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Evaluation of the programme for development of communication competences in social rehabilitation of minors

Abstract: Communication competences are among key social skills, allowing people to fulfil their own needs in concordance with applicable norms. Research proves that their development constitutes an important factor preventing from engagement in peer crime in the adolescence period and plays a significant role in proper social adaptation. Therefore is seems justified to carry out activities developing communication competences in minors, based on diagnosis and evaluation, also due to the fact that the majority of them have large deficits in that regard. The article contains the results of evaluation studies confirming the possibility of effective development of communication competences of pupils in institutional social rehabilitation environment.

Key words: communication competences, social skills, juvenile competence development program

The notion and structure of communication competences

Communication competences are one of the many social competences of key importance for appropriate functioning in interpersonal relations. It is of significant importance for educators due to the fact that, contrary to the approach present in other fields of science, these competences are considered not only with regard to the analysis of mechanisms and conditions of their development, but also of the function they perform in the process of socialisation and upbringing, and thus correct or dysfunctional social adaptation.

The very notion of competence appears in the context of reflection on the level and determinants of efficiency of activities aimed at reaching the goal set by the initiating entity. That is why some believe they are a "tool" allowing people to reconcile two equally important but opposite aspirations - of acceptance and of social status (Smółka 2016, pp. 26-27). They are the ability to exert social influence on the way to fulfil one's own needs and aspirations in line with applicable cultural norms. The needs are therefore a source of goals, and the competences allow for their effective yet possibly harmonious and optimal fulfilment.

In the literature there is a significant discrepancy of opinions about the structural elements that comprise the meaning of competences. Most often listed are the cognitive, motivational and behavioural components (Argyle 2002, pp. 107-141) that are mutually interdependent, yet their scope and role vary in adopted model solutions. Depending on the adopted assumptions, social competences may be treated as synonymous with social and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1997). However, most specialists dealing with this field agree that the "*fundamental components of competences are skills*" (Jeruszka 2016, p. 20), usually defined in behavioural categories, which significantly facilitates their operationalisation and measurement. Therefore, as noted by K. Martowska, both cognitive dispositions, expressed in the ability to adequately process the information received in a given situation, and motivational dispositions, determining the readiness to undertake specific behaviour, are only very important indicators of one's competences. However, their most reliable indicators are behaviours expressed in various situations, comprising the behavioural component (Martowska 2012, p. 19).

Communication competences are a complex social skill, whose purpose is effective communication, i.e. direct and indirect transmission and reception of verbal and non-verbal information, aimed at development and self-fulfilment of an individual. On the one hand this requires a properly functioning speech organ, allowing for correct articulation, i.e. phonetic competences, but also lexical (knowledge of words), semantic (using words in line with their meaning), syntactic (combining words into comprehensible sentences according to grammar rules) and prosodic (modulation of the volume of voice) (Małachowska 2017, pp. 190-191). On the other hand, according to the intention of the creator of the notion, it is also the individual's ability to choose verbal and non-verbal means to communicate according to the existing situation, which is also conditioned by the cognitive and emotional resources of

the speaker, his or her social role, and the applicable cultural norms regulating the means to communicate (Hymes 1972, pp. 269-293). Therefore, apart from linguistic skills, some scientists include emotional intelligence and motivation to express oneself in the structure of communication competences (Wojnarska 2013, p. 17). And because each act of communication is also an act of social interaction, whose successful course depends, among others, on the observance by its participants of predetermined principles and rules, requiring mutual respect and decentration (adopting the perspective of the other party), then taking into account the difficulties it poses for socially maladjusted youth, it is a significant indicator for social rehabilitation work; even more so, as the quality of communication determines the social attractiveness of the pupil, his or her educational and occupational success, but primarily the establishment and maintenance of satisfactory interpersonal relations. It is therefore a key predictor of good social adjustment.

