Social Interaction of Primary School Students In Integrated Learning: Understanding Emotional States

K. K. Reyt
Academic Department of Methodology and
Theory of Social and Pedagogical Research
Tyumen State University
Tyumen, Russia
kirill_pip@mail.ru

O. A. Selivanova
Department of General and Social Pedagogy
Tyumen State University
towerred1966@mail.ru

O. N. Rodina
Department of Foreign Languages
Industrial University of Tyumen
Tyumen, Russia
olga_rodina2605@mail.ru

Abstract—**The article explores and presents an analysis of the features of the social interaction of the primary school children with mild intellectual disability and those with typical development in conditions of integrated learning. The study reveals that the primary school children with mild intellectual disability need help in interaction with both peers and adults. The ability to understand emotional states is considered to be one of the factors facilitating social interaction. Methods of conversation and game situations were used to identify the levels of understanding the emotional states such as joy, fear, anger, anxiety, resentment, aggression, and to reveal signs that help students to identify emotions. The authors provide the methods of developing the ability to understand emotional reactions in the primary school children with mild intellectual disability. They argue that integrated learning is the right environment where social interaction positively affects both primary school students with and without mild intellectual disability.**

Keywords—social interaction; integrated learning environment; primary school students with mild intellectual disability; emotional states; peers

I. INTRODUCTION

It has long been recognized that the main goal of education is the formation of the personality, one's abilities, one's social qualities, and identity. The modern world requires enterprising, communicative people who can actively get involved in work and social life and adapt to rapidly changing life's conditions after finishing school. However, experience shows that in different educational systems, children with various psycho-physical disorders in particular with mild intellectual disability are left without support and attention as school education is often not ready to meet their individual learning needs. Even more importantly, a segregated special school is not an analogy to the general one as it has mainly correction-oriented goals.

It is in the ordinary educational environment that children with special educational needs can have the opportunity for extended social contacts between peers with and without disability and have the potential of peer interaction in case educators know how to facilitate social interaction that leads to establishment of true and lasting friendships [1].

Over the past two decades, inclusive education has become one of the critical worldwide issues in school education. Modern researchers identified several countries in which the concept of inclusive education is successfully implemented. They are Canada, Spain, Sweden, the USA, Denmark, Iceland, Great Britain and Italy among them. Inclusive education has been practiced for about 30-40 years in these countries. In Italy, for example, the concept of inclusive education has been implemented since the 1970s. More than 90% of Italian children with disabilities were educated in regular schools by the beginning of the new millennium [2]. Nevertheless, there is still little systematic research on inclusive education. It is generating intense debate on pupils' views on inclusion [3], teachers' attitudes towards disability and inclusion [4-7], inclusive classroom practice, inclusive pedagogy as the way that teachers construct the environment that works for everyone [8].

Haeberlin (1991) defines 'inclusive education' as a dynamic process of targeting and responding national educational systems to the diverse needs of all learners by creating conditions for successful learning and socialization excluding any forms of children segmentation. In a broad sense, inclusion is understood as involving all children in the general educational process regardless of age, gender, ethnic

and religious affiliations, previous educational achievements, retardation, demographic profile [9].

Inclusion is believed to be one of the main strategies for school education development. The goal of inclusive education is to create conditions appropriate for children with physical, sensory, intellectual disabilities as well as with social disabilities, which help them to integrate actively into society. According to many researchers and educators, the active inclusion cannot be achieved by isolating children with intellectual disability from others and therefore emphasizing their special position. They point out that instead of labeling them with the diagnosis of intellectually disabled, they should be provided with 'supported signs for communication' that promote peer interaction situations [10]. In inclusive education, optimal conditions are created for interaction between children with disabilities and those with typical development. The process of interaction is the most important tool for the socialization of school students with intellectual disabilities. Researchers stress that inclusive education is to enable the development of quality relationships with typically developing peers, and the formation of friendship is a more important goal for children with disability that academic outcomes [11].

