

STUDY AND EDUCATION OF PERSONS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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INVESTIGATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL SPHERE OF JUNIOR SCHOOLCHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Abstract. The article presents the results of investigation of comprehension of emotional states by junior schoolchildren with mental retardation and disorders of psychological development. It deals with the problems of organization and choice of content of work aimed at the formation of skills of regulation, control and identification of emotional state.

The urgency of investigation of emotional sphere of schoolchildren with mental retardation and disorders of psychological development is defined by the influence of emotions on all components of the process of cognition. The limitations of the emotional sphere of such children demand its purposeful expansion and enrichment. The scope of the study includes the peculiarities of recognition of emotional states by mimicry and mastering emotive vocabulary by children with mental retardation and disorders of psychological development. The object of the study consists in foundation and choice of directions and content of work towards development of the emotional sphere of the category of children under study.

The main aim of research and analysis of its results is investigation of the level of comprehension of emotional states by mimicry, revealing the connections between the event and the pertinent emotion and understanding and correct usage of emotive vocabulary by junior schoolchildren with mental retardation and disorders of psychological development.

The research was carried out in a comparative aspect: the authors compared the tasks results of junior schoolchildren with normal development and those of children with mental retardation and disorders of psychological development. Significant differences were registered between the children of the above mentioned groups. The most vivid differences in understanding and correct usage of emotive vocabulary were found while recognizing the connection between the event which is the cause of the given emotion and the corresponding mimicry. The authors worked out the main lines of further activity with the purpose of development of emotional sphere of such children. They determined the following parameters of pedagogical influence: formation of skills of understanding the experienced emotions, recognizing the emotions of other people for correct execution of interpersonal interaction, knowledge of emotive vocabulary for characteristics of the felt and received emotions. The authors provide professional advice in methods of planning and carrying out work for the development of the emotional sphere of junior schoolchildren with mental retardation and disorders of psychological development.

Keywords: junior schoolchildren with normal intellectual development; junior schoolchildren with mental retardation and disorders of psychological development; emotions; mimicry; development of emotional sphere; emotive vocabulary.

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Pedagogical and psychological research clearly shows that the development of children depends not only on the level of formation of intelligence, but also on the advancement of their emotional sphere [1; 3; 6; 8; 13]. Regulation and control of one's emotions need teaching: they need understanding and identification of the emotional state [2; 5; 7; 14]. Signals about emotions given by other people often determine the way how to interpret their words or actions. As long as emotions lie at the basis of social relations, it is necessary to be able to discern the feelings of other people. The perception of outer expressions of feelings generates emotional responses and plays one of the leading roles in communication [5; 9]. Learning how to behave oneself in accordance with the expression of a certain emotion much depends on this fact. Emotions influence all components of cognition: perception, memory, thinking, motivation and cognitive needs [11; 15].

Special interest to the study of the emotional sphere of children with mental retardation and disorders of psychological development is explained by the need of complex psycho-pedagogical influence upon their intellectual and emotional development, and working out systematized methods and techniques of pedagogical control [2; 4; 10; 12].

Immaturity and weakness of a

psycotype are reflected in behavioral reactions undesirable for the society: conflicts, angry emotions, underdevelopment of inner regulation of psychological balance, emotional discomfort and problems in environmental adaptation [1; 6]. In view of peculiarities of intellectual and emotional development such children need special expansion and enrichment of their emotional sphere. The experienced emotions have a specific outward expression: in bodily movements, face expressions, in the change of pitch, force and timbre of the voice, etc. The given research defined the ability of children with mental retardation and disorders of psychological development to recognize outer expression of emotional states by mimicry – by movements of the muscles of facial expression.

The main task of the undertaken research was the identification of the degree of recognition by the contingent under study of emotional states in the pictures showing a child with different mimicry.

The experimental didactic material included photos of one and the same personage – a girl – with pertinent descriptions of everyday situations causing various emotional states: anger, fear, grief, repugnance, surprise, pleasure and offence. The photos were borrowed from the work by P.G. Jacobson "Psychology of Feelings" [15].

