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# The influence of communication style on the social conversation at mental deficiencies preadolescents

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## Abstract

The importance of social communication in human development is well known. In particular, the role of social communication in social insertion of children with mental disability was and still is constantly revealed by researchers. Taking into consideration the mental deficiency's personality features, this paper tried to reveal the influence that the social communication style has on the social conversation at pupils with mental deficiencies

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## 1. Theoretical background

One of the major goals of special education field is that the pupils with special education needs, in particular, the pupils with mental deficiencies should have: a job, a satisfactory level of social communication, an efficient social communication style, a personal social autonomy, abilities to develop different social relationships.

Communication style consists of individual characteristic features reflected in the communication act, and it refers to: specific ways of receiving / decoding messages; personal qualities of processing / interpreting messages; specific ways of expressing the response; personal particular traits of feedback. It relies on three elements: 1. the person's attitudinal process –the constant report of the subject to the others and themselves; 2. the models of

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acquired communication tools: assertive, non-assertive, and aggressive (with its passive-aggressive variant), manipulative; 3. temperamental constitution.

Specialists in the field of communication have revealed four communication styles: non-assertive, aggressive, manipulative, and assertive. The non-assertive style is characterized by the tendency to hide or to run away, rather than face people. It can manifest itself through excessive kindness and conciliation, the tendency to postpone the decision-making process, handing over the right to decide to other people, and a morbid fear of being judged by others; an intense anger is felt at the prospect of possible failure – individuals prefer avoidance and obedience to others' decisions. The aggressive style is characterized by the tendency to be always present, to have the last word, to win at any cost, even if it causes damage or grief to others. The manipulative style is characterized by the preference for a backstage role, by the tendency to wait until the opportune moment comes, and by the tendency to look for any hidden intentions behind others' statements; The assertive style is characterized by the ability of self-assertion, honest and direct approaches in personal speech, accompanied by the ability to provide straightforward opinions without aggression and without harm to others, pursuing their interests without violating the others' needs ( Urea, 2012).

Each communication style is reflected in the social conversation activities. The social conversation can be defined as a communicational activity which involves different persons in order to achieve specific goals, it has a time-table development, specific rules and strategies and it allows social integration. In this activity, each person comes with his/her status, personal features, has his/her own role. During this activity, it will be developed a specific psychological communicational distance between the persons that are involved in the communication process and that implies that each of them should be able to adapt to each other's level of conversation in order to reach the common goals. There are types of social conversation, each of them determines a level of social integration: a) the unadapted type is characterized by major difficulties in communication, weak structure of messages, inability to catch and keep the attention of the other party, inappropriate behaviour to the in partner communication's style; b) the survivor type is characterized by some communication difficulties, minor difficulties in to catch and keep the attention of the interlocutor, constant checking of personal behaviour, wrong criteria for evaluating the interlocutor's communication style; c) the adapted type is characterized by functional communication structure in different social context.

## **2. The structure of research**

The researchers from special education have revealed the principal characteristics of personality at person with mental deficiency: specific heterocronie, genetic viscosity, pathological inertia, rigidity, fragility of verbal conduct, fragility of personality. These characteristics put the finger on all the personality's traits and all the behavioural manifestations at persons with mental deficiency, even the educational influences shape the intensity of those influences. The situation has raised the following question: how does the communication style as a feature of personality influences the social conversation of mental deficiencies preadolescents?

To answer this question, we performed psychological research aiming at revealing the influence of the communication style on social conversation at pupils with mental deficiencies; the wider goal was to thus design special strategies that will determine better communication performance for pupils with mental deficiencies, and will reduce their failure in social environment.

In our research we had two major objectives: investigation of mental deficiencies preadolescents' communication style; investigation of the preadolescents' type of social conversation. We started from the following hypothesis: *taking into consideration the features of mental deficiencies personality), we assume that we will find, at preadolescents with mental deficiencies, specific influences of communication style upon the social conversation.*

## **3. The target group. Characteristics of the investigated population**

Our research had an initial testing procedure on 15 preadolescents with mental deficiencies and the Cronbach Alpha index ( $\alpha = .654$ ) obtained allowed us to proceed to an extended psychological research that had two stages: a) investigation of mental deficiencies preadolescents' communication style; b) investigation of mental deficiencies preadolescents' social conversation type.

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