Organization of Competence-Developing Environment Among Schoolchildren with Intellectual Disabilities (by Examples of Formation of Socio-Emotional Literacy Skills)

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Emotional sphere of schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities, as well as their normally developing peers, performs a number of the very important functions including ensuring the integrity of the organism in surrounding reality, as well as the regulation of the behavior and activities in a social environment. The points of emotional response, manifested in the absence of the adequacy, accuracy, difficulties in understanding the differentiation and verbalization of emotional reactions, disparity of the content of emotional reactions in strength and duration to external influences are characteristic of schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities. That largely predetermines the difficulties of social adaptation and integration of this group of schoolchildren in a modern society.

The existing originality of the emotional response of schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities are caused not so much by organic factors in this child’s development as the lack of timely provided special psychological assistance in correcting existing deficiencies, as well as purposeful formation of their socio-emotional literacy skills manifested in the regulation and control skills and the skills of management of their emotional behavior in a social environment.

Keywords: competence-developing space, socio-emotional literacy, socio-emotional competence, emotional responding, competences of emotional responding, emotional responses, schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities.

The trends of modernization of Russian education that are growing in the science and practice of correctional psychology dictate the need to create an educational environment that would ensure access to quality education for people with disabilities and their socialization. In terms of reforming the education system, with the active implementation of the competence-based approach in general and special education, there is an obvious transition to the innovative type of educational process, new teaching technologies, the new content of work, including the ones in the field of correctional technologies.

Improvements in the efficiency of education, monitoring and enforcement of its current quality on the basis of preserving the fundamental
character and the compliance with current and future needs of an individual, society and state is a major strategic objective of educational policy in the modern modernization process of Russian education (A.D. Dzhurinsky, 2013; A.A. Dmitriev, V.L. Rytkina, E.I. Posokhova, 2008; N.N. Malofeev, 2011; M.M. Potashnik, 2011 et al.). The implementation of the given objective involves the solution of a number of priorities, including the creation of an educational environment that provides access to quality education for people with disabilities and their socialization.

One of the most important, fundamentally new directions for improving the quality of education in Russian schools is a value-based approach to the management of this quality on the basis of the competence-based approach. This approach implies a consecutive change of focus: from education forming the culture of utility (knowledge and skills) to education forming above all the culture of revival, dignity and honor. Certainly the solution of the key issues of improving the quality of education, and therefore its management, is possible only provided the quality control of the entire process of child’s mental development, including emotional and sensual sphere, as the most important system that regulates child’s mental life and behavior both in conditions of normal development and developmental disabilities.

Education renewal or modernization means not to change the “old” quality, but to give some new qualitative characteristics to educational practice that provide a child with developmental problems the opportunities for variable development, taking into account their individual, personal, intellectual capacities, abilities and interests. In this case, instead of the earlier concept of “formation” (in general) there occurs a new concept of “personality formation” as the process and the result of the child’s activity in establishing, creating, and developing of the personality and individuality.

Certainly, the cognitive knowledge and skills acquired due to the traditional school curriculums is an important result of education. However, the school graduates’ competence cannot be limited by them, since they are specifically given and focused on particular situations in real life. The conditions of modern society are characterized by increasing complexity, dynamics and diversity of the social relations and require such a combination of socially important skills from the younger generation. These ones will enable them to function effectively in a complex and constantly changing social environment.

The process of using the skills acquired in the situations remotely similar to the situations in which these skills are referred to is called long-range transport. For teaching the long-range transport it is important to teach everything schoolchildren may face in the future and apply in all situations. The ground of competence-based approach should be not only the definitions of “learning”, “education” and “development”, but also “self-learning”, “self-education” and “self-development”. Therefore, “competence education” should help the younger generation to solve new problems in unknown or unfamiliar social situations. Competence education should be aimed at the development schoolchildren’s knowledge of values, transformation, and attitude to the world not only with the teachers’ help, but also by themselves. In this case, the emphasis is not only on what a child studies, but also on what happens inside a child while studying.

