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Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GROUP ACTIVITIES OF CHILDREN WITH ASD

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Abstract

The article presents the results of a study of group activity of students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in the age range from 7 to 19 years of special (correctional) secondary school of the VIII type. The author describes the clinical and psychological characteristics of children with ASD, specifies the specificity of their development. Using the method of observing the behaviour of students with ASD presented their characteristics by criteria group activity: contact, inclusion in group activities, features of behaviour in the group, features of the emotional response in the group. The analysis of diagnostic material collected during the observation of children and adolescents with ASD allowed us to highlight the features of development and age dynamics of group activity, and formulate conclusions. The greatest plasticity was found in the indicator of group activity "Features of behaviour in the group". Insignificant dynamics was noted according to the criterion "Features of emotional response" due to the specifics of disorders associated with the emotional sphere in persons with ASD. The criteria for "contact" and "Inclusion in group activities" were equally developed. These studies complement and concretize the picture of the development of group activities of the selected category of children, and allow teachers, speech therapists, psychologists, and other specialists to build a comprehensive personality-oriented program for the development of children and adolescents with ASD, taking into account the results obtained experimentally.

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Keywords: ASD, contact, communication, group behavior.



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1. Introduction

The changes taking place, covering various spheres of life in the country, have actualized the search for new sources of preparing the younger generation for an independent life. In this regard, children with problems of psychophysiological development require a special approach and attention. Recognition of their rights, interests and needs, assistance in the process of becoming an individual and in choosing a future life path are extremely important. This necessitates the development and implementation of the most favorable conditions for the harmonious development of the personality of the child with a developmental disability.

At the present stage of social development, the development and creation of alternative methods of influence in the field of training and education of children with special educational needs is becoming relevant. Much attention in the theory and practice of psychology and pedagogy is given to children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). This is explained by a significant quantitative increase in this category of children, as well as the insufficiently developed issues of diagnosing the development, correction and socialization of preschoolers and schoolchildren with ASD. The data of modern researchers show that autism spectrum disorders are observed in 4-26 cases out of 10,000, which is 0.04-0.26% of the total number of children in the population. Particular attention in this area requires the study of the psychological characteristics of the selected category of children in group activity, since the full interaction of a child with ASD in the group affects the further full life in society and its adaptation to different conditions of life.

2. Problem Statement

Despite the variety of existing forms and methods aimed at the study, development and socialization of children with ASD, the issue of developing diagnostic tools to identify specific manifestations in their development in different types of activities is relevant. Therefore, further study of the features of the group activity of children with ASD as a micromodel of social interaction is necessary.

The forecast of socialization of this category of children largely depends on a comprehensive diagnosis and the creation of special conditions for psychological and pedagogical support. It is very important that the diagnostic tools used are sensitive and can identify existing deficiencies in children and adolescents with ASD. In our work, an attempt was made to diagnose and analyze group activity as a form of social interaction and communication between schoolchildren with ASD of different ages. We suggested that, due to the specificity of disorders in individuals with ASD, their activities in the group will have features of emotional response associated with the primary violation of the emotional sphere and proceed in accordance with age-related changes.

3. Research Questions

The history of studying the problems of early childhood autism and ASD is about 300 years old. The first references are found in the literature of the beginning of the XVIII century. Until the mid-20th century, descriptions of this disorder were sporadic. In the early 40s, L. Kanner and G. Asperger presented options for describing several cases in which examples of inadequate social behavior of children were listed.

In Russia, the first descriptions of the RAS were presented by G.N. Pivovarova, V.M. Bashina and V.B. Kagan in the 70-80s of the last century (as cited in Grigorenko, 2018).

Currently, a fairly large number of studies by domestic and foreign scientists highlight various aspects of the mental development of individuals with ASD. Manifestations of the communicative, cognitive, emotional and volitional sides of the personality are studied in the works of Baenskaya et al. (2015). The authors draw attention to the specifics of the communicative-behavioral reactions of a child with ASD and their dependence on the forms and types of interaction with the social environment (Baenskaya et al., 2015). Features of the development of young children with ASD are analyzed in the work of Bardyshevskaya and Lebedinsky (2019). Methodological aspects of the psychological and pedagogical support of children with ASD in different types of activities are reflected in the works of Vorobyova E. A., Shapovalova A. V., Solomko A. D. The authors note the positive dynamics in the development of the communicative, emotionally effective areas of children under the influence of specially organized accompaniment of diverse professional teachers.

