

INTEGRATIVE TREATMENT OF UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

LJILJANA IGRIC • ANAMARIJA ŽIC • BRANKO NIKOLIĆ

received: May '98.

accepted: January '99.

Very often children with learning difficulties show undesirable forms of behavior, which means any of the forms of behavior considered by the society to be striking and unacceptable, or in other words, those which disturb or hinder the process of education and rehabilitation. The objective of this research was to examine the possibilities of applying integrative therapy in the treatment of mental disorders and undesirable behavior in children with learning disabilities.

The sample consists of 13 children with learning disabilities, aged 7 to 11. In this research, the term *learning disabilities* covers children whose problems in academical skills are primarily caused by the low cognitive abilities. The IQ range, measured by Wisc, is scaled from IQ 54 to IQ 84. The AAMD adaptive behavior scale (Part II) was applied (Nihira, Foster, Shellhaas and Leland, 1974; Croatian adaptation: Irgić, Fulgosi-Masnjak, 1991).

The results show that children involved in the integrative group therapy, after the experimental period, have shown statistically significant decreases in the frequency of undesirable forms of behavior. The change in the behavior of children, as perceived by the parents, suggests that the decrease has been influenced mostly by the decrease in psychological disturbances which are related to withdrawal and/or violent and destructive behavior. According to the teachers assessment, the decrease is noticeable in those forms of undesirable behavior which hinder classroom work.

INTRODUCTION

Social behavior in persons with mental retardation

A great number of researchers stress the importance of social behavior of persons with mental retardation (Guralnick, 1984; Hogg and Mittler, 1983; Greenspan and Granfield, 1992; Stančić, V. 1985; Mavrin-Cavor, 1988; Igrić 1991). Their interest in this field is based on the fact that social relations can improve or deteriorate adjustment, as well as personal and intellectual development. Successful socialization and adaptation can alleviate the impact of deficiencies in the intellectual area.

Study on the etiology of undesirable behavior, emotional difficulties, and mental disorders in persons with mental retardation has so far concentrated on organic and biological etiology, neglecting to a certain degree environmental influences. Specific

deficits in social deduction and intelligence in children with mental retardation lead to a lack of adequate opportunities for learning as well as their insufficient exposure to learning through certain experiences or social imitations; their limited resources then cause them to be exposed to a series of stressful experiences, which in turn cause emotional difficulties and undesirable forms of behavior (Chess, 1970; Greenspan, 1979; Stephens, 1974; Eaton and Menolascino, 1982; according to Russell and Forness, 1985).

Lj. Igrić, PhD is a professor and A. Žic, MA is a research fellow at the Department of Mental Retardation, Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, University of Zagreb. B. Nikolić, PhD is an assistant professor at the Department of Diagnostics and Rehabilitative Technology, Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, University of Zagreb