

USAGE OF SYMBOLIC IMAGES FOR DIAGNOSTICS OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AND SEVERE SPEECH DISORDERS

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Communication assessment in early intervention is important for planning of social integration for a child with autism and his communication partners. Symbolic images were used as means of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC). A diagnostic method was developed as a part of a formative experiment of implementation of AAC signs into a daily communication of children with severe speech impairments.

WHAT DID YOU DO OR EXPERIENCE?

A team of professionals (speech pathologists) tested a procedure of diagnostics of communication skills, developed by authors, in preschoolers with severe speech impairments. We used symbolic images to assess interaction at the beginning of AAC usage and to register a progress in communicative skills after getting acquainted with pictograms.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE CHALLENGES?

The challenges were:

- to create a systematic tool to access communication in children that do not use a verbal speech;
- to describe measured communication acts and to create tasks for children to observe them;
- to figure out a progress in communication, to compare results before and after speech correction interventions;
- discourse of a vocabulary, images description, creation of a method of a step-by-step introduction of AAC signs and an algorithm of communication diagnostics;
- to choose words and symbolic pictures, grounding upon their visuality, accessibility and age suitability for children.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE BENEFITS?

Children with autism and speech impairments perceive stimulus diagnostic material and use it further in communication with specialists and relatives. A method is created with a high level of ecological validity to be a tool for diagnostics and training of communication skills.

The practical significance is in the description of an independent instrument for diagnostics and development of the communication sphere. This could be used in practice by special educators, SLPs etc. in cases of autism and other developmental disorders that are accompanied with communication impairments.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Limitations of the research are in a short term of an experiment, two month for observation of changes in communication. Further investigation can be aimed at longitude studies of communicative development, an impact of different AAC tools: pictograms, gestures, their mixes, digital instruments etc.

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