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THE EFFECT OF TRAINING TECHNOLOGIES ON THE CHANGES IN THE COMMUNICATIVE COMPONENT OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCE OF POTENTIAL FOSTER PARENTS

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Abstract

The study aims to determine the distinct features of the communicative component of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents, as well as to detect the impact training sessions have on changes in this component. The experimental study included the confirmatory stage, the design stage, the program approbation for the psychological training, and the control stage. The study sample included 48 potential foster parents. The main study methods included theoretical, experimental, diagnostic, and statistical methods. The article highlights the distinct features of sociability, empathy, and style of behaviour in a conflict in potential foster parents. The main aspects and approbation results for the training for the development of the communicative component of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents are also presented. The proof is provided for the idea that the implementation of the specifically developed training program that includes exercises aimed to develop flexibility, empathy, and ability to establish contacts and competently build relationships helps to develop the communicative component of psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents. Materials in the article present practical value for psychologists in social services.

Keywords

Orphans – Psychological and pedagogical competence – Training

The effect of training technologies on the changes in the communicative component of the psychological... pág. 271

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Introduction

The role of family institution is incomparable to that of other social institutions, as it provides a setting for the development of personality and social role acquisition vital for successful social adaptation. Studies conducted in various countries demonstrate that the development of a child deprived of parental care and brought up in government institutions takes a different route, forming specific character traits, behavioural features, and personality traits.

The analysis of experience in social assistance to children deprived of parental care for various reasons allows us to conclude that at the present time, a foster family provides the best conditions for a child's harmonious development. A foster family can be defined as any type of family structure (foster family, guardianship family, adoptive family) that involves a child being brought up by someone other than their birth parents. A child is placed in such families due to a loss of birth parents or after being removed from their family. Foster family presents an alternative to a child residing in an orphan institution.

Despite the great advantages of foster family as a type of family placement of orphans, the number of renuncements from adopted children and their consequential return to government institutions is increasing. Unfortunately, many citizens who volunteer to adopt an orphan lack a realistic perspective on the specific characteristics of children in this category, as well as the personal qualities, knowledge, and skills a foster parent needs to possess.

All of the above leads to adopted children not forming a stable attachment to foster parents, as well as to an increase in communication difficulties and conflict situations with foster family members. On this basis, personal and behavioural issues are escalating and some foster parents make the hard decision to annul the adoption. With the goal to prevent adopted children from returning to government institutions rises the question of necessity and importance of a higher quality psychological and pedagogical training of potential foster parents for raising an adopted child. This training should allow potential foster parents to evaluate their inner resources and make a weighted decision, helping all family members to prepare for the adoption-related lifestyle changes. Despite research indicating that candidates for foster parents demonstrate the motivation to accept a child into the family¹, the formation of their psychological and pedagogical competence is vital. During the psychological readiness evaluation, it is important to account for potential foster parents having to fulfil their functions of raising the child in a situation of "role interference"².

The problem of the psychological and pedagogical competence of parents is being actively researched in both theoretical and practical aspects. The body of psychological and pedagogical research indicates substantive aspects of understanding the psychological and pedagogical competence and the methodical approaches to its formation are formulated. Some scientific publications are focused specifically on placing the orphans in professional foster families and on the psychological and pedagogical

¹ H. D. Kirk, *Shared fate: a theory and method of adoptive relationships* (Port Angeles: Ben-Simon Publ., 1984).

² J. Ciarrochi; M. Randle; L. Miller and S. Dolnicar, "Hope for the Future: Identifying the Individual Difference Characteristics of People Who Are Interested in and Intend to Foster-Care", *British Journal of Social Work* num 42 (2012): 42.

training of potential foster parents. The structural components for the psychological and pedagogical competence are defined, among other contexts, for the case of potential foster parents.

In the opinion of Y. V. Pozdnyakova, the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents involves professional knowledge, skills, methods, and techniques for the implementation of psychological and pedagogical activities aimed at raising orphans, as well as readiness for its implementation. According to Pozdnyakova, the pedagogical competence of potential foster parents also involves the manifestation of unity between the direct psychological and pedagogical motivation and professionally important personality characteristics necessary for bringing up orphans³.

After comparing and summarizing researchers' viewpoints on the structure of the psychological and pedagogical competence of a potential foster parent⁴, we can highlight the following components of said phenomenon: the cognitive component (competent implication of psychological and pedagogical knowledge and skills in the process of raising an adopted child), the reflexive component (the ability to analyse the effectiveness of the process of raising the child and the successfulness of their foster family functioning), and the communicative component (ability to constructively build the relationship with the adopted child and the social environment). Another competency explored in the studies is the social perception competency, "that composes the functional component of personality competency, which is realized in the communication process and ensures adequate perception and understanding of the self and others"⁵.

The component of interest to us is the communicative component of the psychological and pedagogical competence of a potential foster parent. It covers the ability of a parent to build effective relationships with the adopted child while being aware of their individual and age-related characteristics and needs, ability to empathize and be flexible in communication, to resolve the emerging conflict situations constructively, to communicate with the child's birth relatives and professionals in various government institutions.

