

THE CONTEXT OF COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOL AND FAMILY OF PUPILS WITH ADHD AND ADD AT COMMON PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

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Abstract: The aim of our article is to deal with specific aspects of cooperation between school and family of pupils with ADHD and ADD. The article presents the analysis of conditions which influence the quality and intensity of this cooperation. The answers and opinions of parents, teachers and other specialists belong to the most significant results of our research. They describe the level of cooperation between family and common primary school.

Keywords: a pupil with ADHD and ADD, cooperation between family and school, attention deficit.

1 Introduction

Children with the Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder are usually considered to be restless or unconcentrated at school. They often have intensive reactions or fast changes in mood. Excessive activity is a typical expression of their natural character.

However, there are several problems mainly in the area of education which should be solved in such a way that these children with ADHD would be able to use their auto-regulative mechanisms in order to be included in the society. It is very important to recognize the attention deficit in its early phases not only in the education but also in the learning process. The cooperation between family and school is not always easy. In this process we should take into consideration the healthy and individual development of children (with ADHD) so that we could help them in the area of education and instruction as soon as possible.

The main aim of our research was the analysis of conditions and factors which have an impact on the quality and intensity of this cooperation between school and family of children with ADHD and ADD. After the research we designed a model of cooperation between family and school and we identified the most significant factors.

Another objective of our research was the formulation of main categories which include particular factors and conditions. We focused on specific groups of people - parents and specialised employees of school. We included there teachers, special pedagogues, headmasters, psychologists and assistants of teachers. Based on our experience in the given area, we would like to suggest suitable practical recommendations to improve this cooperation between school and family of pupils with ADHD and ADD.

In order to fulfil our aim, we had to achieve several partial aims. These were the following ones:

- to examine the atmosphere at schools. We talked with the specialists dealing with children with ADHD and ADD. It is very important to know their attitudes to these children and their parents,
- to find out the attitudes of parents of pupils with ADHD and ADD to teachers and other specialists who provide help not only to their children, but also to them,
- to compare the opinions of parents, teachers and other experts about this cooperation between school and family,
- to study specific aspects of this cooperation between school and family of pupils with the attention deficit,
- to analyse conditions influencing the quality and intensity of the cooperation between school and family at common primary schools.

After defining our aims, we wanted to get answers to these research questions:

- How does the atmosphere at school influence the attitudes of teachers and other specialists to pupils with ADHD and ADD and their parents?
- Which attitudes do parents of these children have to teachers and other specialists?
- What do parents, teachers and other specialists think about this cooperation between school and family?
- How do they evaluate the level of cooperation when taking into consideration all specific features of pupils with ADHD and ADD?
- Which ones are the preferred forms of cooperation between school and family of children with the attention deficit at common primary schools from the point of view of parents, teachers and other specialists?

Answers to these research questions helped us to formulate our own opinion, and we were able to agree or disagree with other studies about the cooperation between family and school. Many authors, such as A.R. Barkley (2005), C.L. Bradbury – M. Thompson (2016), E.M. Cantwell (2012), D. Grant (2017), N. Hernandez (2005), A.K. Langley (2004), M. Mandella (2009), B.L. Corbett – N. Glidden (2000), J. Heller (1999), J.F. Taylor (2012), S. Young (2017), G. Kewley (2011), E. Chovancová (2016), P. Verhaeghe (2011) think that one of the most important factors of successful cooperation between family and school is the amount of time spent with children with the attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. They all agree that effective cooperation is based on the relationship and mutual help not only between parents and teachers, but also on the help of other specialists who have a lot of experience in this problematic area and they deal with these disorders in their professional practice.

2 Research and research methods

We adapted the choice of research methods to our research aims and questions. Based on the analysis of conditions of cooperation between family and school and our personal experience, we focused on the qualitative analysis. We used the method of semi-structured interviews in order to collect the research data because we consider this method to be the most suitable one for this purpose.

