



THE USE OF LEISURE TIME AS A STRUCTURED PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION TO PREVENT AND MITIGATE BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS - A CASE PRESENTATION FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF INFORMAL LEARNING AND EDUCATION

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Abstract:

Behavioral problems are a category of special educational needs and can affect the person's evolution. The purpose of this article is to present an incident with problems of internalization and to address it through structured pedagogical intervention in the free time. In the case study, a real or hypothetical example that reflects a more general situation is presented with a view to analyzing in depth and investigating alternatives to emerging problems. Case Reports are the core of the recognition process and the end of a successful training. This article focuses on the use of leisure time as a planned educational practice from the point of view of informal learning and education provided in a center for the design and implementation of personalized and group educational programs of integration philosophy. An incident is presented, as well as the symptomatology it displays. Here is a summary of the inclusion program that was organized and implemented on the one hand to alleviate the problems of behavior and on the other hand to integrate and accept the particular child from his peers. Finally, some basic conclusions are presented based on what has been presented. Overall, a joint free time program for children with and without behavioral problems helps significantly in the development of relationships between children, in accepting a child with behavioral problems from peers, and in real group membership.

Keywords: behavioral problems, inclusion, leisure time, prevention, informal education

1. Introduction

Free time is a reality for all groups and ages. However, children's free time is important in recent years. The type of activities they choose and their performance in them can play an important role in integrating them into the peer group. Leisure time is just as

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important for all children, regardless of whether or not there are special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, in the case of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, free time can affect their participation and integration into society. In this context, the sharing of free time for children with and without special educational needs and/or disabilities is included, as a planned educational practice from the point of view of informal learning and education (Jefferies, Smith, 1990). In addition, given that the kind of support provided to parents of children with disabilities and/or disability is an important raising factor, as it exerts a catalytic effect and affects the lives and the way the family operates, modern research findings emphasize social support networks parents of children with disabilities and/or disability. There is a positive relationship and interaction between informal and formal support, with the most popular type of support from parents' point of view the informal support. This positive correlation comes among others from Early Intervention Centers and Specialists in General and Special Education (Gastouniotou, Lakka, 2016). The purpose of this article is to present an incident with behavioral problems on the one hand as a teaching example of an inclusive approach in the free time on the other hand as a structured pedagogical process in the context of informal education from a center of design and implementation of personalized and group educational programs for infants with and without special educational needs and/or disabilities. The planned educational activities emphasize the interaction between the members of the group and for this reason pedagogical activities of learner-centered teaching are adopted.

2. A brief reference to learner-centered teaching

The main characteristic of learner-centered teaching is the predominance of students' learning activities, whether they are individual (the student works alone), group (the student works as a member of a group), corporate (the student works with his classmate). Learner-centered teaching is based on the collaboration of team members, aims at developing critical thinking and creative thinking, as well as developing social consciousness and promoted through collaborative learning. Under the teaching principle of cooperative learning, the weight in modern teaching is shifting to the learning methodology, which means learning collaborative activation that contributes to an all-round development of the personality of children and adolescents. At the same time, the concept of the group plays a central functional role, it is combined with the concept of class and school work and, by extension, group-centered teaching is the one in which the learning goals and the teaching objectives are accomplished with a basic and necessary channel, the groups of students (Dervisis, 1999). This philosophy concerns both formal and non-formal and informal education.

In particular, in such a learning context, key to teacher teaching techniques, in developing positive behavior or the modification of a negative one, are the enhancement of positive behavior, the use of the reward system, the use of individual education programs, the provision of clear instructions, organizing the training area,

minimizing stress on students (Vogindroukas, Sherratt, 2008). Particularly, in order to promote the well-being and learning of children (Weare, Gray, 2000), methodological approaches and strategies that contribute to the effective participation of children in the educational process, the children themselves are the focus of the learning process, are:

a) In terms of communication skills, the quality of interpersonal relationships, dialogue and discussion between teachers and students helps to strengthen cognitive and communication tools and determines the success or failure of a didactic or a learning conciliation. For example, an interrogation is an effective strategy that, through motivation and creation of incentives, the teacher can direct the learning process and control the development of children's activities in a multidimensional learning environment. It is an effective way of engaging the child in building knowledge and developing critical and creative thinking (Birbili, 2008).