Communication competences of socially maladjusted youth

Studies carried out by A. Wojnarska show that socially maladjusted youth under the supervision of court guardianship (N = 100) compared to their non-demoralized peers (N = 100) have a lower assessment of their own social competences, including also communication competences. This was demonstrated in higher reluctance towards honest and open communication with their relatives or friends, especially with regard to difficult issues and situations. They also demonstrated a poorer ability to receive and provide support by means of conversation in friendly relations, including confiding personal problems. Socially maladjusted minors also had poorer scores in reading and sending non-verbal messages, as well as in verbal communication. They avoided eye contact more frequently, but they also demonstrated a lower level of skills related to adequate identification of feelings based on facial expression and body posture. They usually used a limited code (poor vocabulary, difficulty to build complex expressions) (Wojnarska 2013).

In turn, studies carried out on young people from Youth Upbringing Centres in Warsaw, Poland (N = 183) indicated incorrect articulation of phones in one third of research participants, and the majority demonstrated poor vocabulary, lack of understanding of basic words and making numerous linguistic errors in formulated expressions (Małachowska 2017, pp. 190-191).

The relationship between the low level of communication competences and the intensity of risky and anti-social behaviour is also confirmed by studies carried out in other countries. They show that girls staying in closed social rehabilitation centres have problems with listening to their interlocutors, waiting for their turn during conversation, as well as initiating and maintaining conversations in contacts with others. Despite being aware of the basic rules of conversation, the female minors from closed centres were unable to apply them in spontaneously established interactions (Sanger et al. 2001, pp. 17-26).

Other studies (Irshad, Atta 2013, pp. 35-42) indicate that well-developed self-control, empathy and social competences are factors preventing youth from using violence, and communication skills and pro-social behaviours protect from victimization. Whereas deficits in knowledge and ability to solve disputes by dialogue result in more intense aggression in conflict situations, which for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds is the most accessible pattern of communication preserved over many years. It is also worth highlighting that a low level of communication competences often contributes to learning difficulties and lack of success at school, which is also one of the predictors of social maladjustment. Therefore the development of this type of skills is treated as an indirect factor protecting youth at risk from engaging in peer crime during their adolescence, and thus increasing their chances of a successful educational career and reducing the risk of committing crimes at a later age (Stepp et al. 2011, pp. 457-465).

In the light of the arguments presented, it appears justified to both diagnose and evaluate communication competences among minors, and to develop them in the course of social rehabilitation activities (Sanger et al. 2006, pp. 108-125); in particular due to the fact that, according to studies, the social and educational climate at the facility does not always foster the development of such skills among the young people (Kupiec 2012, pp. 383-398).

Communication competences development programme for youth from Youth Upbringing Centres (MOW)

Acquisition and development of communication competences is a long-term process, starting in early childhood and lasting with varying intensity throughout the lifetime, therefore it is difficult to make up for previous failures and delays during a 2- or 3-year stay of a minor in a social rehabilitation institution and to make him or her reach their full abilities. One of the factors contributing to the fulfilment of that goal is the speed of learning,

accompanying the development dynamics of adolescence, therefore by its very nature the training in communication skills must be short yet intense and requiring a careful selection of topics. With that underlying assumption, together with a group of 5 university students I developed and carried out a programme for development of social competences, which, apart from improvement of management of emotions, development of empathy, assertiveness, moral and self-creation competences, also included training of communication skills in interpersonal relations. The classes were held in one of the youth upbringing centres, 2 times a week, 5 hours each, for 5 months. The meetings were held alternately at the centre and at the university. After diagnostic examination, 7 youth with lowest scores in social competences were qualified to participate in the project.

The objective of the programme was for young people to acquire knowledge about conditions and principles of appropriate communication, as well as training of the ability to correctly interpret and adequately formulate verbal and non-verbal messages in arranged and natural situations. Special emphasis was put on overcoming barriers and avoiding errors in communication as well as training assertive expression in difficult and conflict situations. One of the assumptions of the programme was to use the modelling mechanism, which is why university students were also present during the classes, and also the possibility for transfer of acquired skills in situations outside of the centre, facilitated by weekly trips to the university.