Three groups of junior school-

children took part in the experiment (ten children in each group): children with mental retardation, children with disorders of psychological development and children with normal intellectual development. Children between the ages of 7.5 and 8 were tested.

The children under test were asked to do three series of tasks.

Tasks of series One

Looking at the picture, please, name the emotion the personage is experiencing. Try to define its possible cause.

The intensity of emotion on different pictures is different. In some cases the expression of emotion is subtle; on others it is maximally evident.

Tasks of series Two

Having listened to the description of an everyday situation, please, select the corresponding picture.

This task makes it possible to define the ability of those tested to establish the connection between the event and the caused emotion.

Tasks of series Three

Please, choose a picture that best suits the notion expressing a concrete emotion.

This task allows evaluating understanding and usage of concrete emotive vocabulary referring to the designation of basic emotions.

The experimental data allowed revealing considerable differences between the children with normal intellectual development and the children with mental retardation and disorders of psychological development. Thus, while doing tasks of series One the children with normal intellectual development did not have any diffi-

culty in recognizing clearly expressed mimicry of the personage in the pictures. Errors took place with pictures where the emotion was difficult to identify, where the feelings were "subtle" or similar emotions were expressed, such as "offence" or "grief". The tasks evoked lively interest, desire to describe the mimicry correctly and attempt to classify the pictures into two groups (positive and negative emotions).

The children with normal intellectual development differed radically in the understanding of what they saw in the pictures: not only did they recognize the emotion correctly, but also tried to give one or two possible reasons for the given emotion. We paid attention to the fact that one half of the named reasons referred to descriptions of typical everyday situations, and the other half – to school life situations. For example: "The girl is happy because her mom's talked her up for collecting her toys". "And here she is sad; she doesn't know how to solve the task". The children of this group made their guesses about the causes of a certain emotion and the ways out of the predicaments. For example: "Instead of being sad, it's better to ask the teacher how to solve it". In some cases the personage in the picture received a moral evaluation. For example: "She is crying because it may be her fault, she'd better obey her mom".

The children with mental retardation in the first series could recognize only clearly expressed emotions, such as "anger", "fear" and "joy". And a half of them made mistakes in interpreting the pictures showing such

emotions as “surprise” and “fear” confusing them with each other. The given group of children did not show interest in the task; the children simply fumbled the photos and refused to do the tasks because they did not understand their meaning. It was necessary to explain and give stimulating help to these children. More often the answers had the form of a description of the appearance of the personage and her actions. For example: “The girl has a bow. She is drawing”. Only after a cue had been given (“Is her face joyful or sad?”) did the children define the emotion correctly. The children could hardly give possible reasons for the emotional states, saying: “I don’t know”, or gave a formal answer which didn’t reflect the essence of the problem: “The girl is laughing because she is glad”.

The children with disorders of psychological development correctly defined clearly expressed emotional states, but did not understand or recognize those feelings of the personage which were not clear enough (“regret”, “grief”, “offence”). The following answers were typical in this case: “She does not feel anything, she’s just looking at us”. The children with disorders of psychological development showed unstable interest in the work and treated the photos selectively: they studied some of them with interest and could not concentrate on others. It was necessary to repeat the task several times. The children with disorders of psychological development, the same as the children with mental retardation gave a very superficial characteristic of the emotions of the

personage in the pictures: “The girl is looking at somebody, she has a pen, but she is gay, because she is laughing”. The answers of the children with disorders of psychological development were mostly one-word utterances and reflected the main feeling: “gay”, “happy”, “angry”, etc. In order to get full extended descriptions of possible reasons for the emotional states we had to stimulate them and give additional explanations.

Neither the children with mental retardation nor the children with disorders of psychological development had ever given examples of situations from their school life in order to substantiate the reasons for any emotions of the personage in the pictures.

The results of doing tasks of series Two also showed essential differences between the groups of those tested.