(b) On a social skills level are the theatrical play, dramaturgy, literature-based approaches, role-plays, illustrated material, photographs, etc. where social learning activities are organized, systematised, promoted and enhanced. Consequently, acquiring knowledge is an active process, since children are actively involved in the process of building knowledge through activities, imagination, communication, research and assimilation based on their own interests (Christodoulou-Gliaou, 2007).

3. Children with problems and behavioral disorders: characteristics and dimensions of the problem

Current research activity shows that children with behavioral problems constitute a significant proportion of the educational community and need special education and training services. On this basis, information on general approaches to learning and teaching is recorded and provided, providing descriptions of methods and procedures and focusing on class and behavioral management, as well as on working with parents and professionals (Bos, Vaughn, 2002; Samara, Ioannidi, 2018). However, it should be noted that the severity of the initial problems and the family context are related to different developmental and behavioral outcomes each time (Cambell, 1995) and the necessity of supporting all pupils in specific areas of social competence within the school context (Yavrimis et al., 2009). Thus, students' behavioral problems faced by teachers in the classroom are many and different in form and intensity. This work is difficult and has increased demands, which are in a variety of forms and are related to the classroom and its immediate social environment. Generally, a multifactorial, holistic, systematic approach is required and in no way single-factorial (Poursanidou, 2016).

In particular, according to Heward (2011), the basic characteristic of students with behavioral disorders, emotional or behavioral, is the manifestation of behavior which is significantly deficient in the standards of the cultural and age group in two dimensions: externalization and internalization. It is worth noting that both these patterns of abnormal behavior adversely affect the academic performance and social

relationships of the child and adolescent. More specifically: (a) Behaviors of externalization are: non-observance of classroom instructions, aggression, anger, non-compliance with instructions, destruction of foreign property, vandalism, excessive quarrels, theft, class disturbance, abusive attitudes and quarrels etc. Students with problems of externalization often exhibit antisocial and/or delinquent behavior. (b) Children with internalizing problems have mood disorders and other emotional disorders (e.g anxiety disorders, phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder, bulimia nervosa or anorexia, selective mute etc.), are over-retired and lack adequate skills of social type for effective interaction with others.

In addition, school difficulties relate to learning, performance and behavioral problems typically found in general education. Children with such problems have difficulty or are unable to attend their classroom program. In most cases, school difficulties are mild in nature and are only recognized when the child enters the elementary school and often after attending the first classes (Samara, Ioannidi, 2018).

The impact that a problematic behavior may have on a child may be the inadequate development of his / her cognitive and social skills, poor performance, experiencing unpleasant feelings and low self-esteem.

Children who start kindergarten and elementary school without having reached a satisfactory level of competence in their socio-emotional skills may be faced with various problems during and after childhood.

Characteristic of children with internalizing problems is that they have little social interaction with other children, behave immaturely and choose isolation. They do not pose a threat to others as children with externalization behavior and adopt an attitude that can prevent their wider growth and development. Internalisation problems are characterized by symptoms such as inhibition, anxiety, cowardice, depression and social withdrawal. In particular, these children will rarely choose to play with their peers as they usually do not have the required social skills in order to develop friendly relationships. In the context of the integration effort of recent years, a center for the design and implementation of personalized and group educational programs organizes and implements free time programs and activities for infants with and without special educational needs and/or disabilities jointly. The aim of the program is to manage and address children's behavioral problems and to accept children with behavioral problems from their peers. The following is a case study of an infant with problems of internalization and the inclusion practice as a structured educational process followed in the child's free time.

4. Reference to one case as an example of free time inclusive education

Below, there is a case of a child with internalizing problems and the risk of having behavioral disorders. It is worth noting that, according to Verma & Mallick (2004), a case study in educational research is likely to be personal. In the case study, a teacher may be involved by examining at a child with behavioral problems. One of the

strengths of this technique is that it allows the researcher/teacher to concentrate on the specific case and to explore different situations of interaction within the same situation.

4.1 Presenting a case of a child at risk of behavioral disorders

This schoolgirl is 5.5 years old and attends a public kindergarten. It has a normal mental background and typical psychomotor development, good motor coordination in fine and rough movements and does not face difficulties in self-service. However, she is overly concerned and strongly introverted both in the family and the school context. She has a particular difficulty in creating and developing relationships with peers and chooses to play mainly on her own.

