STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE IN ASSESSING THE EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL SKILLS OF A PERSON WITH MODERATE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

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Abstract

The article contains case study of social skills of the moderately intellectually disabled person. This study complied with the view that social skills are a complex construct, which consists of integrating and complementary structural components, such as: 1) interaction skills; 2) communication skills; 3) participation skills; 4) emotional skills; and 5) social cognition skills; and each of these social skills' structural components is constituted of complexes of social abilities. When identifying the social skills of a person with moderate intellectual disability, the concept of strengths perspective has been observed. Strengths perspective emphasizes the child's capabilities (strengths), rather than the child's inability. Scientific research problem could be defined in the following questions: what kind of social skills expression do the family members and pedagogues of a moderately intellectually disabled person notice? What strengths (available social skills) and problem areas do they identify?

Key words: social skills, strength perspective, case study, a person with moderate intellectual disability.

Introduction

Problem and relevance of the research. The abundance of social skills research indicates a great interest in this problem of the scientists from all countries; however, these researches do not explain the structural peculiarities of social skills in essence. Social skills are the presumption of successful personal socialization and harmonious existence in a social group; they create opportunities for an individual to act effectively in a social environment (Gedvilienė & Baužienė, 2008; Osit, 2008), to communicate avoiding conflicts and maintaining good mutual relations (Brodeski & Hembrought, 2007; Church et al., 2003; Sukhodolsky & Butter, 2007); to express oneself and understand others (Colombero, 2004; Kaffemanienė & Čegytė, 2006).

A complexity of socialization of mentally retarded individuals is explainable by the lack of social skills. A lot of authors noticed that children with moderate mental retardation distinguish in their inability to create and maintain relations with peers or other individuals;

inadequate behaviour and expression of emotions; they have difficulties in expressing wishes, adaptation in social environments; those children experience a need for social communication and they have a poor societal support due to their inadequate behaviour; they may feel rejected, socially isolated, and more lonely than peers of a typical development (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000), even if they attend mainstream schools (Chamberlain, 2001). According to Ailey (2003) and Gervogianienė (1999), the majority of mentally retarded children are unable to find friends, make friendships; they mark in a behaviour, which is annoying and repelling; due to the unacceptable behaviour, peers tend to avoid them and exclude from common activities.

The most important objective of education of mentally retarded school children should be development of social rather than academic skills (communication, behaviour, independence, orientation in social environment) (Gevogianienė, 1999; Ruškus, 2002, etc.), taking into consideration the existent individual abilities. However, the problem is the lack of not only a scientific agreement on the conception and structure of social skills concept, but also the focused social skills research and education methods. Scientists, who were analysing social skills in mentally retarded individuals, often accentuate the inabilities and failures of the latter, and only in rare cases describe the social skills that these individuals may possess. Specialists in educational practice (psychologists, pedagogues), also more often mark negative characteristics when assessing the development of these schoolchildren, and almost never characterize the abilities they have, or positive educational perspectives. From our point of view, mentally retarded individuals, as any other, have individual abilities and potentials that are important for socialization; it is essential to rest on the abilities (strengths), as a resource, in pursuance of helping them effectively develop the lacking social skills.

Scientific research problem could be defined in the following questions: what kind of social skills expression do the family members and pedagogues of a person with moderate intellectual disability notice? What strengths (available social skills) and problem areas do they identify?

Research object – expression of social skills of a person with moderate intellectual disability.

Research objective – with reference to the data of case study, to reveal the available social skills (strengths) and problem areas of a person with moderate intellectual disability.

Research methodology and methods. In this research, a viewpoint that social skills are a construct of complex structure, constituted of mutually integrated and complementary structural components, is being assumed: 1) interaction skills; 2) communication skills; 3) participation skills; 4) emotional skills; and 5) social cognition skills. Each of these social skills' structural components is constituted of respective complexes of social abilities, which are linked in tight system relations (Jurevičienė, Kaffemanienė & Ruškus, 2012).

