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COLLECTIVE IDEAS OF SENIOR PUPILS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY ABOUT ADULTHOOD

Abstract. The article reflects the structure and content of collective ideas of adolescents with intellectual disabilities about adulthood. The article shows the ideological diversity of the corresponding collective ideas formed by a unity of individual concepts of *adulthood*. The authors single out the ideas of the kernel zone including the activity-based and behavioral definitions of adulthood. The peripheral zone embraces the mental characteristics of an adult and the concepts about temper and responsibility. The conclusions and generalizations presented in the article, and the fragments of the judgments of respondents with intellectual disabilities characterizing their specific categories and concepts outline the zone of real and proximal development of ideas of senior pupils of an adaptive school about adulthood. Specification of the structure and content of ideas of pupils with intellectual disability about adulthood may allow improving the education and rehabilitation activity of adaptive school aimed at the formation of biographical concepts of the pupils of this category. The data obtained can be used as a basis for optional courses, extra-curricular educational activities aimed at the formation of ideas about adulthood in the context of the person's life, about responsibility, etc. in pupils with intellectual disabilities. The information on the content of the variable peripheral zone of the concepts of adolescents with intellectual disabilities about adulthood presented in the article may be useful for the development of the basic learning actions of pupils in their social cognition, including the design of problem situations and other learning assignments.

Keywords: ideas about maturity; senior pupils; collective ideas; oligophrenopedagogy; intellectual disability.

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It is generally known that the ideas of pupils with intellectual disability about the future and adulthood are immature, fragmentary and controversial [1; 3; 5; 6; 7; 9; 10; 12; 13; 14]. Rehabilitation practice needs programs forming the ideas about the person's life and the methods of organization of the course of human life in order to help pupils with intellectual disability to form more mature cognitions about the adult and adulthood as their future, and in order to develop their skills to systematize social concepts in time, interpret life experience and make a conscious choice in life [11]. Specification of the structure and content of ideas of pupils with intellectual disability about adulthood and maturity may allow improving the education and rehabilitation activity of adaptive school aimed at the formation of biographical concepts of the pupils of this category, and may facilitate the creation of the corresponding psycho-pedagogical discourse and the design of an optional course based on it. [4; 12].

The article focuses on revealing the structure and content of collective ideas of adolescents with intel-

lectual disabilities about adulthood. The article emphasizes the ideological diversity of the corresponding collective ideas formed by a unity of individual concepts of *adulthood*. [8, p. 231].

A modified procedure of M. A. Kholodnaya "Provisional Interlocutor" has been used in our study. The instruction stimulated those tested to make up micro-texts consisting of coherent utterances rather than separate words like it is in the original variant [15, p. 111]. At the beginning of the interview, the respondents were offered the following instruction: *Imagine you are talking with a person who has never heard the word "adulthood" before. He asks you to explain the meaning of this word. How would you explain the essence of "adulthood"?* The task was not limited in time, and the respondent stopped talking himself if he considered that he had explained the meaning well enough. After that, some questions were discussed with the respondent: *What kind of temper is typical of an adult? What behavior has he got? How old is he? What is the difference between an adult and a child?*, etc.

36 adolescents aged 14-18 years, learning in grades 7-10 of an adaptive school, took part in the experiment (27 males and 9 females).

The technique of inductive identification of categories and coding was used for the interview data analysis [2, p. 194]. Then we calculated the frequency of occurrence of each category in the respondents' text database and the percentage of the answers of this category among the total number of answers obtained.

Results

In the course of content analysis, we have singled out 170 utterances about adulthood, including 10.5% cases of tautology and 1.2% of senseless utterances.

The analysis of the rest of the utterance database allowed us to identify the following categories:

1. Characteristics of occupation and kinds of activity (35.3 %).
2. Characteristics of behavior, relationships and temper (24.1 %).
3. Mental (cognitive) characteristics of an adult (11.8 %).
4. Characteristics through correlation with age (7 %).
5. Characteristics of the factors determining the behavior and temper of an adult (4 %).
6. Characteristics of adulthood in terms of age-based periodization (3 %).
7. Bodily characteristics of adulthood (3 %).