The Conception of modernization of a modern educational model in Russia for the period up to 2020 indicates that the current stage of educational system development is mostly characterized by the transition from the aim to memorize large amounts of information to the
true fundamentalization of school education with an emphasis on mastering basic skills of communication, analysis, understanding and decision-making. The basis of modern educational standards is the formation of basic (key) competencies of a modern person, such as:

- informative (the ability to understand, analyze, transform, apply information to solve problems);
- communicative (the ability to collaborate effectively with other people);
- self-organization (the ability to take responsibility for the health, to use personal resources adequately);
- self-education (readiness to perform their own educational trajectory)

This set of the competences provides social, communicative, information, health-promoting, socio-emotional and other types of literacy that are necessary for each person for full function in a modern society, as well as for arranging professional and personal life, keeping the active citizenship. The main characteristic of these key competences is an effective and creative demonstration of using the knowledge and skills in various situations, especially in the social ones.

Social competence is a system of knowledge about the social reality and us, complex social and interaction skills, behavior patterns in a variety of social situations. This system allows any person to adapt quickly and adequately, to make decisions knowledgeably with the current situation considered, to derive maximum benefit from the circumstances.

Social competence is specified in the ability to act in a society, taking into account the other people’s position as well as the existing rules and norms of behavior. Communicative competence is the ability to interact socially and to communicate of full value. Schoolchildren’s behavior in the process of social interaction is largely mediated by the development of socio-emotional competence.

Socio-emotional competence is a synthetic notion, which is a constellation of key competencies (multifunctional package of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes) including the ability to respond and contact emotionally, receive and send emotional signals using verbal and non-verbal communication means, to perceive, understand and differentiate adequately emotional responses on external expressive signs of emotional responding, to express and verbalize experienced emotional states and to exercise control and emotional regulation of behavior in a social environment.

Based on the analysis of multi-disciplinary perspectives in understanding the essence of the competence approach, we represent our model socio-emotional literacy with its incorporated structural components identified by us as a “socio-personal competences of emotional responding” (CER):

1. Communicative CER;
2. Interactive CER;
3. Perceptual CER;
4. Cognitive CER;
5. Regulative CER.

Child’s socio-emotional literacy largely determines the effectiveness of social interaction in a social environment with adults and peers, the productivity of the establishment of interpersonal contacts. It determines the success of children’s social adaptation in today’s society both with normal and impaired development.

Based on the provisions of the unity of the mental development laws during the normal development and mental deficiency (V.I. Lubovsky, S.M. Valiavko, V.G. Petrova, T.V. Rozanova, 2009), along with the features inherent in the normally developing peers, schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities have specific and unique manifestations of emotional response.
They are accompanied by a lack of adequacy, accuracy, objectivity, complete or partial misunderstanding of the reasons of their emotional experiences; mismatch of emotional response to external influences in strength, intensity and duration. Early detection of these features, as well as the creation of special conditions for developing socially significant competencies of emotional response will improve significantly the processes of socialization and integration of this contingent of schoolchildren in a modern society. Therefore studying the problem of organizing the competence-developing environment for developing social literacy skills of schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities is of considerable interest to both the science and the practice of psychology and correction pedagogy.

The development gap in emotional response, the narrow range of experiences, repeated discrepancy of emotional reactions to external influences in strength, intensity and content, the limited interpretation of sensual material are typical for schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities and can lead to defective perception of other people’s emotional reactions and to not always adequate and differential expression of their own emotional reactions in a socially acceptable way.

The intellectual insufficiency and meager experience peculiar to schoolchildren with an organic central nervous system lesion will cause difficulties in understanding and adequate assessing of situations in which they find themselves. The inertia of the nervous processes leads to the stereotyped expressive and behavioral responses that often do not match the context of the situation. Emotional responding at these schoolchildren manifests rapidly and often accompanied by a lack of adequacy, accuracy, objectivity, complete or partial misunderstanding of the causes of their emotional distress. Violations at the level of the basic components of emotional responding are observed here, e.g. intensity, duration, modality, depth, value, differentiation and intentionality of emotional reactions.