When identifying social skills of a person with moderate intellectual disability, ***strengths perspective*** (Saleebey, 1997, 2001) is being emphasized, i.e. a conception, according to which people have many various strengths (resources) – capacities, abilities, experiences, qualities, and roles, by which the quality of social functioning of a person is described (Saleebey, 1997; Weick et al., 1989); the most important strength of an individual – their ability to grow and change (Early & GlenMaye, 2000). *Strengths perspective* accentuates person's possibilities (strengths), and not inabilities or family problems (Weick & Chamberlain, 1997), and expresses an attitude towards the pupil as a person able to realise their strengths and needs, and actively participate while solving actual own life problems. This perspective is based on an assumption that it is not necessary to understand a problem in order to solve it (Waller, 2006), individual's abilities and strengths are gathered, ideas of growth and development are joined in pursuance of improving the life quality, so it is necessary to develop problem solving skills, and the ability to cope with stress and difficulties (Heinonen & Spearman, 2001). When applying this

theoretical perspective, the focus is given to the cooperation and partnership between a pupil and pedagogue, where the most important role of an educator is to help the pupil actualise available abilities (strengths), motivate the pupil's activity and responsibility for the results of their actions. Besides, the education based on the strengths perspective takes place while cooperating with different systems (the pupils themselves, their families, schools, etc.), each of which is treated as an education/al resource (Weick & Chamberlain, 1997). People's internal and external resources (abilities, strengths; wellbeing, unity, growth, development of support, and the life quality ideas are combined) are used in order to reach four goals: 1) to grow as a personality; 2) to improve the quality of one's life; 3) to develop one's problem solving skills; and 4) to cope with stress and misfortunes (Heinonen & Spearman, 2001).

According to Cowger (1997), it is important to talk with pupils themselves and their family members when assessing their strengths (to figure out, how they got along so far; what they want). Besides, strengths can be identified in other ways as well (e.g., through observation), making efforts to best comprehend the present situation; "perceiving one does not know the upper limits of ability to grow and change and seriously considering the individual's, group's, and society's expectations" (Saleebey, 1997).

Research methods. Attempting to answer the research problem questions, qualitative research methods are chosen (case study: observation, interview). *Case study method* – is a process of systematic information selection about a specific person, social environment, event, or a group, by which it is aimed to figure out how it operates or functions (Berg, 2001); it is a thorough exploration of a single case of some social phenomenon (Babbie, 2004), in pursuance of understanding the interaction with important circumstances (Stake, 2000). In this research, the expression of a person's social skills is revealed using a *case study method*, combining it with an *interview* and *content analysis* of the *observation* data. The research data is selected using methods of *observation* and focused *semi-structured interview*; and methods of qualitative data analysis is *content analysis* of observation texts and interview protocols.

Direct observation method is applied, with which we attempted to gather data about the social skills' expression of a schoolgirl with moderate mental retardation in various environments (observation was carried out at school, in family, shopping, etc.) and while interacting with various persons (mother, sister, grandmother, peers, familiar and unfamiliar adults, pedagogues). Observation data was gathered in a chronological order in 5 minutes interval recording the order of events and manifestations of schoolgirl's skills in various situations.

Formulation of interview questions. Considering the research objective, the following general question for parents and pedagogues is formulated: *Which social skills of a moderately mentally retarded child do parents and pedagogues notice (in the family, group of peers, school, and etc.)?* A question for the participant herself: *How does she feel at home, at school? How does she spend her spare time? What hobbies does she have? etc*.

When submitting the interview, questions about the ways and areas of social skills expression had to be specified. The following narrower interview questions were formulated: *What communication abilities does K. possess? How does she interact with a) family members? b) pedagogues? c) peers? What ways of social communication (language, mimics, gestures, etc.) does she use? How does she express her emotions? How does she recognise the emotions of others and how does she react? How does she solve conflicts?* etc. The sequence of questions depended on the course of conversation, and the content of the research participant.

