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The role of pedagogical diagnosis in the modeling of therapeutic actions towards a child with an intellectual disability

Introduction

The notion of the efficiency of the rehabilitation process in all psychological, pedagogical or methodological analysis relates to the versatile observation and recognition of the child, so to a deeper diagnosis. This recognition is the basic determinant of the objectives which we set for ourselves in the work with a disabled student, as well as programming the pedagogical actions and a modification of those influences in the course of therapeutic work.

The subject of the diagnosis (Greco. Diagnosis = differentiation, recognition) are the difficulties and failures of the student in the process of acquiring information and skills needed in school, their causes, pathomechanisms and negative consequences for one's further development. The objective of the diagnosis is delivering the data, that constitutes the basis for planning the effective rehabilitation actions, adjusted to the individual differences among children. This is particularly important in the population of the mental disabled children because with accordance with the views of heterochronia of development of those persons, the variety of individual features conduces with different prognosis in the field of rehabilitation.

Good moment for gaining knowledge about the child with mental disability is the initial period of his stay in the special school, which the educationalists call the "initial period". It is obvious that for the systematic, directed work with the child there is needed a recognition of his intellectual abilities, emotional-volitional predispositions, psychical and somatic health condition, social dispositions and environmental conditions. The person who is the most likely to notice first the child's difficulties in the realization of the tasks, set by the educational program in the special school, is the teacher – tutor. In the direct, every-day

contact with the student, through the directed observation, the teacher has the greatest possibilities of observing the developmental problems, difficulties in acquiring the basic school competences and social functioning, and as well behavioral disorders. The correct course of this phase of the diagnostic process depends on the factual knowledge (psychological and pedagogical) of the teacher about the matter of disability, its pathomechanisms and developmental tendencies. Essential here is also a deepened interpretation of observed signs of obstructions against the peer team. The effectiveness of the rehabilitation process through diagnosis depends as well on its being multi-pronged, which means that it is necessary to gather information about a child from several, different fields, such as:

- psychological, referring to information about the level of development of the intellectual, directional – cognitive and executive structures, including mainly visual and auditory perception, motor and articulatory skills, side domination, the orientation of one's body scheme and orientation in space; and the perceptual-motor coordination.
- medical, defining the general physical development of the child, his health condition, anomalies in the physical and psychical efficiency, including receptors. It assumes also the need of possible additional specialist examinations of the clinical nature and medical care.
- social – referring to the gathering of information in the student's family environment (the general situation, life conditions, atmosphere within the family) and the school environment (the child's functioning as a student and class member).
- pedagogical, connected with the level of possessed information and school skills, the range, kind and the specific of the difficulty in learning on a given educational stage.

In this many-sided process of diagnosing, the important role falls to the pedagogical measurement, including the teacher's attempts of the appraisal of acquiring the school skills. Much of the needed data the teacher can find during the analysis of the child's documentation prepared by specialists from the psycho-pedagogical clinic.

Nevertheless, as the after-diagnostic practice shows, what turns out to be important is the data obtained by the teacher on the basis of planned, categorized observations, strengthened by the reliable measurement techniques. The data which the teacher

obtains is often uncompleted, very often already outdated because of the specific profile of the developmental dynamics of children deviated from the intellectual norm.

Directed observation of student's behaviors and activities showing their level of psychomotor development

The usage of the "Observational Sheet of Behavior of the First Grade Child from a Special School", developed by Joanna Głodkowska from WSPS in Warsaw¹, can be helpful for a teacher for gaining knowledge about the child and on this basis forecast school achievements. According to constructive assumptions, the observational sheet must serve for assessment of the school maturity of the child starting the special education. Mainly it analyzes the mentally disabled child's behaviors, which disturbances make difficult acquiring mathematical experiences. However, the results of the measurement gathered on the basis of this technique can give the teacher a good orientation in different areas of mental, motivational-emotional and social functioning of the child, at the same time revealing disorders and imperfections that make difficult acquiring different fields of knowledge and school techniques. Moreover, there is assumed a possibility of using this technique in the examination of first and second grade students of special school and of the "zero" class of the general school.

The observational sheet includes following child's data categories:

- A. Preliminary information about the child
- B. Child's behavior against the class mates during gathering works
- C. Child's behavior during motor plays

¹ J. Głodkowska, Środowisko rodzinne dziecka upośledzonego umysłowo w stopniu lekkim rozpoczynającego naukę w klasie pierwszej w szkole podstawowej specjalnej. „Roczniki Pedagogiki Specjalnej”, T. 6, WSPS, Warszawa 1995.

D. Child's behavior during independent mental work

E. Child's behavior during independent manual work.

The first category of the knowledge of the child (A) includes data about: hitherto education of the child, his level of mental and physical development, family, peer environment, etc.

The behaviors included in the second category(B) are observational for the teacher during the activities conducted with the whole class, and they give a detailed picture of particular fields of mental maturity of the child (the development of the speech and verbal contact, the development of visual and auditory perception, the ability to memorize and reproduction, the knowledge resources about the nearest surrounding and changes going on in the nature, the state of hitherto mathematical intuitions).

In the category marked as C there is observed a specific kind of child's activity during motor plays, which reveals the child's level of psychomotor maturity(understanding the rules of plays and games, motor efficiency and visual-motor coordination, orientation in the body schema and spatial orientation in the nearest surrounding).

In the next category(D) of the knowledge of the student, the teacher describes child's behaviors in the independent mental activity, what reveals the maturity of instrumental dispositions, as well as directional (readiness and involvement in the independent mental activity),of the student for the activities during school work.

