

The Social Theater as a Means to Prepare Disabled Children for Effective Social Functioning

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Abstract: *The socialization of disabled children is aggravated by their life conditions and obligatory limitations of social experience. The pedagogical technology of the social theater enables to intensify social adaptation of disabled children. Acting on behalf of a character who possesses particular social and psychological features, developing relationships with the character, comprehending cause-effect connections in his behavior and changing roles freely, a disabled child not only has an opportunity to enrich the scope of emotions and social experience but also to establish dialogic relations with culture, society and, eventually, with oneself.*

Index Terms: *dialogue, disabled child, game, role, social theater, socialization, theatrical miniature*

I. INTRODUCTION

Studying children who are under the conditions of obligatory limitations of social interaction, a number of scientists their discovered social, cognitive, emotional, physical developmental delays (J. Bowlby, J. Langmeier, Z. Matejcek, T.D. Molodtsova, V.M. Slutsky, R.A. Spitz et al). It was found out that child development over a long period of time in an impoverished social environment impeding the satisfaction of important needs triggers the formation of consistent destructive psychological conditions of deprivation [1]-[6]. There are four types of deprivation:

- *sensory* deprivation that emerges against the background of a monotonous life, lack of vivid life impressions;

- *cognitive* deprivation that is associated with deficient, low-quality, incomplete, chaotic and controversial information and cognitive stimulation inevitably leading to distortion of mental images of the world and the self-image. The researches of J. Laugmeier, Z. Matejcek discovered the correlation between age when a child was immersed in an impoverished social environment and intellectual developmental delay [2];

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- *emotional* deprivation caused by a decreased, simplified and clichéd emotional background of interaction with Others. This type of deprivation is connected with feelings of rejection, abandonment and neglect resulting, respectively, in tense relationships with Others and often in decreasing self-esteem. In some cases, there is an increased level of emotional lability, that is, tendencies to frequent changes of contrasting emotions of expressive coloring (at the same time, there is a shift towards depression and apathy);

- *social* deprivation is associated with a life in a closed social environment with well-established, standardized, clichéd social ties and relationships.

Such problems are rather characteristic of disabled children. It is obvious that living conditions, in which a disabled child is placed, objectively complicate his socialization and preparation for successful social functioning. The statement of this fact leads us to the idea that the use of the social theater pedagogical technology in corrective work can become not only a means of enriching the social repertoire and experience of disabled children but also a way to overcome deprivations. Socio-gaming dramatization and methods of a psychological theater orient children with disabilities towards dialogical interactions, immersion into the psychology of a portrayed character and analysis of options for resolving conflicting confrontations. At the same time, the possibilities to choose and rethink a role, free transition from one role to another during the game stimulate the interiorization of a dialogue, that is, its translation into the "inner plan" of consciousness.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our work is based on the idea that the theoretical foundation of the pedagogical technology of the social theater as a means of preparing children with disabilities for effective social functioning can be seen in the concept of a dialogue based on the theory of the intentionality of consciousness in the phenomenological-existential direction of philosophy and psychology. The fact of the matter is that in a significant number of information sources a dialogue is understood as a form of oral speech, within which phrases are exchanged between two or more persons.



However, the etymological analysis of the word "dialogue" enables to conclude that the first element of the word is *dia*, which means "through", whereas the second element *logos* has a wide scope of meanings such as a word, speech, judgment, solution, condition, proof, meaning, etc. [7]. It leads to the conclusion that a dialogue can be primarily considered as notional interaction that exceeds a simple exchange of phrases. Its distinctive features include mutual searching, generating, agreeing, enriching and connecting of meanings. Such a notional orientation of interaction within the game space is the purpose of the pedagogical technology of the social theater [8]. The comprehension of psychology of a character, the motives of his actions and the situation in which he finds himself by a participant of the social theater creates the prerequisites for going beyond his own subjectness. A participant not only "responds to the call of Other" [9] but also opens Other in himself and realizes himself as the Other [10], as reflection on the character's experiences and feelings, his mental states reveal the facets of his own personality to a disabled child, encourages self-observation, self-knowledge and self-esteem. On this basis, value attitudes, meaningful life goals and beliefs are adopted, asserted and reconsidered; effective behavioral patterns are mastered. In the social theater of disabled children, the replay of situations characteristic of other spheres and conditions of social life, that is, those that they do not face in everyday life, is of particular value [11], [12].

