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The Development of Self-Care Skills of Children with Severe Mental Retardation in the Context of Lekoteka

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Abstract: There is a sufficiently large group of infant children with limited health abilities and special educational needs who cannot be included in the available educational programs due to the severity and complexity of the developmental disorders or behavioral disturbances resulted in social maladjustment. Severe mental retardation can be referred to such disorders. Children with severe mental retardation have essential disorders of cognitive processes, disorders of sensory and motor functions, thereof, the formation of specific social adaptation means is an important direction of work. Moreover, children with severe mental retardation require special individual-oriented approach including the development of self-dependence skills, optimization of parental-children interaction. We have elaborated the program aimed at the development of self-care skills in the context of Lekoteka. The program is based on the system of step-by-step teaching. The advantage of the step-by-step system is that it allows to train a mentally retarded child with specific features of the development quickly and effectively to have a certain skill.

Key words: Special education • Mental retardation • Children with disabilities • Self-care skills

INTRODUCTION

At the present time, mentally retarded children are the most numerous category of abnormal children. They make, according to the World Health Organization data, about 1-3% from the general children's population. According to the modern international classification (ICD-International Classification of Diseases, 10th Edition) on the basis of psychometric researches, severe mental retardation is defined at IQ lower than 20 [1, 2].

Children with severe mental retardation have essential disorders of cognitive processes, disorders of sensory and motor functions, thereof, the formation of specific social adaptation means is an important direction of work [3].

Self-care (skills to dress and undress, look after oneself, use a toilet, take food independently, bathe, wash, etc.) directly influences a child's self-evaluation, it is an important step on the way to their socialization [4, 5].

Taking into consideration that one of the main tasks of the modern stage in the system of special education is the development of pupils' adequate and self-dependent activity as a significant life competence, on which the dynamics of mentally retarded children's individual

opportunities development and their adaptive abilities in the process of socialization at large depend, we have considered the stated above problem as one of the most significant [6].

The main goal of the program aimed at self-care skills development of children with deep mental retardation is: the establishment of favorable environment for labor skills development, psychological support of the family with a mentally retarded child and help to adapt in the family and other social groups.

The Current State of the Issue of Mentally Retarded Children's Self-care Skills Development: Self-care (skills to dress and undress, look after oneself, use a toilet, take food independently, bathe, wash, etc.) directly influences a child's self-assessment, it is an important step on the way to their socialization.

Self-care skills formation will allow in future to solve effectively the problems of children's views and knowledge expansion about surrounding things, sensory upbringing, speech, fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination development and also the skill to imitate actions and follow verbal instructions, samples, to observe a definite sequence of actions.

The formation of mentally retarded children's self-care skills does not happen spontaneously. Training of such skills is the work of specialists and parents. The basis of it makes a special program that considers child's possibilities at the certain time and focuses on the immediate goals. Only imitation and sample learning will not promote children's skills formation due to some reasons: various movement, acoustical and visual perception disorders, peculiarities of emotional-volitional sphere, control functions underdevelopment, cognitive development disorders.

The problem of children with special needs self-care skills formation is significant both for children and parents [7].

Step-by-step teaching of self-care skills makes the basis of work with such children. The advantage of the step-by-step system is that it allows to train a child with special needs quickly and effectively to have a certain skill at that age and in that volume that is standard for a child with the normal development. The level, at which a child can independently make any action within this skill and the following small step to which a child should be trained, is defined for this purpose.

As a rule, mentally retarded children are unemotional. Therefore, such teaching techniques are necessary that could attract attention, interest each child. Mentally retarded children are passive and do not display the desire to play actively with subjects and toys. Adults need to create children's positive emotional relation to the offered activity on the permanent basis. Game sessions serve also this purpose.

Children with severe mental retardation need special individual-oriented approach including the development of self-dependence skills, optimization of parental-children's interaction, creation of developmental environment. All this can be effectively realized in the context of Lekoteka, as the work with mentally retarded children is based on the game method that is offered by Lekoteka. The game method is the leading method in case of working with children in the frames of Lekoteka.

Lekoteka is a structural division which can carry out its activity both autonomously and as a part of educational institutions: preschool; educational institutions for children with special needs in psychology-pedagogical and medical-social assistance; institutions of special education; orphanages and boarding schools; children's homes; rehabilitation centers and other organizations rendering a psychology-pedagogical assistance to children with disabilities

(aged between 2 months to 7 years) and with special educational needs [8-10]. Having analyzed already available programs on training and upbringing of mentally retarded children, we have found out:

- There is no program reflecting modern achievements of special psychology, correctional pedagogics, oligophrenopedagogics, medicine, special techniques, equipment and other branches of knowledge;
- It is necessary to provide various forms of communication with children in different types of activity that contribute to their social adaptation;
- The ways and means of continuity implementation in the work of specialists aimed at the upbringing, educational and correctional tasks have not been determined,
- There are no recommendations on the organization of an individual approach and application of differentiated forms of teaching.