We divided the process of our research into the following steps:

- preparation of methodological tools and semi-structured interviews (creation of questions),
- selection of the research sample (usage of available selection),
- realization of the research: collecting of data, recording of interviews, transcription of records and subsequent analysis of results,
- formal processing of obtained data, design of the model of cooperation between family and school, formulation of categories and subcategories,
- interpretation of obtained data, publication of research results, final summary, theoretical and practical recommendations.

We used semi-structured interviews to collect the research data. In order to process our results that we had obtained by means of the qualitative method of interviews, we applied the grounded theory approach by A. Strauss – J. Corbin (1999) whose principles enable us to formulate theories based on the empirical point of view.

The free coding method helped us to design a model of cooperation according to the obtained data during their interpretation. We divided the statements from the interviews into several categories and, subsequently, we formulated their subcategories. We designed a model consisting of four areas based on the categories that we had selected from the obtained

statements of parents, teachers and other specialists. These particular areas emphasize the factors which our respondents think to be the most important ones when dealing with problems of children with the attention deficit.

We used the free coding method from the grounded theory approach in our analysis of the obtained data. Subsequently, we compared the statements within one category (interviews with parents) or within two categories (parents - teachers). Free coding is an analytical process consisting of defined concepts (categories) in terms of their dimension and qualities. The basic analytical processes include asking questions, comparing similarities and differences in particular cases, sharing of experience, etc. The aim of asking questions in the free coding method is to consider all possible categories (subcategories and their division), their aspects, dimensions and different points of view. For example, we used these types of questions: "Who?", "When?", "How?", "How many?", "How long?", "Why?".

In order to name these categories, we used the statements from the interviews which helped us to define the required concepts when we were designing the model of cooperation. We added specific meanings to the given concepts which were related to the experience with the cooperation between school and family of children with ADHD and ADD.

When taking into consideration our research aims and questions, we focused our attention on such people who are in a daily contact with children with ADHD and ADD, and they accompany them during their childhood. Our research sample consisted of parents and specialised employees of schools. Teachers working with integrated pupils with the attention disorder represented one group in our research sample. The other groups of specialised employees were formed by special pedagogues, psychologists, educational consultants, pedagogical assistants and school headmasters. The special pedagogues and psychologists worked not only at school, but also in the centres of pedagogical - psychological consulting and prevention.

We carried out our research at these common primary schools and centres of pedagogical-psychological consulting and prevention in Levice:

- Primary school of Andrej Kmeť, Ul. M.R. Štefánika 34, Levice
- Primary school, Ul. sv. Michala 42, Levice
- Primary school, Pri Podlužianke 6, Levice
- Primary school, Saratovská ul. 43, Levice
- Primary school, Saratovská ul. 85, Levice
- Centre of pedagogical-psychological consulting and prevention in Mierová ul, Levice
- Private Centre of special-pedagogical psychology, J. Švermu 2262/8 in Levice.

3 Research results

We were able to fulfil our aims and we tried to design a model of cooperation between family and school. We based our categories on the data acquired from the interviews.

The qualitative analysis of our research and interviews with the respondents emphasized 5 key categories. These are the following ones:

- a) the area of communication: communication between parents and teachers, communication with pupils, communication of other specialists with parents, teachers and pupils with ADHD and ADD. Communication is a very significant area and we consider it to be the key area in the cooperation between school and family of pupils with ADHD and ADD. As an example, we can mention the way of informing parents about the behaviour and studying results of their child by the school. Reactions of parents confirm our statement:

"... The teacher's way of communication has a strong impact on me and my son. According to her behaviour we know if she is willing to help us with the given problem or not..."

"In my opinion, communication is very important. Who can we speak with if we do not have a chance to speak with the teachers? They inform us about other specialists, too"

These statements point out at the real situation in the cooperation between parents and the institution of school.

- b) the area of personal qualities: teachers, assistants of teachers, special pedagogues and school psychologists show their personal qualities at their work. There are present many factors which are influenced by personal qualities and characteristic features of particular participants in this cooperation. The ability to achieve a compromise is a crucial requirement in this area. We mention several statements from the interviews with parents:

"... In our cooperation there is reflected the way teachers deal with us. For us, the teachers of our child represent the most significant people at school. And their personality, behaviour and the way of dealing with us are very important as well..."

