

PREVENTION AND CORRECTION OF DISORDERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE “CORE” IN READER’S COMPETENCE OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES (based on education of children with deep impairments of vision and hearing)

Elena Goncharova
Institute of Special Education,
Russian Academy of Education, Moscow, Russia

Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of forming an ability to transform the meaning which the author has introduced in a text implicitly into own cognitive, emotional and creative experience of children with disabilities. The stages and methodical conditions for forming this ability in children with impairments of vision and hearing are described.

Key words: *disorders of reading of children, reader’s competence, transition from situational to contextual speaking, children with special needs, children with disabilities, deaf-blind children.*

An introduction to the reading of children with disabilities is a complex and demanding task. Teachers and parents are making great efforts to teach a special child to read and understand what they read. They carry on a day-to-day struggle with difficulties encountered in every text. Unfortunately, these efforts are not adequately effective in numerous cases.

Instead of this struggle with difficulties in reading, it is offered to concentrate attention on prevention of disorders in reader’s development, focusing mainly on initial stages of such development.

Reader’s development (in restricted sense of the word) is understood as a process of development in ontogenesis of reader’s competence.

Reader’s competence is a very complicated functional system, the “core” of which is reader’s or listener’s ability to transform the meaning which an author has introduced in a text implicitly, into own cognitive and creative experience. To describe the structure of reader’s competence, we will use the metaphor of “the wheel of reading”.

The graphic model designed on the base of this metaphor (Figure 1) uses some concepts which are well known to psychologists and important for understanding the structure of reader’s competence. The process of reading includes own experience of a reader (1), it is

provided by the functioning of almost all higher mental functions and neuropsychological structures (2), includes mastering of reading skills (3), implies that a reader is able to transform a text written by another person into own semantic and cognitive experience (4). We believe that such mechanism is a “core” of reader’s activity.

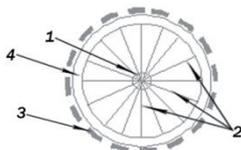


Figure 1. The structure of reader’s competence

Under the favorable conditions for education of a normally developing child, such basic structure of reader’s competence (“the wheel of reading”) is formed by the end of elementary school. And its “core” is formed in preschool childhood (in a period before acquiring literacy) in activities which are joint-shared with an adult, implementing a cultural tradition of reading aloud and storytelling works of children’s literature for children who are not reading yet.

“Falling out” of these traditions is one of the “social dislocations” which Vygotsky considered the key issue in the psychological nature of mental development in children (Вьготский, 1995). Studies of the conditions for reader’s development of deaf-blind children have revealed that congenital impairments of vision and hearing lead to such “social dislocation” at the earliest stages of reader’s development (Гончарова, 2009b). We can reveal such social dislocation in the process of education of other groups of children with disabilities.

When the use of such cultural traditions of children’s introduction to reading made in preschool childhood is limited or absent, serious disorders happen in the formation of the reader’s competence “core”.

In this case, four problems that are significant for diagnostics and, respectively, four variants of disorders in the development of the reader’s competence “core” of children can be identified.

1. The failure occurred at the stage of situational speech development and, as a result, the background (the level of higher mental functions development and representations of reality) for the development of the reader’s competence is not formed in a child.

2. A child went through the stage of situational speech development but the mechanism of text content transformation into own cognitive and emotional experience is not created, in other words, “the rim” in “the wheel of reading” is not formed.

3. The mechanism of text content transformation into cognitive and emotional experience is formed but methods of solving elementary reader’s problems are mastered poorly.

4. The mechanism of text content transformation into cognitive and emotional experience is formed but the base structure of genre competence is not formed.

Such disorders in the formation of reader’s activity “core” can combine both with low and high achievements in mastering technical skills of reading. That is why these disorders may be found even among children with excellent skills of reading and understanding of the texts at all stages of further education (Гончарова & Дмитриева, 2007; Гончарова, 2009a; Гончарова, 2009b).

Object of the research: prevention and correction of disorders in the development of reader’s competence “core” for children with disabilities.

The aim of the research: based on education of children with deep impairments of vision and hearing to develop prevention and correction in the development of reader’s competence “core”.

Methods of the research:

- Theoretical analysis of the materials concerning prevention and correction of disorders in the development of reader's competence "core" for children with disabilities;
- Case study.

