

Psychological and Pedagogical Methods for Development of Assertive Behavior in High School Students

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Abstract. Studies into how the younger generation grows up and develops as part of the society are increasingly relevant today. The society influences human beings and their mental conditioning; it defines the point of origin for tracking the changes at this or that developmental stage. Therefore, assertive behavior, which helps the youth in their social interaction, is an extremely important subject matter for research. Assertive behavior is a person's integrative ability to stay independent, self-confident, motivated to succeed and achieve, and have great willpower. Such behavior enables young people to defend their point of view; to be independent, active, and perseverant; yet to consider others' opinion; thus, to be the doer of their life in a socially conscious manner. This paper describes experiments run at Kochnev Secondary School #1, Neryungri, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Analysis of psychological and pedagogical literature coupled with a summary of psychologists' experience in this field provide an overview of how assertive behavior develops in high-school students.

1. Introduction

Therefore, assertive behavior, which helps the youth in their social interaction, is an extremely important subject matter for research today. The today's world needs assertive people. Youngsters tend to keep up with the times, to be socially active and daring, to understand what they are truly capable and dreaming of, to be significant, to find their place in life. However, not everyone can truly prove oneself as they might want to, since young people struggle to clearly define the borderline between perseverance and assertiveness. Aggression often prevails, as adolescents fail to resolve their matters positively due to lack of soft skills.

Overview of literature on psychology and social studies shows that assertive behavior is defined as behavior that combines inner strength and outer politeness. The handbook definition is "the ability to correctly protect one's interests and line of conduct, to refuse calmly whatever the person disagrees with, and to continue protecting their rights in a socially acceptable manner when exposed to considerable peer pressure." [2, p. 145-147].

2. Relevance, scientific significance, and state-of-the-art

Studies into how the younger generation grows up and develops as part of the society are increasingly relevant today. The society influences human beings and their mental conditioning; it defines the point of origin for tracking the changes at this or that developmental stage [1, 3].

The Federal State Educational Standard of General Secondary Education No. 1897 dd. December 17, 2010 mentions “skills of self-control, self-esteem, decision-making, and informed choice in education and cognition.” [22]

The Order of the Ministry of Education and Science No. 413 dd. May 17, 2012 *On the Approval of the Federal State Educational Standard of General Secondary Education* mentions “protection and improvement of physical and mental well-being of children, including their emotional well-being.” [19]

Thus, the objective is to enable the youth to educate themselves and to develop assertive personalities.

The subject matter of this research is the assertive behavior in high-school students.

The research dwells upon the methods and techniques for the development of such behavior.

The goal is to apply psychological and pedagogical methods for development of assertive behavior in high-school students.

Statement of Problem:

(1) select and test the psychological and pedagogical methods for the development of assertive behavior in high-school students;

(2) analyze the experimental attempts to develop such behavior.

Theoretical overview of the existing papers on the topic shows that international psychologists identify two primary approaches to developing assertive behavior.

The former is related the external behavioral model of a successful person. This is covered by V. Capponi, T. Novak, and E. Salter [17, 23].

The second approach is humanistic psychology that focuses on the inner world and its existential state. Assertiveness from the standpoint of humanistic psychology is covered by Ch. Bühler, Dorothy Jongeward, Ye.V. Zhatko, J.I. Kahn [7, 8, 9, 10, 16]. The knowledge of a healthy constructive and mature personality that this approach has produced makes an important contribution to understanding the phenomenon of assertive behavior, which is positive for societal development.

In Russian psychology, assertive behavior has been studied in its individual aspects by V.S. Agapov, B.G. Ananyev, F.Ye. Vasilyuk, I.V. Dubrovina, S.V. Kovalev [4, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15].