The peculiarity of emotional response provokes difficulties for schoolchildren with impaired intellectual development in the relationships among themselves and the adults around them. It creates serious barriers to their teaching and upbringing in a special (correctional) schools of VIII type. Meanwhile, these are the problems that combine a complex mix of organic and social factors of child’s development, turn into a variety of phenomena of behavioral problems and lead to the additional difficulties in adaptation and socialization of this group of schoolchildren in today’s society.

Specific personal features that are typical for schoolchildren with impaired intellectual development lead in most cases to a severe negative reaction of others and punishments dominating in their upbringing. Such a child often involves in the conflict with the generally accepted norms of behavior and the adults’ requirements thus destroying a precarious system of their relationship with the social reality. Emerging difficulties lead to increased emotional stress, anxiety, negativity and hostility, misunderstanding and conflict that aggravates and intensifies deviations in the emotional sphere including aggressive displays.

Lack of timely psychocorrective support comes to the secondary violations, including that ones of the emotional sphere and social interaction with others. In the future these violations appear in the school and social exclusion of schoolchildren with impaired intellectual development. The difficulties of that kind make the process of school adaptation significantly complicated, create conflicts in children’s group, provoke abnormal behavior, and distort personal and mental development in general.
Analysis of the modern research results (O.K. Agavelian, R.O. Agavelian, 2010; A.A. Dmitriev, 2010; E.S., E.V. Kovyllova, 2009; M.V., E.A. Chereneva, 2011 and others) showed that the socialization problem experienced by schoolchildren of special (correctional) schools of VIII type, are determined not only by organic defect, but also by the lack of abilities to regulate their behavior and activities in a social setting.

For a long time many domestic and foreign experts have turned their attention to the problem of emotional development of children with intellectual disabilities. The emotional state of such children has been taken into account when preparing recommendations for their upbringing and education, as well as the elaboration of oligophrenia classifications. However, questions concerning the mechanisms, conditions and technologies of socio-emotional literacy development in this group of children remain virtually unexplored.

There is a set of scientific papers on the study of understanding the emotional state of another person by children with mild mental retardation (E.S. Drobysheva, L.M. Luchsheva, 2011; N. Yu. Verkhoturova, 2011, et al.). The works by A.A. Dmitriev, S.A. Dmitrieva (2011), L.I. Makadei (2010), A.V. Mamaeva, E.S. Shtefanova (2012), L.V. Tokarskaia, E.N. Pakalina (2009), E.A. Chereneva (2011) etc. point out the important role of social factors in the development of the personality of mentally retarded schoolchildren. According to the researchers these children’s attitude to the people around them, emotional reflection of their relationship to themselves influence considerably on their behavior and must be taken into account in the process of their corrective training.

Some psychological studies (O.K. Agavelian, R.O. Agavelian, 2010; Pleshakova, 2012 and others) are devoted to the research of perception and understanding of emotional expression of schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities and to the revealing of the specific features of their emotional development. The authors reason that schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities can develop the ability to understand the essence of other people’s experiences that has a positive effect on the system of their interpersonal relationships and socialization.

Analytical review of current research has shown that this is not only possible but also necessary to train the intellectually disabled schoolchildren’s basic skills of understanding, differentiating and expressing emotions, as well as the ability to regulate and control their emotional behavior. Regular classes, specially arranged conditions, careful consideration of the slightest change in the emotional sphere of schoolchildren with impaired intellectual development, and timely adjustment of specific psychological and pedagogical problems will achieve a positive result in the correction of the emotional sphere in this group of schoolchildren.

At the base of the organization of the competence-developing environment for building socio-emotional literacy skills of schoolchildren with impaired intellectual development we have defined the following theoretical and methodological principles:

1. The principle of accounting general, specific and individual patterns in the correction of the emotional sphere.
2. The principle of combined corrective developing and preventive effects.
3. The principle of structural and dynamic integrity in the development of cognitive, emotional and regulatory spheres of mental activity.
4. The principle of diagnosis and correction unity.
5. The principle of the cumulativeness of corrective impact.
6. The principle of socially-oriented focus of the corrective process.

