

# Vocational Orientation of the Mentally Retarded Children at the "Art Ceramics" Studio

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## ABSTRACT

The article deals with the role of art education for the purpose of vocational orientation of the mentally retarded students. Vocational orientation is the first major step in the complex system of the measures targeted at social and professional adjustment of the mentally disabled people, and it complies with the principle of equal opportunities for professional development and social advancement of all students. The authors describe the principles and methods of maintaining the art ceramics studio in which students gradually learn about different technological processes and modeling techniques, develop their professional skills related to the processing of materials, decorating ceramics, using different tools, which is believed to be an integral aspect of the vocational orientation of the mentally retarded children. The results of the experimental research on the vocational orientation of the mentally retarded students at the "Art Ceramics" studio in the special education school in Shuya, Russia are presented.

**Keywords:** *Vocational orientation, Mental retardations, Art, Art ceramics, Studio.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mental retardation is one of the most common children's developmental disabilities in the Russian Federation. Mental retardation is understood as severe delay in intellectual development accompanied by significant limitations in social skills and behavior, as well as by mental disturbances. Such retardations transform the steady mentality, which unites people into social communities, and brings about psychological crises [1].

Mentally retarded children are characterized by:

- serious underdevelopment of motor and verbal skills;
- reaching developmental milestones significantly later than expected;
- lack of cognitive activity;
- primitive interests, needs, and motives;
- low interest in learning;

- significantly limited capacity of emotions and volitions;
- the child's passivity in all the life spheres, including their professional growth.

Adequate vocational guidance to the conscious job choice is a most important aspect of social involvement of the mentally retarded children. If such career orientation service is considered at an educational institution, the following interdependent objectives are to be taken into account:

- putting together adequate judgments about modern jobs, job choices, job descriptors, and the job opportunities children may have;
- developing the skill of an impartial assessment of children's personal abilities and suitability for a specific job;
- cultivating their interest for work activities and work ethics;
- promoting optimistic career and craftsmanship prospects;

- building skills of the vocational adjustment to the changing social and economic environment, aimed at enhancement of the professional and social self-identification of the children.

Vocational orientation is a starting point in a complex system of measures taken for the social and labor adjustment of the mentally disabled, but the success of their integration into the society largely depends on how productive this initial stage is [2].

In this article, vocational training is viewed as the process of mastering different skills and developing competencies (both the Soft Skills and the Hard Skills) in a specific job place, as career orientation, and as a vital component of employment. It plays a critical role in the professional rehabilitation of the disabled people, laying the foundation for the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities, while supplementary education for mentally retarded children serves as an effective factor in creating the barrier-free environment so they can start their vocational education further in life.

Decorative art has a great potential capacity for social and professional adjustment of the mentally retarded children. When being included into the teacher-managed artistic activities, the children find themselves in the environment in which the concentrated attention, the mental activities, the focused purposefulness of action, and the careful execution of the teacher's instructions both give them the vivid life impressions from them creating the things of beauty and deepen their interest in the corresponding professions.

## **2. METHODOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

A.A. Aksenova, B.B. Gorskin, T.V. Yegorova, S.D. Zabravnaya, L.V. Zankov, V.V. Lebedovsky, M.S. Pevzner, M.N. Perova, B.P. Puzanov, G.Ye. Suhareva, S.L. Rubinshtain, et al. are the Russian scholars who took a deep insight into the issue of social adjustment, education and psychology of the mentally retarded children. M.S. Aloia, N.C. Andreasen, T.E. Goldberg, M.L. Gourovitch, D. Mitchell, D. Sutherland, D. Missar, D. Pickar, D.R. Weinberger are among foreign scholars who did research on this problem.

O.I. Akimova, G.Ye. Vasenokova, S.M. Mirskoy, O.V. Pashiniva, K.M. Turchinskaya, A.M. Scherbakova et al. studied the issue of labor and

professional training and professional identity of the mentally retarded children.

The research on individual professional direction was done in the scientific works by K.A. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, M.R. Ginsburg, Ye.A. Klimova, N.V. Kuzmina, N.S. Pryazhnikov, S.N. Chistyakov.

Recently, the specifics of the professional orientation work with mentally disabled children have been thoroughly studied and described by Ye.V. Ananyeva, Ye.V. Svistunova, Ye.A. Gertzev, Ye.V. Nesterov, L.V. Kryzhanovskaya.

