THE CREATION OF EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS FOR SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES LIVING IN NEUROPSYCHIATRIC NURSING HOMES IN BELARUS

Children, adolescents and adults with severe mental and physical impairments living in nursing homes are characterized by diverse clinical symptoms (due to organic lesions of the central nervous system) as well as complex disorders in physical, mental, intellectual, and emotional areas. To begin with, let us define what we call “people with severe mental and physical impairments”. The main criterion for combining these people into one category was the fact that they have a significant (severe) degree of intellectual underdevelopment. The available psychophysical features in their development have different impact on shaping their social relations and their cognitive abilities.

In the XX century the issue of learning abilities of people with severe mental and physical impairments considered to be controversial. Until recently (at the beginning of XXI century) in Belarus the education of children with severe mental and physical disabilities was not carried out. The work of employees of these institutions was focused on care for those children. Neuropsychiatric nursery home for the elderly and disabled still remains the leading type of institutions offering support (under the provisions of this institution, approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus of 01.10.2013 No 5. It is a residential institution whose main task (according to No. 5 standing order, approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus of 01.10.2013) is the organization of care, social services and medical assistance to citizens (www.expert.by/EC/monitorings/193778.txt [Access Date: 29/01/2013]). However, placing the problem of inclusion, we should not just lodge an adult with mental and physical disabilities in a nursing institution, but also set new, namely, educational tasks associated with the possibility of implementing professional training, providing an adult maximum independence under professional support (Kravtsova, 2015).

One of the steps of improving special education in the Republic of Belarus is to create conditions for the continuous education of people over 18, for the implemented right to work for people with intellectual disabilities living both in families and nursing homes.

Today, people with intellectual disabilities have the opportunity to get a profession in the institutions of vocational education after they graduate from
special schools (boarding schools) and if medical conditions permit. But it concerns only people with mild intellectual disabilities.

Some graduates who have mastered the educational programs of special education (especially those with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, with multiple and mostly with disabilities musculoskeletal system and others) are not able to get a “profession” according to medical statement. Thus, they are deprived of the chance to find a job, to get additional financial security, to integrate into the society, and as a result they become social outcasts (Lisovskaya, 2013).

According to the results of the survey conducted among parents of graduates from the Correction and Development Training and Rehabilitation Centres (hereinafter - CDTRC) (educational institutions for children with severe multiple psychophysical impairments) most of their grown up children (over 18 years) after graduation from the CDTRC stay in their homes and do nothing and go nowhere (Zabelich, 2014).

Today this question is accompanied by the anxiety from the part of special educational institutions of our country as well as from the part of the parents. The experts are well aware that the loss of developmental learning environment will lead to the extinction of development achievements generated by the years of previous hard work. As for the parents, for whom the future of their grown-up children is the most painful issue, the prospect of the closed neuropsychiatric boarding homes is not attractive. Due to the peculiarities of their memory, attention and other cognitive processes a year without education for such a person is equivalent to the loss of a year training in the CDTRC. Recently (since 2007) in Belarus the territorial social service centers (TSSC) administered by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security have been developed (www.levonevski.net/pravo/razdel5/num2/5d25886.html [Access Date: 01/29/2013]). The territorial social service centers support all citizens, including persons with sever disabilities.

However many graduates from the second branch of special school (moderate and severe intellectual disabilities) and CDTRC graduates cannot take the advantage of attending these centers due to subjective and objective reasons: on one hand, parents have some fears of just cannot provide transportation to these centers every day, on the other hand there are age restrictions (from 18 to 31 years) and limitations on the degree of independence in self-care, as social workers in the TSSC are not ready to work with people with sever disabilities and, besides, the conditions in these institutions are not adapted for this category of people.