That can be generally noted that many papers analyze assertive behavior as an ability to self-express fully and freely in communication with other people. Therefore, the behavior is defined as decisive, straightforward, yet polite expression of feelings, attitudes, opinions, and desires in a manner that does not hurt the feelings, attitudes, opinions, rights, or desires of other people. Assertive behavior is not “innate; rather, the person develops it over time.” [5] As an adolescent matures, they have to address a number of specific maturation-related challengers. For a teenager, it becomes important to learn to accept their appearance; to empower their bodies through sports, leisure, self-regulation, labor, and art; to master gender-appropriate role and behavior; to develop more mature relationships with peers of either sex; to become emotionally independent from their parents and other adults; finally, to get prepared for professional career.

3. Experimental results

The experiments under this research were run at Kochnev Secondary School No. 1 in Neryungri, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). The experimental group comprised 36 high-school students (10-graders) aged 15 or 16.

The first (diagnostic) stage took place in September 2018 to identify the assertiveness components of a high-schooler personality, which were further used as the criteria to assess assertiveness.

Experiments designed to identify assertive behavior in high-school students included diagnostic efforts based on the following methods: the empathy questionnaire by A. Mehrabian and N. Epstein [18], the assertiveness test by V. Capponi and T. Novak [7], and the self-confidence test by V.G. Romek [20].

Analysis of the Mehrabian-Epstein questionnaire-generated data revealed 14 high-empathy students. Those featured emotional responsiveness, sensitivity, empathy towards others, their troubles,

joys, and sorrows. Empathy manifests itself as a desire to help and support. Medium empathy was shown in 13 students who were still sensitive and empathic towards their loved ones, although not all the time. 9 students had low empathy. They were non-emotional, non-sensitive, non-empathic towards other people, their troubles, joys, and sorrows. Such people do not seek to help or support. Such attitude implies an egocentric personality.

Assertiveness test by V. Capponi and T. Novak identified high independence and self-confidence in 8 participants. They were fairly independent, still attentive and respectful to other people and their beliefs. Medium assertiveness was identified in 16 students. Those were overly independent, ignorant of others' opinion. Selfish and tending to overestimate themselves. A slightest change in circumstances could destroy their self-confidence. Finally, 12 (33%) of the students had low assertiveness. They were extremely dependent on others, incapable, and unconfident. In most cases, they'd be unable to handle their challenges without outside help, to be responsible for themselves and their behavior.

Romek's self-confidence test showed that most of the test subjects had either medium or low self-confidence. They tend to be assertive in an ordinary situation; however, any change in circumstances destroys their self-confidence. They can fear the unforeseen situations even if the circumstances are favorable.

It was thus found out that only a third of the test subjects had high assertiveness, another third had medium assertiveness, and yet another third were low.

These results were inherited by the second stage of research (the formative stage, September 2018 to March 2019) to select and test special psychological and pedagogical methods tailored to the population studied. The methods were designed to teach the teens to openly express their feelings and desires, to get and stay in touch. Emphasis was made on soft skills, which are critical in the today's world, on verbal intelligence and contact management, on staying calm and reserved while handling conflicts.

The method selection was guided by V.P. Zinchenko's *How to Build the I* (Rus: Как построить свое «Я») handbook as well as on M.J. Smith's confidence-boosting exercises [21, pp. 13-187].

The main methods the research team employed were: verbal methods (storytelling, retelling, conversation, explanation, and discussion in groups); visual methods (role modeling, demonstration, and illustration); practical methods (exercises); game therapy (relaxation games, business games, and interaction games), as well as music therapy.

Assertive behavior development methods are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Class topics and schedule.

Topic	Objective	Methods
Introductory session. Self-esteem and self-knowledge.	Boost the school students' cognition.	Exercises: Name and Its Meaning, My Coat-of-Arms and Motto, I am a Hero, Compliments.
Tolerance and I.	Promote self-esteem and respect to others.	Exercises: Traits of a Tolerant Person, Who's the Best at Self-Praising or the Rainy Day Memo, What I'm Still Ashamed of, and My Rights. Magic Shop, an interaction game.
Who's a Confident Person?	Learn the signs and skills of assertive behavior.	Conversation: What is Confidence? Exercises: Associations, Let's Roast Each Other, Praise Yourself.
Emotional intelligence.	Teach school students to be aware of their emotional state,	Conversation: Role of Emotions in Human Life, Exercises: My Faults, Phantom.