We mention also an example from the interviews with teachers:

"... reactions of parents influence this cooperation in a significant way. They have an impact on our attitudes and the way of dealing with them..."

"... I cannot force the parents to cooperate with me. This is mainly about their personalities, their personal motivation to make a progress with their child and their willingness to solve the given problems..."

Based on these statements, it is evident that personal qualities of parents, teachers and other specialists represent a very important factor in this cooperation between family and school. This fact was confirmed by the research we carried out and also by the statements we mentioned above.

- c) the area of working with children: the area of (un)concern for children with the attention deficit where this cooperation between parents, teachers and other specialists is very important. In this area we will mention mainly the answers of teachers and special pedagogues who emphasize the importance of working with these children:

"We provide parents with contacts to special pedagogues and psychologists. At the same time, we try to find the best solutions for their child..."

"I am a special pedagogue and when I start working with children with ADHD and ADD, I am interested in all the primary and secondary factors. Then I determine the aims and options that could be useful for these children and their families during the education and learning process."

The concern for these children is a significant category because it influences the attitude of other people to them. Children cannot make a progress on their own.

- d) the area of re-education or therapy: the way of providing help, early diagnostics of the attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, and early intervention that takes into consideration all the needs of the given child.

We mention several examples from the interviews with special pedagogues who talk directly about the re-education of children with ADHD and ADD:

"I am a special pedagogue and I have to wait for the diagnostics elaborated by the neurologist who will confirm or reject the diagnosis of ADHD and ADD. I also need the diagnostics from the psychologists and all the available information about the

given child from the teachers. Then I am able to determine specific ways of working with this child...”

“I consult all the therapeutic ways of working with these children with their class teachers, parents or other specialists...”

“We consult all possible ways of helping to these children with other participants in this cooperation - with the class teachers, the school psychologist, and their parents. They know their children the best...”

All these statements confirm not only the importance of re-education and therapy for children with ADHD and ADD, but also the possible cooperation between parents, school and other specialists who look at this problematic area in a more professional way.

e) conditions at school and in family which influence the quality and intensity of their cooperation: here we included such conditions that appeared in particular interviews and do not belong to the previous categories. The following examples from the interviews with parents point out at these conditions:

“Our confidence to the teachers depends on their way of communication with us ...”

“... if we talk about the confidence, the teachers really try to explain us the problems of our child and they want to find a suitable way of solving the given problem or unpleasant situation. They even recommended us to speak with a special pedagogue...”

We also refer to the statements of teachers who are cooperative partners for the family:

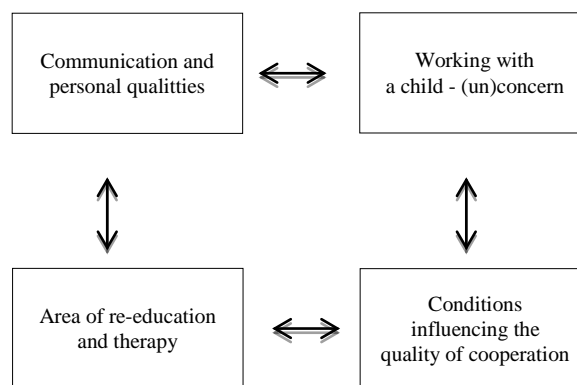
“I try to create the atmosphere of confidence in a friendly way. I try to help the given family as much as I can. Of course, I do not let them exploit me. Each of us should know our own possibilities and limitations. According to me, good cooperation is successful.”

“... I think that teachers do not have problems to have a good relationship with the family of pupils or with other specialists. I suppose that teachers have something in their personality that automatically earns respect of other people. This attitude creates the right atmosphere that enables them to work with children with the attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder and their parents.”

All the mentioned statements confirm the importance of all participants in the cooperation between school and family of children with ADHD and ADD. Without their good relationship they cannot cooperate effectively so that they could help these children to become successful.

