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Support of Disabled Childrens' Psychological and Pedagogical Development

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Abstract

The article summarizes the experience gained from complex, long-term research aimed at creating optimal conditions for psychological and pedagogical support for children with disabilities in the educational space of the cities of Birobidzhan and the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. The main study stages (preliminary, experimental, evaluative) and its results are described. The conclusion suggests that the support culture for children of preschool and school age has been formed in the special (correctional) institution educational process of the region.

Keywords

Development of children; Disabilities; Psychological and pedagogical support; Educational institution

Introduction

Humanistic worldview asserts identity as the supreme goal and value of education, which should ensure personal right to socialization. In this case, every child, regardless of his/her development type, should be considered not as an object of teaching manipulation but as an independent subject of educational activities and a unique personality, worthy of respect and attention.

So today, among the top priorities of the government educational policy, the problem of psychological and pedagogical support for children is stated, which is understood as a complex system of measures aimed at creating conditions that optimally contribute to the harmonious development of the individual and provide a socially acceptable level of education in general and special (correctional) schools and preschools [1].

Our study addresses this urgent problem and has been carried out during the 2009–2014 period. Its goal is to provide assistance to the special (correctional) educational institutions in order to create optimal conditions of psychological and pedagogical support for children with disabilities.

The general methodology of this study is based on a systematic interpretation of the integrity and uniqueness of the individual, of the person as the subject of his own life, and on the fundamental ideas of correctional pedagogy and psychology. According to experience of leading national experts, nevertheless, we take into account works of the foreign researchers as well [2,3].

This article's academic novelty is that it is an orientation on the educational environment of the specific region (the Jewish Autonomous Oblast). It consists of a significant amount of experimental material, original diagnostic, developing and corrective techniques, educational programs and other innovations, as well as recommendations for their use in order to support the development of preschool and school children with disabilities.

Methods

Understanding the study procedure as the most rational way of organizing this study, we found it useful to carry it out in three stages (preliminary, experimental, evaluative), where specific tasks were identified for each stage. The main tasks to be solved in the preliminary stage were associated with the development of scientific

and methodological support providing, planning the interaction of its main subjects, with the readiness estimate of the experimental sites and predicting the result. The tasks of the experimental stage are sent back for revision, improvement, and operational testing of psychological and pedagogical innovations. In the third stage of the study, we evaluated the effectiveness of its materials and results and summed up the formation experience of psycho-pedagogical support culture for children with disabilities in the region. Moreover, the preliminary stage was preceded by the experimental and evaluative stages, which are cyclically repeated throughout the study. Thus, the whole procedure of this study can be described as the integration process of science and practice, which provides optimal conditions for the personality development of children with disabilities and the implementation of their special educational needs.

In the preliminary stage, active development and testing of diagnostic tools and psycho-pedagogical techniques that make up the scientific and methodological basis for support were carried out by all study participants. A significant part of the original author developments is reflected in publications and is a recognized scientific innovation [4-8].

Experimental basis of our research is represented by four special (correctional) educational institutions that are typical of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in terms of logistics, staffing, and organization level of the educational process. They are as follows:

- Special (Correctional) Comprehensive School, municipal special (correctional) educational institution for studying scholars with the eighth type disabilities, intellectual disabilities;
- Special (Correctional) Boarding School for Children with Disabilities, state-regional budgetary institution for orphans and children left without parental care;

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- Steps Educational Center, state-regional autonomous educational institution for pupils who need individual training;
- Compensating Kindergarten, municipal preschool educational institution with the prior qualified correction of deviations in pupils' physical and mental development.

The study involved 260 preschool and school-age children with disabilities and 140 teachers who work with them. Readiness assessment of the experimental sites was carried out in terms of motivation and personal component of the psycho-pedagogical support and represented by relationships, states, and directions of the subjects. As it turned out, the institution teachers selected for this study were highly professional, creative, and had a thorough understanding of the problems regarding psychological and pedagogical support for children, taking into account all its difficulties and contradictions. Underlining the special importance and complexity of this problem, teachers and educators have expressed a sincere desire to be personally involved in finding a suitable solution. The psychological readiness is meant as a subjective state of the person (or group), which manifests itself in the desire to perform an activity as well as awareness of his/her ability in this activity [9,10]. Thus we come to the conclusion regarding the possibility and the need to move to the experimental stage of the study.

