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Sociotherapy Helpfulness Research among Children and Adolescents

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Abstract

The article presents results of sociotherapy helpfulness research among adolescents experiencing existential frustration. Helpfulness is understood to mean an evidence-based approach which suggests that adolescents' reflexive reports are valid data to be analyzed. The issue of providing sociotherapy to children and adolescents experiencing existential frustration is accentuated by the fact that they need to experience not only the authenticity of boundaries, values, intentions, and capabilities, but also to experience the authenticity of authenticity itself. In sociotherapeutic practices children and adolescents are engaged in joint activities, which are, to a large extent, artificial, and built on symbolic values. Therefore, it is important to be guided not only by goals, means, and regulations, but also by evidence-based helpfulness. As a result of phenomenological analysis of reflexive texts written by adolescents at the end of a six-month sociotherapeutic program the main themes and meanings of the experience of identification and authentication were singled out.

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1. Introduction

The article presents the results of sociotherapy helpfulness research among adolescents. The understanding of helpfulness based on the opinion of the authors (psychotherapists, teachers, psychologists), is complemented with

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the understanding of evidence-based helpfulness by assuming that adolescents' reflexive reports are valid data to analyze the meanings and trends of helpfulness in sociotherapeutic practices.

The adolescents participating in the sociotherapeutic group may be described as experiencing strong existential frustration. When they called for help they said that they did not see any meaning in their life, they did not believe in the effectiveness of their efforts, and they did not know how to be in relationships with their parents.

As criteria for interpreting sociotherapeutic experience we chose the existential frustration of identity and the existential frustration of authenticity. The existential frustration of identity in sociotherapeutic experience is overcome by an experience of wonder and awe. In the phenomenological analysis of the reflexive reports by the adolescents we revealed helpful effects and we composed a list of core themes. The existential frustration of authenticity is overcome by an experience of obviousness, evidence, and confirmation. We listed core meanings of helpful effects of the experiences of authentication that were revealed in the reflexive reports.

Presently (this is especially true for education, pedagogy, psychology, and psychotherapy) the risks of alienation are revealed as identification problems, i.e. the loss of self, loss of one's own world, and non-identification with the world. The risks of illusiveness or non-authenticity are revealed as authentication problems (i.e. being convincing and authentic) of a person's existence. These risks and problems are specifically relevant in childhood and adolescence. The risks of alienation are exacerbated by high technologies and mediating human presence in the world. Technology not only makes life and human labor easier, it also confuses people and requires efforts on their part to return to the fundamentals of life.

The identification and authentication problems are important not only for everyday life but also for professional relationships. For example, they are applicable to education, training, and psychotherapy practices. It is possible to create interfaces which mediate the relationship between a person and the current world anywhere starting with oneself and finishing with a major conflict. In this context educational, developmental, and rehabilitation activities as well as therapy helpfulness research projects gain significant relevance.

In this article we present therapy helpfulness research results based on working experience from the autonomous non-profit association "Family", located in Kemerovo, to the east of Novosibirsk in south central Russia. This organization has performed sociotherapeutic programs with children and adolescents for 15 years. The head of the association and the programs is T.N. Karpunkina, the first co-author of this article. Her working experience is presented in a number of publications [1, 2, 3].

2. Methods and materials

The methodological basis of the therapy helpfulness research rests on the findings presented by Rice and Greenberg [4, 5], Timulak [6, 7], Elliott [8], Cooper and McLeod [9]. The main principle of this type of research consists in the hypothesis that a client's preferences and evaluations are valid data to prove therapy helpfulness and effectiveness. The materials analyzed are the texts that were written as reflexive opinions and the answers that were gathered during structured and semi-structured interviews. The important advantage of the helpfulness research, or significant events research [8], lies in the fact that actual subjective experience provides analytic data that are not affected by the experience and perception of therapists, counselors or observers. In these studies there is no need to enlist or adapt clients' experiences to certain categories, which are often used in quantitative measures [7].

This article discusses the material gathered over a fairly long period of time. The material to be analyzed includes reflexive reports written by adolescents participating in sociotherapeutic activities. In the 15 years of the association's existence over two thousand children and adolescents have taken part in sociotherapeutic programs but in the past few years several dozen texts have been written by adolescents and then analyzed for the helpfulness research. This article presents the results of a phenomenological analysis of 20 reflexive texts written upon completion of a six-month therapeutic program.

We accumulated a large volume of reflexive texts that is why the analysis was performed in several stages:

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