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Personal Integration Resources of Mentally Handicapped Teenagers into Society

Abstract

The paper deals with the issues concerning the study of mentally handicapped teenagers' integrative potential within modernisation of contemporary Russian education. The research is concentrated on the study of personal and social determinants influencing the readiness of mentally handicapped students to be integrated into the environment. Research manipulations included the use of tests by J. Guilford and M. O'Sullivan in the adaptation of E. S. Mikhailova and "Observance card" by J. Stott in the adaptation of V. A. Murzenko with a group of around 130 teenagers with mild mental handicap. Obtained results showed that social intellect development of mentally handicapped teenagers is rather low due to biological but mainly social factors connected with unsatisfactory conditions of upbringing and educational development, lack of possibilities to satisfy personal social and emotional needs as well as non-formedness of social abilities.

Keywords: social intellect, personality's integrative potential, mentally handicapped teenagers, social and psychological adaptation

Introduction

In the modern conditions of modernization of Russian general and special education, a problem of the study of integrative resources of the personality of children and teenagers with disabilities is being actualized. It has been done in order to improve psychological and pedagogical support which promotes the process of their socialization and successful integration into society. In some scientific works socialization is considered as a process of interaction between a human and a society taking into account such factors as personality, own activity, capacity for social cognition, belief system, consciousness of own abilities, social competence (Bales, 1970; Kunithsyna, Kazarinova & Pogolsha, 2001). The capacity of mentally handicapped teenagers for the cognition of social interactions, adoption of behavior norms established in the society are complicated due to their mental development aspects. But a number of authors note that in pre-adult age teenagers with mild mental handicap demonstrate regress of psychotic symptoms, improvement of adequateness and social competence of the personality, increase of intellectual level, intensive growth of self-consciousness. Special schools' graduates can choose their own occupation and adjust to the world quite well (Isaev, 2003; Konovalova, 2009; Korobeinikov, 2002).

Research characteristics

The research objective was to study social and personal determinants of mentally handicapped students' readiness to be integrated into the society, including social intellect (SI), social development situation, as well as their social and psychological adaptation. As research techniques were used conversation,

observation, testing, study of psychological history, pedagogical and medical documents, and mathematical statistics. Program of the research consisted of "Observance card" by J. Stott adapted by V. Murzenko; test of social intellect by J. Guilford and M. O'Sullivan adapted by E. Mikhailova (Mikhailova [Aleshina], 2006; Guilford, 1967; O'Sullivan & Guilford, 1975). 130 teenagers aged between 14 and 17 participated in the assessment. The experimental group consisted of 70 senior students with mild mental handicap. All subjects had diagnosis F70 (Intelligence quotient under Wechsler fell within the range of 60-69 in accordance with ICD-10). The reference group was formed of 60 normally developing teenagers.

Discussion of the research outcomes

Analysis of performance of certain subtests of J. Guilford's approach by the subjects from the experimental and reference groups revealed that there are quantitative and qualitative differences between the results of the assessed.

It was revealed that more than half of teenagers in the experimental group achieved a medium level in performance of the first subtest item, which is usually for the vast majority of teenagers of the reference group. Such teenagers are able to master regulatory requirements of the society, understand consequences of their behavior and people's nonverbal reactions in typical interaction situations. At that, the third of the group of mentally handicapped teenagers achieved in this subtest the result below the average, which is indicative of significant difficulties in the understanding of person-to-person relations, connection between behavior in the communication situation and its consequences.

Upon carrying out items of the second subtest, teenagers of both groups experienced certain difficulties. Thus, more than one third of the assessed teenagers in the reference group and almost half of the assessed teenagers in the experimental group achieved results below the average in this subtest, which are indicative of the insufficient understanding of nonverbal components of communication, including body and gesture language. In the verbal contact, the teenagers are generally guided by the contents of the messages and may be wrongly while understanding the sense of the context, as they do not take into consideration the accompanying nonverbal reactions, they are poorly sensitive to emotional condition of their conversation partner. Just half of the teenagers in the reference group and one third of teenagers in the experimental group coped with the test at the medium level. It is interesting that it is possible to form the ability to understand the undermeaning of nonverbal messages by mentally handicapped teenagers. A general trend, which is customary for teenage years, is being revealed – being guided by direct meaning of the message without considering nonverbal accompaniment.