The adoption of a child into the family is a hard work future parents should prepare for. The formation of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents incorporates both theoretical and practical training. The practical portion takes a form of training sessions. According to the Psychological Dictionary, "the social-psychological training is a field of practical psychology based on the use of active methods of group psychological counselling for the development of competence in communication"⁶. The effectiveness of this method is demonstrated for working with

³ Y. V. Pozdnyakova, *Formirovanie psihologo-pedagogicheskoi kompetentnosti zameshchayushchih roditelei sredstvami socialno-kulturnoi deyatelnosti*. Ph.D. Thesis. Moscow: Moscow Pedagogical State University, 2012.

⁴ Y. V. Pozdnyakova, *Formirovanie psihologo-pedagogicheskoi kompetentnosti...*; I. A. Merkul, "Problema formirovaniya psihologo-pedagogicheskoi kompetentnosti roditelei", *Aktualnye problemy psihologicheskogo znaniya* num 4 Vol: 17 (2010): 41–44 y S. S. Piyukova, *Formirovanie psihologo-pedagogicheskoi kompetentnosti roditelei priemnyh detei*. Ph.D. Thesis. Samara: Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education. 2002.

⁵ Y. V. Vardanyan; E. P. Masanova y T. G. Bylkina, "Stressoustoichivost i psihologicheskaya bezopasnost kak faktory razvitiya socialno-perceptivnoi kompetencii studenta", *Gumanitarnye nauki i obrazovanie*, num 3 Vol: 23 (2015): 13.

⁶ A. V. Petrovsky and M.G. Yaroshevsky (eds.). *Psihologicheskii slovar* 2nd ed. (Moscow: Politizdat, 2007), 410.

adolescents, young adults, and adults alike⁷. A study by Y. V. Vardanyan, L. V. Vardanyan, and E. A. Lezhneva demonstrates the ability of this method to promote the realization and development of psychological safety in students. While describing its characteristics, the authors highlight that “Training integrates professional and developmental tasks, the fulfilment of which develops achievement motivation”⁸. The method’s effectiveness in the development of various aspects of psychological competencies is also noted⁹. The method of our study includes a multi-stage preparation of a training program and its implementation according to principles of psychology and group communication, as well as the examination of the approbated program’s effectiveness.

Although the body of literature contains several research articles on the topic of our interest, a unified concept of the development of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents is lacking. In the psychological and pedagogical field of study, the problem of the formation and development opportunities for the communicative component of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents is understudied. The reason for this lies, firstly, in the lack of a clear focus on solving this vital issue in the modern education system and the social sphere and, secondly, in the theoretical and methodological aspects of the problem being underdeveloped. Our study aim is to determine the distinct features of the communicative component of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents and to detect the impact training sessions have on its changes.

Proposed methodology

General description

The experimental study includes the following stages:

- 1) a confirmatory experiment aimed to determine the base development level of the communicative component of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents;
- 2) design and approbation of the training program for the development of the communicative component of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents;
- 3) a control experiment aimed to determine the approbated training program’s effectiveness and to detect the changes in the development level of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents based on the re-test results.

⁷ N. P. Kondratyeva; Y. V. Vardanyan; M. y Dementieva, L. V. Vardanyan, “Influence of training lessons on change of value-rational component of psychological culture of students of early young age”, *International Journal of Engineering and Technology (UAE)* num 7 (4.38) (2018).

⁸ Y. V. Vardanyan; L. V. Vardanyan y E. A. Lezhneva, “Influence of Training in Psychological Safety on Development of Motivational Basis of Student’s Professional Strategy”, *Ciencia e Tecnica Vitivinicola* Vol: 29 num 12 (2014): 2.

⁹ T. V. Savinova y G. V. Pilshchikova, “Trening kak tekhnologiya razvitiya innovacionnogo myshleniya studentov”, *Gumanitarnye nauki i obrazovanie*, num 4 Vol: 24 (2015): 89.

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Algorithm

The experimental study was conducted on the basis of a municipal education institution for orphans and children deprived of parental care “Our home” in the Lyubertsy municipal district of the Moscow region (Russia). The study sample included 48 potential foster parents. The empirical data was collected by an educational psychologist E. V. Inyavina under the guidance of the candidate of psychological sciences, assistant professor of psychology at the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute N. P. Kondratyeva. The following diagnostic methods were deployed in the study: the measure of emotional empathy (A. Mehrabian, M. Epstein), the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (K. Thomas), and the “Assessment of the sociability level” questionnaire (V. F. Ryahovsky). The statistical analysis was carried out using Student’s t-test.

