
SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL WORK WITH DIFFICULT CHILDREN

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Abstract: An analysis of the social pedagogical work with difficult children is presented, outlining characteristics, specifics and approaches for prevention and social accompaniment. In order to highlight the specifics of this group of children, a comparison is made with two other groups of children in a situation of life difficulty - "socially disadvantaged children" and "children at risk". The analysis refers to the understanding that difficult children are children with impaired emotional development, difficulty in communicating with others and disrupted behavioral control, all of which can lead to consequences both on a personal and behavioral level. It is emphasized that difficult children turn into such in situations where adults cannot find an adequate approach to them, and most often these adults are members of the family, parents, or teachers. An overview of scientific positions on difficult children by English, American, Russian and Bulgarian researchers is offered. This is the basis for outlining the main spheres which affect children negatively and categorize them as "difficult children" - emotional-personal; learning-cognitive; behavioral; somatic. The reasons for children's difficult behavior are examined, including: the family and the flaws in it; the lack of spiritual connection between parents and children; the asocial environment; participation in criminal groups; errors in the work of educational institutions; economic difficulties that have influenced all spheres of public life. The characteristics of problem children are presented that account for the formulation of the principles of social pedagogical work with them. It is emphasized that one of the important approaches in the work is the development of skills for social inclusion, social expression and self-assertion. The model for social pedagogical work with difficult children is developed in two aspects: preventive work and social accompaniment. Preventive work consists in constantly informing all stakeholders - teachers, educators, non-pedagogical staff in educational institutions and the family on the opportunities for preventing "difficult children" on the one hand, and ensuring interaction between the participants in the preventive activities as well as striving to attract more organizations and institutions, on the other. The social accompaniment as a social pedagogical work includes: identification of children with difficult behavior at the earliest stage of the disadaptation process, diagnosis of the factors of the difficult behavior and the reasons for the disadvantage, preparation of an individual road map for working with the child, implementation of the individual program for accompanying the child, measuring and analyzing the results of the child's work and his / her close circle.

Keywords: difficult children, children at risk, socially disadvantaged children, family, social pedagogical work.

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholarly literature offers different concepts of children with disadvantages that result from unfavorable personal, social and cognitive aspects and living conditions, which disadvantages put them in a situation different from what is generally accepted as normal for their development. Such concepts include "children with difficult behavior" (difficult children, problem children), "socially disadvantaged children" and "children at risk". These groups have similar characteristics as a result of the unfavorable life situation of the children but have their own distinctive features. What is of interest in terms of professional practice and scientific challenge is the study of the similarities and differences between the three groups, not for the sake of study itself, as they concern children with certain deficits resulting from needs that have not been satisfied. It is precisely the revealing of these deficits, their categorization and the clear definition of the problem that can help, with the application of the appropriate approaches, deal with the problematic situations that impede the adequate growth and development of the child as a psychologically and emotionally healthy person with adequate behaviour.

2. CHILDREN WITH DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR – DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS

In order to derive the specifics of the "difficult children" group, it is advisable to highlight the differences between the groups of children in difficulty. It can generally be said that a child develops fully under the conditions of effective communication, gradual and progressive guidance for achieving personal life goals provided by family, pedagogical factors and other significant adults; as well as conditions of any kind necessary for the effective development of the potential. These are necessary factors for the formation of a person confident in their qualities, with the ability to recognize and successfully overcome the difficulties in life.

In general, risk is perceived as a situation that impedes or prevents the child from developing fully in a psycho-physiological, personal-cognitive and emotional-behavioral aspect, which in turn results in a risk for the child itself. Also, risk manifests itself as a disadvantage due to failure in particular activity resulting from a precarious circumstance, which leads to complications, prevents the children's adaptation to the normal life in society, and this

constitutes a risk in two dimensions - both for the child and for the community, as the behavior is contrary to accepted norms of life in society. The second aspect of risk is emerging as the main distinctive feature of children at risk and children with difficult behavior.