A cognitive-behavioural teaching strategy (Siemionow 2012, pp. 227-236) was used, with its efficiency in social rehabilitation confirmed by both foreign and Polish research (Barczykowska 2011, pp. 87-113), complemented with elements of creative social rehabilitation (Konopczyński 2006). At classes the students had the possibility to visualize the acquired competences as new parameters of non-deviational identity, creating portrait and self-portrait photos.

Methodology assumptions, objective and organisation of the study

One of the underlying premises to carry out evaluation studies for the implemented programme of development of communication competences among the youth from the social rehabilitation facility was the idea of *evidence-based practice*. *"Currently, evidence-based practice is treated as an ideology on the one hand and a method of activity on the other. Ideology is born from an ethical principle regarding the need to provide the most effective intervention, action or treatment. In turn, as a method, evidence-based practice is a way to*

implement those interventions whose effectiveness was positively verified by scientific research and everyday life" Barczykowska, Dzierzyńska-Bereś 2013, p. 133). Designing and implementing prophylactic and social rehabilitation programmes according to that idea requires an initial diagnosis of actual needs, which forms the basis for qualification of participants. These programmes have precisely defined objectives, stages, forms of work, tasks and duration, and thanks to application of scientific procedures and evaluation methods it is possible both to have a reliable assessment of effects achieved and to introduce possible improvements.

Based on these premises, the level of communication competences of all MOW youth was diagnosed before the commencement of the programme. This led to the creation of a group of 7 persons, with a majority of boys with lowest skills in that regard.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the practically implemented programme, in evaluation research we were looking for changes that took place in the area of selected structural elements of communication competences of participants. With that objective in mind, three more detailed research problems were formulated.

1.   What changes took place with regard to knowledge about the conditions and principles of correct communication among programme participants? (cognitive component)

2.   What changes took place in communication skills among programme participants? (behavioural component)

3.   What changes took place with regard to rational confidence/trust in interpersonal contacts among programme participants? (motivational component)

Therefore according to the premises resulting from theory it was adopted that the level of examined competence will be determined by the knowledge of principles of verbal and non-verbal communication, the ability to receive and formulate expressions adequately to the situation, and the motivation to establish interpersonal contacts related to vesting rational trust in people.

Research methods and techniques used

In our evaluation research an experimental method was used, following a single-variable plan with control group (Brzeziński 1996, pp. 325-326), consisting in carrying out an initial

(PRE) and final (POST) measurement of communication competences in the experimental (7 pupils participating in the programme) and control group (7 pupils who did not take part). It was assumed that the age of respondents should be the controlled variable, not because older participants may have better developed communication competences, but because older ones are usually more demoralized, which negatively correlates with the competence level (Wojnarska 2013, pp. 202-206 and 211-217). That is why the composition of the control group was determined based on a draw from among all the youth staying in the centre while preserving the age structure corresponding to the age structure of the experimental group. The average age on both groups was 15 years, and the statistical test used confirmed the absence of significant differences ($\dot{X}_E$ = 15.14; SD_E = 0.69; $\dot{X}_K$ =15.57, SD_K = 1.62; F = 0.41; p = 0.53). During the experiment it was also agreed with the teachers and educators that control group pupils would not participate in any other classes than those normally organised in the centre.

Due to lack of standardized tool for measuring communication competences, in our research the technique of individual interviews was used, with each pupil interviewed using a custom questionnaire with 32 open questions related to selected aspects of communication competences (knowledge, skills and motivation).

The indicators for the cognitive component were answers to questions related, among others, to the knowledge of communication barriers and ways to overcome them, principles of active listening, meaning of non-verbal messages in communication, ways to encourage and maintain conversation on difficult topics, as well as expressing criticism or appreciation, assertive communication of one's own opinion in difficult or conflict situations.