Methodological approaches to diagnostics, correction and prevention of the mentioned variants of reader's development disorders among children with disabilities were developed.

The most difficult situations were studied in the course of research conducted in the boarding school in Zagorsk (now town of Sergiyev Posad in Moscow Region).

The procedure aimed at formation of basic mechanism of reader's activity enabling the transformation of another person's experience described in the text into the content of personal cognitive and emotional experience of a child is described in this paper. This procedure was developed, tested and approved in the process of education of children with complex sensory disorders including partially sighted deaf and deaf-blind children with residual vision (hereafter the deaf-blinds) (Гончарова, 2006).

First of all, it should be noted that the need in such mechanism for teaching deaf-blind children to read can appear not in one moment since mastering of literacy by a deaf-blind child coincides with the very first initial step of mastering verbal speaking when pupils begin to learn coordinating their actions and observations with words. At this stage of education, reading is used in its non-specific function, as a means intended for serving a situational communication with a deaf-blind child and thereby for providing necessary conditions for the formation of vocabulary and grammatical system of their verbal speaking (Соколянский, 1999).

The materials for reading at this stage are words corresponding to objects that are used by deaf-blind children in their actions; phrases corresponding to these actions; and, at last, texts describing specific events and situations of their lives, that is, the situational, by its nature, speaking. To comprehend such speaking, there is no need for children to have any special mechanism of transformation of another person's experience into their own. The thing is that children themselves are heroes (the main characters) or immediate participants of the events described in the text. The text or its separate parts serve as a trigger for repetition of the previous experience of a child (who has read and recalled). On the basis of such reading children can acquire bright, comprehensive and emotionally colored notion of the events described in the text because the context of these events is their personal property.

The ability to completely, integrally and emotionally imagine the events where the child was not an immediate participant will be necessary when a teacher begins to offer stories describing events of other people's lives.

It is just the period of education when there is a special need in teaching children to recognize the following situation: children should understand that instead of common "mirror" that reflected their own lives there is now a totally new "device" by which they can see the experience and outlook of another person. Children must be taught immediately to use this new "device" adequately just the moment they start to use it.

In other words, at the stage of transition from perception of situational speaking to perception of contextual speaking three main problems must be solved:

1. in the course of this transition we should help a reading child to understand the change in their position concerning to the events described in the text;
2. to help a child recognize that the procedures and sets of reader's activity that were formed at the previous stage of education are useless for solving new reader's problems;
3. and, at last, to provide a purposeful formation of the procedures and sets of reader's activity that are adequate to this type of texts.

While solving the first problem, it should be taken into account that the problem of interaction between a child and an author arises for the first time just at the stage of transition

from situational to contextual speaking. This stage is believed to be the starting point for the formation of the true reader's activity of a deaf-blind child. It should be noted that at the stage of mastering situational speaking when a child is simultaneously the hero, the author and the reader of the text, the positions of the reader, of the author and of the hero of the text are not yet differentiated.

The first important qualitative change in the differentiation between positions of the reader and the author of the text in relation to the events described in the text occurs in the transition to working with the texts whose authors and heroes do not coincide with the reader. The author's position is a position of immediate participant or observer of the events described in the text. Meanwhile, the reader's position is a position of a person who is not a participant nor a witness of the events described in the text, and they can get notions on these events only from the text.

The child who starts learning to read at the stage of mastering situational speaking is in the reader's position for the first time only during the transition to perception of contextual speaking. This transition is just the moment when reader's development starts and the foundation of reading as cognitive activity is laid. The understanding of this change and the ability to differentiate between the author's and reader's positions is the first step in purposeful formation of the main mechanism of reader's activity, and it is the first step to the formation of reading as communicative and cognitive activity.

It was the reason why the section "Differentiation between positions of author and reader" was introduced into the first unit of the program for a cycle of lessons for deaf-blind children. This section is quite unusual for the programs of teaching to read (Гончарова, 2006).

This problem may be solved while working with the simplest (by their structure and content) texts describing the events from child's life.

In contrast to traditional forms of working with such texts at the reading and speaking development lessons, where questions addressed to the text content prevail, and a teacher uses these questions trying to achieve the right understanding of all words and grammar constructions in the text, we widely use in our lessons the procedure of "asking the reader about the context in the presence of the text's author".