Even worse is the situation of older people who do not live in the family but in neuropsychiatric boarding homes, that is, in a closed society. These people have an extremely weak motivation for self-development, there is a deformation of the personality, the sense of responsibility for their actions and deeds is poorly developed or slowing down. As a result of imperfective diagnostic tools, as well as for other reasons, in neuropsychiatric nursing homes we can find people with normal mental development, mental retardation, behavioral problems, which happens due to the social situation of development in closed institutions. So, the famous Russian psychologist I. A. Korobeynikov notes in one of his articles that “... the frequency of such errors happen not only due to the insufficient training
of PMEC (psychological, medical and educational commission) specialists, but is also forced by the need of preserving and even worsening of mental retardation diagnosis ... otherwise the legitimate reasons for their residence in a specialized boarding school disappear” (Korobeynikov, 2012, p. 20). Many residents of such institutions have never received any education for various reasons, losing, as a result, their capacity and employment opportunities because the diagnosis approach to the definition of disability still exists in the country.

Study and results

The study was carried out in nursing homes for adults. A qualitative approach was used, and 35 persons with moderate or severe degree of intellectual disabilities were intervieved.

The aims of research were:
- to learn about an individual person’s history of life,
- to identify a preferable vocational activity of each person with disability.

Many of these people living in nursing homes for adults cannot read, write or count, because they either have never been taught or have been taught occasionally. Among the 35 surveyed people aged from 22 to 47 years old, living in neuropsychiatric nursing homes of Lida and Chervegn, all were diagnosed “moderate or severe degree of mental retardation” and deprived of legal capacity. 50% of the respondents were transferred to these institutions from orphanages, boarding schools, which carried out only care and supervision, but did not concern the issues of their education. The remaining 50% were lodged in the mental nursing home for various reasons but almost all of them tell the following story: they went to school, studied there for three or four years (only one woman aged 43, said she had graduated after nine forms of a village school), the mother died (was killed), the father left (abandoned the children, he is an alcoholic, he is in prison). The majority (85%) of the respondents assess their capabilities adequately and compare them with the realities of life, which says that they have no pronounced degree of intellectual disability. The responses stated the following: “I want to deliver mail in the village, like my father”; “I want to wash dishes in the dining room of our boarding school”; “I can work on the farm, because I love to plant potatoes and trees”; “I want to help the priest in the church” etc. One woman wanted to be a hairdresser, and the director of the orphanage confirmed that she is “doing great hairstyles. We saw a great desire of those people to learn to read, write, count, master the elements of computer literacy, because they all want to be returned to legal capacity so that they were able to work and earn their living.

Practical implication of the study

To restore the capacity of people living in nursing homes it is absolutely necessary to create the environment of motivation allowing to include them in the
supporting activities, maintain an active and ongoing training of their level of independence that will contribute to the socialization and social integration of people with mental and physical disorders living in neuropsychiatric nursing homes as well as it will reduce government spendings on their maintenance.

We objectively assess the opportunities of the residents living in neuropsychiatric nursing homes and we state that it is necessary to provide educational conditions for all of them, a chance to restore the capacity should be given to everyone. In this regard, we believe it is necessary and possible to create educational environment for socialization and social integration of people with mental and physical disorders, living in neuropsychiatric nursing homes.

We consider relevant to begin creating educational conditions with the scientific rationale and curriculum development for neuropsychiatric boarding houses, including such subjects as: household independence; development of communication, reading and writing; applied mathematics with elements of computer literacy; human health; sexual education; elements of artistic and creative activities, applied work, and others.

The curriculum is the main regulatory state document, which defines the list of subjects and the number of hours per week allowed for the study of a particular subject. In the development and scientific substantiation of the curriculum for neuropsychiatric boarding schools it is primarily to take into account the current state of social-economic development of our country, the living prospect of the residents of nursing homes and the provision of their viability.