Research duration: 6 observation sessions lasting 2 hours (or 840 min) were carried out. Average duration of an individual interview – approximately 45 minutes.

Research sample. A person with moderate intellectual disability (21-year-old schoolgirl, K.) is chosen for the case analysis; she attends a class of work education in special school.

The pupil distinguishes in low capacity for learning, inability to apply the acquired experiences in analogous situations, unfocused orientation activity, and poor self-control basics. Her language underdevelopment is of second degree. Due to the impaired coordination of movements, she is unable to timely perform self-handling actions. She gets dressed on her own. Expresses her discontent in negativism, impulsiveness; she is aggressive with peers, dissatisfied, envious, and aims to harm[1]. Family members (mother, sister, and grandmother of the pupil), pedagogues (class teacher, class supervisor), i.e. individuals, who have a direct educational relation with the monitored pupil, participated in the examination of the moderately mentally retarded schoolgirl's social skills[2].

Research Results

Interaction skills (interaction management and control abilities). *Interaction skills* manifest in the impact of the communicators on one another; they consist of both the management of one's own behaviour and abilities to manage and control the interaction of others with you (e.g., ability to resist the negative effect, etc.).

Considering the interview data, towards the annoying situations, criticism, and comments K. rather often reacts in a retreat, turning away, and oppositional reactions (talking back, sometimes with aggression), or laughs, which is inadequate to the situation:

[Once K. heard me talking to another teacher about her inappropriate behaviour, and started to cry, rub her eyes, murmur: "Well fine, I will continue not to listen," and began hitting herself on the face (K.M.) / I told the class supervisor that she did not listen to me, so she grumbled a lot and called me a denunciator, did not eat her breakfast, was kicking the door, and could not be controlled (K.A.) / During a task, K. jostled with a boy, so she slammed the door and went to her group (K.A.)] [3]

When criticized she acts inappropriately and laughs:

[Mother seeing K. hit the little chicken asks why she behaves this way. K. replies that she is not hitting it, she only wanted to try. Mother disciplines her. K. starts to laugh loudly.]

Apparently, a girl is unable to manage interactions, when she is being laughed at.

[One of the girls said that K. could not be a teacher, because she does not know how to count. Then K. got angry and ran away from the playground, sat on a bench and sadly watched the girls (K.A.) / Took a rag and went to clean the dust. But when she entered the boys' room, they started to make fun of her. She threw the rag and shouted that she was not going to clean anymore (K.A.)].

Anxiety or avoidance of contacts with strangers manifest (Leffert, Siperstein & Millikan, 2000; Ronen, 2005):

[While in the bus, acquaintances of the mother come, greet, and start talking. They ask K. how she is doing. She turns her eyes away and responses silently that she is fine. Then they ask her, where they are going. K. turns towards the window and does not respond to the question. / K. is standing near the fence watching the neighbour. The neighbour greets her, K. averts her eyes and walks away].

Communication skills. When describing the communication abilities (ability to pay attention to other person, to listen to others, understand, sympathise, participate in experiences of other people, etc.) Gervogianienė (1999) noted that these abilities exceed the limits of the basic communication actions. According to the authors, not only verbal and nonverbal actions, and their adequacy are typical for the ability to communicate, but also the *need to communicate*, *sociability*, *sense of empathy*, *flexibility*, and *ability to solve conflicts*.

[1] Findings of the Pedagogical-Psychological Service (PPS).
[2] Principle of anonimity is being followed, therefore, names of parents, pedagogues, and children are not mentioned, as well as, the school title; only abbreviations are recorded, which have nothing in common with the actual names, sometimes only the gender is noted.
[3] Here and further in the text, in square brackets, fragments from observation protocols are presented.

