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**SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES
IN THE SITUATION OF INTEGRATIVE CAMP: EXPERIENCE
OF REHABILITATION OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM**

Abstract. The article reveals the essence of work with children with disabilities in the conditions of integrative camp. It describes inclusion of disabled children in the integrative camp environment and creation of optimal conditions of development of children with special needs in the process of their inclusion in society. It is noted that the work of camp professionals is targeted at providing socio-pedagogical support for children as well as at ensuring interaction within the created system of measures that help to reveal the child's potential. The article exemplifies the opportunities of the integrative camp in overcoming most of the difficulties of social adaptation which cannot be addressed by traditional pedagogical programs such as development of daily living skills and habits of taking food, acquisition of communication experience in various non-standard situations, possibility of contact with children and adults from different backgrounds, and application of the skills acquired in rehabilitation programs in various real-life situations. The article describes various techniques and forms of work with children with disabilities in the conditions of integrative camp: various rehabilitation group and individual sessions (art therapy, movement therapy or physiotherapy, music therapy, play therapy); classes in hobby groups (clay modeling, puppet workshop, painting), puppet shows, folk games, and walks in the woods.

Keywords: child autism; child with autism; children with disabilities; socialization of children; social adaptation; social-pedagogical support; child recreation; forms of work; integrative camps.

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Today, children with disabilities, especially those with severe deviations in psychological development, have no chance to communicate with typical children. A new attitude to children with disabilities is beginning to form; still the majority of Russian

people feel fear and antipathy towards persons with serious psychological disorders. It is usually connected with little experience of interaction with such people.

It is beyond doubt that significant changes are taking place in the sphere

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of special education and are connected with such factors as the growing contingent of children with disabilities and design of models of special education and psycho-pedagogical support for child development in the process of education. In spite of the fact that questions of special assistance, support and socialization of children with severe psychological disabilities are often raised in mass media, and there appear different types of special education institutions opening a possibility to educate children with disabilities and determining maximally possible socialization as the final goal of education, still many of these children are confined to home education and communicate only with the family members. In addition, the family bringing up a child with developmental disorders is often isolated from the society: friendly ties get severed, the parents lose jobs, they have little chance of taking a rest from daily routine, families often break up and find themselves on the verge of poverty.

In this connection, there arises a vital problem of designing a system of educational, psychological, pedagogical and rehabilitation support for families caring for children with special needs which would help them to optimally and adequately enter life, social activity, socialize and feel themselves useful and in-demand members of society.

Socialization presents a complex and convoluted process for a child with severe disorders of psychological development. The process of socialization continues during the whole life of a person and includes two interconnected but not identical processes:

social adaptation and isolation [6; 7]. According to I.S. Kon, socialization is a person's acquisition of social experience and a certain system of social roles and culture in the course of which a certain personality is created. As many specialists say [5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 12; 15], social adaptation of a person with disabilities presupposes accepting, acquisition and reproduction of the rules of behavior, norms, values and aims characteristic of the modern society. The problems of socialization of children with disabilities are connected with the fact that it is difficult for them to master the norms and rules of behavior because of impairments, absence of examples on the part of the adults and impossibility to take part in joint communication in real situations [8; 9; 11; 14; 15]. Problems with socialization usually consist in the inability to organize one's own participation in the life of society as the adaptation of such child not infrequently takes place under closed conditions in which he acquires the rules, values and aims differing from the socially accepted ones. In this connection the child with disabilities cannot master different social roles as there is no one to present and explain them to him. In this case social development of the child with disabilities takes a specific course; as a result there forms a personality ignorant of the surrounding world: people, their relationships, rules of behavior and traditions. All this leads to the situation when the child's behavior does not comply with the standard, is inconceivable for the surrounding people and is not accepted by them.

In view of all this, it is evident that special rehabilitation measures should be taken to render special socio-psychological assistance to families with disabled children [2; 3; 4; 10].

Rehabilitation of children with disabilities in our country is carried out by different rehabilitation centers. But their environment can hardly be called even a semblance of normal society, though, of course, psycho-pedagogical tasks are accomplished there successfully enough. Meantime, there are tasks the successful completion of which demands placing a special child in the environment close to the regular society [2; 4; 10; 12; 13]. These are the tasks of social adaptation which are even impossible to set under inappropriate conditions. Socialization is more efficient in the situation of integration and inclusion. According to L. S. Vygotskiy, the task of the education of a child with disabilities is his integration in the life and creation of conditions for compensation of his disability taking into account not only biological but also social factors [1]. L. M. Shipitsina [15] notes that inclusive education has important advantages facilitating socialization of a child with disabilities at all stages of his life, his engagement in the culture of peers and formation of “healthy” interpersonal relationships, as well as achievement of the potential level of development taking into consideration general and special needs.

