

Hobbies and interests of younger pupils with intellectual disorders

Introduction

Intellectual disorders affects 1% of all the people. It can be a result of pathomorphisms or the damage of the brain in the foetal life, during a childbirth or soon postnatally. One of essential problems of the special education is the inclusion of retarded persons into the stream of social life, despite their psychological and physical disabilities. Every human being, also the intellectually retarded feels the need of being useful, wants to have an opportunity to communicate with other people, wishes to use from cultural assets and create the culture, as well. The mental retardation, though „dissimilar” in some respects, are not completely different, they can function normally with a little proper help, with the advantage for themselves and the society. Like everyone else, they have their own interests, passions and hobbies.

The problem of interests of younger pupils still has not been examined sufficiently in every respect, few are publications in this range, as well.

The notion of curiosity, interests and factors determining their development

Interests come into being and are shaped in relations with the outside world. They are normally preceded by curiosity which is the most important factor contributing to the cognition of the world. „An interested mind is constantly on the go, it investigates and seeks material for the thought, like a strong and sound body is in the continuous search of food”¹. An observation of a small child reveals his or her incessant act of investigation and trying everything, experimenting with the surrounding objects. Where the astonishment appears, one can also encounter a lively thirst of new experiences and contacts with new and various facts. The cognition of occurrences which would evoke curiosity are usually accompanied by positive feelings, e.g.: satisfaction, joy, pleasure, contentedness.

Curiosity is qualified in the psychological literature as „the manifestation of the cognitive activity under the influence of certain phenomena, events, problems, without the order or

¹ J. Dewey: *Jak myślimy?*, Warszawa 1988, PWN, p. 57.

the external compulsion”². As defined by „The Dictionary of Polish”, curiosity is „an inclination, a strife for the recognition of something, a wish of learning about something, interest in something, curiosity, an interest”³.

Psychologists agreeably claim that a child who does not have any opportunity to satisfy his or her own curiosity, in the future will not feel a sufficient motivation for learning, and taking up a hobby will seem to him or her as something trivial and uninteresting⁴.

A teacher wanting to arouse the cognitive curiosity in children, and then maintain it, should provide the adjustment of the appropriate rate, the maximum communicability, the form and the manner as well as the variety of the conveyed meaning. A higher degree of curiosity is developed under of the social influences. In a certain moment the child is well-informed that he or she can solicit other persons via interrogation so as to enrich his or her own supply of experiences. In time the curiosity changes into an interest in problems which appeared from the observation of things and the gathered material. According to A. Gurycka, this interest is a „relatively permanent and observable striving for the cognition of the surrounding world, assuming the shape of the oriented cognitive activity of definite intensification, appearing in the selective relation to the surrounding phenomena, i.e. 1 - in perception of definite features of objects and their relationships, the relationship occurring between them, and also selected problems; 2 - in the pursuit of examining them, studying them, solving them and 3 - in experiencing various feelings (both positive and negative) connected with the acquisition and possession of knowledge”⁵.

According to E.B. Hurlock, „interests are a source of motivation which prompts a human being to activities compliant with his or her desires in the situation, when there is an opportunity of a free choice”⁶. When an individual feels that something bring him benefit and satisfaction, he or she develops interests in this direction.

Interests play an essential part on every stage of human development, yet they are subject to changes in the course of the physical and intellectual development. In one’s childhood they provide the motivation to learn, influence one’s behaviour and attitudes as well as the intensity of children’s aspirations.

The development of interests depends on many factors, most important of which are :

² B. Zdrowska: Ciekawość poznawcza dzieci 4- i 6-letnich. *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* 1994/3-4, p. 28.

³ Słownik języka polskiego. Warszawa 1978, PWN, p. 295.

⁴ P. Pellegrino: *Sztuka wychowania*. Warszawa 2003, Wydawnictwo Salezjańskie, p. 73.

⁵ A. Gurycka: *Zainteresowania*. W: W. Szewczuk /ed./: *Encyklopedia Psychologii*. Warszawa 1998, Fundacja Innowacja, p. 1078

⁶ E.B. Hurlock: *Rozwój dziecka*. Warszawa 1985, PWN, p. 244.