Verbal contact and communication abilities. Communication skills are firstly associated with the *abilities to initiate and maintain verbal and nonverbal contact* (Bellack et al., 2004; Canney & Byrne, 2006; Gervogianienė, 1999, etc.).

The research revealed K.'s ability to initiate communication using verbal means. She often initiates the verbal contact, especially with the persons she fancies:

[She is the first to rush to the guests, greet them, and ask about the purpose of their visit (K.M.) / Another class supervisor entered our class, so K. immediately asked her name, and kept on asking various questions as long as she was in the class (K.A.)].

[In the bus, a girl sat next to K. K. started asking, "What is your name? <…> How old are you? <…> Are you going to the garden?" etc.)].

The girl is happy, when invited to communicate:

[During the brake, a teacher asks K. to go for a walk together. K. rejoices and walks hand in hand with the teacher for the entire brake, smiles to everyone, and keeps repeating that she loves her teacher].

On the other hand, observations revealed the participant's tendency to "communicate" with surrounding things, animals, "talk to herself:"

[Closes the door and starts to lay the bed (laughing, clapping), and says, "I slept well," asks the dog, "How did you sleep, Nerius?" She answers herself, "Good, I'm proud of you." Laughs // Takes a rake and starts raking leaves, says, "When will you stop falling, I am sick of raking you," drops the rake, claps, and starts laughing. // Starts putting the stones back into the bottle, and one falls on the ground. K. laughs and says, "Well you, slob, where did you fall?" claps and laughs. // She finds the missing one, "Oh, here you are," claps, smiles, puts on the cap on the pen and places it into the handbag. // Comes into the kitchen and sharpens the pencil, saying, "Why do you keep breaking, huh?"].

The observation data confirmed the research findings of Matson, Cooper, et al. (2006); the authors described that priorities of the moderately mentally retarded individuals are given to things, not people. Apparently, this can be explained in a way that things cannot cause negative emotions, because no feedback is received (no problems or conflicts arise), therefore, as observation material proved, when communicating with surrounding things, positive emotions are dominant. On the one hand, such "communication" with things shows research participant's infantilism or exclusion from social environment; however, it can also be assessed as a strength, potential for the development of social relations, taking advantage of her inclination to communicate, even if it is with things.

Interpersonal relations maintenance abilities. The girl has a great need to communicate; however, sometimes she marks with a wearisome endeavour to draw attention to herself, and when fails, behaves aggressively:

[When walking, she constantly kicks the corner of the wall. Mother invites her to come closer, sit and watch TV. K. refuses. Then mother suggests to put puzzles together or find some other activity. K. says that nobody makes friends with her and starts biting her own hand and scratching her face. / Mother is watching TV, sister is knitting, grandmother is sleeping. K. is rapidly walking through the rooms from corner to corner, complaining loudly that nobody communicates with her. // K. runs into the playground, meets a friend there and asks her, if she has seen her sharpener. The friend says she has not, K. starts shouting that she is lying and requests her to show the pockets. The friend does not want to show her pockets, then K. runs towards her and sticks her hands into the girl's pockets. When she finds nothing, says, "Good for you, you didn't take it." The girl says she is no longer a friend of K. and runs away].

Social expressiveness, according to Malinauskas (2004), manifests in verbal expressiveness, oratory abilities; and *social sensitivity* – ability to understand (decode) verbal signals; on the other hand, social expressiveness manifests in ability to follow social norms that

regulate behaviour. Social expressiveness abilities of the observed, manifests in expression of care, saying compliments:

[When friends come to me, the door always opens and K. asks, whether we want coffee. If we respond positively, she makes it and we drink it together (S.) / Often says that I look pretty (K.M.)].

Flexibility, adaptability, conflict solving abilities. Social adaptability helps to create and maintain interrelations, choose behaviour that is adequate to the situation, and effectively solve problems (Samašonok et al., 2010).