Yet the school, as well as rehabilitation centers cannot create a learning and educational environment maximally approximated to the natural one. A child may be immersed into it

in the conditions of a summer integrative camp where children with disabilities find themselves among typically developing peers and get a chance to “adjust” to a usual big collective [2; 4; 10]. The distinction between a special and typical child is blurred at an integrative camp. Children with disabilities get rare experience, find themselves accepted in the community of typical children, get new stimuli for development and raise their chances to adapt to normal social life.

An integrative camp is more successful than traditional pedagogical programs in solution of many problems of social adaptation and acquisition of useful knowledge such as daily living activities, taking food, communication in various non-standard situations, getting in touch with typical children and adults; there emerges a chance to use the skills acquired at rehabilitation classes in various real life situations. The parents get a unique opportunity to take rest, a chance to see how other families with similar children are living, to learn to make more objective assessment of their child, to communicate with other parents and learn from specialists.

Below is the description of a case illustrating work aimed at adaptation of a child with autism spectrum disorder at an integrative camp.

A boy, D., aged 6 years 2 months. Diagnosis – emotional-volitional sphere disorders. D. comes to the integrative camp for the second time; during the previous year he went to an integrative kindergarten (twice a week). We made acquaintance of D. more than a year ago when his parents turned for help to the

Center of therapeutic pedagogy (Moscow) complaining of speech problems, poor sociability, inability to play and communicate with other children and anxiety. At that time, D. did not pay attention to other children in the group, did not participate either in common games or planned group events, violently protested against attempts to distract him from his own game (railway) – the boy was possessed by emotions and it was practically impossible to calm him down. D. acutely responded to markers of real danger (accidental fast nearing of an object, loud noise, and sharp movement towards himself). He was very sensitive to stimuli causing discomfort (did not like to dress, to wash hands, and was too squeamish) which made him too vulnerable in contacts with the environment.

As time went on, D. began to follow the group timetable, got fully used to the group daily routine, began to take part in common games with the peers, especially emotional games with a strong sensory component, and learned to comply with the rules of a familiar game. Still his behavior was stereotyped; though D. followed the timetable he was greatly upset when there were changes in it.

Today, D. knows all children, pedagogues and some parents by name. He singles out some children with whom he has made friends. He feels like spending more playing time with other children (invites them to play, wants to play with them on the playground, walk hand in hand, etc.). If no one wants to play the game he chooses he gets upset. Reaction in conflict situations are mostly infantile

(he cries, shouts: “Help!”, runs to the adult for comforting).

He cannot always follow causative-consecutive connections in situations (for example, he was running and bumped into another child – he shouts: “He’s beaten me!”). He began to take interest in emotions and preferences of other people (“Kate, do you like buckwheat porridge?”).

In communication, D. uses speech, initiates communication independently, asks questions and answers them. His speech activity has considerably grown since early this year: D. began to understand speech better and process information faster.

D’s mood is mostly stable; he gets upset by objective causes (when his plan of action is changed; when somebody takes his toy from him; when he hurts himself). His emotions are adequate; they are attached to situations. D. differentiates simple emotions in himself and other people around him (“I am upset, I am crying”). He accepts help, and can ask for help if he cannot do something.

D. is especially sensitive to the stimuli of certain modalities (fear caused by rumble, car hoots, noise, or even a moderate tactile stimulus like water drops on skin, etc.)

Thus, the following are the main tasks of further work with D. in the summer integrative camp:

– solution of emotional-volitional problems of D. (lowering the level of anxiety, emotional deliverance and raising self-assessment and motivation);

– enrichment of the social experience of D. and teaching him to

communicate with typical peers;

– creation of maximally favorable conditions for development of the boy's creative potential.

Various forms of work are cultivated at the camp to allow all members of the forming collective to interact with each other in a non-formal atmosphere. The activity is organized in such a way as to provide each person with a chance to show himself, to reveal his talents and creative potential. It is important that the children should be involved in interesting activity where no one is neglected.

In order to accomplish the set tasks, different group rehabilitation classes were chosen for D., such as folklore games, outdoor games, art-therapy, puppet performance, soft school, walks in the wood, dramatic circle, outing, fishing, bathing, singing by the fire, etc.

Timetable was the pivot of D's camp life. A large camp timetable hung on the door for D. to see what class was on schedule. Apart from the general timetable, D. had an individual copy which he could always take out and see. Any news or changes in the timetable (for example, because of bad weather) were always hung on the door of the dormitory. Such organization seemed very rational for D as the daily routine created an impression of predictability and safety, which lowered the strain and anxiety, especially at the beginning of the term.