In Russian social psychology, interaction is considered as a process of direct or indirect influence of objects (subjects) on each other, generating their mutual dependence and connection, the direct organization of their joint actions allowing the group to realize a common activity for its members [12]. In turn, social interaction is understood as a mutual exchange of collective experience, knowledge, concepts, the highest result of which is the occurrence of "culture". In the course of social interaction, children's communicative skills, people skills are improved. The nature of interaction is of great importance for the development of the entire personality of the child. The effectiveness of children joint activities is determined by the level of social interaction skills formation [13]. Research in this direction was carried out by a number of Russian scientists such as N.P. Dolgoborodova, G.M. Dulnev (1961), L.V. Zankov, E.A. Kovaleva (1986), M.I .Kuzmitskaya, N.L. Kolominsky (1976, 1978), V. V. Korkunov (1986, 2009), and others. It was shown that relationships can arise and be improved on the basis of the active participation of all children. The interactions can have a strong educational influence on participants of joint activities. Integrated learning has been recently actively developing in Russia. The transition to inclusive education is a long and controversial process. Of course, as inclusive education is implemented, certain difficulties are inevitable. The most serious barriers and obstacles arise in the relationships of students. Schoolteachers switching to inclusive education should be prepared for the fact that classmates developing typically cannot make contact with peers who have certain disabilities. Unfortunately, modern children are characterized by quick temper, hostility and aggressiveness towards others, intolerance of others' opinions, inability to reckon with the desires of others. Researchers stress that the integrated learning environment contributes to the formation of humanistic values of children with typical development [14-16].

Researchers argue that while forming social interaction skills, the age characteristics of children should be taken into account. The child character, its main features are formed at the preschool age. They subsequently influence the practical activity of the child and his/her communication with people. During this period, there is an intensive establishment of friendly contacts. As for children with mild mental retardation, they are in special living conditions. First, at preschool age most of them are at home education. Second, cognitive impairment also impact their adaptability. Therefore, these children need help in organizing interaction with the environment [17, 18]. Literature review identified some features of social interaction of primary school children with intellectual disability. They include affection and volition immaturities, cognitive immaturity, concrete and superficial thinking, poor vocabulary. Difficulties in reasoning, absence or distortion of complex semantic relations, a large number of semantic gaps are present in speech of children with intellectual disability [19, 20].

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, the schoolchild does not have a sufficient level of communication and interaction skills with peers and adults. Therefore, the work on building social interaction skills in children with disability should be organized at the level of primary education. Teachers participating in the program for implementing inclusive education need to develop inclusive methods that would facilitate partnerships in the children's environment. It can be games, exercises, and collective creative activities. It is through the game that the child changes and the psychological barrier disappear in communication between children with different abilities.

II. Methods

A. Participants and methods

This study was carried out in comprehensive school № 89 in the city of Tyumen, Russia. The total amount of participants was 60 primary school students aged from 9 to 10. Twenty of them were students with mild intellectual disability. Other 40 students were with typical development.

Based on the psychological and pedagogical characteristics of students, a number of features of the primary school students' interaction were revealed. First of all, it is necessary to note the uniqueness of students' relationships in classes which is manifested in the situational contacts. Students with intellectual disabilities have little control over their emotional manifestations, and often do not even try to do it. Due to this factor, frequent clashes between students are observed. They are accompanied by manifestations of aggression, anger and resentment against each other. The primary school students may be characterized by quick temper, incontinence in terms of both peers and adults. Consequently, it leads to difficulties in the students' interaction within the classroom, as well as with adults. Finally, it makes difficulties in the process of education and training at schools.

In order to assess students' ability to understand emotional states, the authors used the methodology "understanding emotional reactions represented in the picture" created by

Uruntayeva, Afonkina [21]. The methodology content was adapted to the psychological characteristics of primary school students with intellectual disabilities participating in the study. The instruction was simplified and the scope of tasks was reduced. The amount of tasks and instruction remained in the author's version for children with typical development. To examine and evaluate the understanding of emotional reactions, the participants were offered slides with a graphical presentation of the basic emotional reactions: joy, fear, anger, anxiety, insult, aggression on the stylized face. The presentation of slides was accompanied by the experimenter's questions: "Find and show from the offered pictures the emotion of joy, fear, anger, anxiety, resentment, aggression. The participants' answers were recorded in the protocols. During the diagnosis, a method of conversation was used. It aimed to reveal the signs that help children to identify emotions. Different clarifying questions were asked to understand the causes of difficulties and to identify the potential opportunities for the learners to develop the ability to understand emotions. The experimenter encouraged full answers. The questions were formulated on a simple and accessible level for students and allowed one to receive more objective information about them. This method created a positive motivation for children to participate in the study and contributed to the insight of primary school students.

B. Assessment

It was assumed that if the student was able to independently and correctly determine the emotions, the answer was evaluated to 5 points. If the experimenter helped the student one or two times, and the remaining emotions were diagnosed, the answer was evaluated to 4 points. If the experimenter helped the student four or five times, the answer was evaluated to 3 points. If the student determined all the emotions only with the support of the experimenter, the answer was evaluated to 2 points. If the student found it difficult to determine emotions even with the support of the experimenter or called from 1 to 3 emotions, the answer was evaluated to 1 point. Help consisted in describing situations where the basic emotional reactions (joy, fear, anger, anxiety, insult, aggression) could be clearly manifested.