Results

An important area of the experimental stage of our study was the completion, improvement, and practical testing of diagnostic, developmental, and corrective techniques that help us optimize psycho-pedagogical support of children in the educational process. Diagnostic techniques make it possible to get objective information about the problems in the development of children and the reasons causing difficulties in their learning and interpersonal interaction. Analysis of experimental data showed the extent to which the conditions of bringing up and education of children in a particular educational institution comply with the principle of correctional and developing orientation and personality-oriented approach. The analysis also allowed us to determine and eliminate the factors that reduce the effectiveness of psychological and pedagogical support. The quantitative results of experimental work are described in detail in the publication of this study [4,5,10,11].

Developmental and corrective techniques that combine individual and group-work forms are aimed at overcoming existing disturbances in mental development of children, as well as prevention of possible deviations in the development of personality and character. At the same time, we worked on psycho-pedagogical assistance and support for children with disabilities in problem situations. However, special attention was paid to provide conditions conducive to optimal assimilation of social experience and the development of personality and individuality.

Using our innovations in the diagnostic, developmental, and corrective work in institutions contributed to the optimization of psychological climate, the timely resolution of problems and preventing their occurrence, and implementation of positive forecast of each child's development. The process of research and its results were discussed at the consultations (individual and group) and teachers' meetings (in small groups, involving specialists who were solving a specific problem, and in big groups, with the participation of the entire institution's teaching staff).

At this stage, materials' compilation allowed us to monitor the process of psychological and pedagogical support for children with

disabilities at a high level, and also objectively evaluate and predict the results. Monitoring was carried out in two interrelated ways. On the one hand, we constantly monitored the process of research; on the other hand, we tracked its results. Situational, current control was used for promptly identifying and eliminating the factors that impede psychological and pedagogical support. On its basis, we designed recommendations aimed at solving some problems and the prevention of their occurrence. In order to ensure the necessary level of final summarizing control, we involved independent experts (experienced teachers, qualified researchers, and officials of the educational institution administration). This type of control made it possible to assess the effectiveness of the developed recommendations, and to be sure that they can actually become part of everyday work in support of the development of children in the educational process.

If the proposed programs, techniques, or recommendations turn out not to be successful enough, we concluded that in the course of research activities not all components of the problem have been identified. We did not adequately interpret causal relationships, which led to the result of having a low theoretical and practical significance. To make the necessary adjustments, we should determine the point of omissions, having redefined, go back to situational, current monitoring, and using its results improve submit recommendations. Thus, the cycle of the system and the unity of the casual and summarizing monitoring of research work has become the key to its effectiveness [1].

Studies by V.N. Vvedenskiy [12], E.A. Klimov [13], A.K. Markova [9], et al. show that the professionalism of the teacher is determined by the specific content of his/her hard and noble work. And it's not just a certain level of skill, focus on professional values and ethics, or the significant achievements in the field of teaching. This is a special systemic organization of consciousness that manifests itself in the ability to stimulate public interest in the profession, the trend toward self-improvement by professional means, and the effort to enrich the profession with creativity. The modern teacher is required to realize a wide range of social, psychological, and other problems associated with the education of the child's personality, to be able to work practically with the educational processes, to build educational situations, and not just to solve problems related to the educational activity.

A teacher or tutor, who is in charge of the psychological and pedagogical support of children with disabilities, has to solve professional problems in special circumstances and be proactive at their smooth integration into everyday life. In our study, we involved the following categories of children:

- Preschool and school children with intellectual disabilities;
- Orphans and children left without parental care with disabilities;
- Preschool children with impaired speech development;
- School children who were recommended for individual education with not contraindicated distance form (with severe hearing, vision, musculoskeletal system, emotional and volitional, somatic (including oncology) and mental disabilities).

Each of these categories of children is characterized by its own laws and features of development. Variations in physical and mental development manifest themselves differently in cognitive activity, the emotional sphere, and social and communicative behavior. But almost all children with disabilities have difficulties in learning, problems in collaboration with others, and decreased performance and rate of mental activity. Unlike their normally developing peers, they experience serious difficulties in solving a variety of life situations and need help from others.

Therefore, in the experimental stage of this study, we scientifically and practically cooperated with groups of basic educational institutions on the organization of favorable conditions for effective psychological and pedagogical support for children with disabilities and activity in the educational process. In this case, we proceeded to determine the optimal intensity of the interaction of psychological and pedagogical theory and practice for each experimental institution. It included from two to eight joint correctional and educational, scientific, and practical activities per month.

It is known that at low intensity of this interaction, the number of negative factors decrease. These factors are associated with lack of experience in organizing support as a form of child support in solving the problems of development or in preventing their occurrence. The educational problems gradually stand to the fore, and educational programs have become an end in themselves rather than the main means of becoming a socially successful personality on the basis of his/her individuality. And if the intensity of scientific and practical interaction increases so that it becomes excessive, the implementation of optimal conditions for psycho-pedagogical support are complicated by other negative factors, such as reduction of autonomy in decision-making and accountability for results, tending to the constant assistance [14].