In particular, the student has the following characteristics:

- Excessive worries / anxiety,
- She strives for perfection,
- She constantly requests confirmation,
- She often escapes to daydreams,
- There is a lack of social skills,
- Nervousness,
- Difficulty concentrating.

4.2 Example of pedagogical intervention in leisure time

The inclusion program designed and implemented concerned a small group of infants (six children) so that it can work properly and have the right climate. A nursery teacher and a special educator undertook to carry out the program. From the beginning, clear rules and limits were set for the group and acceptable behaviors. There has always been a positive and immediate response on the part of the teachers and at each meeting time has been given for discussion of those who have been working with children through the "Friends Circle". The "Friends Circle" functioned in the first meetings as an opportunity to get acquainted with and develop relationships between children but also trust between them.

The meetings were held twice a week for one hour at a time and the duration of the program was an academic year. The basis of the program was that sharing and exploiting the free time of a child with behavioral problems and his or her peers with no problem behavior could positively affect the former, develop social skills and lead to effective inclusion in a group. Leisure time was shaped by energetic techniques, based on role play, theatrical play and acting, narration of stories, experiments, poems, songs and miming, and group games (Active Methods..., 2004).

Through the role playing and the theatrical play:

- Children understand the actions and feelings of other people and how they feel.
- It may become more complicated if they otherwise play roles to advance the conversation.
- Children develop the right ideas, feel respect, and appreciate what others feel.
- Children are taught ways of communicating.

- Children who do not easily express themselves are helped to externalize emotions and thoughts.
- Children develop their imagination.
- Exercises for encouragement, encouragement and trust can help children both in developing social skills and in creating friendly relationships.
- Creativity and teamwork are promoted, skills are being developed, and there is room for discussion.

Through the role play and the theatrical play, this particular student was able to express some fears and concerns that she experienced and encountered. Opportunities for discussion, expression of emotions and confidence building among the members of the group helped in particular to alleviate the problems of internalization.

It is a fact that a socio-emotional education treats each student as an active subject to the processes of learning and the discovery of the world. In this way, it interconnects, through experiential approach and open communication, new knowledge with preexisting and developing to the maximum extent personal abilities (Kontogianni, 2004).

Finally, cooperation with parents for the management of internalisation problems was also important in the achievement of the program. Parents were given clear instructions on common attitudes towards problems, on the right patterns of behavior they should give to the child, and on managing negative emotions. More specifically, under the logic of prevention, early diagnosis and corrective intervention counseling guidelines and guidelines for developing child discussions were given to promote communication and help to externalize opinions and feelings in a context of more effective communication and interaction between them (Paraskevopoulos, Herbert, 2013).

5. Conclusions

Timely detection of children in need of support is particularly important, as without proper intervention behavioral problems can become more intense, consolidate and influence academic performance, emotional stability and personal and family relationships. For students at greater risk of a disorder, intervention is much less effective when it is late and not timely (Fox et al., 2001). In the context of this reasoning, the program implemented was aimed at alleviating the problems and providing timely support.

In addition, avoiding stigmatization and marginalization of the child with problems helps to tackle problematic behavior. As Elliot et al. (2008), the needs of socialization and communication are very important in the development of the individual, and experience is shaped, through interaction with the others, with two goals: desirable socialization (necessary compliance) and individualisation (self-expression). A joint free time program for children with and without behavioral

problems helps significantly in the development of relationships between children, in accepting a child with behavioral problems from peers, and in real group membership. Finally, creativity and organized play are important areas of development (Lamers, 2014). It is, therefore, possible and necessary to achieve an all-round activation of the individual through creative activities and games. This category includes the role play and the theatrical play chosen as activities for the organization of leisure time. In general, a cornerstone of effective inclusive education, in the context of formal, non-formal and informal learning, is: (a) teaching strategies, emphasizing social skills and emotional skills; (b) student's individuality as a challenge for the teacher (c) and, lastly, the role itself and the scientific and pedagogical skills of the same training officer as an animator, co-ordinator, facilitator, co-creator, instructor and evaluator of the educational process and intervention (Paraskeva, Papagianni, 2008; Dermitzakis, Ioannidi, 2004).

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