At the first preparatory stage of learning the work is carried out with the texts that are well-known to children. The hero, the author and the reader of these texts are children themselves. By formulating the questions to context, we try to show the child, who is the hero and the author of the text, the advantage of such position (hero + author) compared with the position of a reader who has never been the witness or the participant of these events. The following is an example of such approach.

We prepared beforehand the texts for the reading lessons, and it was done individually with each pupil in the group. The texts contained the descriptions of some events or situations of the pupil's life that were unknown to other children. It may be the description of his family, flat, family celebration, any event that he has observed, etc. Usually we select a text with illustrations (if possible), for example, a story about the family of one of the pupils in the class.

Analysis of Case study

Oleg's family

Oleg has mommy, daddy and sister Lena. Mommy works. Daddy works. Lena does not learn. Lena goes to kindergarten.

To reconstruct the context of events described in the text the teacher asks the questions and gives tasks to readers in the presence of the text's author.

The following are the questions to the text mentioned above: What is the name of Oleg's mommy? What is the name of Oleg's daddy? How old is Lena? How old is daddy? How old is mommy? Has Oleg got a granny? Has Oleg got a grand-dad? Where do granny and grand-dad live?

It is clear that the reader who does not know Oleg's family cannot give correct answers to these questions. Only Oleg, the author of this text, can give the right answers. When the first reader makes mistakes or refuses to answer, the teacher offers the same questions or tasks to another reader and then the author. Then the results of every child's work are discussed.

Such procedure demonstrates the advantages of the text's author when they perform a task to reproduce the entire picture of the events described in the text, helps a child to make the difference between the reader's and author's positions of the text.

At the first stage of education children discover the difference coming from their accustomed position of the author and the hero of the text. At the next stage of education we create such conditions for children in order that they could experience the changes in their position towards the situation described in the text, and they should do it many times during one lesson. This procedure can give children a possibility to assess advantages and disadvantages of each position, to reproduce in great details the events described in the text including a context reproduction.

Such exercises gradually form in children understanding of the fact that the strategy "have read and recalled" used earlier is now useless because the texts now describe the events from the other persons' lives.

What activity of a reading child is adequate to this new type of texts? What activity of a child can give the bright, integral, emotionally colored notions of the events described in the text of new type? When responding to these questions, we supposed that such activity at initial stages of education may be a direct co-operation between a reader and an author who work together on teacher's task to recover the whole picture.

At the initial stage of education the teacher should organize co-operation of the reader and the author, the teacher being the mediator between them. The simplest way of organization of communication is to re-address to the author the questions initially addressed to the reader. By organizing the communication between the reader and the author, the teacher prompts the author (if the author is a child) the different procedures for elucidation of the text content (for example, the teacher recommends them to draw a picture, to show actions in gestures or by dramatization, etc.). Pupils master in such a way the roles of the reader and the author of the text. They become more and more independent and active in communication with each other and teacher's help is less and less necessary for them.

Such co-operation can be presented in a game that we conventionally name "the author's presentation". This presentation is created on the base of reading of the text which describes the events from the life of one of the pupils.

The essence of this procedure is that pupils reproduce the text content in an exterior form with the help of the author and under the direct control of the author. By controlling, directing and organizing the implementation of actions done by the readers for "the hero" in this presentation, the author of the text is gradually adding some content and tries to achieve the situation when actors reflect, as adequately as possible, the events which the author observed, experienced and described in the text. At this stage, reader's activities are simulated in exterior forms which are the most adequate to specific nature of reading as communicative activity where the experience of other people is acquired by the reader with the help of the text.

The next phase of the work is coming from the necessity of interiorization of communicative components of this activity.

The task was to transform a direct co-operation of the reader and the author of the text into an internal dialogue of the reader and the author mediated by the text. In our work we used the Galperin's theory of step-by-step formation of mental actions and notions (Гальперин, 2008).

Children must be learned to ask the questions about the context and to avoid the incompleteness of the text without a direct communication with the author, and they must do it when reasoning or thinking in the course of reading.

Our idea was to transform the co-operation of the reader with the author of the text into common way of mastering the text content. Then, by reducing and by interiorization of all its components, it is necessary to achieve the situation when communication of the reader with the author as well as performing actions for the hero occurs in the mind of the reader in the course of reading.