The children with normal intellectual development correctly defined the emotional response to an everyday situation verbally described to them. (For example, father said: “I’ve got a present for you!” – the chosen emotional response – “amusement”.) Several mistakes in the choice of the right picture may be attributed to subtle differences in the mimicry. When the mistake was pointed out the tested tried to correct it, justifying it by the similarity of expression of emotions. The children listened to the descriptions of situations with special attention and interest, evaluated them and correlated them with their own experience of communication with members of their families. For example: “I got angry, too, when my brother broke up my toy car”.

While establishing the connection between the events and the caused emotions the children with mental retardation and the children with disorders of psychological development made rather significant and sometimes rude mistakes, i.e. they chose pictures regardless of the text. When the mistake was pointed out those tested did not show any wish to correct it. Interest to the tasks petered out very soon. While listening to the text they were passive and could not concentrate.

The tasks of series Three were aimed at checking up understanding and usage of concrete emotive vocabulary.

The children with normal intellectual development understood the words referring to the designation of basic emotions perfectly right. Not only did they give the names of the main phenomena of the emotional life (joy, fear, surprise) themselves, but also singled out more "subtle" manifestations of emotions through mimicry: "grinned", "is lost in thought", "grew sad". The children gave complete and precise description for each state bringing examples from their everyday and school situations. Thus, the speech of such children displays logical correlation between the visual perception of mimicry and its correct verbal designation. The children's answers are also interesting in the fact that they contain explanations of the reasons for certain emotions.

The children with mental retardation and the children with disorders of psychological development could not discern the right semantic correlation between the verbal expression of an

emotion and the mimicry of the personage in most tasks. They did not use their life experience for the description of the emotional state of the personage in the picture or gave examples which did not correspond to the demonstrated emotion. The words referring to the designation of basic emotions were replaced by the words describing temperament, appearance and actions of the personage in the pictures.

We argue that the discovered deficiencies in the development of the emotional sphere of children with mental retardation and children with disorders of psychological development weaken the social possibilities of their personality. Based on our research, it is possible to see the connection between the ability of the children of the given categories to recognize and identify emotions with the peculiarities of relationship with the people around them. This fact is expressed, primarily, in the low level of their need of communication combined with disadaptive forms of behavior.

Emotional immaturity of children with mental retardation and children with disorders of psychological development reveals itself in the weakened compassion and sympathy. The children lack criticism in self-evaluation of their behavior, stability of relationship with the social surroundings and self-regulation of their emotional state. The pedagogues experience excessive difficulties in setting up pupils' collectives and ensuring children's socialization. As a result, the educating potential of society (family, school collective, etc.) is in-

significant. Disregard of other people's feelings, misinterpretation of the correlation between the emotions and their causes define the peculiarities of the social behavior of such children: it is inconsistent, often illogical, conflicting and little predictable.

Thus parents, teachers and educators are confronted with a number of serious psychological problems of interaction with such pupils. Apart from solving the tasks of the education process, the teacher should also concentrate on the development of the emotional sphere of the pupils and should monitor the dynamics of its formation. Analysis of pedagogical situations shows that in the majority of cases the influence on the children's emotional sphere has a sporadic and non-systemic character. The planned purposes of work usually include the aim of emotional development, but it is often presented in a formal and non-concrete way.

Modern special pedagogy and special psychology are actively looking for new perspectives and content of research in developing the emotional sphere of children. Worthy of attention are *Guidelines for work with preschool children suffering from systemic speech disorders* by E.V. Karaulova, which presuppose organization of interaction with the parents (information-instructive interaction, and interaction aimed at the formation of working skills); coordinated cooperation of all teachers of the nursery school [2].

The parts of the work and the guidelines for development of the content of the lessons suggested by the author may be used in relation to junior

schoolchildren with mental retardation and children with disorders of psychological development.