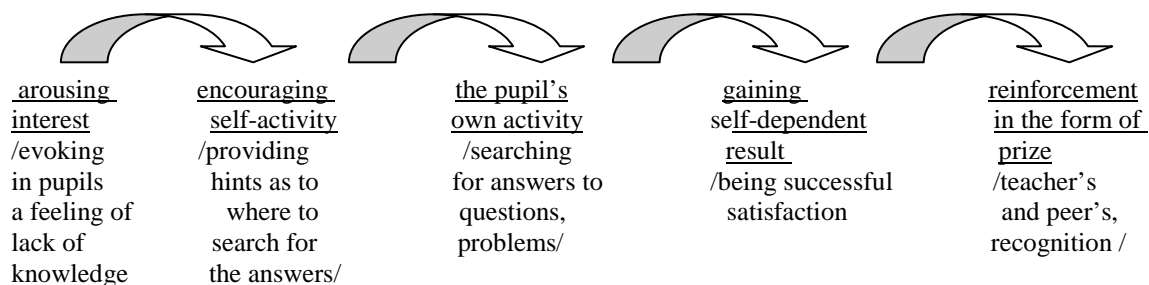
- Biogenetic factors - age, sex, abilities;
- social and cultural factors - personal patterns, a world of objects, peers, accessibility to cultural resources, programmes and methods of education.

The process of interests' development goes through the four phases:

- the curiosity of the world in the face of everything that is new, unknown, strange, unclear;
- the selection of the cognitive activity impulses, concentrating the cognitive activity on definite impulses which are supposed to become the content of interests;
- the personal satisfaction from the research results and the resistance to a failure in this range;
- the self-amplification of new interests via the waking up "the hunger for knowledge" in a given sphere, the raise of the level of sensitivity to novelty and the vagueness within the range of the woken interests which force to further cognitive activities.⁷

The course of the interests development is represented in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 The process of interests development



The content of interests depends on first of all: cultural factors, social experiences, pedagogical tendencies, individual living conditions of children.

Interests most frequently remain related to the needs currently felt and are conducive to their satisfaction. The bigger the need has been satisfied, the stronger and more permanent the interests will be. R. Więckowski (1985, p.3), distinguishes two basic types of interests: passive and active.⁸ The passive interests are frequently defined as declarative interests. A child declares that he or she is interested in something. This kind of interests can be investigated - depending on the child's age - by means of conversations, written

⁷ A. Gurycka: Zainteresowania. W: W. Szewczuk /red./: Encyklopedia Psychologii. Warszawa 1998, Fundacja Innowacja, p. 1082.

⁸ R. Więckowski: Zainteresowania dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym. *Życie Szkoły* 1985/1, p. 3.

statements, tests, questionnaires. If the child not only ascertains that he or she is interested in something, but also he or she acts towards penetration into the object of his or her own cognitive endeavour, then we can speak about the active interests, which we can examine based on the conducted observation of the child's behaviour in different situations.

With reference to the intellectually retarded children, the development of interests can be limited.

Research problems and the methodology of research

The basic aim of the conducted research was the recognition of interests of children with the intellectual handicap in the mild degree, in the younger school age. Research covered 53 pupils /23 girls and 30 boys/, from the grades I to III of the District Complex Of Special Schools in Legionowo /the Mazovian province/ as well as classes in integrated elementary schools in Łęczna /the province of Lublin/.

The research problem to be solved was contained in the question: What kind of interest do the children with degree of a mild intellectual disorders develop in the younger school age?

An enormously precious research technique of pupils interests is the technique of observation which can take different forms. According to the degree of the methodological correctness one can favour:

- the technique of casual observation,
- the technique of observational diaries ,
- the technique of categorised observation.⁹

The research of interests of schoolboys from classes I – III was conducted with the use of the categorised observation and the conversation questionnaire. The conversation questionnaire was used for the measurement of interests expressed verbally; it enabled to find answers to the following questions:

- How do children with the mild degree of intellectual handicap spend their time free from school activities?
- What games and toys are preferred among the examined children?
- What do they like collecting?
- What books, periodicals, television programmes and computer games are they interested in most?

⁹

M. Łobocki: Metody badań pedagogicznych. Warszawa 1984, PWN, . 128.

- What are the jobs of their dreams?

The observation was used in order to evaluate the interests shown in activity. There was an attempt to answer the following questions:

- With what objects do children play most often during spontaneous activities?
- With what topics do they raise most often in their conversations with adults or peers?
- What subject matter do they take up most often in spontaneously performed art works?