When it comes to children with problems, other commonly used concepts include: socially disadvantaged children, children with asocial behavior, children with deviant behavior, children with criminal behavior, and each of these builds the profile of so-called "children at risk ". Because of this overwhelming perimeter of problems, the group "children at risk" is multidimensional and comprising different specifics related to the individual risk profile. It is important to specify that for disadvantaged children the normal physical, mental and social functioning are disrupted, which prevents them from having a fulfilling life, high self-esteem, from being able to develop and improve. In this group of children, the risk is hypothetical, as the availability of the necessary resources of the environment - family, friendship, kinship, school, etc., and their acknowledged support as well as the persistent work of professionals, makes it possible that the disadvantaged position does not develop into a risk situation for those children. The disadvantages situation shares certain similarities with the risk but there are also distinct differences. It can be said that inequality does not always end up in a risk for the life and health of the individual, but the risk always puts the person in unfavourable conditions.

The current analysis focuses on children with troubled behavior in order to emphasize the specific need for individual professional approaches towards overcoming the children's self-destructive behavior and towards streamlining their energy and talents in the right direction.

The social category "difficult children" has been analyzed recurrently in scientific research practice, but it should be taken into account that the term is still used in a different situational context. Very often, the term difficult children refers to children with learning difficulties that are the result of personal psychological peculiarities, of the lack of understanding on the part of parents, teachers and other important figures in the child's life. In other cases, this means children with conduct control disorder and communicative deficiencies that may affect them both on personality and behavioral levels.

According to the English researcher M. Rutter, children's emotional development is often impaired. In such cases, he speaks of a difficult behavior that leads to complications in the psychological development of children. Many of these complications are associated with deviations from normal behavior, and not with symptoms of a mental disorder. According to him, this category includes (Rättter, 1987: 19-39): children whose development and behavior are inadequate to their age and whose proper gender identification has not been formed; children subjected to adverse factors for prolonged periods of time; children experiencing the turmoil of changed living conditions – the arrival of a new family member, the death of a relative, etc .; children experiencing the influence of negative socio-cultural environment; children with various developmental disorders; children with strong emotional sensitivity; children with limited opportunities for social development; children living in social circumstances that hinder their development; children who, with their behavior, impede the normal life and activity of others, etc.

Russian scholarly literature discusses the cases of children not comprehending the lesson, going into conflict with teachers, rebelling in order to claim their rights, finding it difficult to realize the responsibility for their actions and deeds. Again, it is emphasized that difficult children become such in situations where adults cannot find an adequate approach to them. Difficult children, in turn, also experience a lot of predicaments and discomfort. They are the ones who suffer, more often than others, from various failures and, as a result, become a incorrigible loser and this becomes a hindrance for them. (Grancheva, 2013).

In American theory, two main questions arise in reference to children at risk: what behavior is to be considered normal and what deviation from the norm would define someone's behavior as abnormal. Regarding normality, the researchers hold the opinion that it should be defined as harmony between the inner world of the personality and the social community. They also believe that the normal personality adapts to or functions in the social group, establishes and builds relationships and friendships with some of the representatives of this group. On the other hand, they treat behavior that demonstrates difficulties in adapting as behavior deviating from the customs and ethics of the particular community, a behavior that leads to acts of murder, rape, and others. Other American scientists view difficult-to-adapt behavior as a risk to adaptation and integration, with society's priority being in the regulatory mechanism for such conduct (Valkova, 1999: 83-84).

In Bulgaria, the scientific approach to children with problematic conduct is generally expressed in the notion that the term 'difficult children' applies to children who are negligent, undisciplined, unsuccessful, unable to learn and be educated. It is assumed that difficult children are not always hooligans and that they have an interesting and troublesome fate. The difficult child is a misunderstood person that requires an individual approach and whose future depends to a large extent on the guidance received, on conduct management measures and etc. The child that is considered difficult engages, even without any apparent cause, in unacceptable activities such as fighting,

bullying, committing anti-social acts, etc. (Topchiiski, 1998: 48). The distinguished Bulgarian psychologist Gencho Piriyov points out the following: "... when we talk about problem children, we mean those cases where such deviations from the norm are observed that pose serious problems for educating and upbringing" (Piriyov, 1998: 251). The researcher considers that the main characteristics of problem children are the deficient balance with the environment and the inadequate responses to the common family, school and social requirements. Plamen Radev defines the following types of children's problem behavior: behavior that is based mainly on attention to desired events - good judgment, desired activities, etc. ; behavior that allows a person to avoid undesired demands or unwanted events such as: shame, fear, sanctions, etc. ; behavior that responds to sensory effects - relieving pain, seeking comfort, and others. The author refers to the US federal definition of children's behavioral symptoms (Radev, 2013: 349-350) that suggest disturbed behavior: learning difficulties that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors; difficulties in building and maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; general, widespread mood of misery or depression; a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