Experiences difficulties when choosing appropriate behaviour, and reacts angrily when disciplined:

[I told her off and noted that she will leave the hall, if she keeps on clapping and making noise. Then K. started to clap even harder, fell on the floor and after several minutes started to scratch her face (K.M.) / She feels comfortable being dirty and sitting at the table without washing her hands (Mč.). // [Once K. went to the bathroom to wash on her own, and brush her teeth. I asked her to reduce the water stream a little bit; so she responded angrily, whether she has to be dirty (M.)].

Cannot apologize when being incorrect, often blames the others:

[K. hinders a plate on the table and pours out the soup. Straight ahead she blames her sister that she rocked the table and therefore the soup got spilled.].

Finds it difficult to express her opinion during a conflict:

[K. was sitting on the lounge chair. A. entered the group and kicked at her leg saying, "Go to your room." K. began scratching her face and crying (K.A.)].

Besides, it was noticed that the monitored girl has her own behavioural strategies in conflict situations. For example, when the girl is too enthusiastic, she looks for mother for compassion or calms down with food (can eat endlessly):

[Mother repeatedly asks K. to calm down, lifts her from the ground, starts to caress her, console, asks not to be nervous, wipes her tears, and tidies the girl's clothes. Pours soup and asks to ear. K. calms down a bit and is silent. Mother once again offers her food. K. starts eating.] // *[The girl was angry for some reason. I offered her some gooseberries. So she ate all of the gooseberries from the gooseberry-bush (M.)].*

Sometimes in conflict situations she gets confused, tensed, reacts in an aggressive behaviour, and withdraws:

[Once during an activity, K. jostled with one boy, so K. slammed the doors and walked away (K.A.)].

Participation skills. In this research, the concept of *participation skills* is chosen in order to accentuate the social aspect of participation and the expression of skills needed for the participation in some activity: sense of initiative, acknowledgement of individual and group differences (Goleman, 2001); ability to join the group activity; render offers; be interested in how others progress to perform tasks; offer help; share available means; allow others to express their opinion; consult others without undervaluing other people (Elliot, Malecki & Demaray, 2001; Raudeliūnaitė & Paigozina, 2009; Zins, Weissbert, Wang et al., 2004).

It was noticed that K. is eager to participate in peer activities:

[When my friends come, she always finds the reason to enter my room. We invite her, so she comes right away (S.)].

Is able to take initiative, offer help:

[K. asks, whether chicken need their water to be changed. Mother says that she can change it. K. runs, takes a cup, scoops the clean water from the bucket, and pours it to chicken. // K. approaches her mother and says she will help her wash the clothes. Mother agrees. K. is very pleased and starts jumping, saying "Ok, I will certainly help." The girl laughs, washes her hands and starts sorting clothes according to their colours].

However, in collective activities she participates only briefly, quickly gets upset, withdraws, and observes the peers from the distance:

[Tells her friends that she does not want to play anymore, but rather will go collect apples. Goes to the apple tree, takes an apple from the ground, cleans the apple, and eats. Watches the girls].

Participates in peer activity, if she is prompted with food, presents:

[Teacher explains the task that schoolchildren will have to accomplish. K. looks through the window, examines her fingers. Teacher notices and says she will treat the children, who accomplish the task, with apples. K.'s attention is drawn; she calms down, and starts working.] *// Guests arrived to school. K. told she did not want to see anyone. One of the children saw through the window that the guests brought boxes. Children guessed those were the presents. K. jumped saying, "I will also go to the hall" (K.M.)].*

When taking part in an activity, she regards only her wishes, does not consider the situation:

[Once we were working outdoors and I asked her to bring the bucket for trash, and she replied, "What, am I a servant to you?" (Moč.) / if you ask her something, she always feels offended, saying, "You are scolding me again." Regards only her wishes, if she thinks of something herself (M.)].