It is achieved by complicating conditions for communication between the reader and the author of the text in educational process. For example, the teacher offers the reader, as usually, to reproduce events described in the text but for the situation when communication with the author is delayed. The teacher organizes the implementation of reader's actions in such conditions and explains the need to think of content that is absent in the text or is presented in little details without author's help. At this stage it is necessary to teach children to correlate the results of their work with the text in order to avoid contradictions between the text and the introduced supplements. The author retains the control functions in order that the results of the basic tasks performed by the pupils do not contradict the content of the text. It is a new step in preparation of a deaf-blind child for reading of the fiction books for children. It is an important step in transformation of the direct co-operation of author and the teacher into "internal dialogue", "joint creative work of those who understand". An outstanding Russian philosopher and psycholinguist Bakhtin considered that the psychological nature of the perception of a literary text is coming from such joint creative work (Бахтин, 1979).

However, it is impossible to become a reader if a child reads only during school lessons. A child needs to be introduced into the world of books as early as possible. Since the children literature remains inaccessible to a deaf-blind child for a long time, it is necessary to create an artificial medium for every level of reader's development of a child. In these media, children, based on their own desires and in accordance with their own cognitive interests, may accomplish the "ways" of moving which they mastered at special lessons.

We offer to create three such "artificial" media, three spheres of reading which are referred to different levels of development of reading activity of a deaf-blind child.

The first sphere of reading should be created for children who know only the ways of comprehension of situational speaking. It will contain the books which describe the events and the situations of life of a deaf-blind child. Those may be books about their family, home, etc. The books are created by the child or by the teacher on the base of observations on child's behavior, gesture stories, pictures. The child is at the same time the author, the hero and the reader of these texts. The children like these books very much. Reading these books is just the same for children as walking in their own homes. Moving in this space does not require the development of special means, but it is just the place where they learn to walk, learn to look around, and where they acquire their first experience and learn to associate it with words, learn to see some familiar and accustomed images behind words.

The second sphere of reading should be intended for children who have already mastered the simplest methods of cooperation with author according to our program. This sphere of reading can be composed of books from the first sphere of reading of all other pupils. It must contain books written by teachers and other school personnel about their own life, their families, children, and various life stories. Such reading substantially broadens minds of children, and their notions about the nearest persons become more complete and adequate. It serves as a good basis for more close contacts with these persons. While reading such books, a child can perform all the skills of co-operation and interaction with the author or with the hero of the text which they acquired at the reading lessons based on our program.

The third sphere of reading includes adapted children's fiction books. The variants of adaptation may be different by the degree of its complexity and they may be made in view of a real speech development level of children. The transition to this sphere of reading supposes

that the child already has the ability to recover the context and the implication of the events described in these texts and does it mentally without author's help during the reading.

In our approach, a combination of special lessons and independent reading is described by the following rules:

✓ Each step in complication of material suggested for reading which requires change of structure and content of reader's activity of a child should be first prepared at lessons of reading with simple lexico-grammatical material familiar to the child.

✓ As soon as the child masters methods of mental activity needed for comprehension of the texts of new type, it is necessary to provide conditions for their fixing and realization in reading by free choice of a child, or in reading "with pleasure"

✓ As the child masters a new sphere of available reading and demonstrates a certain level of reader's independence, it is possible to go to the traditional work on "exploitation" of reading of such texts for solving educational and correctional problems.

In conclusion, it should be noted that this system has successfully been used in the boarding school for deaf-blind children in town of Sergiyev Posad for more than 20 years. It is aimed, first of all, at junior children who are able to read the simplest texts. The presented approach is used with some adaptation in the work with preschool deaf children who are able to read as well as with those children who have not yet mastered literacy and who have aural perception of speech. This approach can serve as an effective means for correction of the revealed disorders in the development of a reading competence "core" of children who have already mastered reading skills.

Conclusions

The presented phases and the method of working with children during special reading lessons, the libraries for children's reading by their free choice, the rules of combination of special lessons and independent reading of children represent the system of "detours" for forming the core of reader's competence of the most complicated category of potential readers.

Three "artificial" media, three spheres of reading which are referred to different levels of reading activity development of deaf-blind children could be created.

The first sphere of reading should be created for children who know only the ways of situational speaking comprehension. The second sphere of reading should be intended for children who have already mastered the simplest methods of cooperation with the author according to our program. The third sphere of reading includes the adapted children's fiction books.