The lesson of "Handwork" was the most dreadful time for D. as it was held in the building known as "The Hut". D. refused to enter it point blank and very soon would not even

near it. It turned out that he was afraid of a big oven placed in the hut. The oven caused D. strong anxiety, but at the same time attracted him: in order to overcome fear, D. often resorted to a form of auto-stimulation – he kept asking about the oven and demanded an immediate and similar answer ("Why is the oven placed in the hut?", "Who put the oven in the hut?, etc.). We finally found out that this complex ambivalent feeling was based upon an early created fear: according to D's parents, the fear of the oven was brought about by Russian fairy tales. They were the origin of the fear of a real oven that can be stoked by Baba Yaga, and made up constant provocations of D. Such emotions brought only discomfort and anxiety. After this, D. could not go to dinner together with other children and would not eat at all.

We began to help D. overcome the fear of the hut (we were fortunate that the boy could name the object of his fear himself). In different games with D., we started to create a situation of "acute safety" (during folklore games, we hid with him in safe shelters (under the table, under the blanket) running away from "wicked men", made a journey to save "the Beauty" while walking in the wood, etc.).

Drawing on the fact that the presence of frightening objects in the plot triggers off the will to overcome fear we employed the fear of the hut in one more camp building called "House of the Leader". We always offered D. a simple resolving commentary of what was going on inspiring him with our calm intonation and

stressing the insignificance of the frightening aspect of the situation. And we tried to create and reinforce affective tension necessary for organization of lengthy purposive activity.

Similar work was carried out with the help of drawing with D., and we always tried to make concrete and draw in detail positive elements (“pies are baked in the oven”, “it is warm to sleep on the oven in winter”, etc.).

After some days of such work, D. agreed to go up to the hut and make a handcraft object on the grass near the entrance to the hut. And all materials were handed to him through the window, which was funny and interesting for the children: we asked the children to give D. colors or take scissors from him, show the boy their works through the window – thus we tried to enrich his social experience while we were about it. By the end of the term, D. could enter the hut and be inside for some minutes. Thus, the affective tension associated with fear was lifted “by increments”. A fearful impression had finally lost its significance and was resolved in the general positive feelings of various playing situations having become part of a complex meaningful context.

An important role in our therapeutic pedagogical activity was played by individual and group game therapy. D. liked to play folklore and outdoor games at the camp (Geese-swans game; the Cat and the Mouse game, circle dances, etc.). D. knew the rules of many games and told about them to many children inviting them to play. In the middle of the term D. even began to take unexpected actions during circle dancing

just for fun (instead of dancing he started running about interfering with the dancers’ keeping a circle) and invited others to take part in his pranks. Such traditional folk games were an excellent training for the boy. The children joined D. with pleasure in different games and helped him to stay in the event (held him by the hand on the way from the tent to the playground lest he should run away).

Telling and drawing plot-driven stories about the child with real details presented an efficient technique of raising self-assessment and motivation. During various classes, on the way to the forest or lake, we talked with D. about situations in which he was presented as a “helper”, “quite a grown-up boy”, a “daring person”, etc. In general, by the end of the term D. began to possess quite a number of “heroic” stories about himself which raised his tone. Thus, during fishing, D. helped an adult to catch fish, and not vice versa and finally caught fish. D. helped other children to get into the boat to make a voyage, etc.

The selection of D. for the main role in a performance was the most unexpected and positive moment. At the end of the term, each group prepared a performance, for which the children chose and rehearsed roles, parents sowed costumes and pedagogue and volunteers made the sets. D. had good memory; that is why it was not difficult for him to learn the part of his character. D. was greatly immersed in his role and took part in the choice of the costume. In the “theater”, all children rehearsed together, helped each other recollect the lines

and movements and communicated.

Thus, at the integrative camp D. got many new impressions and together with them – new stimuli of development which positively told upon his emotional state.

The following results, including rehabilitation ones were achieved with the help of various games and classes.

- Classes facilitated lowering the level of anxiety, emotional tension and feeling of danger.

- Realization of various playing techniques and situations raised the level of self-assessment and motivation of D.

- The atmosphere of safety of social environment created at the camp made it possible to enhance the feeling of security and lower the level of anxiety of D, which is a vital step on the way to socialization.

- D. tried a practically new social environment, got rich, diverse and invaluable experience of communication.

- Active participation of D. in common activity let his new creative capabilities manifest themselves.

Purposive socio-pedagogical rehabilitation of children with disabilities is successfully carried out at the integrative children summer camp. The activity of the integrative children summer camp is aimed at creating optimal situation for development of children with disabilities when they join society. This aim is achieved through providing various forms of social activity, broadening of socially important ties, formation of the skills of social interaction and socially initiative activity of typical children. The children successfully master new

skills at the camp with support of the teachers. Having found themselves in a new social environment for the first time, children with disabilities get diverse and invaluable experience of communication with new people and significantly broaden the scope of their social ties. On finding themselves in the situation where the whole life of the collective (including food, sleep, classes and entertainment) abides by definite rules, special children learn to live according to these rules in a natural way which is an important landmark in the process of socialization.

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