In many cases, when the groups of children at risk and of children with difficult behavior are identified as overlapping, a more comprehensive approach to the issues is adopted and the groups now includes cases such as: children with poor discipline, children who fail at school, children with different psychosomatic disorders, children from underprivileged families and others. A leading indicator is the personal profile resulting from inadequate family environment. It is of the utmost importance for pedagogical specialists working in kindergartens or schools to recognize and be aware of the personal characteristics and specificities of the development of children at different ages and to take these personality traits into account for adjusting the learning content in accordance with the specific personality traits of the child and his / her behavior that results from them.

Since a sequence of negative situations and negative stimuli is characteristic for children's difficult behavior, it is important to review the reasons for it. Todor Topchiiski's conception determines reasons for the difficult behavior of children as follows: the family and the faults in it; the lack of spiritual connection between parents and children; the asocial environment; the participation in criminal groups; errors in the work of educational institutions; the economic difficulties of the transition period of the country that have affected all spheres of society (Topchiiski, 1998: 48).

The characteristics of problem children give a more concrete idea of the directions that working with them should develop in, such as (Mircheva, 2006: 20-25): Students who do not talk - they are slower and more difficult to communicate with; they avoid committing to anything; they often complain and create the impression of being distracted; they sit quietly, as if they are not interested in what is going on around them; most often these are the children of authoritative parents or of families with conflicting relationships. Students who never listen - these are children who find it hard to concentrate, especially if they do not understand or are not interested; it is difficult for them to stay still for a long time. Dreamers - these children also have a short attention span; their enthusiasm is sparked easily but fades away quickly; they do not disturb the discipline, do not interfere in anything, but think of other more interesting things; their grades vary, which is indicative of inconsistent learning. Loners - this kind of children are not involved in the games and conversations of others; they prefer to sit quietly by themselves and seem to feel most comfortable when no one is interested in them; they are often timid, insecure, painfully sensitive; they are often subject of ridicule and mockery; they find it difficult to establish contact with their classmates; very often these are children who have been victims of violence; they work very well on their own; they do not complain, do not draw other's attention to themselves; they are quiet and shy, and can often fall victim to aggressive behavior on the part of their classmates. Angry students - these are children who always feel offended by someone; at an early age, they often cry at any insignificant occasions, whimper and complain; these children are often neglected at home, and it is mainly by being cross that they manage to win the attention of others. Hypersensitive children - this type of children take every remark as an insult and become upset; sometimes their behavior is unpredictable, and they start crying even at the slightest demonstration of inattention; they often deal with their pain crying and hidden away from the others; they complain very rarely; they leave school without notifying anyone; they tend to escape from home; these are children who have experienced a highly traumatic event, and some of them develop suicidal tendencies. Pessimists - these are children who often whimper and grumble about not being able to cope or understand, but who do not make any effort in order to do so; their behavior can be associated with a fear of failure that is so strong that children prefer not to do anything rather than fail; such children usually come from families where one parent is particularly strict and demanding, while the other is lenient and ready to sacrifice anything for the child; such children are insecure; they can often manifest the symptoms of an inferiority complex. Know-all children - such children think they are always right and are never guilty of any arising tensions; they find it difficult

to accept that they can be guilty even to a slight extent for what happened; they are striving for infallibility. Cheerful students - such children are noisy and unrestrained; they speak and laugh loudly; they ask inappropriate questions while others are focusing on the lesson. Extremely ambitious students - the intense desire of such students to succeed can create conflicts; they cannot accept loss; they cannot stand defeat; winning is extremely important for them and because of this they can, for example, during games turn everyone against themselves. Bullies - these are hyperactive children; they usually use obscene words; they choose a victim to harass; they impose their opinion on others; they try to command the respect of others by shouting and yelling; it is possible that such children are victims of domestic violence or living in families with social or moral degradation.