References

1. Бахтин, М.М. (1979). *Эстетика словесного творчества*. М.: Искусство.
2. Выготский, Л.С. (1995). *Проблемы дефектологии*. М: Просвещение.
3. Гальперин, П.Я. (2008). *Психология как объективная наука*. М: Институт практической психологии.
4. Гончарова, Е.Л. (2006). *Как помочь ребенку с нарушениями зрения и слуха стать читателем: монография*. Приложение к Альманаху Института коррекционной педагогики,(10). <http://almanah.ikprao.ru/articles/almanah-10/knizhnoe-prilozhenie>
5. Гончарова, Е.Л., & Дмитриева, Д.В. (2007). Бездумное чтение у младших школьников: кто виноват и что делать? *Воспитание и обучение детей с нарушениями развития*, (4), 3-13.
6. Гончарова, Е.Л. (2009а). Жанровая компетентность начинающего читателя как предмет экспериментального исследования в норме и в условиях отклоняющегося развития. *Дефектология*, (5), 12-21.
7. Гончарова, Е.Л. (2009б). *Психологическая реконструкция ранних этапов читательского развития (по материалам изучения и обучения слепоглухих детей): монография*. М: Полиграф сервис.
8. Соколянский, И.А. (1999). Усвоение слепоглухим ребенком грамматического строя словесной речи. *Дефектология*, (2), 57-61

PREVENTION AND CORRECTION OF DISORDERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE “CORE” IN READER’S COMPETENCE OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Summary

Elena Goncharova

Institute of Special Education, Russian Academy of Education, Moscow, Russia

The article is devoted to the problem of prevention and correction of disorders in reader’s development of children with disabilities.

The process of reader’s development in ontogenesis is described in the system of notions of Vygotsky cultural-historical psychology and is understood as formation of reader’s competence – a special psychological functional system the “core” of which is an ability to transform the content of a text into the content of reader’s experience. The “core” of reader’s competence of normally developing children is formed in activities which are joint-shared with adults, implementing a cultural tradition of reading aloud and storytelling the works of children’s literature for children who are not still reading. When the use of such cultural traditions of introduction of children to reading performed in preschool childhood is limited or absent, serious disorders happen in the formation of the reader’s competence “core”. The extent and the nature of disorders in the development of the reader’s activity “core” may differ depending on the stage of the development where the “failure” happens and on the components of its structure which turned out to be the most vulnerable.

The process of formation of the reader’s competence “core” was studied in the course of its purposeful formation in the most complicated category of potential reader’s – deaf-blind and partially sighted deaf children. It was shown that the starting point in the development of the reader’s competence “core” is at the stage of the transition of a child from situational to contextual speaking. In the course of teaching a “special” child it is necessary just at this stage to create conditions for the formation of initial forms of such subsystems of reader’s competence as ability to dialogue with the author, co-operation with the hero, ability to cope with the different problems described in the text.

The article presents the methodical approaches needed to solve this problem. These approaches were developed, tested and approved in the process of education of junior children with complex sensory disorders.

Methodical approach which helps children to recognize that procedures and sets of reader’s activity that were formed at the previous stage of education are useless for solving the new reader’s problems is described. Other methodical approaches enable a teacher to form a set for interaction of a child-reader with the author of the text. The procedures for organizing such an interaction, which helps the child-reader holistically and fully represent the content that goes beyond his personal experience are disclosed. The successive steps for the interiorization of the interaction of a reading child with the author of the text and for conversion it into an internal dialogue are outlined.

It is shown how mastering new reader’s abilities can be combined with reading by free choice of a child prior to the moment when this child will have abilities to read children’s literature. The three “artificial” media, three spheres of reading which refer to different levels of reading activity development of a deaf-blind child are presented. The rules of combining special lessons with child’s reading by free choice are described.

The presented system of the “detours” for forming the core of reader’s competence has successfully been used in the boarding school for deaf-blind children in town of Sergiyev Posad for more than 20 years. With some adaptation, it is implemented in the work with preschool deaf children who are able to read as well as with those children who have not yet mastered literacy and who have aural perception of speech. The system can serve as an effective means for correction of revealed disorders in the development of the reading competence “core” of children who have already mastered reading skills.