	to differentiate emotions.	Role-playing game: Life as It Is, Awareness, Sketch: Convey Your Emotions.
Communicative technologies of power and self-promotion	Give an idea of communication skills. Analyze the psychological barriers in communication and how to overcome them.	Conversation: Communications in Our Life Exercises: Compliment. Games: Contacts, Three Words, Mirror, Learn to Listen, Chinese Whispers, Name That Feeling, and Communications.
Efficient communication	Analyze passive, aggressive, manipulative, and assertive behavior. Analyze the benefits of confident behavior.	Conversation: Communication Rules. Exercises: Relationships, Dark Forest, Best Options, A Situation, Behavior Breakdown, and I as a Statement. Role-playing game: Manipulation.
Conflict	Teach the ways to handle conflict.	Exercises: Conflict, Infinite. Role-playing game: Bomb Shelter. Game: Where's the Manager? I Got a Fly in My Soup!
Shaping a self-confident personality	Give an idea of positive thinking, positive inner image; promote self-confidence.	Conversation: Confidence. Exercises: Compliments, Evaluate Yourself, I am the Best!, I'm Confident in You!, Recommendations, and Change Your Mood.
I'm calm.	Promote adaptive and constructive behavior skills.	Conversation: Emotion Control, Exercises: What to Do?, I'm the Best Thing to Have Happened to the World, and Here's Why, I'm Free.
Tell about yourself	Boost creativity and team skills.	Conversation: How to Pitch Yourself. Exercises: Presentation, Associations, Interview, Mirror, Find a Partner.
Together, We're Strong	Rally the group.	Conversation: Secrets of a Dialog Exercises: Fall as a Test of Trust, I Understand You, Talk to Me.
Overcome together	Develop self-analysis and skills to overcome the psychological barriers the hinder self-development.	Conversation: How to Support People, Exercises: Consignment Shop, Self-Portrait, Mask Off, I Image.
Confidence relationships	in Train school children to show confidence in interpersonal relationships, in particular when protecting their own interests.	Conversation: Rules of Confidence, Exercises: My Strengths, My Successes, Transformation, Complete the Sentence, Catch in the Circle.
Confidence uncertainty	in Train the skills it takes to behave constructively in uncertainty.	Exercises: A Small Success, My Habitat, My Qualities, Buy You..., Set Your Pace, Relaxation exercise: Flower.

Self-control	Train the skills to arbitrarily control one's one state in (di)stress.	Exercises: Your Dignity, Self-Discontent, Applause
Self-knowledge	Boost the students' self-knowledge and self-awareness. Teach them how to influence people with reasoning and counter-argument.	Game of interaction: In Your Shoes. Exercises: Friendship Poster.
Goal pursuit	Further the skills of goal pursuit. Give confidence in interpersonal relationships.	Exercises: the Unsmiling Princess, Everyone Who..., Warlocks, Funny Picture. Sketch: the Stone.
My problem	Give the idea of positive thinking, positive inner image. Developing the skills of understanding one's own emotional state and 'conversing' with oneself.	Exercises: Color of My Problem, Active Listening, What Kind of I?, My Wishes, Needs, and Aspirations.
Others and I	Expand emotional and communicative skills.	Conversation: Learning to Help Each Other. Exercises: Good Stuff Only..., I've Got..., Compliments.
Feelings, emotions	Boost the ability to express and recognize various emotional states.	Conversation: What Kinds of Feelings Are There? Exercises: the Diversity of Feelings, Positive or Negative: Try to Guess, Oh You Did Please Me, and Who's Got a Bigger Problem?
Love yourself	Teach assertive counteraction against negative and obtrusive influence.	Game of interaction: the Orchestra. Exercises: Interaction, My Darling Me, Kitchen Boys.
Positive thinking.	Help understand one's value and develop a positive self-attitude.	Conversation: Think With a Smile. Exercises: Sun, Image of Me, My Goals, Strength Zone, Wiseman.
Self-confidence.	Continue to reinforce positive self-esteem. Watch commercials. Identify hidden manipulations.	Exercises: Attention, Psychogymnastics, Gait. Discussion: Internet is for Me or I am for the Internet? Workshop on analysis of popular groups and public pages on social media.
Stay Yourself.	Relax the muscles, trust more.	Exercises: Ledge, Tell About Yourself. Listen to relaxation music by K. Mänd-Lakhiani and D. Snyder. Discuss L. Friedlander's <i>Take the Lead</i> to analyze how assertion helps combat negative influence.
Community Trust	Learn to perceive oneself as a self-valued and sensible	Conversation: Learn to Trust. Exercises: Motion, Alien.