The different disadvantages and types of conduct of the child that define them as belonging to the group of difficult children are determined by various reasons, where the strength and depth of a problem depend on the interaction of these different causes in real life situations. The nature of the correlation of the abovementioned determines the power and the extent to which the problem is being manifested as a defeat on the child's personal, psychological, emotional, cognitive and behavioral status. "The combination of internal and external conditions affects the strength and depth of the problem that arises from the risk conditions." (Borisova, 2003: 34-35).

3. PRINCIPLES OF THE SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL WORK WITH CHILDREN WITH DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR

The basic principles of social pedagogical work with children with difficult behavior are in line with the needs of these children. The cornerstones in the work include the following: each child is unique and significant; approaching the child as a person with individual peculiarities and interests; emphasizing on the positive behavior of the child; work based on the strengths of the child; forming the child's future life aspirations related to profession and realization; encouragement; involving the child in activities important to them; advising the child about socially useful cooperative activities with other children that will allow for satisfying his / her needs of self-assertion in the group; encouraging the development of useful interests and instilling higher spiritual values in the child; deep trust and respect in the relationship with the child.

4. SPECIFICS OF THE SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL WORK WITH CHILDREN WITH DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR

Research shows that the main areas of concern for children with difficult behavior include: emotional-personal - related to fear, anxiety, character peculiarities, psychopathies; learning-cognitive - low success rate, poor motivation for learning-cognitive activities; behavioral - difficulties in establishing contacts, disadaptation, lack of social skills, etc.; somatic - problems and impediments in the physical and psychological development (Kuzmanova - Kartalova, 2013: 81). In this regard, it is necessary to streamline social pedagogical work with the children in these four directions, seeking the assistance of the parents, the extended family and the teachers in order to ensure informed and purposeful interaction with the children, while taking into account their individual problems. With regard to the behavioral sphere, the following symptoms are recognized: violence; risky actions; destructive behavior; drug and alcohol use; destruction of other people's property; self-destructive behavior; a tendency to self-harm; violation of the rights of others; deliberately defying behavior; theft; violence and aggressive acts such as bullying, peer harassment or cruelty to animals; hostility; lying; disrespect for authority and parents. In terms of the emotional-personal sphere: frequent or severe outbursts; rage; dissatisfaction with behavioral expectations; refusal to participate in games or other normal childhood activities; excessive affability; extreme sensitivity and excessive fears. In terms of the learning-cognitive sphere: irregular school attendance, low activity during classes, disputes with classmates and teachers, lack of interest in the learning process, low learning achievements, demotivation for learning. With regard to the somatic sphere: sleep disorder; difficulties in switching from one activity to another; excessive levels of energy; inability to stay still and to focus (Radev, 2013: 249). In general, the unfavorable signs, situations and indications overlap and combine into a complex of symptoms that affect the child's initial condition and behavior and reinforce the sense of difference that results in various forms of aggression or self-aggression. In order to prevent destructive states, children need targeted support for integrating socially, the formation of a positive system of values that will underpin their self-regulation and self-realization as well as the prevention of asocial behavior by adopting age-appropriate social skills (Social Work With Various Groups ..., 2013: 15).

Working with difficult children begins with the diagnosis of causes and symptoms, as well as with identification of the main areas affected. The following approaches can be used to diagnose: monitoring children in different situations of organized and informal activity; talking with teachers and class leaders; discussing with parents the family environment and relationships; studying the peculiarities of the personal development of children; informing

on the school success rate of children at risk; analysis of learning problems; studying the peculiarities of the school environment; analysis of the social portrait of the class; study of the health status of the child at risk.

One of the important approaches to working with children with difficult behaviors is developing skills for social inclusion, social expression and self-assertion. In pursuance of building such social skills, one can work on: building children's confidence that will ensure they accept difficulties more calmly and manage to control their feelings; developing assertive abilities for confronting humiliation and insulting labeling; building skills to find constructive solutions of problematic situations; creating caring and respectful relationships with others by taking into account the differences, uniqueness and inviolability of each person; fostering positive relationships with adults; creating a caring and supportive family environment; developing a sense of belonging to home, peers and society; assisting the training process.

The sequence and nature of working with difficult children is determined by the type of problem and the strength of its performance. An important prerequisite for effective work is the clarification of the following circumstances (Individual Accompaniment ..., 2012: 30): demonstration of serious behavioral problems on the part of the child, related to failure to abide by school rules and regulations, aggressive behavior, etc .; developing depressive condition in the child - closing in, emotional introspection, unwillingness to answer questions asked by the teachers; absences from classes and school without good reasons; use or suspected use of alcoholic or narcotic substances; crisis situation in the family; sudden deterioration in health.

