

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES IN DRAMATIC STUDIES

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Abstract: There is a higher risk of behavior disorder development in institutionalized children mainly for pathological reasons, or limited learning opportunities connected to multifactorial dimension of behavior disorder etiology. It is possible to compensate for these disadvantages by targeted intervention in form of drama education. The article presents the output of a research, the subject of which was the creation and verification of the efficiency of intervention strategies methodology with the use of drama education studies to support and strengthen the institutionalized children in order to prevent behavior disorder.

Keywords: Residential education, drama education, intervention, socialization, behavior disorder..

1 Research basis

Our contribution introduces the concept of intervention program methodology research in group of children at risk of behavior disorder development. For three years, we have been working on the intervention program, its methodology and verification, the verification process is still under way. Selected special education students of bachelor or master study program contributed to the process. The aim of the longitudinal research is to create a methodology of coordinated specific prevention and early intervention with the employment of drama education, which would enable the teachers to provide the children at risk of behavior disorder development with abundant opportunities for their academic and social development.

The multifocal theories constitute the research platform; they are built on the concurrence of influence correlation of bio-psycho-social quantities of behavior disorder development. In the intervention program conception, we use the resilience theory, defined as resistance, ability of an individual to cope with stress effectively and manage positive adaptation (Šolcová, 2009). Both of these theories blend in this concept provided that behavior disorder development is influenced not only by *risk factors (stressors)* increasing the possibility of behavior disorder development, but also *protective factors (supportive)* that could limit or even eliminate the influence of the risk factors. The risk factors are undoubtedly a strong tool identifying the probability of problem behavior, but they represent only a half of the equation. The protective factors are the other half. They enter into various interactions in the course of child's life, they show cumulative effects and contribute to increase the resistance and adaptability of an individual (Vojtová, 2010).

The employment of resilience processes, their purposeful adjustment intertwines the intervention process, where we attempt to strengthen the resistance of the target group of children against the risk factors. We extend their scope for coping strategies. The intervention always directly concerns these processes on the individual level. We strengthen the formation of relations and take into consideration not only the needs, self-actualization attempts, biography and the course of life but also the reality of the individual's life. Drama education is one of the ways to fulfill these demands and enables the child to cope with analogical life situations through play and draft experience; it supports its growth in many socially important areas.

The research target group was children at risk of behavior disorder development or children with disturbed social, and in many cases also personal development. The risk of behavior disorder development is very high in this group. They are children from dysfunctional social background. According to the WHO (ICF, 2001) categorization, they belong into the group of people without impairment, whose problems in functioning and behavior are a direct result of social background (WHO, ICF, 2003). The WHO sees the reason for their problems in

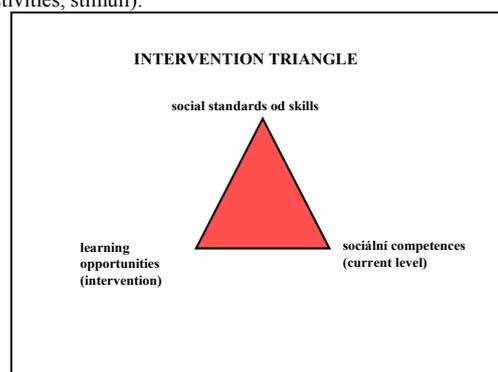
insufficient support, discrimination, or stigmatization. These aspects become, mainly in children, potential barriers for successful socialization processes and education and they endanger the future of a child.

1.1 Intervention in form of Drama Education and its Resilience Drive

We aimed the prevention in our program at avoiding the formation of barriers. We try to stop the undesirable trend in the way children behave by intervention and to establish new models of their reactions and behavior (Vojtová, 2010). Drama education offers great conditions for intervention processes adjusted in this way. The merit of drama education in context of prevention and intervention lies mainly in the following attributes:

1. it helps to create an experience,
2. gives an opportunity to independent thinking (group work, every individual is important, has the opportunity to express their ideas, contribute to the whole),
3. it guarantees the freedom to the group (under teacher's sensitive management, the group learns to accept, appreciate and encourage each other.),
4. it provides the opportunity to cooperation (the work on common project, inclusion of so called outsiders),
5. it provides the opportunity to build social awareness (role play, the child becomes someone, understands him/her, decides for the role and him/herself),
6. it comes to emotional release (while solving conflict situations, different problems in expressing emotions, relaxing, releasing the tension),
7. communication, vocabulary is being developed, we work with voice.