In the current medical literature, the clinical manifestations of ASD are adequately described. So, about age and gender characteristics of patients in a psychiatric hospital suffering from autism spectrum disorders, aged 4 to 14 years, it is said in the works of Alifanova M. K. et al. The authors note the predominance of males among the studied individuals (85%), the dominance of the clinical manifestations of atypical autism (60% of cases), and also indicate the proportion of age-related manifestations of the disorder (25% of childhood autism).

A large number of studies by foreign scientists in the field of studying children with developmental problems are devoted to early childhood autism, which indicates a global trend towards an increase in the number of individuals with a highlighted problem of mental dysontogenesis. An analysis of the phonological difficulties of verbal communication in children with autism is presented in Wolk et al. (2016). In studies by Quill et al. (2002) a close relationship between the communicative and social development of the child is revealed. Barbera (2017) substantiates the conditions for teaching and speech development of children with ASD, as the basis for successful socialization.

Over the past decade, approaches to the determination of ASD have changed greatly due to the extremely diverse picture of the manifestations and heterogeneity of the group by etiological grounds. Among the causes of the disorder, scientists call genetic and environmental factors, but the latter are currently poorly understood (Gilbert & Peters, 2005).

Disorders of the autistic spectrum include a wide range of disorders "with disorders of psychological / mental development." The main features of ASD are:

- violations in the field of social interaction and communication;
- the presence of stereotypes and difficulties associated with adaptation to new conditions (Baenskaya et al., 2015).

The specifics of PAC include:

- violation of communication (external detachment, encapsulation, withdrawal into oneself);
- the presence of a large number of fears, increased anxiety (a new space, a change of route, replacement of a toy leads to panic and psychomotor agitation);

- violation of the rhythm of biological cycles (disturbance of the sleep cycle, perverse appetite, or refusal to eat);
- impaired neurodynamics (impaired coordination, may seem awkward, tiptoeing);
- the presence of stereotypes and autostimulation (rocking, shaking hands, etc.);
- speech impairment (from complete absence to difficulties in supporting dialogue, the presence of echolalia / phrase-stamps, the absence of the pronoun “I”, is chanted, etc.);
- features of perception (eye contact is broken, peripheral vision is developed, the presence of hypersensitivity to sounds, smells, etc.) (Savina, 2019).

4. Purpose of the Study

To identify and analyze the features of the development of group activity as a form of social interaction and communication of students with ASD of different ages.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the study was made up of scientific ideas about the general and specific patterns of impaired development, the main provisions of the activity approach, as a condition for the development of consciousness and personality of the child as a whole. The theoretical basis of the study was based on the works of domestic and foreign authors. The concept of (Lebedinsky, 1985) about level emotional regulation in children with mental disorders.

The study used methods of analysis of domestic and foreign sources of literature, observation, interpretation and comparison of observation results. To organize data on the manifestations of the group activity of schoolchildren with ASD, the method of ranking the results of observation by the selected parameters was used.

Diagnosis was carried out by the method of slice observations of the group activity of schoolchildren with ASD at different age periods. Observation was carried out for 6 months for students in grades 1-12 of a special (correctional) comprehensive school of the VIII type, studying under the program for children with a slight degree of mental retardation. Among the observed were children and adolescents with ASD of organic origin with mild mental retardation. Age range: 7-19 years old. Total: 25 people (17 boys and 8 girls).

Slice observation was carried out according to the criteria:

- contact
- inclusion in group activities,
- features of behavior in the group
- features of emotional response in the group.

For each position, parameters / indicators characterizing the level of criterion formation were identified.

According to the criterion of “Contact”: initiates / does not initiate contact, establishes / does not establish visual contact with adults / peers, establishes / does not establish tactile contact with adults / peers.

According to the criterion of “Inclusion in a group activity”: the degree of inclusion in a group activity, the stability / instability of attention in a group activity, the duration of inclusion in a group activity, assimilates / does not assimilate the rules of general activity, the effectiveness of activity in a group (in comparison with individual activity), fulfilment of group instructions, degree of fulfilment of requirements of generally accepted behaviour in a group, motivation of group activity.

According to the criterion “Features of behaviour in the group”: there is / is no verbal activity in the group, may / cannot take into account the order in the group, the ability to orient oneself on peers, the ability to imitate the teacher, the ability to work together, react to instructions in the group, the ability to separate attention.