The predominance of activity-based and behavioral definitions makes us refer them to the kernel zone of collective ideas of the respondents with intellectual disability about adulthood.

The respondents with intellectual disability characterized the following *occupations and kinds of activity* of an adult: work, employment (8.8%); starting a family, being a married person and a parent (5.9 %); housework (4.7 %); getting education (3.5 %); spending money (2.9 %); travelling and entertainment (2.3 %); driving a car (1.7 %); getting well-off, buying a flat, going in for sports, doing business, possessing firearms; socially useful activity; serving in the army; communication with the family of the parents (1.1% each).

Now let us pass on to the discussion of the utterances about *behavior, relationships and temper* of an adult.

The respondents with intellectual disability described the *behavior* of an adult as that of a person *who knows what to do; who is an experienced, skilled person, behaving well like an adult, i.e. not as a minor or adolescent – the adult person does not swear, does not use bad language, does not fool around, does not fight, does not play noogies, does not play with toys, does not break anything, does not stay out till late at night, eats much, goes to*

bed on time, etc. The abundance of negative definitions in this list demonstrates formal opposition of an adult's behavior to the derogatory behavior of a schoolchild. The characteristic of the new features of adulthood connected with arbitrary regulation of behavior in accordance with conscious value-based orientations is represented in only one supposition: *An adult is well-behaved. ... To say nice words. [What new traits appear in the person?] To talk with adults, to appreciate one's relationships, to make friends, sense means thinking. An adult is looking for sense in everything. [Have you ever tried to look for the sense of something?] Yes. [Did you find it?] One has to do the things one is to do, to do homework.* The cited supposition mentions the search for sense, value-oriented relation, reflective process (thinking), and communicative actions.

Those tested rarely mention the scope of experienced *relationships* and the corresponding *behavior*, for example: *He begins to behave himself like an adult. [What do you mean?] It's as if you were a different person. Sometimes you smile, sometimes not. Sometimes you are happy, and sometimes you quarrel. [And what is typical?] You begin to behave well with other people around. / He keeps shouting, is often startled. When he grows old he does not behave like he used to, he becomes kind. / The behavior might*

change; you may become either bad or good, or a decent person. It depends on your own behavior. These utterances reflect the forming understanding of the diversity of relationships and behavior. And the predicted range of diversity is limited by stereotyped evaluations like *kind – wicked, good – bad, joyful – angry (swears)*. The predicted affective instability and conflict behavior (*shouts, swears, is startled*) should be paid attention to.

The image of an adult became more definite due to the characteristics of *responsibility* and *independence* (13), for example: *A grown up – he can do what he likes. You try not to ask your parents too often. / You are responsible for yourself. Kids chatter, but are not taken seriously, they will be punished for what they do by their parents. An adult is like a law abiding citizen.* Independence is manifested in attempts to earn money, separate residence, refusal from the parents' help, and caring for oneself.

The collective idea of respondents with intellectual disability about responsibility includes the following understanding of the forms of activity for which an adult is responsible: *words, deeds, actions; things one has messed up; good things one has done.* Responsibility is more often interpreted as readiness to take responsibility for one's actions, and less frequently – for the actions of children and close

people, for example: *Choice of responsibility. [What is responsibility reflected in? What or who can one be responsible for?] Many things. Be responsible for one's words, for oneself, for relatives, for children. Wedding.* Let us give examples of utterances representing a more detailed understanding of responsibility enumerating its spheres, and naming the actions which reflect it (*decide, help, stand up for*): *This is responsibility, to be responsible to somebody: law, family, at work. No one will let you off. You are responsible for yourself. When we are children, our parents are responsible for us. [Who are we responsible for?] We are responsible for whom we have tamed. For example, a relative asks to stand up for him, and you wonder whether to help him or not. There are people who are responsible for any person, for example, judges.*

But such extended discourse of responsibility is hardly characteristic of respondents with intellectual disability. Simple utterances are more common: *It's time to be responsible for one's actions. He may be sent to prison. / If you are taken by the police, you will be punished, not your parents.* The understanding of responsibility in the given examples is narrowed to legal responsibility for wrongdoing which incurs punishment. In other words, the discovered concept *to be responsible* is semantically close to the con-

cept *to be punished*. This means that responsibility in the conceptsphere of respondents with intellectual disability is actualized where and when there is external control of life activity.

