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Eliminating Helplessness in Pre-School Children Relying on Proprietary Programme Entitled Optimistic Kindergarten

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Abstract- Optimism is indispensable in increasing possibilities for achieving success. It is very crucial to develop optimism from the early childhood. Nice slogans and wonders about success do not constitute the basis of optimism. It seems that the way of one's thinking about experiences and "I will try to do something" attitude are the fundamentals of optimism. Undertaking work on learning optimism contributes to creating relaxed children and adults, which may be difficult nowadays. The aim of the article is to present such a method of working with children so as to enable them to develop themselves and live to the fullest while being motivated and ready to pick challenges waiting for everyone. The question is whether a child is willing to accept them and whether he or she can handle unpleasant consequences. It is vital that these consequences do not affect a child badly and hamper their further development.

Keywords: *optimism, helplessness, acquired helplessness, optimistic kindergarten.*

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Eliminating Helplessness in Pre-School Children Relying on Proprietary Programme Entitled Optimistic Kindergarten

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Abstract- Optimism is indispensable in increasing possibilities for achieving success. It is very crucial to develop optimism from the early childhood. Nice slogans and wonders about success do not constitute the basis of optimism. It seems that the way of one's thinking about experiences and "I will try to do something" attitude are the fundamentals of optimism. Undertaking work on learning optimism contributes to creating relaxed children and adults, which may be difficult nowadays. The aim of the article is to present such a method of working with children so as to enable them to develop themselves and live to the fullest while being motivated and ready to pick challenges waiting for everyone. The question is whether a child is willing to accept them and whether he or she can handle unpleasant consequences. It is vital that these consequences do not affect a child badly and hamper their further development.

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I. Introduction

The man bent over his guitar,
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.
They said, "You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are".
The man replied, "Things as they are,
Changed upon the blue guitar"

Wallace Stevens, The Man with the Blue Guitar (1937).

The first years of a child's life constitute a period in which it acquires certain skills enabling it to function in its closest environment. Every newborn in the initial phase of development is helpless. It acts by means of response. It communicates its needs through tears; however, it has not got any power to influence others to fulfil its necessities. While growing up a child consciously acquires skills enabling it to combat helplessness. Such a skill may be making the first steps to touch objects unreachable from the horizontal position or uttering the first words to communicate with its environment. It is the time in which a child learns how to control and manipulate its environment in order to achieve desired effects (Perleth, T. Schatz, M. Gast-Gampe, 2003). During the pre-school age while a child attends kindergarten, it obtains new competences that help it to function in its peer group as well as the ones that may prove to be useful in relations with its siblings, teachers and parents. Appropriate and conscious guidance from adults is a key to success of a child in a kindergarten. The way in which it takes the world, uses various opportunities, establishes relations and picks challenges is influenced by adults significantly. Consciousness of kindergarten teachers and parents of methods of work with children so as to facilitate their development and instil resourcefulness is very important.

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II. Resourcefulness vs. Helplessness in Pre-school Children

Every human being must set goals properly in order to achieve success. One must act accordingly to the plan of expected results, but primarily he or she must be motivated enough to be consistent. It is often the case that despite well-planned actions a problem which impedes further undertakings occurs. Motives are different and concern everyone (M. Levine, 2006). A child also sets some goals, and obstacles to attain them also appear in their lives. It frequently demotivates children and triggers helplessness. Consequently, it may dissuade children from taking other attempts.

Helplessness may be defined as a mental state which is connected with the lack of reaction in a particular situation since the negative effect is expected. No attempts are taken because for a helpless person it seems obvious that there will be no results. Helplessness may initiate sadness, apathy, frustration and pessimism. It usually stems from paying no attention to the problem, the inability to solve it and emergence of such states as unwillingness, fear and pessimism. It demotivates from having positive and open-minded attitude. Helplessness usually comprises the lack of belief in one's abilities, low self-esteem as well as inability to combat one's fears (M. Seligman, 1996). Repetitiveness of such states in life often leads to acquired helplessness which in the 50's was studied by Curl Paul Richter. In 1964 at the University of Princeton dr Martin Richter presented his thesis on the subject matter and introduced it into psychology (M. Seligman, 2010). According to the definition it is an acquired state

