

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH RISKS TO CHILDREN IN MODERN EDUCATION



The article focuses on the psychological threats to the health of children and youth emanating from the education system and education: relations of power between teachers and children, parents' ambition to train psychologically and physiologically immature children, etc. The author exposes the contradiction between the set out humanistic approach and the actual directive training mechanisms in educational institutions as well as the promotion of teachers' consumer attitude to the student's health. The author arrives at a conclusion that students' health is sacrificed to academic achievements.

Key words: psychological health risks, healthy lifestyle attitude and behavior.

Modern psychology considers education a principal social activity in the creation of a number of systemic social and mental impacts in the life of society: in particular, in the acquisition of traditions, values, standards and attitudes of behaviour of large and small social groups, formation of a repertoire of personal, social and professional competences necessary for the socialisation of a personality, and human development as an important condition for the competitiveness of the state [3].

Unfortunately, one has to admit that the ambition to succeed in this activity implies potential risks of psychological and socio-psychological origin to the health of students.

Psychological risks to the health and development of a child in an education institution are usually defined as a more or less direct threat of negative consequences resulting from the influence of various environmental and microenvironmental factors, one of the most significant of which is a rather hostile social environment which a person is exposed to since childhood [7].

One of the major risk factors in preschool educational institutions is the emotionally denying type of interaction between the child, and the teacher and other children. Over many years of research, we have not encountered a single kindergarten (either in the Kaliningrad region or in other regions), which did not have students falling in the category of outsiders. Today, a child or a teenager can be openly made fun of; the whole group can get involved in the discussion of their appearance, intelligence or personal qualities. The result is the distortion of the formation of a basic attitude towards the world, and personal and emotional disorders leading to psychosomatic diseases [6].

Another risk factor for the health of a preschool or primary school student is a positive attitude of parents towards early training. The advancement of the programmes oriented towards early development of writing and counting skills results in psychological and physiologically immature children starting learning at an early age, which turns out to be too demanding for their bodies and nervous systems, i. e. harmful for both their physical and mental health.

An increase in the number of children with the neuropsychological condition of developmental disorders in the study groups (including preschool groups) gives rise to concerns among psychologists. Various inborn brain development disorders result in the deficiency in its early developing structures. The consequence is the dysontogenesis in the formation of later developing brain structures and related disorders affecting most functional systems of the body.

It is the neuropsychological status of developmental disorder that causes destructive behaviour in children and teenagers. Without adequate psychological management, such children fall into the risk group. The school students with cognitive disorders are unable to meet the expectations of parents and teachers. Due to the absence of individual life programmes and individual world view, their suggestibility increases manifold. Thus, such children are easily suggestible and inclined to deviate from the healthy lifestyle behaviour.

However, disorders and individual variations in brain development most severely affect the functioning of the later developing structure — in particular, speech development and control (stammering, dysgraphia, dyslalia, etc). This phenomenon indicates the problems in the development of consciousness and behaviour control, including that in the field of health.

Another psychological risk factor is the relations of power between the teacher and the student. The development crises (3 years, 6 years, early teens) described by the classics of psychology when taking place against the background of the evaluative disciplinary system based on the teacher's domination may lead to the "acquired helplessness" syndrome in obedient students, which makes the formation of the individual level of health protection almost impossible.

The historically developed in Russian education asymmetric relations of power between the teacher and the student, and the teacher and the student's parents, within which the need to adapt to the teacher's opinion dominates over the individual features of the child, ignore the student's psychological discomfort, stimulate and encourage the conformity behaviour styles.

At the same time, it is general knowledge that the widening of the generation gap in our society stems from the painful transformation of the collectivist self-concept of the Soviet people into the self-concept of the individualistic Western culture with its behavioural strategies, mottoes and priorities.

However, instead of the civilised formation of "European" consciousness in youth, support of universal values, encouragement of behaviour compatible with political pluralism and obedience to law, helping young people with understanding global processes, developing a "common language", promoting freedom of opinion, we experience a spontaneous transformation of the elements of consciousness and its innate behavioural forms according to the Western pattern, which is not sustained by the education means. In such

cases, other mechanisms based on pop music, literature, cinema, television, media — the product of which is a surrogate of hardly the best achievements of Western culture, which are, however, more or less relevant to the actual social situation — come to fore.

Apparently, there is a need to revise the relations of power and orientate teachers towards the liberalisation of their interaction with students, formation of an active behavioural strategy of a "winner" personality characterised by a positive self-image, high achievement motivation, tolerance to changes, mobility, no fear of mistakes, and ability to act independently in competitive conditions.

However, there are certain remarkable examples in this field but these projects are not wide-spread at the moment. The transmission of the out-dated power relation system eliminates the effect of cooperation, interaction and prevention as the principles of the 21st century education and ensures the education function as an institute of inheritance.

At first sight, it cannot entail significant consequences for children's health. But the distant effect can manifest itself in the fact that children, accustomed to the out-dated model of cultural experience transmission, can turn out to be incapable of creating new, called for living conditions and be able only to reproduce the structures and style pertaining to the previous generation, being rather the subjects of control or regulation than the agents. A notable example is the associations of young people with very pronounced and distorted nationalistic attitudes as well as religious sects akin to "White Brotherhood", "Aum Shinrikyo", the "Church of Scientology", etc.