The respondents with intellectual disability named such *personal traits* of an adult as *kind (3), clever (2), beautiful (2), cultured, well-mannered, amiable, experienced, law abiding citizen, elegant, slim, with good figure, well-off, caring, nice, angry (1 for each)*. Discussing temper or disposition, the respondents with intellectual disability note changeability of the temper with ages, underline the sharpness of possible changes – both for the better and for the worse, for example: *[Does anything change in the person's disposition?] It does. If he was soft and kind, he may become tough. He may change for the better; it depends on the way he behaves. I am prone to being rude ... I am. / He's getting bad habits, brings harm to the whole society (steals different things). Such things do happen, if he has such temper. He may be rude to others, play pranks, and may lose his friends. In a word, he may be a real hooligan, an urchin, a hobo. There are many of them. 50 to 50. The rest are normal. I am not like this, and never will be. / [May be] kind. May shout everyone down.* The same tendency was found in the prediction of behavior.

Sparsely registered *mental (cognitive) characteristics* of an adult deserve to be mentioned separately.

The ideas about *understanding one's own self and life experience* express the opinion that an adult *knows all, knows what he wants; realizes what he is doing; is clever and realizes that he is doing something in the wrong way; that he has had a rich life experience*. Some utterances consider lines of reflection: *[Share opinions about] where to study, what temper he has got, what people are closer to him. / Adulthood is the realization of what mistakes you have made ... I grew older and did not learn. I had bad marks at school, I simply sat and did not think about the future, about what was going to happen. Then I grew up and became older. I realized I was wrong. I came to realize it due to this school. First thing – easy program, I knew I was capable to achieve much more, but the fat was in the fire. / You see through what you are doing. ... understand that you are in for it, and no one is going to save or help you*. The cited excerpts contain implicit motivation of an adult towards self-knowledge (*what kind of temper he has*), professional self-determination (*where to study*), social perception (*what people are closer to him*), ability to learn on one's mistakes (*realization of what mistakes you have made*), prediction of the future (*think about the future*), change of beliefs (*real-*

izes that he is doing something in the wrong way), change of attitude to one's own potential (*I knew I was capable to achieve much more*), conscious awareness of one's behavior (*see through what you are doing*). The understanding of irrevocability of the time lost and its opportunities has been expressed in the discourse of the respondents with intellectual disability only once.

Perseverance, purposefulness, sense of planning and obligation of an adult are expressed in the following utterances: *He wanted and did it. / It's time to plan what you are going to do, what occupation to choose, and how much you will earn. / He will do what he has said. / Then he makes plans. He plans by himself, and does not wait for his parents to do it for him. / One should get something quite different from life. At work, he thinks about what's going to happen tomorrow. How long he should work, when it is time to go to work again, when are the holidays. / Has achieved something, has realized his dream (3.5%)*.

The ability of an adult to make independent decisions and to solve problems is expressed in the following way: *You solve your problems yourself. / But you can also consult your parents. Children often turn to their parents for advice. Orphans consult nurses and ... / You can decide for yourself about your fu-*

ture. / *You don't have to ask your parents' permission if you want to go anywhere* (2.4%). These rare utterances of the respondents with intellectual disability characterize the specter of problems urgent for the given period rather vaguely.