Findings

On the ground of the effected conversations on the ways of spending free time it has been stated that: 39.6% of the examined pupils most willingly plays games, 20.8% watches television, 15.1% plays football, 11.3% cycles, 7.5% plays computer games and 5.7% listens to music. Since most of the examined children play in their free time, it was examined what kind of games and toys they prefer. The gathered data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Games and toys preferred by children in the younger school age with the intellectual disorders /verbal declarations/

No.	Types of games	Girls N=23		Boys N=30		Total N=53	
		number	%	number	%	number	%
1.	Constructional /blocks, puzzles, sand, plasticine/	4	17,4	8	26,7	12	22,6
2.	Thematic /toy cars, dolls, mascots, materials on nature/	11	47,8	5	16,7	16	30,2
3.	Motor outdoor activities /with a ball, playing tag, running, jumping, cycling/	6	26,1	16	53,3	22	41,5
4.	Musical /listening to music, singing/	2	8,7	1	3,3	3	5,7

As shown by the data, the girls prefer slightly different games and toys from the boys. The most popular among the girls are games /47.8%/ with the use of dolls, mascots, various materials on nature and motor outdoor games /26.1%/, e.g. cycling, walking. Less attractive activities were constructional games /17.4%/. Two girls /8.7%/ declared that they like musical games the most, they gladly listen to music and sing.

The boys definitely prefer motor games /53.3%/, the most often mentioned of them are: football, tag, cycling, running and jumping. Secondly they mention constructional games /26.7%/ including: building from blocks and sand, jig-saw puzzle, modelling from

plasticine. Several boys /16.7%/ are interested in thematic games including: playing a policeman, a postman and a vet.

The vast majority of the examined pupils collect different objects, the most frequently mentioned include: mascots, toy cars, dolls, different hair decoration, postcards with animals, school accessories, computer games, natural materials /chestnuts, cones, shells, stones/. A part of the examined children /24.5%/ declared that they collected nothing.

The preferred books, periodicals and television programmes watched most often are concerned with storybooks. According to the children they should be colourful and interesting. What is alarming is the fact that 17% of the examined pupils does not like books.

The children's favourite games and objects which they gladly play are often related with their dream jobs, however, 25 pupils in the 53 examined /which constitutes 47.2%/, has difficulty in declaring their future occupation. The jobs mentioned most often by the boys are: a policeman, a driver, a carpenter, a sportsman, a vet, a postman. The most interesting job among the girls were: a hairdresser and a nurse. Other jobs mentioned by the girls are: a singer, an artist, a fortune-teller and a housewife.

The observation of the examined children concerning: the objects chosen most often to play with, the topics of conversations with adults and peers, themes of spontaneously performed art works, enabled to make an attempt to state the revealed interests. The data gathered in the research are represented by the Table 2.

Table 2 Hobbies and interests of children in the younger school age with intellectual disorders /revealed in activities/

No.	Types of hobbies and interest	Girls N=23		Boys N=30		Total N=53	
		1	%	1	%	1	%
1.	computer	1	4,3	6	20,0	7	13,2
2	musical	2	8,7	1	3,3	3	5,7
3	artistic	4	17,4	2	6,7	6	11,3
4	drama (theatrical)	5	21,7	3	10,0	8	15,1
5	sports	2	8,7	9	30,0	11	20,8
6	natural science	3	13,1	2	6,7	5	9,4
7	no obbes or interests	6	26,1	7	23,3	13	24,5

As shown by the Table 2. 40 in the 53 examined pupils of classes I - III, which constitutes 75.5% - have revealed various hobbies and interests. The most popular of them are connected with sports /20.8 % of the examined/, the second position is drama

(theatrical) interests /15.1 %/, in the further order: computer /13.2%/, artistic /11.3 /, natural science /9.4%/ and musical /5.7%/. The greatest number of girls have shown drama (theatrical) /21.7%/, artistic /17.4%/ and natural science/13.1%/ interests, yet most of the boys declared sports /30%/ and computer /20%/ interests.

Conclusion

The child's environment provides him or her with impulses causing the formation of first childish interests. If a child is taken care of properly, these interests are developed more quickly and have an opportunity to be consolidated.

The most often hobbies and interests shown by the examined children with mental retardation in the light degree are: drama (theatrical), sports, artistic, computer and musical interests. The artistic creativity of the intellectually handicapped persons is developed in such places as: kindergartens, schools, occupational therapy workshops, clubs and club rooms as well as the family environment.

The conducted research has shown that educational facilities take every opportunity to care for the spread of interests of their own charges through organizing additional circles of interests /theatrical, musical, artistic, technical, ecological, sports/. The vast majority of children attends such classes, yet not all the parents take advantage of this offer. The conversations with teachers have revealed that 30.2% parents do not mind the development of their own children's interests, excusing themselves with the lack of time.

In consideration of the important role which hobbies and interests play in the life of a child and then in the life of a grown-up, one ought to appeal to parents so that they will discover and strengthen in their child those hobbies and interests which will be useful to him or her in the psychical and social adaptation.

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