Results

Based on the data from the confirmatory research stage, we compared the styles of behaviour in conflict situations with the levels of empathy and sociability of potential foster parents. The data analysis indicated that most potential foster parents who show compromise behaviour displayed average levels of empathy (12.5%) and sociability (12.5%), as well as low levels of empathy (12.5%) and sociability (12.5%), equally often. Only 6.25% of potential foster parents bearing this behavioural style were found to show high levels of empathy and sociability. Potential foster parents with high levels of empathy (6.25%) and sociability (12.5%) used a cooperation tactic of behaviour in conflict. This tactic was also the one guiding 12.5% of potential foster parents with an average level of empathy and 6.25% of participants with a low level of sociability. The avoidant behavioural style was characteristic for potential foster parents with average (6.25%) or high (6.25%) level of empathy and average (6.25%) and low (6.25%) level of sociability. The most prevalent style of behaviour in conflict was the adjustment style: it was used by 18.75% of potential foster parents with an average level of empathy and sociability (18.75%). This style was used by 12.5% of participants with a high level of empathy and high (6.25%) and low (6.25%) levels of sociability. The rivalry tactic was the most rarely used. It was preferred by 6.25% of potential foster parents with a low level of empathy and 6.25% of participants with an average level of sociability. There were no potential foster parents with a low level of empathy and an average level of sociability who used cooperation as a style of behaviour in conflict. The avoidance tactic was not used by parents bearing a low level of empathy and a high level of sociability. The adjustment style was not used by participants with a low level of empathy. The research sample did not contain potential foster parents with average and low levels of empathy and high and low levels of sociability.

As a result of the confirmatory research stage, we discovered that a significant portion of potential foster parents did not reach a sufficient formation level of the communicative component of the psychological and pedagogical competence. Due to this, a need for a relevant training implementation arose. According to the study goal, the following training objectives were formulated:

- 1) to develop positive relationship building skill;
- 2) to develop empathy;
- 3) to develop constructive tactics of behaviour in conflict situations;

4) to develop the parent's ability to communicate with a child considering their individual and age-related characteristics.

The training included nine developmental sessions. One session lasted on average three hours per week in a span of two months. The means of implementation of the developed program included exercises, roleplays, conversations, discussions, brainstorm, and creative tasks. The training process provided the participants with an opportunity to confront the difficulties they will have to overcome as a foster parent, to objectively evaluate their resources and capabilities and make a weighted decision recognizing the degree of responsibility it implies. All of that would help not only achieve a healthy parent-child relationship but avoid the situation where foster parents decide to annul the adoption, thus lowering the risk of second-time orphanhood phenomenon emerging.

After the training sessions were finished, the control experiment was carried out with the goal of examination of the approved training program's effectiveness. The diagnostics previously deployed were re-implemented using the instruments listed before. The data acquired using the emotional empathy measure (A. Mehrabian & M. Epstein) the number of potential foster parents with a high level of empathy increased by 22.9%. It became more characteristic of them to understand another person deeply and clearly, to show the abilities to provide support when needed, to understand another person's feelings, and to listen to each other. They also showed greater mutual trust and altruism.

According to the data collected via the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument 22.9% more potential foster parents chose cooperation and 4.1% more chose compromise as their strategies of behaviour in conflict. The participants demonstrated greater will to resolve the conflict as fast as possible, focus on constructive discussion of the problem, as well as the willingness to make concessions and listen to the opponent's opinion. Only for a small number of subjects, the conflict resolution remains a difficult problem.

The data provided by the "Assessment of the sociability level" questionnaire showed a decrease in the number of participants with average and low levels of sociability from 4.2% to 16.6%.

Discussion

According to the results of the control stage, it should be noted that after the formative experiment the indexes of development of the communicative component of psychological and pedagogical competence increased in potential foster parents participating in the study. The data analysis carried out using Student's t-test demonstrates the statistically significant differences in participants' levels in the three examined indexes on the confirmatory and the control stages ($t_{emp} = 3.1$, $t_{emp} = 4.5$, and $t_{emp} = 2.7$ accordingly) on the 1% significance level.

The acquired data confirms the effectiveness of the suggested training program aimed at the development of the communicative component of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents. The research data also supports the claim that a thought-out and carefully designed training program as a method of active social-psychological education promotes positive change in the components of the psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents, which is indicative of scientific novelty and practical significance of the study.

As a result of the study, the definition of its fundamental concept has been specified: the communicative component of the psychological and pedagogical competence of a potential foster parent implies the ability to build effective relationships with the adopted child while considering their individual and age-related characteristics and needs, to express empathy and flexibility in communication, to resolve the rising conflict situations constructively, and to communicate with specialists from various government institutions, as well as with the child's birth relatives.

Conclusion

The study achieved the following results:

- 1) the definition of the concept of communicative component of psychological and pedagogical competence of a potential foster parent is specified, its specific characteristics are formulated, and the importance of its further development is indicated;
- 2) the training program is developed and approbated; the said training, in concordance with its goal, objectives, and structure, is aimed at the formation of the communicative component of psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents;
- 3) the re-test of the components and statistical data analysis indicate statistically significant differences in the variables under examination; the research hypothesis is confirmed.

The research materials can be used by practicing psychologists in the social sphere for increasing the level of psychological and pedagogical competence of potential foster parents.

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