Is unable to work independently, however, does not want to accept and use the help from the surroundings:

[Would not find, walk back without us (M.) // If you ask her to bring something, she will walk away and will not return (Mč.) / I say: "Let's go, I will show you." She responds, "I know. No need to explain it to me (K.A.)].

Other scientists gathered similar data, as well (Carter et al., 2005; Haskett & Willoughby, 2006).

Emotional skills manifest in two ways – on the one hand, they help people to understand themselves, their emotions, control themselves when communicating and participating in collective activities; on the other hand, emotional skills help to understand the partners of communication or joined activity.

Emotional sensitivity and expressiveness – ones of the essential communication abilities. According to Malinauskas (2004), emotional skills enrich and enliven the verbal and nonverbal communication. The author states that *emotional expressiveness* belongs to the area of nonverbal information transference and covers not only the ability to express the need for communication, attitude towards communication, but also shows the individual's ability to express emotions in a manner, which is understandable and acceptable to others. *Emotional sensitivity* refers to the recognition of others' emotions, and *emotional control* – ability to control and regulate one's emotional states and their nonverbal expression, as well as, the ability to hide emotional state, and avoid a spontaneous burst of emotions (Malinauskas, 2004).

Interview data indicate that the schoolgirl is able to understand others' emotions that are visibly expressed, reacts adequately to a cry, and is able to express sympathy. Understands if someone is hurt, and reacts empathically:

[I came to work with an aching back, so K. asked, what was that caused me the pain. I told that it was my back. So the girl replied, "You'd better sit down, I will bring things you need" (K.A.)].

Emotional expressiveness manifests in the girl's ability to sympathise, solace:

[When father died, K. embraced me and said she is also sorry for him, and started crying (S.). // Her roommate was sick. K. went to the medical aid post, called the nurse, brought a cup of tea that was left after the supper. Sat on the bed, stroke her head, saying, "Poor you, you are ill" (K.M.)].

Especially willingly sympathises the other in need, if she is in a good mood:

[When she is in a good mood, she understands that a friend is in pain. She brings her a glass of water, cuddles, and acts as a smart girl (K.A.)].

K. adequately reacts to surprises that she finds them pleasing (smiles, claps). Is happy, when receives presents:

[During her birthday, I gave K. coloured pencils and colouring book: she was extremely happy to receive a present, showed everyone what she got, clapped, and laughed. This lasted about two hours, until her mother told her to go and colour the book. She did as was told, but continued to laugh for a long time (S.). // [K. was sitting at the window and waiting for her mother. When she saw her coming, she started clapping and jumping (K.M.).]

Reacts lively to stimuli:

[Mother compliments the girl. K. starts clapping and smiling. / She is happy when finds out about a trip, is eager and acts from inertia: pulls all her clothes from the wardrobe and asks, "Shall I wear these pants?" Drops them on the floor. Pulls other clothes from the wardrobe and asks again, "Shall I wear this shirt?", etc.].

Is able to describe what she likes:

[*Enjoys playing with a doll (K.) / Likes little stones (K.) / Being in a canteen (K.)*].

Self-regulation. In changed situations, the research participant shows anxiety applying verbal means and body language:

["You are not my teacher," says K. to the already leaving student <…> Next morning, when K. saw a student entering the class, she began to laugh, became fidgety. Crouched when sat down at the table.].

The girl distinguishes in impulsivity, spontaneity:

[*We were raking leaves in the yard, and she suddenly dropped the rake and started to kick flowers (Mč.)*];

uncontrollable fury (Sigafoos, O'Reilly, Seely-York, et al., 2004), inability to control her emotions:

[K. sister enters the kitchen and says that K. has taken her notebook. K. stands up and starts shouting at the sister that she did not take any notebook, that she lost it. Sister continues to dispute. Then K. falls on the ground and starts biting her arms, scratching her face, hitting the head on the floor, and screams that her sister is a liar and she has not taken any of her things. // *When I came to work, I found K. crying. I asked her to calm down, but she started to stamp her feet on the floor, scratch her face, rub her eyes, and attack the children (K.M.) // K. was punished for inappropriate words and we have not taken her outside, so she started pounding and kicking the doors, swearing. It was difficult to control her emotions until I told her that she would not get her dinner (K.A.)*].

