaptation to one's condition and many other factors which at first sight seem to be occasional but may prove to be important from the point of view of yet unknown regularities.

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