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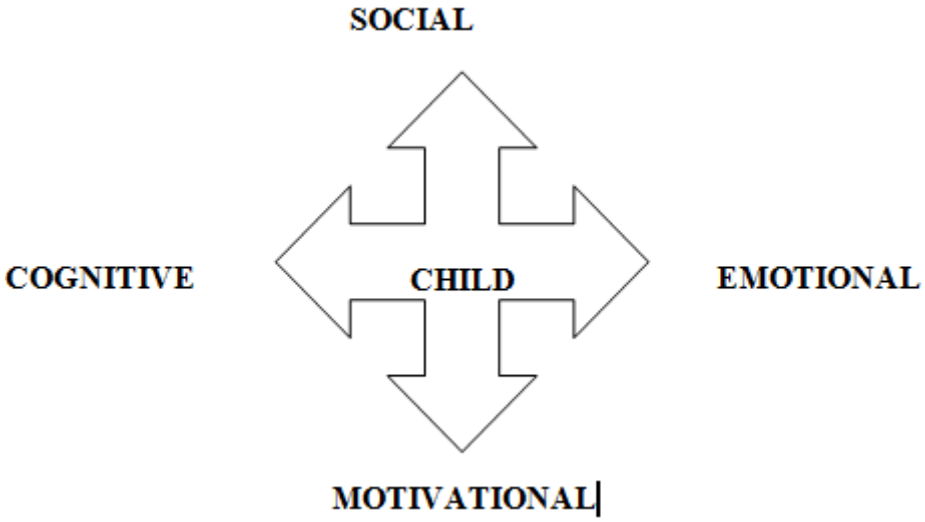
whose main characteristics are repetitiveness of problems and fixing in one's mind that there is no cause and effect relationship between what is done and what is achieved. It seems that it is better not to pick challenges as one knows course of their actions and he or she may encounter difficult and sad situations. It is significant that people who receive help and support right on time stop to fall in the state of helplessness. It also concerns a child who supported and guided properly can develop freely without experiencing failures (ibid, 2010).

Helplessness in children decreases a control of environment and one's behaviour. It frequently initiates four deficits:

Model 1 : Consequences of helplessness in children



Source: Self-edited material based on K. Przełowiecka, 2010.

A pre-school child manifesting the state of helplessness in the aspect of cognitive deficits has difficulties in comprehending a particular situation, and primarily, it learns new and easy tasks unwillingly. Such a child lacks motivation and is withdrawn. Therefore, teacher's observation, quick response to child's state and cooperation with parents are vital. In the social aspect difficulties are manifested through child's withdrawal from contacts with peers and teachers. Teacher's intervention is of great importance. A teacher should create such conditions for a child in order to look after a child who is cheerful and willing to cooperate. It is the task of a teacher to support child's relations with peer group as well as building up positive image of itself. A pre-school child gets discouraged very easily; thus, teacher's support is crucial. Proper stimulation and encouragement to try in order to achieve success is necessary and it conditions future functioning of a child in adult life. Motivational deficits cause the fact that a child does not take any actions, cannot focus on a particular task and accomplish it. Such a child finds engaging it into a task difficult. While encountering such difficulties, a teacher should motivate a child to remain active. A teacher should focus on child's strong sides (ibid, 2010). Only through working on positive sides, a desired effect may be achieved, and this in turn may initiate child's willingness to be active. Moreover, thanks to focusing on child's pros, it does not withdraw and tries again. Emotional difficulties in the state of helplessness are fear, a lack of willingness, hope, sense and aim, and resignation. Teacher's work on releasing optimism in a child and creating such conditions so as to enhance positive emotions and attitude as well as satisfaction from the accomplished tasks is very crucial. If a teacher does not prevent from difficult behaviour and states in children, it may trigger future problems with learning, social isolation or improper behaviour and attitudes in society (C. Hehenkamp, 2005).

As a teacher responsible for kindergarten education, for 33 years, I have been observing children when they start education in the kindergarten and experience various states, emotions and situations. The first period in which a child cannot handle new situation is adaptation in the kindergarten. It is the most difficult time for both children and parents. Separation of a child with its parents for the time spent in the kindergarten and acceptance of reality may be a difficult moment for the entire family. It is a bitter pill to swallow for a child to accept that it must stay without parents. Although parents know that everything is all right, they are not ready for separation. In such a period teachers should build up the feeling of safety both in parents and a child as well as to pay special attention to the atmosphere in the kindergarten, especially in the changing room in which parents leave children. It is the time of close cooperation with parents in which a strategy to cope with difficult moments occurring at this time should be determined. Special attention should be paid to the

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barriers in the communication with a child and a parent. Teacher's skills play a significant role as it is the teacher who stimulates the process and relations between with parents and children. Teacher's competences are vital in the life of every tutee. Teachers while working with the youngsters can have a substantial impact on its further development and education. He or she can stimulate tutees through behaviour, personality and attitude. Self-consciousness of teacher's power is of great importance as from the very beginning a teacher becomes a mentor for a child. It is the teacher who creates optimal conditions for child's development, inspires a child to act independently and helps to develop self-consciousness thanks to which a child entering school is ready to pick new challenges (C.M. Nawrot, 2014). Troublesome helplessness in pre-school children also occurs in relations with peers. Situations in which a child cannot solve a personal or a group conflict are very frequent. Further difficulties cause resignation and withdrawal.