Statements made by Emerson and Hatton (2007), Sevcik, Romski and Adamson (2004), which implied that different behavioural and emotional disorders may be typical to mentally retarded persons, were confirmed; the disorders manifest by:

• Self-injure, stereotypical movements (Dekker & Koot, 2003; Dykens, 2000; Rojahn et al., 2001; Noll & Barrett, 2004; Symons et al., 2005):

[*If attitude towards her is negative, she harms herself (M.) // A boy hit K. on her shoulder. The girl ran into the playroom, sat on the ground and started beating the floor with her hands, swaying, and hitting the head on the bed. She was scattering herself for about an hour, scratching her face, and sending out anyone who entered the room (K.A.)*] [Starts to hit herself on the face / Sat on the floor and began beating the floor with her hands, swaying, hitting her head on the bed. // Starts kicking the bucket / Stamps her feet / Scratches her face].

• Mood change (Lancioni & O'Reilly, 2001; deRuiter, Dekker, Verhulst et al., 2007):

[K. starts biting her hand and scratching her face. Mother tells her to calm down and offers some apples. K. agrees. Eats the apples. Sits on the sofa and stares at one point. Begins watching television. Starts laughing together with the others].

Social cognition skills. Social cognition skills undoubtedly condition the quality of person's social functioning (firstly, communication, participation in activities). The basis for them is the knowledge (cognitive level) of social norms that regulate the behaviour. Practical level of social cognition skills – *social sensibility* – helps to decode social signals (*perception of social signals*), assess the situation (*social situation assessment abilities*), by comparing it to the knowledge about social norms (*social norms recognition abilities*), as well as, to make decisions about behaviours that are acceptable to the situation, or solve problems when needed (*decision making abilities*). *Social sensitivity* – ability to understand (decode) verbal signals, identify and follow social norms, which regulate acceptable social behaviour (Malinauskas, 2004), – as well as, *problem-solving* are related to cognitive abilities. The basis for social sensitivity is the awareness skills about the communication situation being correspondent to social norms, which cover the recognition and assessment of partners' and one's own emotional state, behaviour, and communication situation. Both, knowledge of social norms, and the practical orientation towards the social norms in various situations require a high-level social and emotional intellect.

When examining *social sensitivity abilities*, it was noticed that K. most often does not react to the requests, verbal instructions of the adults, does not obey, and so everything has to be repeated several times:

[Sees a ladybird. Takes it. Mother asks to put it back. K. squeezes her, claps and laughs. I ask her why she behaved this way. K. does not respond. // *If she is busy with her matters, you can shout, call, but you will not get her attention (M.)*].

However, sometimes she obeys to a stricter word, or stare:

[*Once I was doing my homework, and she was sitting behind me and mumbling about her going outside, picking apples, and said she would bring me some , so I turned around and looked at her. She said, "Fine, fine, R., I will not disturb you anymore, do your homework." (S.)*].

Decision-making abilities, orientation in complex situations. Some difficulties exist when making a decision:

[*I told her to go for a walk. And without any thought I told her to go along the fence. So she went alongside the entire length of the fence and stopped. She stood there for a long time (M.)*];

and difficulties in following social norms (behavioural rules):

[In the playground, K. asks a friend about her missing pencil-sharpener. When the latter told she had not seen it, K. argues that she is lying and orders to show her the pockets. The friend refuses to do so, then K. puts her own hands into the girl's pockets.] [*She knew that I made a pie for guests. We went outside, and she ate it all (M.) // [We were going to town by bus, and an old lady accidently fell on the ground while getting on the bus. It was so funny for K. that she started laughing out loud. I could not calm her down. The more I tried to soothe her, the merrier it was for her (M.)*].