Characterizing adulthood via correlation with age (7%), the respondents with intellectual disability either simply stated the age as an indicator of adulthood, or drew the boundaries of adulthood in terms of ages: *On his birthday – he's gonna be 18*. A number of definitions demonstrate vague interpretation of age-related features of adulthood (*big, elder, you're a man*) and inclusion of elderly and old ages into the period of adulthood (*getting old*). The respondents with intellectual disability also named the *factors influencing the behavior and temper of an adult*: height and organism development; parental upbringing; imitating parents; congenital factors (4%). Implicit ideas about age-based periodization of human life oppose adulthood to youth, childhood, adolescence and old age (3%). *Bodily characteristics of adulthood* are the most infrequent (2.9%).

By way of discussion of the outcomes we shall note that the studies of ideas of adolescents with intellectual disability aged 12-15 years (n = 30) about adulthood are the closest in the topics under investigation [5]. The content analysis of

associations of the adolescents with intellectual disability based on the stimulus “adulthood / adult” has revealed the themes of family, children; profession, occupation; responsibility, duties; independence, material sphere, appearance, age, friends, entertainment, absence of prohibitions. The associates “had a form of enumeration of various professions or descriptions of an adult's appearance, were concrete and had narrow sense”, oriented towards “external signs of ‘pseudo-adulthood’ associated with drinking alcohol, smoking, and using bad language” [5, p. 52—53].

The abovementioned topics, with the exception of appearance and absence of prohibitions, have been discovered by our research too. Our results allow us to state that utterances about developing bad habits are utterly rare, and suppositions about the absence of prohibitions in adulthood have not been encountered at all. On the contrary, the respondents with intellectual disability often formulated critical comments and prohibitions relating to drinking, smoking and using bad language, for example: *Not to use dirty language, not to swear* (an utterance from the category “Behavior”) / *He's getting bad habits, brings harm to the whole society (steals different things). Such things do happen, if he has such temper. He may be rude to others, play pranks, and may lose his friends. In*

a word, he may be a real hooligan, an urchin, a hobo. According to our data, the peripheral zone of collective ideas of the respondents with intellectual disability about adulthood, being variable according to its nature, contains information about some adults' developing bad habits, but the respondents with intellectual disability interpret these facts not as signs of adulthood but as bad behavior, i.e. adequately. Practically the same may be said about the characteristics of appearance as a sign of adulthood – references to bodily characteristics of adulthood are rare (2.9 %).

In view of the fact that the ideas about adulthood undergo active change in adolescence, the given comparison may reflect the preceding stage of development of the collective ideas under consideration, and our findings – the stage of proximal development after 2-3 years.

Thus, the kernel zone of collective ideas of the respondents with intellectual disability about adulthood includes characteristics of occupations and kinds of activity of an adult, and characteristics of communication, behavior and temper. Within the sphere of collective ideas of the respondents with intellectual disability an adult concentrates on their job, family and household duties, getting professional education, but the ideas about the forms of leisure activities are

non-typical. The behavior of an adult is described through negative definitions formally opposing their behavior to the derogatory behavior of a pupil. References to the scope of experienced relationships of an adult and the kind of behavior caused by them are rare.

The concept *to be responsible* is semantically close to the concept *to be punished*, and the responsibility discourse has no references to the causes of responsibility free of external control; to the responsibility for the consequences of the decision taken or the choice made. The latter forms of activity and agentivity have not been found in the discourse of the respondents with intellectual disability. Specifically, mental and cognitive characteristics of an adult are rare in the adulthood discourse of the respondents with intellectual disability and make up the peripheral zone of collective ideas of respondents with intellectual disability about adulthood. Characteristics of adulthood in terms of age-based periodization and salient chronological boundaries of the period are included in the peripheral zone of collective ideas.

The data obtained can be used as a basis for constructing pedagogical discourse of maturity, including the design of problem situations and other learning assignments constituting the zone of proximal development of the pupils with intellectual disabilities. The contexts of

application of certain categories, concepts or expressions of semantic positions may be useful for the development of the basic learning actions allowing the pupils with intellectual disabilities to specify the meaning of these units and translate the understanding achieved by the minority to other pupils.

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