According to the criterion “Features of emotional response in the group”: the manifestation of adequate / inadequate situations of emotions, the presence / absence of emotional and personal communication, focuses / does not focus on the emotional state in the group, the presence / absence of manifestations of stereotypical behaviour (behavioural stamps), the presence / absence of manifestations spontaneity of behaviour.

6. Findings

Please replace this text with context of your paper. According to the results of observations of the group activity of schoolchildren with ASD with a slight degree of mental retardation of different age groups, 4 clusters were identified:

- 1 cluster (N-7) was made up of children 7-9 years old (1 year of study);
- the 2nd cluster (N-6) includes schoolchildren of 10-12 years old (3-4 year of study);
- 3 cluster (N-7) was presented by students 13-16 years old (5-9 year of study);
- 4 cluster (N-5) were teenagers 17-19 years old (10-12 year of study).

The qualitative characteristics of the group activities of students in each cluster are presented in table 01.

Table 01. The results of group activities of students in grades 1-12

Cluster	Criteria	Characteristic
Students 1-2 grades (7-9 years)		
1	Contact	Sustainable contact avoidance, frightened by strangers and adults. Avoidance of visual contact, with persistence, a negative reaction is noted. Tactile contact is extremely selective, give a hand only to "trusted" adults. Do not go to tactile interaction with peers, try to resist it
	Inclusion in group activities	Do not take part in group classes, games. Demonstrate detachment, attention is not focused on general activities. Not included in group activities. The assimilation of the rules of general activity does not occur. They do not participate in group activities. Group instructions are not followed. They do not assimilate the requirements of generally accepted behavior in a group, there is no motivation for group activity

	Features of group behaviour	Speech activity is mediated only by one's own needs, expression occurs in one-part words: give, drink, sleep, etc. They do not focus on generally accepted norms of behavior in a group. They do not respond to peers. Teachers are not oriented, showing indifference. Attention is involuntary. Group activities are not included
	Features of emotional response in the group	Emotions are rare, but adequate. The manifestation of inappropriate emotions is not observed. With the "chosen" people they show the importance of emotional and personal communication. In the group they show empathy, sometimes empathy (occasionally). Avoiding stereotypical behavioral cliches, an infrequent manifestation of spontaneity in behavior is noted
Students 3-4 grades (10-12 years)		
2	Contact	They do not show initiative in contact, but they come in contact with "trusted" ones. Avoid visual interaction and direct eye-to-eye look. Tactile interaction is extremely selective. Give a hand selectively, only to authorized person
	Inclusion in group activities	Purposefully can not be included in the overall group activity. Attention is involuntary, attention is fixed sporadically. Inclusion in group activities is situational and episodic in nature. The assimilation of the rules of general activity is fragmented. Activity in the group does not appear. Group instruction does not execute. They do not adhere to generally accepted rules, there is no motivation for group activity
	Features of group behaviour	Verbal activity is mediated by simple everyday words that reflect their needs. The group does not focus on generally accepted norms of behavior and does not take into account the sequence of interaction. They do not react and do not perceive the specific role of the teacher, and also do not respond to group instruction. Are not included in joint activities
	Features of emotional response in the group	The manifestation of emotions is extremely rare, they can show fear. In some situations, they can show aggression, negativism. Contacts are avoided in emotional and personal communication. Groups do not focus on the emotional state. Use stereotypes, spontaneity of behavior is extremely rare
Students in grades 5-9 (13-16 years old)		
3	Contact	Begin to show interest in the interaction. There is a decrease in avoidance of visual / tactile contacts, they are interested in visual and tactile interaction
	Inclusion in group activities	Become interested and take part in group activities. The arbitrariness of attention is formed. The duration of inclusion in group activities depends on one's own interest. The internalization of the general rules of group activity is noted. Begin to show their abilities, respond to praise. The requirements of the group instruction are fulfilled with a manifestation of responsibility, trying to follow generally accepted requirements. The motivation of group activities is social in nature (need praise, encouragement)
	Features of group behaviour	Do not show initiative, but answer questions (monosyllables). They begin to monitor the activities of the group and correlate their behavior with the actions of the group, taking into account the order. In a joint activity with the teacher, they begin to correlate their actions with his actions. When responding to instructions in