Model of cooperation between school and family of pupils with ADHD and ADD:

1. Communication and personal qualities
2. Working with a child - (un)concern
3. Area of re-education and therapy
4. Conditions influencing the quality of cooperation



We interpreted the obtained results according to the aforementioned statements and we divided interviews into two categories. The first category consisted of parents of children with ADHD and ADD. The second category included teachers and other specialists who are with these pupils in a daily contact. The results can be divided into two parts - “school from the point of view of parents”. For them, the most significant factors in this cooperation are the following ones:

- personal maturity and professionalism of teachers,
- relationship of the class teacher to parents of pupils with ADHD and ADD,
- regular active meetings of teachers and parents,
- teachers should be initiators of successful cooperation,
- teachers should focus on positive qualities of these children.

These mentioned aspects were the most frequent ones in the interviews with parents. They influence the cooperation between school and family of pupils with ADHD and ADD in a significant way.

These factors can be compared to the data from the interviews with teachers and other specialists. They stated the following aspects influencing this cooperation:

- all participants in this cooperation should be willing to communicate,
- personal qualities of particular members in the cooperation,
- willingness of parents to help them,

We would also like to emphasize the research findings from the interviews with the headmasters of schools. From their point of view, the following aspects are the most decisive ones in this cooperation between school and family of pupils with ADHD and ADD:

- headmasters as consultants should be informed about the ways of solving the given problems,
- controlling and concern for employees of school (teachers, special pedagogues, etc.),
- impartiality and objectiveness,
- school activities

Our research confirms that this cooperation is gradually improving and all participants are more willing and interested in solving problems of children with the attention and hyperactivity disorder.

These children need to be praised also during the course of any specific activity and not only at its end. After our qualitative analysis we can offer several recommendations for successful and effective cooperation.

4 Conclusion

Our recommendations for pedagogical theory and practice are based on the research findings from the interviews. Some of

these recommendations were directly expressed, or even required. We would like to specify the ways of helping to children with the attention disorder at school in the following recommendations:

- on the desk there should be placed only such objects the child needs at the moment,
- the child should be adequately motivated to participate not only at the beginning, but also during the course of particular activities,
- the teachers can achieve adequate concentration of the child with ADHD and ADD when they gradually explain and repeat the instructions,
- the learning style of children is mainly visual and, therefore it is important to choose suitable teaching aids, e.g. to show them instructions, or to motivate them after fulfilling the given tasks,
- short-term memory can be strengthened with frequent repeating or by means of dictionaries, manuals, pictures, tables, etc.

We named the most frequent measures which are required in providing help for these children with the attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder at school. We also offer recommendations for the family environment:

- frequent controlling of child's activities. The child does not have to know about this parental controlling. It is possible to do it in a playful way,
- visualization of activities for the child. We mentioned this fact in school activities but this can be useful also in doing homework. We will show all tasks to the child and we will cross them off the task list after doing them,
- it is important to have active breaks for relaxing and change the activities frequently,
- contradictory educational opinions between the parents of the child, or between teachers and parents are not suitable. They should be able to achieve a compromise for the best of the child,
- the child should not be excluded from the family chores and obligations. We recommend active participation of the child in the daily family life.

Our recommendations for school and family environment are based on the personal experience of parents, teachers, special pedagogues and psychologists from our interviews.

Supporting and creation of positive relationships between school and family represent a very important area of the educational practice. This mutual cooperation and its significance are even more important in the case of children with the attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder.

The aim of our research was to analyse factors which influence the cooperation between school and family of pupils with ADHD and ADD at primary schools. We focused on the specific aspects of this cooperation. Our intention was to design a model that will help us to identify the most significant factors. They can be further supported and developed in order to achieve more successful and effective cooperation. With our obtained results we would like to contribute to the improvement of pedagogical theory and practice. At the same time, we would like to help to reduce the labelling of these pupils as "problematic", "lazy" or "unconcentrated" pupils.

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Primary Paper Section: A

Secondary Paper Section: AM