III. RESULTS

"Trying on" various social "costumes" and role pictures associated with them is an important mechanism of socialization. The authors of the concept of status and role (G. Mead and R. Linton) believed that the social repertoire is directly connected with social success of a person [13]. As a result of a disabled child's participation at the social theater classes we had an opportunity to confirm the following: a desire for social and creative self-actualization, a sense of responsibility to Others, to the team and to himself, self-control and self-discipline are formed, as well as volitional qualities, allowing a child to overcome external and internal resistance and manifestations of "hospitalism" (R. Spitz's term) [6];

- a "bank" of behavioral patterns for standard and non-standard situations of social interactions (official, professional, interpersonal, intergroup, symbolic, conflict) is expanded;
- skills and experience of coordinated and expedient participation in collective actions are developed in order to achieve a common goal;
- a tolerant position towards other cultures, worldviews and logic is formed [10], [14];
- communicative skills are developed;
- the ability to experience ethical and aesthetic feelings that stimulate pupils to building social ties and relationships "according to the laws of harmony", receives a development impulse.

IV. DISCUSSION

Understanding a game in the social theater as a dialogical interaction we must emphasize that in its course the participants not only broadcast but also generate new meanings to each other, that is, they make joint meaningful discoveries, breakthroughs, thus, enriching analytical and social experience. However, a dialogue unfolding in the inner space of an individual is no less important. For the formation of this internal dialogue it is necessary to ensure:

- free and voluntary participation in activities; a disabled child is free to enter or leave the game at any time;
- striving for "social tomorrow". T.Yu. Ronami very subtly noted that theatrical and creative activities of children should rely on the micromodels of social contacts not only within children's but within adult societies, and, besides, on the micromodels of interactions of the children's world with the adult world [15]. In this regard, social-gaming interactions should not only reproduce the social connections and relationships of the current moment of life of a disabled child but also carefully prepare him for effective functioning in those social environments, in which he will integrate at subsequent stages of his life journey;
- the effect of recognizing when even in new unfamiliar dramatic material a disabled child recognizes the features of already well known to him. Thus, a participant of the social theater finds guidelines to organize activities in a new situation and dramatic material is enriched and becomes saturated with familiar and understandable meaning content [16];
- reflexive-analytical activity of a disabled child, in the course of which variants of motives, actions and existential choices are comprehended both within the game space and beyond it;
- the clarity of the framework of the game space-time continuum. D.B. Elkonin noted that a game is a kind of otherness in a different social environment with characteristic prescriptions of it: status masks, role-playing rules, symbols of social belonging, etc. [17];
- focus on collision. Game activity in the social theater ceases to be simple play-acting and starts implementing its educational and socializing functions only when it becomes a challenge for moral and volitional qualities, intellectual abilities and creative potential of a person;
- release of the game action from the minor elements, from "white noise". It should be borne in mind that a game is not life but deeply conditional interaction of characters in particular circumstances. Consequently, if in real life moral enlightenment of a person can take years, in the game space this effect can be achieved within minutes and hours;
- the collective nature of game interaction; without explicit or imaginary contact between characters within the space of the game it loses its meaning. The social theater is a type of collective creativity. Therefore, even bright game solutions of one participant of the game, not supported by other participants, do not achieve the expected educational effect.

At the same time, the ability of the participants to convey the meanings and motives of their characters' actions looking for adequate verbal and non-verbal means is crucial, while other participants must form the ability to interpret them correctly. The choice of dramatic material has a significant meaning for the solution of educational and socializing goals set before the social theater of disabled children. We came to the conclusion that a theatrical miniature is the most efficient, especially at the initial stages of work. Our opinion is based on the following arguments.

First. A theatrical miniature does not overload intellectual, emotional and volitional spheres of disabled children. From our point of view, long performances are often too laborious for disabled children and the low quality of the final result undermines their faith in their own abilities.