The optimal intensity of the interaction of psychological and pedagogical theory and practice, that promote the effective support of children with disabilities, implies not only motivational and personal readiness of practicing teachers-pathologists to productive interaction with scientific and pedagogical staff, but the ability to make rational use of innovative scientific developments during correctional and educational activities. To do this, you should constantly work on improving your pedagogical skills and professional competence.

Among the forms of work, namely, facilitating the integration of science and education, and increasing the effectiveness of psychological and pedagogical support for children with disabilities in educational institutions, we should emphasize the development and implementation of vocational training and skills development. With their help, we can determine the constructive directions of information impact on teachers, educators, and psychologists; correct inadequate support models requiring intervention; and test and consistently implement productive psychological and pedagogical innovations in the correctional and educational process [15].

In this study, we have developed and successfully implemented two 72-hour educational programs at the University. These programs are for the professional development of the teaching staff (Disabled Children Psychological and Pedagogical Support, Psychological and Pedagogical Support for Children with Speech Disorders). For teachers, educators, and psychologists working in correctional schools and preschools but not having defectological education, we have organized two 500-hour retraining programs (Psychological and Pedagogical Support Culture for Disabled Children in Terms of Modern Education, Special (Defectological) Education). Taking into account the wishes of the teaching community of the city and the region, we have proposed these educational programs to both direct participants in our research, the staff of the fundamental educational institutions, and all those for whom it is interesting and necessary.

In addition, practitioners of special education can avail assistance in the form of interviews and consultations, which provide reliable information about the nature, objectives, and means of psychological and pedagogical support for children with disabilities. They have the

opportunity to participate in the experimental, diagnostic, correctional, and developmental work within the framework of this study, assist in the preparation of publications, scientific and methodological materials.

In solving the problems of the second experimental stage of our research, future bachelors and masters of special (defectological) education have taken an active part, along with the staff of fundamental educational institutions. While stressing on the importance of competence approach in the preparation of future teachers, experts point out its systemic nature and diversity. Today, a teacher is one of the main subjects of the educational activity, not just a carrier of knowledge and ways of its transmission. The most important competencies required for future speech pathologists are based on the knowledge, constructed through experience, implemented and refined on the basis of purposeful activity [9,12,13,16].

The qualifying characteristic of a teacher, educator, and psychologist working at specialized educational institutions necessarily includes the exercise of fundamental rights and educational needs of children, as well as knowledge of methods and techniques of psychological and pedagogical assistance. At the experimental stage of the study, we have been practicing innovative inclusion forms of students in support of the children's development (business game, designing, virtual tours, discussions, real diagnostic, correctional and educational activities, development and solution of creative tasks, etc.). These forms have been widely used in the study of the leading disciplines, in teaching practice and, of course, in the course of research activities. This contributes to the successful training of future pathologists for independent professional activity [11,17,18].

Particular attention has been paid to the development of professional and personal priorities and psychological culture [19], as well as information and communication competence, giving the opportunity for students to use different information systems and databases for educational purposes. We have provided necessary training, methodological and reference materials (printed and electronic files) at the students' disposal. And the basis of scientific and methodological support of the educational process are the worksheets made by lecturers of the Correctional Pedagogy, Psychology and Speech Therapy Department, the authors and participants of this study.

Discussion

At the third or evaluative stage, study materials and valuable scientific and methodological guidelines have been brought to their intended destination and were highly appreciated. They provided theoretical and practical basis for the optimization of the psychological and pedagogical support process for children with disabilities in educational institutions.

According to domestic experts, the main purpose is the creation of an environment in which each child (regardless to the development type) could become the subject of his/her own development and life, activity, and communication [14,20]. The educational environment of school or kindergarten for development becomes optimal for socially successful people only if the teaching staff has a deep interest in issues related to the organization of psycho-pedagogical support and the relations vector between its main subjects is directed toward the child. As it turned out, in those educational institutions that have formed the experimental basis of our study, the impact of negative factors significantly reduced the effectiveness of psychological and pedagogical support for children and work-related personnel. We divided these factors into two groups: unintentional and intentional.