	personality.	Role-playing game: Bomb Shelter, Endless Clarification.
Uncomfortable socializing	Teach them how to influence people with reasoning and counter-argument. Learn how to recognize different ways of influencing you.	Conversation: Uncomfortable socializing or how to deal with unpleasant circumstances. Sketch: Grindstone, Now Swap Seats Those Who..., Tell the Number.
Positive thinking.	Teach to see the good and the beautiful in most ordinary things in life.	Conversation: Smile is Your Friend, Exercises: Five Pleasant Moments, Goal Setting, Aggressive and Shy.
Identify the entourage	Teach how external traits betray someone's behavioral style. Teach how to communicate efficiently.	Conversation: Who's Next to You. Exercises: My Entourage, Dark Forest. Best Options. Situation.
Borderlines.	Instill the idea that everyone has rights.	Conversation: Classroom Cooperation. Exercises: My Rights and Others' Rights, Painting Duet, Find a Partner.
Last class. Towards the goals.	Form a prospective life strategy, help students understand they are responsible for their own future.	Conversation: Goal Setting Exercises: I Assume Responsibility. Roadmap of Desired Feelings. Roadmap of My Goals. My Life Goals.

Aside from the methods above, each class had muscle relaxation exercises to relieve muscle tone. These exercises used special techniques to help students relax for better performance and less tension. Muscle relaxation sessions only comprised verbal exercises and were done after the students had well learned the ways to relax in contrast to tension. Students would sit in a relaxed position with their eyes closed and listen—and follow—special commands delivered as hypnotic verses. Muscle relaxation was attained by imagination.

Such exercises made extensive use psychotherapeutic and pedagogical methods that helped students maintain their mental well-being and prevent psychoemotional distress.

Each class ended in a reflection session to retrospectively evaluate the emotions (what they liked and what they didn't, what was good and what was bad, and why) as well as the meaning (why what they did was important and why it had to be done in the first place). It's important to always explain to high-school students the importance of what they do, i.e. what they do it; of equal importance is their own subjective opinion.

The third (control) stage took place in April 2019 to find whether and how assertive behavior had evolved in the subjects.

This study did identify positive changes. Mehrabian-Epstein questionnaire was used again and identified that 24 (66%) of the students now had high empathy. Mann-Whitney U-test was applied to find whether the difference was significant. The empirical $U_{emp} = 397$ was significant at $p \leq 0.01$.

According to the Capponi-Novak assertiveness test, 17 (47%) attained high confidence and independence. The same U-test was applied to find whether the difference was significant [32].

The empirical $U_{emp} = 411$ was significant at $p \leq 0.01$.

Romek's test showed 14 (38%) of the students were highly self-confident.

Significance was tested by the Wilcoxon T-test [32]. The empirical $T_{emp} = 163$ was significant at $p \leq 0.01$.

Thus, the obtained empirical values were significant, indicating the effectiveness of the applied methods.

The conclusion is that the development of assertiveness in high-school students is a unity that combines multiple interrelated steps taken in a logical sequence and specific goals set for each step, specific subject matter and optimized activities to attain high assertiveness.

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