I.A. Groshenkov, T.N. Golovina, N.P. Vaisman, S.Ya. Rubinshtain, S.L. Mirskiy are the psychologists and educators who did the research on esthetic, creative and artistic development of the mentally disabled children.

## **3. SPECIFIC ASPECTS AND PROBLEMS OF THE PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION OF THE MENTALLY RETARDED STUDENTS AT THE ART LESSONS**

Professional orientation of school students is a major factor predetermining their correct and accurate career choices. It is even more important with the children having different mental conditions. The students taught at the special education schools are most often diagnosed with various mental retardations, oligophrenia at the moronity stage (mild mental deficiency) and imbecility (minor mental deficiency), Down's syndrome, Klinefelter's syndrome, Turner syndrome. Recently, there has been an increase in students diagnosed with mental disorders aggravated by the autistic syndrome. Each mental disorder has its own peculiar aspects and the causes of development, which results in different approaches to their education and vocational training.

It is very important to realize that mentally retarded children are immature in their emotions and volitions and deficient in their cognitive activity. There can be mental retardations of constitutional, somatogenic, psychogenic and cerebral and organic states [3], [4].

However, general retarded mental development is characterized by a mere developmental delay, which is revealed in immaturity of thinking, lack of background knowledge that is necessary for learning, deficient intellectual capacity, domination

of playing motives over learning motives, quick-paced fatigue from learning. In that case, emotional development can also be delayed, yet the mental retardations are uncritical. Also, there can be observed delayed intellectual development [5], [6].

Visual and imaginative manner of thinking is typical of the children diagnosed with mild and minor mental deficiencies (oligophrenia at the moronity stage and imbecility). Such students are capable of solving simple practical tasks and can evaluate the situation correctly. At special education schools, they develop reading, writing, and counting skills, learn about the world and some vocational orientations.

Yet, a lot of mentally retarded children fail to develop their profession-oriented abilities, and their potential remains unfulfilled. The reason for that is the concomitant encephalopathic symptoms, namely: cerebrastrhenic (increased fatigue and mental drain), neurosis-like (vulnerability, timidity, fearfulness, stuttering, tics), psychopathy-like (affective excitability, disinhibition of impulses), epileptiform (seizures), apathetic-adyamic (tardiness, apathy, weak motives for action) [5], [7], [8].

As K.S. Lebedinskaya and G.Ye. Sukhareva put it, such complications are typical of the oligophrenic children, and the children with Down's syndrome and mentally retarded children also may have those encephalopathic symptoms [1], [4].

A majority of scholars believe it that each mental disorder has its own special aspects and the causes of development, and that predetermines special organizational forms of training, education, and vocational guidance [9].

The purpose of vocational orientation of mentally retarded children is to provide competent assistance for them to adjust to the society, to choose a job in accordance with the state of their health, their interests and abilities, and to develop some profession-oriented skills [3]<sup>p.4</sup>. This process is to be targeted at creating a system of relatively fixed dominant behavioral patterns, steady professional interests, high self-esteem, and a positive attitude towards work.

A.V. Lobanova and M.A. Nikitina argue that competent vocational orientation of mentally retarded children involve considering such professionally significant personal traits as interest in the profession, professional self-orientation, disposition and capacity, values, motives as well as the health condition [3].

The ultimate result of the vocational orientation of mentally retarded children is the development of two main groups of qualities: one is the qualities reflecting a child's professional self-orientation, and another is the qualities determining professional competencies. The two groups correspond to the two major goals: 1) of helping a child to select a suitable job and 2) of bringing out their best professionally significant qualities [10], [11]. The first group of qualities embraces a complex of emotional value-based attitudes and self-assertive professional drives, like ideals, beliefs, principles, viewpoints, and personal relationships. The second group may include subject-matter professional competencies and social professional competencies [12], [13].

In this case, art has a great capacity for teaching work ethics, shaping attitude towards the world, enhancing social adaptation, as well as for moral, aesthetic and spiritual development of a child. All that makes art a powerful means of self-identification and self-realization for mentally retarded students. Folk arts and decorative and applied arts are particularly beneficial in that respect, because they have both utilitarian and aesthetic functions.