The choice of perspectives and content of work in developing the emotional sphere of children with mental retardation and children with disorders of psychological development should be defined by the long-run objectives. We believe that we can refer here the abilities:

- to understand the experienced emotion;
- to choose the right kind of behavior while experiencing an emotion for achieving one's goal without harming other people;
- to see what emotions are felt by other people for building up interpersonal relations in a proper way;
- to establish the connection between the event and an emotional response to it;
- to master the emotive vocabulary to be able to characterize experienced and observed emotions.

Social training for achievement of these objectives should include such kinds of work that would correspond to the specificity of intellectual development of children with mental retardation and children with disorders of psychological development. First of all, it is necessary to define the topics, and then work out exercises for analysis, recognition and identification of each emotion, including exercises on identification of outward manifestation of emotional states by movements of the muscles of facial expression. More attention should be allotted to the expression of emotions which are not strong enough, as long

as children with mental retardation and children with disorders of psychological development quite easily interpret facial expressions only when the emotion is maximally intense.

Creation of specially organized real life situations so that the child could experience this or that emotion may be considered as an important part of the work. This would help the child to better understand the emotion and successfully analyze it. This work should be followed by "playing back" the given episode in the child's consciousness (conscious recollection), and conducting talks about the past emotional experience.

The imagination potential of children with mental retardation and children with disorders of psychological development is limited, but it can be used for the development of the emotional sphere. The children may be asked to imagine everyday situations and situations from their school life that would make them feel certain emotions.

To work out the feeling of compassion we recommend observations of emotional states of other people and discussion of situations bringing about certain emotions. As emotions underlie the relations with other people, so this kind of work would facilitate improvement of children's perception of other people's feelings. This work may be continued by interpretation of words or actions of other people whose signals of emotions have been perceived by the children.

One of the methods of becoming more sensitive to one's own and someone else's emotions may consist

in using the knowledge about the causes of each emotion. It is beyond doubt that while choosing these specific events it is necessary to take into account the age, level of intellectual development, life conditions and social experience of the children. Thus, the interpretation of such feelings as fear, grief, pleasure, surprise, and so on should be carried out from the position of the child. Perception of outward expression of emotions brings forth response feelings and emotions in children. This fact should be used to build up the skill of choosing the pattern of behavior suitable for a certain emotion.

Realization and identification of the experienced emotional state form the basis of social training of children to self-regulate and self-control their emotions. Special attention should be paid to the verbal language of emotions, i.e. to the words denoting phenomena of emotional life. It is necessary to evaluate in advance the amount and quality of the vocabulary referring to the designation of the basic emotional states (emotive vocabulary). In the course of the above mentioned forms of work the teacher should repeatedly use the notion pertinent for denoting the experienced or perceived emotion. This simple technique will help to define and enrich the child's emotive vocabulary.

After acquaintance with the content and volume of the suggested kinds of work in the field of development of the emotional sphere of junior schoolchildren with mental retardation and schoolchildren with disorders of psychological development practi-

cal teachers may experience disappointment and inner discontent. The main question that may worry them – how to allocate time between education process and systematic purposeful development of emotions? These kinds of work are quite combinable. It is possible to use practically any stage of any lesson to attract the attention of the pupils to the feelings experienced by the teacher and the pupils, to model the relation between the given feeling and the situation, etc. This kind of work will demand from the teacher a clear cut plan of classroom activities and a search of possibilities of inclusion of the planned work into the education process.

Tutors and teachers-logopedists have by far better chances of realization of the kinds and content of the work aimed at the development of the emotional sphere of junior schoolchildren with mental retardation and schoolchildren with disorders of psychological development.

In the course of joint activity the teaching staff should achieve the following results:

- children's emotions should be adequate to the events causing them;
- they should conform to the social norms and the circumstances of their appearance;
- emotions should be expressed in such a way that they would not harm the surrounding people.

It is quite evident that the development potentials of children with mental retardation and children with disorders of psychological development are different. In the course of work with such children the time al-

lotted to the work and predictions will be also different. Continuing practice will be required from the children to acquire and keep the skills of self-regulation and self-control of emotional behavior.

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