Upon fulfilling the third subtest, the subjects of both groups had difficulties; they insufficiently perceived different meaning which may be borne by the same verbal messages depending on the character of relations between the people and context of the communication situation, which is especially customary for mentally handicapped senior teenagers. More than half of teenagers in the experimental group attained marks below the average. It may be explained by the fact that thinking of mentally handicapped teenagers is characterized by narrowness, limitedness of their immediate experience; it is difficult for them to penetrate into undermeaning of verbal interaction. However, as the results of the study have

shown, there is a possibility of formation of this ability by the mentally handicapped: the third of the assessed teenagers in the experimental group carried out the item at the medium level.

The results of the carried out forth subtest by the experimental group are fairly lower than those in the reference group. The majority of seniors in the reference group got medium and above the average marks for this item, whilst just half of the experimental group received medium level marks. Successful subtest performance implies the ability to perceive the structure of interpersonal situations in dynamics, analyze difficult situations of people's interaction, understand the logics of their development, the needs of the members of communication and consequences of their behavior.

They are characterized by the insufficient understanding of the context in the situations of interpersonal interaction: nonverbal components of communication reflecting various emotional conditions of the person, undermeaning of speech acts, as well as their emotional sense-feeling depending on the communication situation; they are less capable to understand people's relationships, their social roles, to analyze the logics of events' development in non-typical situations of interaction.

At large, the study has shown that the general development level of social intellect of mentally handicapped teenagers is fairly lower than the social intellect of their normally developing peers and has a number of specifics. At that, the majority of the experimental group achieve social intellect evaluation within the range of medium and below the average level, whilst social intellect of teenagers of the reference group is at the top boundary of "the medium level" and in some cases at the level "above the average".

However, among the subjects of both groups, a broad range of individual differences in the performance of certain subtests was revealed, which is an evidence of the groups heterogeneity in the development of social abilities.

It is also necessary to note that more than half of the assessed mentally handicapped teenagers have potential capacities for the adoption of the normative requirements of the society, the ability to orientate in usual daily communication situations and understand the logics of the course of events relying on their background. Social capacities in the structure of intellect of each certain subject are developed sufficiently what is necessary to be taken into consideration while elaborating the intervention and development programs.

As the research has shown, insufficient development of social intellect reflects relatively low level of social and psychological adaptation of mentally handicapped teenagers. Due to the insufficiently developed capacity for social cognition, these subjects poorly differentiate situations in respect to their importance and degree of threat, which lower their social and psychological adaptation. However, upon relatively higher estimation of the social intellect of mentally handicapped teenagers, more adequate reactions to frustrating satiations are noted, which increase the level of their adaptation.

The analysis of the research results into integrative potential of the personality of mildly mentally handicapped teenagers has showed that it is determined not only by biological, but mainly by social factors: unfavorable conditions of development and upbringing, dissatisfaction of social and emotional needs, insufficient

development of certain social abilities and constructive strategies of coping behavior.

Conclusion

It is known that social intellect and social competence are primary mechanisms ensuring personality's adaptation but the ways of their improvement are different. Thus, social intellect develops due to the formation of socially-desirable personal and communicative characteristics, improvement of the mechanisms of psychic regulation and self-control increasing the ability to handle stress and mainly determined by the social situation of development. Whereas the improvement of social competence is carried out through learning, the increase of knowledge and experience, inclusion of active methods of social and psychological education should be paid special attention in the course of psychological, pedagogical, medical and social support of mentally handicapped children. Obtained results are the basis for the improvement of the support system for disabled teenagers which is to promote their successful integration into the society.

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