Second. As a rule, characters portrayed in a theatrical miniature bear recognizable "social masks". At the initial stages of work of the social theater it is useful for these "social masks" to be "compatible" with the psychology of the participants, so that they can truly recreate the image close to themselves and successfully overcome psychological limits. In addition, reliance on the mask allows a participant to concentrate on understanding the collision and finding ways to implement it through gestures, facial expressions, intonation, extralinguistic and paralinguistic elements of speech.

Third. Working with theatrical miniatures allows children with disabilities to freely move from role to role (even within a single lesson) and to communicate their interpretation to other participants. Thus, each participant can prove himself in several, sometimes contrasting roles. In this case, the classes of the social theater are transformed into a creative laboratory, when, playing repeatedly the same miniature, the participants reconsider the images of roles, look for new means of translating their creative ideas into actions. Stimulation of variable thinking of the participants of the social theater ensures the formation and development of the participants' ability to adequately perceive and evaluate the subtle nuances of the meaning interpretation of the collision and behavior of the characters.

Fourth. A theatrical miniature enables to respond quickly to current events in external educational environments. The participants of the social theater of disabled children record situations and everyday events that can be "melted down" into a theatrical miniature. Consequently, observation and creative activity of the participants is stimulated not only in the interpretation of the image but also in the development of dramatic material. In the form of the following theatrical miniatures standard models of social interactions in various life situations can also be reproduced: "Mailing", "Visiting the exhibition", "A lost child", "At the doctor's office", "A volunteer", "A birthday", "We are going hiking", "Let's make it up", "How much does it cost?", "Visiting someone", "Welcoming guests", "An intermission", "A baby lost", "Come on, let's do it together", "I myself", "Believe me", "We are so different but still we are together", "Help me", "Do not worry", etc. E.V. Bondarevskaya and S.V. Kulnevich denoted this kind of meaningful activity as "involvement in

life-creativity" [18].

Fifth. As we already noted above, a theatrical miniature is connected not only with the interpretation of characterological features and motives of characters' actions but also with the "transfer" of value conclusions from the game collision to life practice. To put it differently, an established dialogue with the "character in a situation" enables to perceive the game conflict as an element of one's own social experience. This effect is greatly enhanced if in a compact theatrical miniature that acquires the value of a parable, a deep, and in some cases, without exaggeration, meaning of cosmic scale is expressed.

Sixth. Work on the role is not limited to interpretations of characterological features and motives of actions of a character. A character is "immersed" in the situation. Therefore, collision "knots" are often associated with non-linear reactions of characters, when implicit meaning is assumed in their words and actions. So Br'er Rabbit, a central figure of a well-known fairy-tale by J. Harris, being trapped, asked Br'er Fox to do whatever he wanted but not to throw him in the briar patch, although in fact that was what he sought (and achieved, using a meaning opposition).

Seventh. A theatrical miniature enables to involve audience into action (for, instance, relatives). It has the ability of meaningful influence and "contagiousness" since creative findings of the participants – images, ideas, phrases – "are adopted by life" sometimes becoming important elements of the socio-cultural environment of a family of children's team.

V. CONCLUSION

The difficulties of socialization experienced by disabled children are of complex nature. Obviously, this complex nature must be opposed by another one – the complexity of psychological and pedagogical means of disabled children's socialization and overcoming the defects of social adaptation. The theatrical and creative activity of pupils is a complex synthetic socializing system in terms of its content. It is built on the basis of a meaningful dialogue between the participants of the social theater and time, culture, Others, characters of theatrical performance, a conflict situation and, finally, with themselves. It is a dialogue that enables a participant to become aware of oneself as a socially active being included in various socio-cultural environments, social connections and relationships. A dialogue provides the "exit" of the personality beyond the limits of one's own subjectivity, the formation of a sense of responsibility and the ability for effective existential choices. Free transition from role to role, "trying on" a variety of "social costumes" stimulate the search for one's own "social face", and deep immersion into the psychological world of a character keeps the participants from primitive playing performance, aiming them at understanding and searching for a psychologically and socially justified pattern of behavior.



Participating in the social theater creates conditions not only for efficient socialization of disabled children but also for preventing deprivations, developing the ability for self-regulation through the interiorization of external connections and relationships, values and norms. All this enables disabled children to form consistent guidelines in building harmonious social relations and interactions.

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