Conclusions regarding the level of communication skills were drawn based on behaviours declared by the participants and formulated messages they would use in presented situations. The ability to express emotions based on fiscomics, voice intonation and body posture. The participants were also asked to describe situations where they had an opportunity to express praise or to criticise other people, as well as ways of reacting in conflict situations. The level of competence was determined by the total number of points awarded based on the assessment to what extent the response of the participant was an adequate reaction in a given situation.

For each statement indicating the rational trust skill in interpersonal relations the participant received points, whose total determined the level of motivational component. Questions asked during the interview were related to the participants' perceived significance of trust in interpersonal relations, the number of people they trust in and outside the centre, and the assessment of the level of trust vested in them by others. They were also asked how one should act in order to gain trust and not to lose it, and what rules one should follow when trusting or mistrusting someone.

For statistical analysis of obtained results in both the experimental and control group, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used (Ferguson, Takane 1997, pp. 272-290), applied to data expressed as sten scores calculated based on raw results according to the procedure described by J. Brzeziński (Brzeziński 1996, pp. 541-543).

Results

The results of the study with statistical analysis results are presented in the tables below.

Table 1. Changes in knowledge about the conditions and principles of appropriate communication in the experimental and control groups

Respondent no.	PRE				POST			
	experimental group		control group		experimental group		control group	
	W.	Sten	W.	Sten	W. S.	Stens	W. S.	Stens
1	1	7	2	1	10	7	13	9
2	4	4	4	4	18	9	5	5
3	5	5	1	7	5	5	7	6
4	1	7	1	9	21	10	9	6
5	3	3	1	9	15	9	6	6
6	2	2	4	4	6	6	4	4
7	5	5	6	6	15	9	5	5
ANOVA	$X_E = 4.71$; $SD_E = 1.89$; $X_E = 7.00$; $SD_E = 2.45$; $F = 3.82$; $p = 0.07$				$X_E = 7.86$; $SD_E = 1.86$; $X_E = 5.86$; $SD_E = 1.57$; $F = 4.70$; $p = 0.05$			

ANO	$X_E = 4.71$; $SD_E = 1.89$;
VA in	
ANO	$X_E = 7.00$; $SD_E = 2.45$;
VA in	

Legend: X – arithmetic mean, SD – standard deviation, p – statistical significance, F – statistical test

The data in Table 1 shows that the level of knowledge about conditions and principles of communication in the experimental group before the start of the programme (PRE) was lower compared to the control group, although it did not reach the required statistical significance (p=0.09). However, after the completion of workshops (POST) the participants from the experimental group demonstrated a higher level of knowledge compared to their peers from the control group, and the observed differences were statistically significant (F = 4.70; p = 0.05). Apart from that, in the experimental group there was a statistically significant increase in the knowledge on communication (F = 9.81; p = 0.01), whereas in the control group there was no statistically significant difference in that regard (F=1.08; p=0.32). We can therefore assume that the educational programme designed contributed to the increase in knowledge on conditions and principles of appropriate communication in participating pupils.

Table 2. Changes in communication skills in experimental and control group

Responde nt no.	PRE				POST			
	experimental group		control group		experimental group		control group	
	W.	Sten	W.	Sten	W. S.	Steny	W. S.	Steny
1	1	8	2	1	23	10	18	8
2	6	4	1	6	27	10	13	7
3	1	7	1	7	12	7	19	8
4	8	6	2	9	17	8	13	7
5	7	5	1	7	19	8	13	7
6	4	4	5	4	13	7	9	6
7	3	3	5	4	20	9	13	7
ANOVA	$X_E = 5.29$; $SD_E = 1.80$; $X_K = 6.71$; $SD_K = 2.29$;				$X_E = 8.43$; $SD_E = 1.27$; $X_K = 7.14$; $SD_K = 0.69$;			

	F = 1.68; p = 0.22		F = 5.52; p = 0.04	
ANOVA in	$X_E = 5.29$; $SD_E = 1.80$;			
ANOVA in	$X_E = 6.71$; $SD_E = 2.29$;			