The cornerstone for the creation of methodical series is the intervention triangle, that defines the basic starting points of intervention process in children at risk of behavior disorders. These are: social competences (current level of social competences), social standards of skills (aim of the intervention, usual skills in children of the same age) and learning opportunities (particular intervention methods and techniques, activities, stimuli).



1.2 The Aims of Intervention

The aims of intervention were set in two categories according to the needs of the target group. The aims connected with the need to increase the resistance of children to negative influences from their environment were in the first category, the aims directed to development and reinforcement of coping strategies were in the second category. The intervention aims of the first group are directed to reinforce children's ability to cope with stress effectively and manage positive adaptation. They are connected with the search for a way to limit the effect of negative

influences coming from children's social environment.¹ Further, we also focus on children's ability to decide in problem situations. We increase their responsibility for their behavior. The second category consists of aims directed to the formation of child's social relations, to the support of self-actualization tendencies, to the respect for life's reality of an individual, to natural activities, to the skill of analogical life situation management, to the support of development in all socially important situations.

While working with the children, we verified the *principles* of support of the intervention efficiency:

Regularity of lessons – children at risk who often live a life of chaos and disarray of events often connected to the feelings of insecurity need a set order, program of a day/week which would give them certain cues in their life, provides them with a feeling of security and at the same time eliminates the stressful fear of future.

Fixed structure of lessons – follows from the same principle as previous point. Fixed order of a lesson makes the work easier not only for the children but also for the lectors. When children get used to settled system, they know what follows, what to expect and they can prepare for the activity. After some period of time, they require "set schedule" themselves and they are very sensitive to every modification. We stuck to fixed structure in our lessons: introduction, warming up activities, introduction into the topic, topic solution, and reflection.

Rules – it was necessary to set rules, which we all agree to stick to. It is advisable to tell the children that we create the rules in order that everybody, including the lector, feels comfortable in the group. While creating the rules, we may not forget the rule of keeping all confidential information, which appears during the lessons, secret. This rule is very important for creation of an intimate and secure atmosphere. All the rules should be agreed to by the group, and possibly confirmed by signatures. When a rule is broken, it is important that the rule-breaker realizes that he has broken a rule. Even when the lesson participants find it hard to keep to the rules, they must respect the set limits.

Number of children in the group – the number of children depends on the age and specific needs of the group. In our case, the ideal number was 6 to 8 children in one group. It is difficult to carry out some group activities using drama education methods at low attendance. On the other hand, it is very difficult to keep the concentration in a large group of children: there is also a higher risk of conflict development among the children and it is demanding for the lector to pay the same attention to every child in the group.

Length of a lesson – speaking from our own experience, the optimum lesson length proved to be 60 minutes. One hour lesson offers enough time to elaborate the topic; it is difficult to keep the concentration and attention of the children in our target group (especially for the individuals with hyperactivity syndrome) for longer time.

Atmosphere – children with many negative experiences from social interactions in various environments often approach new situations and people with distrust and fear. Their negative approach is partly only a defense against possible danger. We therefore try to create secure and familiar atmosphere right from the beginning. The space for open communication is created on the basis of secure atmosphere. The participation on activities is voluntary. We don't force anybody, we just encourage.

Activity – an active approach of the participants is crucial for the success of the intervention. Any change or development progress happens on the basis of lived and felt experience. A passive presence and performing activities without own active approach is no help. But even observation of the activities and passive presence in the lessons can be beneficial for the participant. It happens sometimes that a child is not willing to take part in the activities, yet it is salutary for him/her to be present in the lesson. Often, his/her negative approach is only a transient matter and s/he joins the others after watching them for a while.

Reflection – takes place on two levels (children and lectors) and in different forms (verbal expression, gesture, posture, picture selection etc.) In verbal reflection, we sit in a circle and every participant has a chance to express his/her views on given activities: what s/he felt, what s/he experienced, what s/he liked or disliked what s/he did well and why. We choose the alternative forms of reflection mainly when the attention and concentration of the group is low and we still need to stick to the rites of the lesson and reflect on it at the same time. The reflection of the lectors follows the reflection of the children, it is directed to every individual, and we share what went well, what not and at the same time we point out what can be changed by the child her/himself. In the end, the participants should evaluate each other; we stress the importance of positive evaluation. The final evaluation should give a positive impression to motivate further work.