		the group, there is a need for support and help from peers. They accept the instruction, try to follow it, but need help
	Features of emotional response in the group	The emotional range is poor, but there is a manifestation of adequate emotions. Interest in communicating with selected members of the group, a fragmentary manifestation of empathy is noted. Decrease in the use of stereotypes and behavioral stamps, but enslavement is observed. Spontaneity is manifested only in contact with selected persons
Students in grades 10-12 (17-19 years old)		
4	Contact	They begin to take the initiative in interacting with “chosen” individuals. They do not avoid visual contacts, they interact visually with some interested. Tactile contact with adults is not avoided, they do not experience discomfort during interaction. When interacting with peers, they show interest in tactile contact
	Inclusion in group activities	Included in group activities, show responsibility and interest. Attention in group activities is stable, is arbitrary. Included in group activities throughout the activity, but need stimulation. When you feel their importance, they try to contribute. The requirements of the group instruction are met, but need to be monitored. Follow generally accepted rules and regulations
	Features of group behaviour	In the group, they are not active, but respond with personal interaction. The order in the group is taken into account, but needs to be controlled. In the process of interaction, they begin to focus on peers and correlate their actions with the actions of the teacher. They accept the instruction, try to follow it. Show interest in joint activities
	Features of emotional response in the group	The spectrum of emotional reactions is expanding, the manifestation of adequate emotions is observed. Selectivity in communication, a fragmentary manifestation of empathy is noted. Insignificant use of stereotypes and behavioral stamps, sometimes spontaneity manifests in contact

Please replace this text with context of your paper. A comparative analysis of group activity according to the selected criteria allowed us to form a dynamic picture of the age-specific identity of schoolchildren with ASD from different clusters.

1. Contact

Students of cluster 1 showed a steady avoidance of contacts. No visual contact was established, with persistence they showed a negative reaction in the form of withdrawal using autostimulations associated with fine motor skills (shaking hands, playing with fingers). Tactile contact with adults was established, but it was extremely selective and was of a short-term nature (only familiar adults were given a hand). We did not establish tactile interaction with peers; we tried to resist it.

In Cluster 2, students retained the avoidance of visual contact (avoiding a direct look, switching eyes to inanimate objects). Tactile interaction was selective in nature, exclusively with "trusted" people. Preserved increased hypersensitivity, both tactile and visual.

Students of cluster 3 showed a slight initiative of contact and a relatively steady interest in interacting with peers and adults. General reduction in avoidance of both visual and tactile contact. Insignificant use of autostimulations in establishing contact.

Students of Cluster 4 showed a manifestation of initiative when interacting with “selected” people with whom they were interested in establishing visual contact and interacted with. Tactile contact with adults was not avoided, while interacting with peers, an interest in tactile contact, stimulating the continuation of interaction, was noted.

Thus, according to the criterion of “Contact” in a comparative analysis, one can see the gradual removal of barriers to group communication, while the assimilation of means of verbal contact by the end of schooling does not occur.

2. Inclusion in group activities

Students of cluster 1 did not have any involvement in group activity. External detachment and withdrawal into “one’s own space” was revealed; participation in group classes was not noted. They could not master the rules and requirements of generally accepted behaviour in the group, so the group instruction was not followed. There was no motivation for group activity.

In cluster 2, students revealed episodic (situational) inclusion in group activity, while the tendency for the absence of general group activity continued. Attention was of an involuntary nature, fixed on inanimate objects falling into the field of view. We did not adhere to the rules of general activity, since their development was fragmented. There was no motivation for group activity.

Students of cluster 3 revealed relative dynamics, interest and a short inclusion in group activity. The internalization of the general rules of group activity and the implementation of group instructions were noted (they demonstrated responsibility, tried to follow generally accepted requirements). The beginning of the development of the arbitrariness of attention (fixation on general activity) and the manifestation of abilities stimulating the motivation of group activity are noted.

Students in Cluster 4 showed involvement in group activities, which continued only with stimulation (encouragement, praise). In joint activities, they tried to contribute to the overall result if they felt their importance. The requirements of the group instruction were fulfilled, followed the generally accepted rules and norms, but constant monitoring by the teacher was required. Attention in group activities was relatively stable, motivation was social in nature and was formed on the basis of the desire to receive encouragement.

Thus, according to the criterion of “Inclusion in group activity”, a gradual transition from spontaneous and episodic attempts to inclusion in group activity was noted, but only if there is stimulation in the form of rewards and praise.

