Katarzyna Januszczak

AUTISM AND INTERACTION. INTERACTIVE SKILLS OF 6-9-YEARS-OLD CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

Summary

Autistic developmental disorders attract the attention of many specialists in the fields of medicine, psychology, pedagogy and speech therapy. The results of scientific research conducted on this disorder still do not allow to solve the basic problems related to etiology, symptomatology, criteria for diagnosis and methods of autism therapy. Descriptions of this disorder, repeated in the literature on the subject and fixed in social beliefs, indicate that children with autism have special difficulties in communicating with the environment and making contact with other people, even from the immediate environment. Disorders of the interactive skills of autistic children are becoming a challenge for their parents, carers, teachers and therapists.

The subject of this work is to show the state of interactive skills of children at the age of 6 to 9 with autistic disorders. Choice of age range in the selection of the test group results from the fact that by the age of six a properly developing child masters the language system and enters the next stage of development – the development of conceptual thinking (Piaget, 2006). The sixth year of life is therefore a kind of a turning point in linguistic and cognitive development of a child, and in connection with the child's compulsory education, also in his social development.

A group of 30 autistic children aged 6-9 years was included in the study. Thanks to the division into smaller groups, both because of the ability to use speech and general level of functioning, a description of interactive skills has become possible for autistic speaking and non-speaking children.

The work consists of three parts: theoretical, covering the first two chapters, methodological, contained in the third chapter, and analytical, to which the next four chapters are devoted. The first chapter contains theoretical issues regarding autism spectrum disorders. Based on the literature review, the history of research on this neurodevelopmental disorder, its etiology and symptomatology is presented. The problems and diagnostic criteria highlighted in the medical classifications ICD-10, DSM-IV and DSM-V as well as the criteria for the differential diagnosis of autism and other disorders such as Asperger's syndrome

or intellectual disability are described here. Methods and directions of therapeutic interactions divided into directives and non-directive are also presented.

The second chapter is devoted to the theory of interaction. It defines the concepts of language, speech, speaking and discusses the essence of linguistic behavior in the context of a sign. This chapter also explains the term interaction in the light of various concepts, among others theory of social interactionism and sociolinguistics.

Chapter three is methodological in nature. It indicates assumptions according to which interactive skills were analyzed. Research problem is formulated here and research hypotheses that will be verified through the results of empirical research analysis. The chapter describes the study group taking into account the age of the children studied, environmental characteristics, and the time of therapeutic interventions. A division into smaller groups is made according to the level of using speech and the general level of functioning. This part of the work ends with subchapters discussing the research procedure and methods of analysis of empirical material.

The main empirical part, i.e. chapters four, five and six, presents the state of interactive: social, situational and pragmatic skills of the examined children. The division of autistic children into: non-speaking and low-functioning children, who are not speaking at a medium level of functioning, speaking at a medium level of functioning and high-functioning, using speech is considered.

The seventh chapter is devoted to the model of interactive behavior in autism. Due to the large variety of autistic disorders among the examined children, two models of interaction in autism are indicated: in the absence of speech and with verbal skills retained. This chapter emphasizes the essence of interactive skills as a criterion for assessing children with neurodevelopmental disorders. The end of the empirical part of the work are the principles of programming speech therapy in the case of autistic disorders and methods for developing interactive skills for both autistic speaking and non-speaking children.

Research conducted for the needs of this doctoral dissertation shows that children with autism have the opportunity to shape communication competences, which should be a determinant of therapeutic actions taken. The state of interactive skills is largely conditioned by the ability to speak – non-speaking people have greater difficulties within each of the skills. The level of functional abilities also correlates with the state of interactive abilities. The relationship is observed that the greater the disturbances recorded in the child's social sphere, the more intensified his cognitive and emotional disorders.

Katarzyna Jarmuszch