Such behaviour shows the deficiency of *social situation assessment* abilities.

Conclusions

The structure of social skills is individual for each person; and this causes unequal level of social adaptability and social functioning. The identification of individual social skills is important because it allows constructing an education oriented towards the child's strengths.

A viewpoint, oriented towards a person's *strengths*, means a provision to acknowledge the individuality and available abilities. The identification of available social skills (strengths) is extremely important when assessing social skills of a moderately intellectually disabled

person. A reason for the application of case analysis methods was to highlight the strengths of a schoolgirl with moderate mental retardation: her abilities, experiences, characteristics, and roles, to describe particularities of her social functioning and educational potentials. The identification of social skills, when analysing social interactions and behaviours in certain situations (observation method) and scrutinizing subjective interpretations of the pupil's actions by interaction participants (interview method), allowed to reveal the person's social skills (strengths) and problem areas in detail.

It needs to be highlighted that a majority of moderately intellectually disabled individuals do not speak; therefore, it may be difficult for the researcher to communicate with the person, in pursuance of gathering authentic interview data about the individual, when talking to them. The advantage of this research is the possibility, when identifying the skills of the moderately intellectually disabled person, to talk not only with family members and pedagogues, but also with the pupil herself, whose answers were supplemented by interview data of other research participants.

Analysing the content of the PPS findings, mostly negative characteristics that described inabilities (intellectual, linguistic) were noticed. However, under a detailed case study, the social skills (strengths) of the person were highlighted — the need to communicate, especially with adults, the need for communication and emotional contact; the basic emotional sensitivity (recognition of the others' emotions) and expressiveness (empathic reaction, care for others), social sensitivity (recognition of the essence of uncomplicated social situations), and other abilities. The person's linguistic skills, even if they are poor, are her strength, which expands her opportunities of social functioning, allows making contact with peers and adults. For instance, the person feels and is able to express her emotions (especially satisfaction and joy) in an elementary language. There is an especially obvious need for motivation (the attention of adults and compliments). Spare time hobbies are rather primitive and infantile.

Problem areas of social skills also became obvious. Especially poor are social cognition skills: orientations in complicated situations of social interaction and problem-solving abilities. For the expression of the latter abilities not only a well-developed language is necessary, but also the entirety of all other social intellectual abilities. She lacks *self-control* the most: it is difficult for her to find an adequate solution in a conflicting situation; to calm down; however, she uses strategies of the learnt behaviour in such situations (complex situations are solved defensively (inadequately laughs, withdraws). A somewhat hypertrophic need for food is also related to the lack of self-control abilities.

Considering data of the case study and findings of other authors, it can be stated that typical and individual difficulties of social functioning are characteristic of the person, as of the majority moderately intellectually disabled schoolchildren, due to which she cannot avoid conflicting situations (Scrambler et al., 2007): inadequate expression of emotions and behaviour, poor self-control skills.

Under the basis of strong and problem areas analysis, tasks for an individualised social skills education are formulated, and the most relevant of them is the education of social cognition skills (knowledge of social norms, conflict-solving) and emotional and behavioural self-control abilities. In the perspective, during the process of education of the lacking social skills, it should be leaned on the pupil's strengths (available linguistic abilities, the need to communicate, emotional sensitivity and expressiveness abilities). Referring to the strength perspective, the strengths of a person become the most important resource in education of social skills.

Besides, a purposeful systemic collective activity (specific tasks for each participant, educational methods, constant attention to the expression of social skills) in various environments and various situations of all education participants should be projected in the

education of social skills. A purposeful education of social skills has to take place in the least restricting environment, having the pupil actively involved in social interactions with peers and adults; however, due to a specific environment of special schools, schoolchildren lack actual situations, in which these skills could be applied and improved. Therefore, it is extremely important for the family members of intellectually disabled person to participate in the education of person's social skills.

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