In general pedagogy the content of education is defined as “a system of scientific knowledge, activities and social relationships, which must be mastered by the learners” (Chepikov, 2003, p. 40). Concerning people with mental and physical impairments we talk about their correctional and developmental education, which primarily provides the formation and development of the personality, the accumulation of social experience, mastering different methods of activity: the larger their social experience is, the more successful will be the socialization and social integration of these people into the society.

Basing on the comparative approach, we tried to identify the components of the content of education for adults with severe mental and physical disorders. In comprehensive school the main components of education are cognitive, practical, creative and the component of values (Efremov, 2009, p. 153). Considering the available experience of education for children with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities under 18 years, the analysis of the curriculum and training programs of the second branch of the special school, the potential of such students and the pathological biological mechanisms of existing disorders, we distinguished the components and hierarchy different from those of comprehensive school (Leshchinskaya, 2015).

The preference is given first of all to the emotionally-valuable component: the emotionally positive learning environment, the formation of emotionally friendly attitude to others, the emotionally-valuable orientation. This component has caused the inclusion into the curriculum such subjects as: “Fundamentals of Artistic and Creative Activities”, “The Development of Emotional and Volitional Sphere and the Formation of Demanded Social Behavior”.
The practical component reflects getting skills and mastering different activities forming and enriching social experience. The practical component is considered fundamental in the curriculum for neuropsychiatric boarding-homes. It is provided within all the subjects of the curriculum, but some subjects have a special significance: “Elements of Applied Mathematics”, “Applied Labor”, “The Formation of Generalized Way of Life”.

The cognitive component is non-principal but supplementary. Vitally important knowledge based on the personal experience and arising from practical needs of the learners is formed.

Until recent time, the creative component has never been allocated in education of adults with mental and physical disabilities. It is provided with such subjects as: “Fundamentals of Artistic and Creative Activities”, “The Development of Emotional and Volitional Sphere”. Russian and Belarus researchers found that children with severe mental and physical disorders being connected to the synchronous activity together with talented children and adults, in certain conditions and with the help of special technologies such children are able to create and achieve considerable success. We transferred these results on adult education. The image of a man with severe mental and physical impairments changes through the use of compensatory mechanisms of the central nervous system. Thus, complementary evaluation and demonstration of achievements gives a positive response, the range of activities expands in the process of creative activity, new neural structures involve into the activity. Good mood, positive emotional background enhances success as a result higher mental functions are restored and developed.

Let us consider a brief characterization of some subjects of the curriculum for neuropsychiatric boarding schools.

Forming the ability and willingness to operate in everyday situations requires not only concrete, specific ways of activity, but also generalized, universal ways. This educational aim reasoned the introduction of the subject “Domestic Self-Sufficiency”. Generalized system of actual methods of activity is conditioned by the spheres of human activity and the necessary life competencies. The introduction of the subject “The Development of Communication, Reading and Writing” was dictated by the need to expand communication between learners with severe mental and physical impairments and to include them into social interaction in the form acceptable to them. Communication can be carried out not only by means of speech (words), but also through images, gestures, tactile symbols, telecommunications, graphics, icons (images or groups of figures reflecting the specific content), gestures which can be used either as non-verbal speech support or as an independent means of communication (gestural language). Alternative communication and augmentative communication, which increase knowledge, can also be carried out. Some scientists identify alternative and augmentative communication (Tetzchner, 2014, p. 20). We believe that the augmentative communication is broader, deeper, further, since it extends the view. With regard to the specific needs of people with severe mental and physical impairments the specific form of communication can be selected and used – vital communication. The content and pattern of vital...
communication is determined by the content of necessities of a person and his or her individual capabilities. Vital communication has a conditionally-syntactic pattern: the open door, window or book may mark the beginning of some event, but closing marks the ending. A ritual pattern can be given to music miniature or a fragment of a television movie. Electronic educational resources are given a big role and get a particularly symbolic purpose. They allow the use of color and sound to create a specific emotional background and sensory stimulation through the use of polar stimuli.