7. The principle of qualitative structural and dynamic analysis to correct forms and mechanisms of emotional responding.

8. The principle of organizing of cultural and productive competence-oriented learning environment.

9. The principle of priority development of socially significant personal competencies of emotional response.

10. The principle of active acquisition of socio-emotional experience.


12 The principle of gradual formation of socially important personal competencies of emotional response.

Socially significant competencies of emotional response were formulated on the basis of our socio-emotional literacy model and its structural components.

1. Communicative CER (to design emotional response using verbal and non-verbal communication means; to express adequately emotional reactions using external expressive means of emotional responding and speech, etc.);

2. Interactive CER (to respond emotionally, to establish emotional contact; to interact effectively and emotionally; to use and coordinate emotional interaction styles while emotional responding, etc.);

3. Perceptual CER (to perceive emotional information in a holistic, structural and objective way, to distinguish and apply emotional responding models according to the situational context, to summarize the practice of emotional experiences in images, etc);

4. Cognitive CER (to understand symbolic and objective content of emotional reactions, to differentiate and interpret emotional experiences on the grounds of external expressive signs of emotional responding; to transfer emotional responding experience to new conditions, etc.);

5. Regulatory CER (to plan emotional response execution using external expressive means of emotional responding and emotional vocabulary; to exercise voluntary regulation and control of the expression of emotional reactions; to manage emotional responding at will on the stages of orientation, execution and control, etc.).

The formation of these socially important competencies of emotional responding schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities has been implemented by our developed psycho-correctional technologies including a number of interchanging stages with the use of modeling techniques, play therapy and art therapy methods and techniques.

The efficiency of formation of understanding, differentiating and expressing skills, as well as skills of voluntary control, regulation and emotional responding management in compliance with the social environment, norms and rules of behavior, is possible only on condition of the organization of culturally-productive, socially-mediated, competence-oriented learning environment rich in patterns of socially approved behavior. Such cultural and productive environment gives schoolchildren examples of action, patterns of social behavior, determines completely the choice of methods and techniques to form socially significant competencies of emotional responding of schoolchildren with impaired intellectual development.

Timely studying the features of emotional responding of schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities, as well as purposeful formation of their social and personal competences and socio-emotional literacy appreciably helps overcoming the difficulties of social adaptation and integration of this group of schoolchildren in today’s society.
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Организация компетентностно-развивающего пространства в среде учащихся с нарушением интеллектуального развития (на примере формирования умений социоэмоциональной грамотности)

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Эмоциональная сфера школьников с нарушением интеллектуального развития, так же как и нормально развивающихся сверстников, выполняет ряд важнейших функций, среди которых обеспечение целостности организма в окружающей действительности, а также регуляция своего поведения и деятельности в социальном окружении. Свойственные учащимся с нарушением интеллекта особенности эмоционального реагирования, выражающиеся в отсутствии адекватности, точности, несоответствии содержания эмоциональных реакций по силе и продолжительности внешним воздействиям, трудностях в понимании, дифференцировании и вербализации эмоциональных реакций, во многом предопределяют трудности социальной адаптации и интеграции данного контингента школьников в условиях современного общества.

Имеющееся своеобразие эмоционального реагирования учащихся с нарушением интеллектуального развития обусловлено не столько органическими факторами в развитии такого ребёнка, сколько отсутствием своевременно реализуемой специальной психологической помощи по коррекции имеющихся недостатков, а также целенаправленного формирования у них социоэмоциональной грамотности, выражающейся в умениях регуляции, контроля и управления своим эмоциональным поведением в социальном окружении.

Ключевые слова: компетентностно-развивающее пространство, социоэмоциональная грамотность, социоэмоциональная компетентность, эмоциональное реагирование, компетенции эмоционального реагирования, эмоциональные реакции, учащиеся с нарушением интеллектуального развития.