3. Features of behaviour in the group

In students of cluster 1, the revealed speech activity was mediated only by their own needs, single-compound words were used (give, drink, sleep, etc.). There was no reaction to peers; a reaction of indifference towards the teacher was demonstrated. They did not focus on the rules of behavior in the group, attention was involuntary, the presence of joint activity was not observed.

In cluster 2, students retained poor speech activity, verbal activity was mediated by biological needs. They did not react to teachers and did not perceive him. The rules and norms of behavior in the group were not observed, the order in the group was not taken into account during the interaction, and did not respond to the group instruction. They were not included in joint activities.

Pupils of the 3rd cluster did not show verbal initiative in the group, but when they contacted, they answered questions (monosyllables). The emergence of the ability to orientate oneself on peers and adherence to priority in the group is noted. In a joint activity with the teacher, they tried to correlate their actions with the actions of the teacher. In responding to group instruction, the need for support and seeking help from peers was noted. They accepted the instruction, tried to follow it, but needed help.

Students of Cluster 4 showed personal responses in personal interaction, but activity was not observed in the group. In the presence of external control (teacher), they observed the order in the group, focused on peers. When interacting with the teacher, they correlated their actions with the actions of the teacher. The group instruction was accepted and tried to comply with it. The interaction revealed manifestations of sustained interest in joint activities.

Thus, according to the criterion “Peculiarities of behaviour in a group”, a reaction to the addressed speech and its understanding was noted, as well as an interest in peers, which stimulated communicative and emotional development, but the need for support and help remained.

4. Features of the emotional response in the group

Students of cluster 1 noted a lack of interest in others, the spectrum of emotional reactions is poor, emotions were rare, but adequate to the situation. The manifestation of inappropriate emotions was not observed. A short emotional and personal interaction was established with the "chosen" persons. The group occasionally showed empathy, sometimes empathy. The use of stereotypical behavioural stamps is noted. Spontaneity of behaviour was not revealed.

In cluster 2, the manifestation of emotions was extremely rare in students, there was a decrease in fear from the usual children's team, which affected the decrease in aggression. In emotional and personal communication, the avoidance of contacts and the lack of reaction to the emotional state of the group continued. In the interaction, the use of stereotypes continued (the ritualism of actions was preserved), sometimes it was possible to observe spontaneity of behaviour when interacting with well-known people.

Students of cluster 3 revealed a relatively small number of emotional reactions, but adequate to the situation. The emergence of interest with selected members of the group was noted (a short manifestation of empathy, interest). In the interaction, a decrease in stereotypes and behavioural clichés was observed, preference was given to contacts with “chosen” persons with whom spontaneity of behaviour was noted.

Students of cluster 4 revealed an expansion of the spectrum of emotional reactions and a demonstration of emotions adequate to the situation. The selectivity in communication remained almost unchanged, as in students of 3 clusters. The use of stereotypes and behavioral stamps decreased, but was periodically used when a new situation arose. The manifestation of spontaneity of behavior in contact is noted, sometimes not only with “chosen” persons.

Thus, according to the criterion “Peculiarities of emotional response in a group”, relative dynamics in the establishment of emotional-personal communication and the expansion of the spectrum of emotional reactions were revealed, however, the use of stereotypes and behavioural clichés remained due to the specifics of emotional disorders in children and adolescents with ASD.

7. Conclusion

As a result of the comparative analysis of the group activity of schoolchildren with ASD with a slight degree of mental retardation of different ages, results were obtained that testify to the age dynamics in the development of group activity according to the criteria of “Contact”, “Inclusion in group activities”, “Features of behaviour in a group” and “Features of emotional response in a group”.

Using the ranking method, it was found that the greatest development was given to such an indicator of group activity as “Features of behaviour in a group”. The second place in terms of dynamics is “Contact”, followed by “Inclusion in group activities”. The greatest difficulties in group interaction were noted by the criterion “Features of emotional response” due to the specifics of disorders in children and adolescents with ASD associated with the emotional sphere.

Thus, a comparative analysis of group activity has led to the conclusion that the most plastic in group activity is the “Contact” parameter, and the least “Characteristics of emotional response”.

The data revealed allow us to compose a differentiated picture of using the opportunities of group activities to determine the conditions of psychological and pedagogical support for children with ASD.

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