Lesson structure followed the basic principles recommended by Valenta (1999) and the needs of the group. We maintain the following parts at every meeting: rite², warming up activities, introduction to the topic, topic solution, reflection, lesson conclusion, rite.

The topic served as a bearing element of every lecture. Katarina Majzlanova (In. Valenta, 2006) with her list of topics inspired our selection.

1.3 Examples of Activities

Window, a conflict between friends

Aim: To take the responsibility for one's own decisions, deeds

Cognitive: solution of a problem situation, ability to argue

Social: joining the social group

Emotional: empathy development, perception of the other and reaction to him/her, learning to forgive

Age: 10 and above

Time: 50 –60 min

Annotation: The friendship is one of the most important relationships between people. Our life would be empty without friends. A conflict is an ordinary part of our life; it is therefore only natural that it happens also between friends. But how should you behave in a situation when a trusted friend betrays you? The activity makes us think about the term betrayal and what it is connected to.

Progress: Children pair up randomly, by the molecule game, by a cut picture or by counting for instance. They decide who is going to be **A** and who is going to be **B**.

Improvisation assignment: **A** and **B** are best friends, who have just broken a window together. However, **A** is scared of the consequences, the window has to be paid for and s/he is going to have problems at home. When the headmaster investigates the case, s/he denies everything and blames **B**. The improvisation starts at the moment when **B** comes back from the headmaster's office into the class and approaches to **A**.

Improvisation: It is a mass improvisation, everybody starts at once. The lector advises the children to stop when they need and sit down quietly in order not to disturb the others.

Reflection: After the improvisation is over we sit down in a circle. The lector runs the reflection. Example questions: How did it feel to deny the blame? How did it feel to get betrayed? What was the conclusion of your improvisation? Is a situation like this real? Could it happen in real life? Did something like this happen to you? How did you solve the conflict? Could the problem be solved differently? What did the people around you say?

Doctor's waiting room

Aim: Assertive behavior, good manners

Cognitive: solution of a problem situation, ability to argue.

¹ This aim is connected to the situation in the institutional education system, where children return to their families from which they were taken away by legal action after they finish the education.

² By **rite** we mean the activity that repeats always in the introduction of our lesson and sets the right mood of the group and enables easier participation in the activities. It is an activity done together by everybody, within the rite, the participants realize that they belong together and their common activity is about to begin. We chose the activity which helps warming up and activation of the group.

Social: communication development, ability to compromise, self-assertion in a social group.

Emotional: empathy development, acceptance of a different view, perception of the other, reaction to him/her

Age: 10 and above

Time: 20 minutes

Annotation: One enters many situations on daily life basis where it is necessary to come to an agreement with people who are both, strange and familiar, to him/her. A play in a pretended situation gives a chance to try "in draft" one's own solutions of the situations without any sanctions.

Props: chairs

Progress:

- 1) Children create doctor's waiting room by the means of chairs and everybody sits comfortably.
- 2) Then they draw a piece of paper with character traits of their role on it: occupation, character, illness, how much time s/he has, if he wants to open the window or not. The improvisation starts at the moment when the lector comes in, playing a cleaner, opens the window and leaves. The children start to act in roles.
- 3) The lector observes the progress of the improvisation; s/he could interrupt in role of a doctor entering the waiting room.

Reflection: Example questions: What was the cause of the conflict? How was it solved? Could it be solved differently? If so how? Have you ever been in a similar situation? What was your solution?

Note: The improvisation from the beginning of the lesson can be repeated after the reflection using the solutions proposed by children.

Summary

In the contribution, we introduced the research concept focused on the creation and verification of intervention programs in a group of children at risk of behavior disorder development. We follow the drama education techniques and methods in formation of the intervention series, because by the means of drama activities, the child can experience the feeling of success and self-assertion, emotional relieve is no longer afraid of new experience, which is the basic condition for further educational action. We present two examples of studies from the intervention program which we have tried and which have had an effective impact on the target group.

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