Another aspect of helplessness in a pre-school child is communication of one's needs. The quality of relations in the kindergarten and communicating one's needs has an impact on child's social functioning, emotional and cognitive development as well as it contributes to child's development. Child's development depends on optimal conditions, proper didactic process, mental support and fulfilment of its needs (J. Izdebska, 2000, p. 100). Low motivation is a frequent obstacle in achieving success for children. A lack of determination to attain goals initiates the fact that a child does not feel satisfaction and external support from peers and its teacher (T. Gordon, 1991). Learning positive attitudes and behaviour should be enhanced in children in order to help them to become optimisms who have not got difficulties in solving problems, pick challenges and are proud of their own success. Working with children and relying on proprietary programme entitled Optimistic Kindergarten helps to promote positive thinking, optimism, cheerfulness and resourcefulness which in turn, helps a child to generate positive energy, parents' happiness and teacher's satisfaction with work.

III. How to Become an Optimist? How to Work According to Optimistic Kindergarten?

Optimistic Kindergarten was designed for pre-school education, headmasters, teachers, parents and children in Poland. Since 2004 more and more kindergartens have participated in the programme by Irena Dzierzgowska and Cecylia Mirela Nawrot.[1] The aim of the programme is to support children and all adults engaged in their development and education as well as development of social skills. The programme consists of 7 modules in which parents and teachers play the most important role while working with a child. It teaches them cooperation, ability to exchange experience, evaluation and common learning in order to improve pedagogical skills.

1. Upbringing.
2. Testing multiple intelligences.
3. Child's motivation and success.
4. Child's skills.
5. Cooperation with parents.
6. Development of pedagogical and senior staff of a kindergarten.
7. Promotion of a kindergarten.

Optimistic Kindergarten is a programme based on systematic work; it has been reviewed and is aimed at both public and private kindergartens. It meets the requirements of Pedagogical Innovation in which kindergartens participate. A kindergarten implements the programme, and then, after realizing seven modules, it is evaluated and applies to the chapter for obtaining the Certificate of Optimistic Kindergarten.

A book entitled Optimistic Kindergarten is included in the programme. There is a description and instruction how to implement the programme. In the first part of the book, development of a child in social, emotional and cognitive aspects is presented. Additionally, moral upbringing and the essence of optimistic upbringing are described. The second part comprises a family training of optimism, educational fairytales and a code of optimistic parents. The last part elaborates upon the issues connected with optimistic kindergarten such rainbow folders and optimistic adults.

The programme assists teachers in changing children's social attitudes, cooperating with parents as well as motivating parents to undertake new educational work on a child. Optimistic Kindergarten also influences teacher's attitudes, enhances the image of a kindergarten in the local environment, gives boost for innovation and develops creativity. In enables the change of a rainy day into a day which despite the weather is full of joy. The programme strengthens communication as it minimizes barriers in interpersonal communication, develops skills useful during school education and helps children to build positive image of themselves. A great emphasis is put on motivating children to overcome difficulties, which in turn, triggers success.

The programme is organised by "Partner" the Centre for Enhanced and Continuing Learning in Gliwice (I. Dzierzgowska, C.M.Nawrot, 2004).

IV. Conclusion

Kindergarten education is the first stage of child's education. Kindergarten is a place which works

[1] Material compiled on the basis of proprietary programme Optimistic Kindergarten

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in accordance with work standards, meets national requirements, and is subject to control, supervision and evaluation. It is the institution which seeks for the best solutions in order to perform their work. It is important to supplement basic programmes with educational packages which support teacher's work for the benefit of children in the XXI C. Modern parent wants a kindergarten to become an institution in which he leaves his child as well as gets support, assistance and help. A helpless child becomes a helpless student, and thus, it does not improve its educational achievements and graduates lacking the feeling of success. Therefore, it is important to put emphasis on programmes which alter social attitudes and behaviour, explain how to communicate, have fun, solve problem, be happy and attain goals.

The results of studies conducted in Poland by the authors of the programme were presented at the Symposium of Psychologists in which dr Martin Seligman was a special guest.

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