Among the unintentional factors, we considered the situations of insufficient responsible attitude of the teacher, educator, and psychologist to the various issues relating to development of the child; underestimation of the importance of the support problem; and inability to choose a rational way to solve this or that situation because of limited experience. In this study, the number of such factors has fallen by more than 50%. Among the intentional factors, we have assigned the wrong actions or omissions of personnel due to a conscious disregard for the children's personality development, a violation of the well-known professional and ethical standards. Such cases rarely occurred in experimental institutions, but we were able to reduce their numbers by almost 80%.

In our view, reducing the impact of both intentional and unintentional factors is due to the formation of the psycho-pedagogical support culture for children and the growth of professional skills of employees at these educational institutions.

In this study, scientific and practical conferences and seminars at various levels (regional, national and international) are annually conducted at the University; they are devoted to the psychological and pedagogical support for children with disabilities and promote the introduction of our innovative experience into the educational space:

2009—Psychological and Pedagogical Support of Children in Educational Institutions Regional Scientific and Practical Seminar;

2010—Modern Technologies of Psychological and Pedagogical Support of Children in General and Special (Correctional) Schools and Pre-schools Young Scientists and Students' Scientific and Practical Conference;

2010—Modeling Conditions for Psychological and Pedagogical Support of Children in Health and with Disabilities Regional Scientific and Practical Conference;

2011—Creating Optimal Conditions for Psychological and Pedagogical Support of Children in Educational Institutions International Scientific and Practical Conference;

2012—Scientific and Methodological Support of the Educational Process in Special (Correctional) Educational Institutions Scientific and Practical Seminar;

2012—Implementation of the Special Educational Needs of Children in Mass and Special (Correctional) School and Pre-School Institutions National Youth Science Conference;

2013—HIA Children Psychological and Pedagogical Support Challenge Regional Scientific and Practical Seminar;

2013—Professional Competence Improvement in HIA Children Psychological and Pedagogical Support Regional Scientific and Practical Seminar;

2014—Children Psychological and Pedagogical Support Culture as a Rule of Professional Educator All-Russian Scientific and Practical Conference.

The outcome of this research is represented by six volumes, offering great opportunities for analysis and synthesis of materials research, as well as allowing further insights into the leading domestic and foreign experts' developments.

Using materials and results of this study, three MPhil dissertations were defended (by I.A. Emelyanova, E.A. Borisova, G.S. Rodionova) and 18 master's dissertation have enriched the theory and practice

of correctional pedagogy and psychology. Those works significantly complement the existing science representations about the development features of children with various developmental disabilities, as well as the optimal conditions for their support in the educational process. Ten master's dissertations are being finalized. Three participants of our study (E.S. Dunaeva, O.V. Karynbaeva, N.V. Koryakina) are preparing to defend theses for Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences Degree. Their works are devoted to optimizing the process of training and retraining of psycho-pedagogical personnel for the system of special (defectological) education to meet modern requirements of the process and outcomes of children support with disabilities in correctional and educational process. In each of these theses, the quantitative results of our study are presented, as well as their qualitative interpretation.

Participation in the problem development of the study has increased the future special (defectological) bachelors' research activity, as evidenced by numerous diplomas and certificates attesting to their achievement. At the request of the special (correctional) educational institutions in the city and region, final qualifying bachelor works are annually defended; it is evidenced by our graduates' professional maturity and personal readiness to meet the challenges associated with the accompaniment of abnormal children's development.

It should be noted that in the course of this research, its experimental base has expanded considerably. At the initiative of teachers and psychologists, our developments are actively put into practice in the correctional and educational work at special schools and preschools in Jewish Autonomous Oblast. The teaching community's interest in content and results of our study is also reflected in the constant appeal for advice and the proposal of scientific and practical cooperation plans and programs.

Conclusion

Thus, the results of this research showed that the children's development support problem in correctional and educational institutions has become the object of deep and conscious attention of the teaching community of the city and region. The functional efficiency of innovations, aimed at implementing positive outlook in personality development of children with disabilities, has received confirmation.

The involvement of practitioners in research activities, creation of conditions for the experience exchange, assistance in the preparation of publications and development of a methodological nature, and providing goodwill of decision-making have contributed to the increase in professional interest, responsibility for the outcome of work, and the tendency for self-development.

Comprehensive, long-term study has greatly expanded an area of scientific knowledge concerning the support of the children's abnormal development, enriched not only the theory but also the practice of psycho-pedagogical sciences. Thanks to the research, in the city and region, a culture of psychological and pedagogical support for children with disabilities in educational institutions is being formed and successfully developing. This contributes to the renewal and improvement of the special (correctional) education system. The goal and tasks of this research have been performed, but we continue to develop solutions for this urgent problem.

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children with disabilities and actively participated in the scientific and practical activities.

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