The last category on the sheet(F) gives basis to the analyses of the efficiency of executing manual work and the readiness and involvement in the manual activity, because it describes behaviors of the student observed during the carrying out art and technical works and practical activities, for example self-service activities, cutting with scissors, stringing necklace, making a figural puzzle and a number of others.

The detailed examination procedure for the teacher, the way of evaluating and interpreting of obtained diagnostic data is presented by J. Głodkowska.

Selected attempts of pedagogical assessment of student's school abilities

In literature on the subject the pedagogical diagnosis is usually identified with the measurement and evaluation of the teaching results by checking the students' knowledge and revealing the range of school difficulties. The role of the diagnostic tools play various tests of information in the cadre of particular school subjects, which usually do not full-fill the rigors set for tests, and the quantitative evaluation is insufficient from the point of view of the planned pedagogical therapy. An even bigger arbitrariness we encounter in the moment of the examination of the basic school competences, like reading and writing. The "Quick Reading Test" by J. Konopnicki ², traditionally used in the pedagogical diagnosis examines the number of words read per minute. Those are one-syllable words, not context-connected, which make the diagnostic value of the test limited. The child reading texts, which he encounters in natural class circumstances, include words of different length, more or less known, so demanding different perception time. With the words not connected by context, the semantic aspect of the ability of reading cannot be done; only the analysis of the technical side of reading in the relation to the educational stage can be made.

The pedagogical aspect of the diagnosis of the difficulties of mastering to read and write should take into consideration finding the answer to the question, what is the present level of mastered skills by particular students of a given school class and the whole team? And which partial skills have not been acquired so far and need further practice? The methodological legitimacy of using typical tests for the students of special schools in examinations of mentally disabled children should be underlined.

Those requirements are fulfilled by the "Test of Reading Abilities Assessment" (the technique and comprehension) by Józefa Bałachowicz. This test was elaborated for the mentally disabled children. I used this test for the purposes of my empirical

² J. Konopnicki, *Problem opóźnienia w nauce szkolnej*, Ossolineum, Wrocław- Warszawa- Kraków, 1961.

studies on the ability of reading of the third grade students included in the individual revalidation in all special schools in Szczecin, Police and Stargard. The test allowed me to realize the methodological objectives, which I assumed upon the basis of the indicated studies.

The test comprises of eight tasks, which include 46 words of different length. The test has a form of a simple essay. The lexical layer of the text is closely connected with the linguistic experience of the students of lower grades, because the vocabulary included in it is in an active or passive children's dictionary. Referring to the individual experiences of the students and their behaviors shaped in nearest surroundings enables the students to anticipate next contents during the reading and to regulate the tempo.

The test used for the assessment of efficiency of reading aloud has two equivalent functions: for the initial diagnostic assessment and a controlled assessment. The questions attached to the test serve to estimate the meaning aspect of the reading ability of the students and they reveal the possibilities of the hierarchical creations of representations of the text by mentally disabled children on the given levels: elementary, literal and interpretational level of reading with comprehension. In connection with that the received diagnosis in the field of reading has a deepened character and reveals possibilities of the dynamics of the disabled students' development. The characteristics of the results of those studies together with detailed analysis: how to use a test? And how to interpret results? Can be found in the literature about given matter.

The next kind of basic school competences of the child, which subordinates to permanent teacher's assessment, is the degree of mastered writing ability. The degree is examined in three kinds of trials:

- 1.rewriting
- 2.writing from memory
- 3.writing what one hears

The objective of this trials is to grasp significant details which concern the quality of writing (error characteristics, frequency of making errors) and the writing technique (including the positioning of the hand and holding the writing tool) and the evaluation of the level of graphic writing.

Some help for the teacher in the assessment of the level of discussed ability and the evaluation of the child's progress on the consecutive levels of education constitute a "trial writing test" by T. Straburzyńska, T. Śliwińska and J. Wojnarowska – Stawowy³ for mentally disabled children from the classes of integrated education. The most versatile, but at the same time the most difficult for children, is the "trial of independent writing" on a given topic, related with the everyday experiences of the children, for example, "Write several sentences about your mum's work at home". What is as well important is the appearance of the notebook: its esthetics, the differences in school and home notes, the number of deletions and corrections and the technical obstructions for the left-handed students.

In the system of help for the children with difficulties in learning, the diagnosis, as recognizing the causes, symptoms and consequences of developmental disturbances, gives basis for planning proper therapeutic actions or to make a decision about the further education of the child.

The organization of the psycho-pedagogical help in the new reformed system of education is regulated by the Decree of the Ministry of National Education and Sport from 7th January 2003. According to this act the child has the right to obtain the psycho-pedagogical help in the public schools and other institutions (in the common and special educational system), which is organized especially in the form of:

1. didactic-compensatory activities;

³ T. Straburzyńska, T. Śliwińska, Seria testów czytania i pisanie dla klas I-III szkoły podstawowej, RiTV, Warszawa 1983.

2. specialistic activities: corrective-compensational, speech-therapeutic, socio-therapeutic and other therapeutic activities.

Within the framework of those activities there is scheduled usually a team work, simultaneously stressing their maximal individualization depending on individual prognosis and children's needs. It is defined by the following schema of tasks:

- Tasks available to children without the help of the teacher,
- Tasks available only with the help and supervision of the teacher, so lying in the sphere of the nearest development of the child (so called "tomorrow" of the child's development)
- Tasks not accomplishable even with the help of the teacher, which the child has to mature enough to master them during the therapeutic actions.

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