The youth from the experimental group before participation in the programme had a comparable level of communication skills to their peers from the control group, and observed differences were statistically insignificant (F = 1.68; p = 0.22). However, after carrying out the workshop, the participants demonstrated a significantly higher level of skills than their peers from the control group, and observed differences were statistically significant (F = 5.52; p = 0.04). In the experimental group there was also a statistically significant (F = 14.23; p = 0.003) increase in the average ($X_{PRE}=5.29$; $X_{POST}=8.43$), which according to the adopted assumptions can be considered an indication of increase in communication skills among pupils participating in the programme. However, in the control group the observed differences between averages ($X_{PRE}=6.71$; $X_{POST}=7.14$) turned out to be statistically insignificant (F = 0.22; p = 0.64). Based on the above it can therefore be assumed that the implemented programme for social rehabilitation of minors covering the development of communication skills turned out to be effective also in that respect.

Table 3. Changes in rational trust in interpersonal relations in experimental and control group

Respondent no.	PRE				POST			
	experimental group		control group		experimental group		control group	
	W.	Sten	W.	Sten	W. S.	Steny	W. S.	Steny
1	1	8	2	1	11	7	7	5
2	6	5	7	6	9	6	5	5
3	5	5	1	7	13	7	11	7
4	8	6	1	7	13	7	16	9
5	5	5	1	6	12	7	15	8
6	4	4	5	5	7	6	12	7
7	1	7	1	7	11	7	8	6
ANOVA	$X_E = 5.50$; $SD_E = 1.41$; $X_K = 6.64$; $SD_K = 1.63$;				$X_E = 6.57$; $SD_E = 0.61$; $X_K = 6.57$; $SD_K = 1.37$;			

	F = 1.97; p = 0.19	F = 0; p = 1
ANO VA in	$X_E = 5.50; SD_E = 1.41$;	
ANO VA in	$X_E = 6.64; SD_E = 1.63$;	

The analysis of results obtained (Table 3) indicates that both before the beginning of the workshop (F = 1.97; p = 0.19) and after their completion (F = 0; p = 1) no statistically significant differences were observed in the level of trust between the pupils from the experimental and control groups. Although in the experimental group there was a slight increase of the average ($X_{PRE} = 5.50; X_{POST} = 6.57$), and the results obtained became more uniform, the observed change did not reach the required level of statistical significance (F = 3.39; p = 0.09). In the control group during the programme implementation period there were also no statistically significant changes in that regard. It can therefore be concluded that the workshops held with minors did not significantly contribute to increase in their rational trust and thus strengthening the motivational component indicating openness to communication with others.

Discussion of the findings

The performed pedagogic experiment was aimed at checking if it is possible to effectively influence the development of communication competences of minors in the conditions of institutional social rehabilitation. The findings allow for modest optimism. It turned out that as a result of purposefully organized and systematically implemented training there was an increase in knowledge and communication skills of participating pupils. However, the actions taken did not bring expected changes in motivation towards establishing interpersonal contacts due to the expected increase in rational trust. The difficulties in reaching that goal probably result in part from the increased neuroticism that characterizes socially maladjusted youth (Kupiec 2013, p. 251). Unfortunately there is still lack of research in the impact of anxiety on the development of communication competences, although a negative correlation should be expected here. The low sense of security can also be strengthened by the unfavourable situation of the minor, if there are court proceedings against him or her, or if due to isolation he/she does not have sufficient contact with close persons. It can also happen that he or she is a victim of violence or rejection by peers, and his/her contacts with educators are filled with formalism and indifference rather than openness,

friendliness and engagement. The existence of such factors can reduce the level of trust, and thus motivation to establish interpersonal contacts, and is very difficult to overcome both for the pupil him/herself and for their supporting educator. Therefore it is possible that if the classes were held for a longer period, they could contribute to the emergence of positive changes also in this aspect of communication competences.