Pedagogical dictate leads to the formation of acquired helplessness instead of adaptability and self-control in most students, while, as we know, the aforementioned process would be most efficient if the individual could participate in it being able to transform external social condition, set their own targets, and exercise internal self-control provided the absence of external compulsion and imposing of subject-agent relations.

However, one cannot exclude the paradoxical variant — the formation of protest self-destructive behaviour forms in the youth: either passive (fantasy fans) or active (psychoactive drug users) ones. In both cases, one cannot speak of the transmission of a socially acceptable health attitude by the education means.

Since education is the main sociogenetic mechanism of social intelligence and mentality reproduction, it is difficult even to imagine and predict the range of distant consequences that could be brought about by the lack of precise and timely changes in the existent hierarchy of the power relations between students and teachers, as well as other agents of the educational process in the framework of the education reform.

It is more probable that the stereotypes and behaviour models characteristic of most teachers in a traditional society, akin to that our country once was, are conservative and irreversible. On the one hand, this conservatism creates an illusion of stability when the amount of social changes crosses the stress threshold; on the other hand it is responsible for the cultural "gap" between Russian and international students.

Thus, the problem of power relations in pedagogical interaction — a particular case of the institutional education crises — becomes a risk factor for the development of the sphere of will control, children's responsibility and

motivation and, hence, for the development of the basics of the healthy lifestyle behaviour [5; 7].

One of the most dangerous consequences could be the non-recognition of the referential meaning of the educational environment of the education institution by the student when the child/teenager rejects the values and standards of the school or tries to quit it.

Emotional burnout in teachers

The psychological condition of teachers is affected by modern educational conditions. Many of them suffer from the psychological burnout syndrome (PBS) or psychological disorganisation, which manifests itself in emotional exhaustion, a negative attitude to students, the feeling of professional incompetence and unsuccessfulness, fatigue, the loss of zest for life, etc. According to our data, more than a half of school teachers in city schools fall into the PBS risk group; 28 % already developed its symptoms, and only 11 % of the teachers examined are psychologically healthy, professionally efficient and do not require any psychological rehabilitation. Without the improvement of the psychological health of teachers, one cannot speak of the creation of favourable conditions for the physical and psychological health of students.

The study into psychological health risks to children gives grounds to interpret them as systematic events, which are wide spread in the conditions of modern kindergartens and schools. However, unlike natural disasters, famine and epidemics, the aforementioned factors are institutionalised and formally harmonised with the legal and social structure of our society. In other words, within the educational system, they are the responsibility of people, state education institutions and politicians. There is an evident contradiction between the set out children-oriented humanistic approach and the actual directive mechanisms of education and training management at education institutions. The result is the wide-spread consumer attitude of teachers to the health of students — health is sacrificed to academic achievements. Today's education is not aimed at developing individual health lifestyle mechanisms in students.

Today, the targeted systematic influence on a personality aimed to develop the psychological bases of the healthy lifestyle is non-existent in the educational process, which results in the absence of a sensitive period of socialisation in the field of health — the period, which, to a great extent, determines the future state of health. Local health promotion measures and programmes for children and youth are not oriented towards the integral psychological health model and are not incorporated in the self-preservation mechanism. Thus the health protection skills and readiness are not formed or are deficient. Innovative pedagogic technologies are not applied to modelling health and its determinants.

Risks to health are increased by the poor connections between the education system and other social institutions (family, healthcare, media, etc). A study into mass media reveals a lack of cultural scenarios, and healthcare samples and models for children and youth, as well as their promotion through media and other channels.

The aggregate of the above mentioned risk factors affects the psychological basis of health protection of preschool and school children. Our conclusions were supported by the empirical examination of more than 300 students conducted according to a specially developed methodology at all stages and levels at the educational institutions of the Kaliningrad region. The results of the study show a negative dynamics of the healthy lifestyle attitude and behaviour indicators in preschool and school children, and college and university students. The most successful group in terms of healthy lifestyle behaviour indicators is preschool children (up to 80 % showed the medium or high level of a healthy lifestyle parameter). However, as the age and education stage of the students increase, the situation gets worse.

The healthy lifestyle attitude of school children is rich in contradictions both within and between its elements. The most developed component is the cognitive one, which embraces certain ideas of health and awareness of how to maintain it. However, the discrepancy with the emotional and incentive components significantly affects the readiness of school and university students for taking individual health maintenance measures. The most problematic areas, from the point of view of self-preservation psychology, are those of nutrition, self-preservation, self-destructive activities, and that of sexual relations when speaking of teenagers, among which 70 % of respondents showed the features of the self-destructive behaviour.

The examination of the control group — medical staff — showed the prevalence of low healthy lifestyle attitude and behaviour (more than 60 %), which indicates poor development of the psychological basis of healthy lifestyle through transmission of knowledge (even at the professional level).

In conclusion, I would like to mention that the aforementioned psychological factors affect socialisation in the field of health, which takes place in the educational process. To improve the health of the succeeding generation, it is necessary to introduce a new student health protection model constructed in view of the psychological healthy lifestyle mechanisms.

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