The social-pedagogical work with difficult children is carried out in two directions - work on problem prevention and social accompaniment aiming at dealing with the child's difficult behavior.

Work on prevention of the problem of "difficult children": constantly informing all stakeholders - teachers, educators, non-teaching staff in educational institutions and the family on the opportunities to apply measures towards preventing the problem of "difficult children"; ensuring interaction between the actors of preventive activity and striving to attract more organizations and institutions that can provide aid and support to children.

Social accompaniment for coping with difficult child behavior involves:

- Identifying the children with difficult behavior at the earliest stage of the process of disadaptation - state, forms of deviant behavior, stage of disadaptation.

- Analyzing the factors of the difficult behavior and the reasons for the misfortune in the children - collecting information about the child's personality, his environment, socio-cultural situation of development, type of family, style of family upbringing, determining the main factors for difficult behavior, factors for the protection, outlining the root causes of problem behavior, identifying the necessary intervention, and cooperating with other professionals, bodies, and agencies.

- Preparing an individual road map for working with the child through social accompaniment, including: developing a plan for working with the child, with the teachers, with the family; determining the optimal opportunities and conditions for accompaniment - specialists, resources, maintenance, etc .; development of an action program for the case of a child with a difficult behavior - expected results, deadlines, methods, technological approaches, success criteria, stages of work, coordination of activities, areas of responsibility.

- Implementing the individual program for accompanying the child: individual talks with him/her and his / her parents, mediation for normalization of relations and raising the status of the child, involvement in socially significant activities - sport, creative activity, realization of social design, training for building social habits, creating conditions for success. For children with seriously disadaptive behavior, approaches are being implemented to recover from personal injury, to change attitudes and actions. The child is attached to a specialist who personally accompanies him/h. Programs and measures for the resocialization and correction of deviant behavior, for the change of values and settings are organized.

- Measuring the results of working with the child and his/her close circle. Analysis of the social adaptation of the child. As indicators of evaluation, the following can be used - degree of disadaptation, coefficient of social adaptation, social experience, personal achievement, level of motivation for achievement of outlined expected results, social interest, creative potential, indicators for the status of the child's personality etc. If the results of the actions prove to be ineffective, it is appropriate to: identify the reasons for the failure of the programs and working approaches implemented, adjust the program while taking into account any errors or omissions made, including additional resources, optimizing working methods, researching alternative forms, raising the question about the future labor realization of the child. In case of positive results, steps for finalizing the work program are undertaken - analyzing and to describing the experience of the case, recording changes and remove the child from the data bank of the children with difficult behavior (Rean, 2004, Kiribev & Senchukova, 2005).

The results of the social pedagogical work with difficult children are usually not of a unique nature. They depend on the individual-typological characteristics of the different children, on their life and moral experience, on their inner

attitude, on the one hand, and on the motivation to change their status in the socio-cultural environment on the other. One of the most important factors for children to feel good, accepted and involved is family relationships. Collaborative activities, meaningful conversations, successive actions, active listening and encouragement are extremely important to be more relaxed and confident to learn to use their strengths and communicate effectively. The family is the most prominent factor, followed by the school environment and friendships, the child is in a difficult situation, but it is also the factor that can take him out of it. Changing as a relationship, parents and teachers can help the child overcome the insecurity, stubbornness and all the features that put them in a difficult situation. It is of particular importance that children are aware of, are convinced that they are loved by the family, that they are valued as individuals, that they have a friendly environment that is suitable for their understanding and feeling and that they have communication with a significant adult for them to admire and receive its approval. To tackle difficult behavior, children can also work with long-term programs such as camps, youth centers, holiday celebrations to strengthen community ties and to promote positive role models in children.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be concluded that difficult children can be accepted as part of the group of children at risk but in a more special personality-psychological context in which they need special attention, understanding and encouragement. These are children with higher emotional sensitivity and intelligence, where the lack of conditions to develop their qualities and talents and, as a result, to be truly appreciated, places them in the "children at risk" category. Very often with the right approach, understanding, respect and encouragement to develop their potential through attention, creativity and creativity, these children become successful people and leaders in life.

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