It is also symptomatic that among the pupils from the control group, for whom only traditional forms of social rehabilitation[1] were applied during the implementation of the programme in question, no significant development of communication skills was observed. It can therefore be concluded that only a carefully planned, based on diagnosis, purposefully and systematically implemented formative activity can bring the expected results, contrary to intuitive and ad-hoc, less or more attractive forms of spending free time organized for youth. It is also related to the observed lack of individual approach to pupils, limiting their initiative, independence, self-expression and self-creation, which in conditions of social isolation creates a very unfavourable formative climate, hampering the development of social competences of minors.

Based on experience and observation from the project it can be guessed that its success was to a large extent influenced by:

- purposeful and systematic character of implemented social rehabilitation actions, achieved thanks to a preliminary diagnosis performed among the pupils, careful and well-considered planning of each meeting (class scripts) and persistent implementation for at least 5 months, two times a week, several hours each,

- balanced application of individual and group forms of work,

- organizing classes in an open environment (outside the facility) with participation of well-socialized youth (university students),

- self-evaluation of educators by participation in a self-assistance group (discussing difficulties encountered with other educators) and using supervision.

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[1] By traditional forms of social rehabilitation I mean actions aimed at primarily maintaining strict discipline, based on using behavioural methods (the token economy system) and limited to organizing sports activities, access to media or occasional excursions during free time from school teaching. Observation shows that those are the typical forms of free time activity organized in youth formative centres (MOW).

A very significant factor affecting the effectiveness of conducted activities is the knowledge, skills and attitude of the educator running the classes. He or she should not only know what, how and why he/she wants to teach the pupils proper communication, but also successfully prevent divisions from appearing in the group, resulting from mechanisms of marginalisation and exclusion. Another very useful skill in this respect is the ability to maintain motivating dialogue with the pupils and to mediate in conflict situations. It was also observed that pupils remembered more and learned new skills faster when activating methods were used during classes, requiring more engagement and independence compared to "feeding" strategy, based on unidirectional communication.

Conclusion

The study leads to the conclusion that in institutional social rehabilitation conditions it is possible to carry out effective formative activities resulting in pupils' increased knowledge about correct communication and proper formulation of verbal and non-verbal messages. Yet it is much more difficult to exert influence to increase motivation to establish safe interpersonal contacts based on rational trust in oneself and others, fostering the development of communication competences.

However, the results should be treated with caution due to the small size of the research sample, resulting from logistic and educational reasons (increasing the size of the group leads to reduced time available for individual contact with each pupil and for his/her self-presentation). On the other hand, carrying out studies on larger samples is required more insurveys rather than experimental research, and despite obtaining representative character it can also lead to false conclusions, as "*it is known that the larger the sample, the easier it is to reject the zero hypothesis.*" (Brzeziński 1996, p. 338). Despite this it can concluded that the results achieved encourage continued evaluation studies on the effectiveness of the proposed programme for development of communication competences in social rehabilitation of minors as well as looking for and testing new solutions in that respect.

Abstrakt: Ewaluacja programu rozwijania kompetencji komunikacyjnych w resocjalizacji nieletnich

Kompetencje komunikacyjne należą do jednych z kluczowych umiejętności społecznych, które umożliwiają ludziom realizację własnych potrzeb w zgodzie z obowiązującymi

normami. Badania dowodzą, że ich rozwój stanowi ważny czynnik zabezpieczający przed angażowaniem się w przestępczość rówieśniczą w okresie adolescencji i odgrywa istotną rolę w prawidłowej adaptacji społecznej. W związku z tym uzasadnione wydaje się prowadzenie na podstawie diagnozy i ewaluacji oddziaływań rozwijających kompetencje komunikacyjne nieletnich, tym bardziej, że większość z nich posiada w tym zakresie duże deficyty. Prezentowany artykuł zawiera wyniki badań ewaluacyjnych, które potwierdzają możliwość skutecznego rozwijania kompetencji komunikacyjnych wychowanków w warunkach resocjalizacji instytucjonalnej.

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje komunikacyjne, umiejętności społeczne, program rozwijania kompetencji u nieletnich

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