C. Data processing

Only correct answers for each picture were counted. The aim is to find out whether children are aware of the emotional states of adults and peers, what signs they rely on; who is better understood (an adult or a peer). Data are correlated with levels of understanding peers and adults emotional states. A high level: the student independently determines the emotional states of peers and adults on each picture. The average level: the child independently determines some of the emotional states of people represented in the picture with meaningful help of the teacher. A low level: the child defines a limited number of emotional states, even taking into account the teacher's diverse help. The student's answers were subjected to qualitative analysis aimed at revealing children's understanding of various emotions and the correct relationship between the cause of emotion manifestation and external conditions.

III. RESULTS

The results of the study of the ability to understand emotional reactions by primary school students with a mild degree of mental retardation and those with typical development are shown in Fig. 1.

The data confirmed that the differentiation of emotions on stylistic images is common to all participants, as the low level of the skill formation was not detected in any of the groups. The results revealed that the understanding below the average level was characteristic for both boys and girls.

The students found it difficult to differentiate the emotions represented in the pictures. They often tried to guess the right answer. The answers to clarifying questions that reveal knowledge of internal and external signs were formulated by student only with the active assistance of the experimenter. It may indicate ignorance of the signs of basic emotions, inability to differentiate the interlocutors and own states. It can interfere with the effective process of communication, as emotions are integral parts of social interaction. The children showed best results, recognizing the emotional states such as joy and fear, while they have difficulty in identifying the essential signs of emotional reactions expression. The qualitative analysis stated the fact that boys and girls with mental disability showed good results in verbalization and understanding of emotional states such as joy, fear, anger, and aggression. Any students could not differentiate the emotional state of 'anxiety'. Besides, the students had difficulties in differentiating 'offense'. When comparing the results of primary school students with intellectual disability and those with typical development, it becomes obvious that the difference in the level of understanding of the emotional state
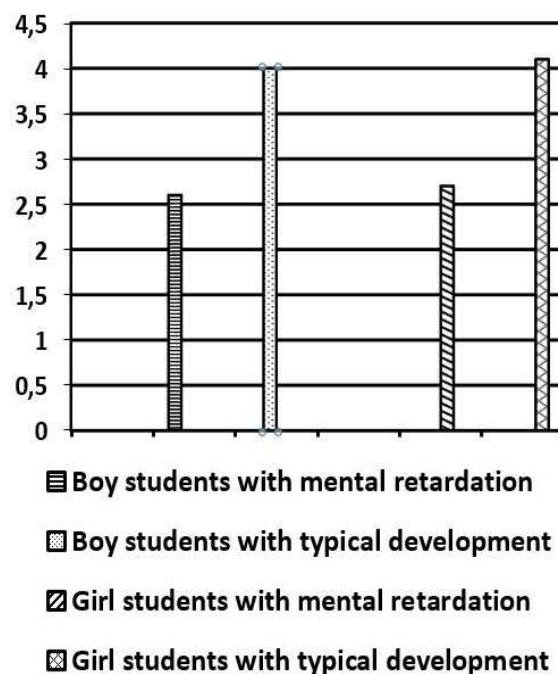

Fig.1. Assessments of the ability to understand emotional reactions in primary school students with intellectual disability and typical development

exists. The average score of this parameter among students with typical development corresponded to the above average level: 4 points for boys, 4.1 for girls. The students resorted to the help of the experimenter only in one or two cases. The students usually found it difficult to differentiate the emotional states of anxiety and resentment. The students called the signs characteristic for the studied emotions that could characterize the situations in which these emotions could be manifested.

IV. CONCLUSION

The results indicate the underdevelopment of the ability to understand emotions in primary school students with mild intellectual disability. These abiliy does not only respond to emotional sensitivity to the partner and own emotional state, but also to the cognitive component that is manifested in the knowledge on the features of the different emotions manifestations.

The authors consider that the effective targeted development of these skills will be realized through:

- the understanding own emotional responses and those of the partners in the social interaction,
- the perception of emotional reactions of surrounding people by external expressive manifestations of emotional response,
- the development of senses of compassion and empathy in an environment where children learn to share their subjects, try to provide help and emotional support to the partner.

This approach will allow children to cooperate more successfully with the environment, work in a group and achieve joint results in educational and extracurricular activities.

To sum up, peer social interaction positively affects both primary school students with and without intellectual disability. Helping peers with disabilities to participate actively in educational and social activities; children with typical development receive important life lessons imperceptibly for themselves. This positive experience contains the growth of social consciousness, the awareness of the absence of differences between people, the development of self-awareness and self-esteem and the development of their own life principles.

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