At the present time, the deficiencies of software are compensated by pedagogical and methodical recommendations, application of the progressive pedagogical experience.

These circumstances have become the reason for the program development.

The Program Content of Mentally Retarded Children's Self-care Skills Development in the Context of Lekoteka:

The elaborated program is based on the experience of the Center of medical pedagogics (Moscow) work, it gives the possibility to teach children with different developmental disorders.

The system of step-by-step teaching, developed by the American psychologists Brus L. Beiker, Alan J. Braitman ("Way to independence") [10] has become the basis of the program. The advantage of the step-by-step system is that it allows to train a child with special needs quickly and effectively to have a certain skill.

The level, at which the child can independently make any action within this skill and the following small step to which a child should be trained, is defined for this purpose. The reward system (attention, food reward-favourite food or drink, hobbies, etc.) is applied. The development of each skill has its scheme of steps - from simple to difficult. The help of an adult decreases in volume in the process of action acquisition within the skill, it follows from physical help to a gesture and then - to the instruction.

Step-by-step work with a child aimed at the forming of specific skills according to this program:

- The action carried out together with a child, accompanied by a step-by-step instruction or comment of actions;
 - The partial help by an action (the child carries out the last action on his own);
 - The pedagogue helps to begin the action and the child continues and finishes it independently, under the adult's control;
 - The child carries out the action on his own from the beginning to the end following the speech instruction of a pedagogue;
 - A child carries out the action on his own if the program of the action has a subject level (e.g., a child has one thing of clothing in the necessary order on each chair while dressing);
 - A child carries out the action completely independently.
- Training of parents and tutors, specialists of educational institutions, pedagogues of other institutions to use the means of Lekoteka and methods of game interaction for children having developmental disturbances.
 - Selection of adequate means of communication with a child;
 - Self-care skills development;
 - Normalization of parental-children's relations;
 - The assistance to the family having a child with special needs.

The work aimed at the development of mentally retarded children's self-care skills in the context of Lekoteka is divided into 3 stages:

1 Stage-Preparatory: At this stage the collecting of anamnesis takes place—the gathering of information about pre-natal and early development, about the level of the child's social orientation, medical information and information on the developmental disturbances and problems of physical health.

The following necessary purpose at this stage is the acquaintance with the child and diagnostics of the level of the child's actual development, the character of disturbances and character of interaction in parental-children's pair. The method of observation is the most adequate for the solution of diagnostic tasks in the work with the families of infant and preschool age children.

2 Stage-Work with the Social Environment: In order to get more information about the character of the child's and family's difficulties, parents are to fill in the questionnaire for parents.

"The short description of the family" is made up after the data have been collected. At this stage, houses are also visited to define social opportunities and the child's environment.

3 Stage-Drawing up of Individual-centered Program of Psychology-pedagogical Forwarding: The structure of the program includes the data about the child obtained at the previous stages of work. The structure of the program includes target sections:

Motor Control Development: This section includes games with lacing, finger-type games. Exercises with water are also used in this section. Different pathways, a swing set are used in the work to develop motor coordination in the frames of this program.

The elaborated program is intended for the use by specialists of Lekoteka, realizing psychology-pedagogical forwarding of families upbringing preschool children with severe mental retardation.

Program Goals:

- Creation of favorable conditions for child's labour skills development.
- Psychological support of the family rearing a child with developmental disorders.
- Promoting the solution of psychological problems that prevent children from entering preschool educational institutions, help family and other social groups adaptation.

Tasks:

- Diagnostics of mentally retarded children's self-care skills formation level.
- Informing parents on questions of the child's development and upbringing, the level of the child's development, the results of psychology-pedagogical investigation, features of revealed disturbances;
- Involvement of parents in the processes of investigation, prophylactic treatment, correction and therapy, the formation of proactive attitude;

Cognitive Sphere Development: This section includes games-imitations promoting the development of an adult-child emotional contact and also the formation of children's ability to imitate actions of an adult.

Personal-Social Development: The development of labor skills is carried out in this section: skills of undressing and dressing, washing, combing, care of a nose and mouth, eating habits.

The issues of a mentally retarded child's social-personal development are feasible only in case if necessary conditions have been created for this purpose. One of these tasks is the formation of self-care skills necessary for life, skill to solve specific labor instructions, to create independently simple hand-made crafts from different materials.

Every-day household situations are used in the process of self-care skills formation; pedagogues solve all-developing and correctional problems (pedagogical situations), various games and game exercises to enhance the effect.

Children with severe mental retardation need a special individual-oriented approach including independence skills development, overcoming tendencies for dependency in situations where children can fulfill tasks on their own, optimization of parental-children's interaction, creation of the developing environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The elaborated program gives the possibility, taking into account specific features of mentally challenged children, to help them with their personal development, especially with their independency. Labor activity is a necessary condition of the personality important qualities formation. Joint labor activity with a pedagogue-self-care, household, manual labor becomes significant for the children with intellectual development impairments form of leisure arrangement and it allows to enter real labor relations successfully.

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