The curriculum introduces the subject of “Applied Mathematics with Elements of Computer Literacy”. The word “applied” in the “Modern Dictionary of Russian language” is interpreted as “having practical value, applicable in practice” (Chemohonenko, 2007, p. 507). The subject of “Applied Mathematics with Elements of Computer Literacy” includes educational material about calculations, sizes, shapes, spatial relations of objects, which have practical significance being used in everyday life. “Applied Mathematics with Elements of Computer Literacy” expands the educational training of learners by supplementing the arithmetic numbers with geometric material having a practical application. The pragmatic orientation of education is enhanced as in the process of studying applied mathematics the learners will solve purely practical problems of direct relevance to everyday life. Computer literacy training will increase the capacity of learners and will improve the quality of their life as residents in boarding homes. We assume that the use of new modern computer technologies can increase the level of motivation of learners, will set the individual rate and scope of the task, i.e. will help to personalize the learning process and will allow to see the result and the evaluation of the task quickly which will make the educational process interactive.

The subject “The Man and His Health” forms knowledge and skills that enable secure healthy life style, monitor key health indicators, maintain health and strengthen it. Health is considered in a broad concept, i.e. as somatic, physical and mental. The last one characterizes the state of mental well-being, which means the absence of mental disease manifestations and ensuring the regulation of behavior adequate to the conditions of activity. The subject “The Man and His Health” aims at conservation and preservation of health in the broadest sense of this word.

The subject “Fundamentals of Artistic and Creative Activities” may include music and rhythmic exercises, visual activities (painting, drawing, sculpture), dramatization. This direction will implement the interaction between pedagogy and art and use them with the aim of correction taking into account the interests and abilities of a person.

New educational content was the subject of discussion in the teaching staff of Special schools of the Republic of Belarus. This is due to the fact that in boarding homes for adults there are no teachers but only social and medical workers. We have analyzed 29 questionnaires expressing collective and personal opinions. The presented version of the curriculum which reflects the new content of education received support and understanding. Here is an evaluative judgment: “The project of the curriculum is designed to meet the current level of pedagogical science, the needs and opportunities of people with
severe mental and physical disabilities, ensures the development of inclusive processes helping to improve innovation in the field of special education” (SEI Auxiliary boarding school No 11 of Minsk).

Summary

The novelty of the developed educational content is:

a) the recognition of opportunities for creative activity of people with severe mental and physical impairments and creating the appropriate conditions for this, which are determined by the new subject areas, allowing the use of the unity of art and pedagogy in correctional purposes, as well as emotional and motor capacities of students;

b) the allocation of a new subject domain “Domestic Self-Sufficiency“ forming universal, generalized ways of life, contributing to enhance the viability and perform a guided self-sufficiency;

c) the introduction of vital communication, expanding opportunities for communication and views exchange on the basis of using symbols and increasing the range of effects on the nervous system;

g) in a wide variety of applied content of education (applied mathematics, applied work) which provides the capacity (partial or complete), helps to feel significant, useful and improve self-esteem.

In the future, we plan to develop a rating scale of autonomy level (self-service level, the level of adequate behavior, the level of speech perception, of reading and writing, the elementary level of practical mathematics, and others), as well as create training programs for the selected subjects of the curriculum.

Scientific research and practical activities of the Belarusian pathologists has proved the limitations of monistic view on people with mental and physical disorders and showed the end of the marginalization of special education. Joint efforts of different specialists changed the image of a man with severe mental and physical disabilities.

Literature


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Summary

The article discusses possible ways of education for people over 18 years with severe mental and physical impairments in Belarus. These ways imply the creation of educational environment for their socialization involving the scientific rationale and the development of the curriculum for neuropsychiatric boarding houses, as well as forming extracurricular, generalized ways of life, the introduction of vital communications and applied training content.

Key words: people with severe mental and physical impairments, educational field with the vital content, the living prospects of nursing homes residents, feasible home employment, secure working conditions