Folk art is characterized by a prominent sense of rhythm, love for the repetition of motives, for the slow, measured tempo. Above all, folk craftsmen value symmetry and balance [1]<sup>p.342</sup>. Due to those features, folk art classes, on the one hand, improve a student's abilities to create useful things and instill work ethics, and, on the other hand, they stimulate artful activities and develop the ability to create beautiful things.

The art of ceramics is the representational art that transforms the surrounding environment and makes it possible to explore the world through objects and things. The ceramics like clay toys, pots, bowls, jugs, pots date back to the ancient times, and they have changed little since then. Ceramics are still relevant today due to the association with keeping up the comfort of the household [14], [15].

In addition to artistic and aesthetic aspects, ceramics art studies are focused on the students' learning about the working process, the molding techniques, the ceramics designs, the skills of handling different materials, of decorating ceramics, of using specific tools.

The purposeful studies of the art of ceramics encourage students to think, test, search, experiment, help boost creativity, develop skills,

and, most importantly, express students' inner world, which has a positive effect on the professional self-identification and personal development of a mentally retarded student. In fact, mentally disabled children (those having minor mental deficiencies) are eager and willing to take part in art ceramics classes, it being a kind of rehabilitation process, and such classes can be considered a productive means of the student's development and their vocational orientation.

#### **4. VOCATIONAL ORIENTATION OF MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN AT THE "ART CERAMICS" STUDIO**

In the course of the theoretical research, it was suggested that classes at the "Art Ceramics" Studio could improve professional orientation of mentally retarded children if the following provisions were considered:

- the optimal syllabus for teaching the art of ceramics to mentally retarded children was developed;
- the adequate number technical and art skills necessary for making objects of clay was identified;
- engaging educational techniques and methods were selected;
- various visual aids (vivid imagery, videos, presentations, active learning methods), emotional teaching methods (emotionally involving methods and game methods) and integrated effect on different senses (a sense of sight, of hearing, of smell and of touch) were used;
- the ultimate number of the students' practical activities was specified;
- the effective methods of teaching mentally retarded students were singled out (the methods of folk pedagogy that is consistent with the creative principles of folk art), i.e. repetition, variation, improvisation, search and project methods, methods of creating emotional intensity of the classes by the use of different types of arts, the case study method [16], [17].

To test the hypothesis, a pedagogical experiment was conducted. The special needs students were taught the art of ceramics at the "Art Ceramics" Studio in the boarding special education school in Shuya, Russia, for two years.

The individualized approach was used. The special aspects of the teenagers' health state, their interests and abilities, their professional choice and motivation for the proposed activities, their personal traits were taken into account, and a group of 15 teenagers from Year 5 and Year 6 was formed. Also, the Instructional Guidelines on the Employment and Vocational Activities of the Handicapped with the Regard of their Disabilities [18] were considered.

The following structural components of the syllabus were identified:

- cognitive, meaning enhancing intellectual operations and enlarging the sensory, visual and artistic experience of the students;
- motivational, oriented at creating inner motivation for learning with a focus on higher self-esteem and confidence;
- developmental, involving development of imagination through maintaining an emotional impact on the students; of hand motor skills; of art skills as the main competence tool in the ceramics art;
- educational, aimed at the use of the ceramics art, including traditional (folk) art, as a means of fostering a respectful attitude towards the historical and cultural heritage of the Russian people; moulding an emotional and aesthetic attitude to the art and the world in general and a respectful attitude towards craftsmanship and crafts;
- organizational, focused on giving the students maximum possible freedom of action; on the assistance in understanding the roadmap of actions; on the fruitful teacher-student joint activities;
- productive, implying the indispensable creation of an object of a utilitarian significance and aesthetic appeal.

The teaching methods at the studio included professionally-oriented conversations; virtual tours and real-life excursions, that would gradually enrich both the students' life and their visual perception; practical classes of the fundamentals of creating ceramics objects that are both useful and beautiful; project work aimed at teaching the students how to use the objects made by them to maintain the object and play environment; participation in competitions, exhibitions, fairs, etc.

The teacher gave individual tasks (of creating the same object of ceramics art, but with individual variations, or completing individual tasks according

to the plan written on cards), group tasks (doing the same or different tasks in different groups), and used teamwork (teamwork with individual tasks, teamwork with one and the same task when the students had to decide themselves about the distributions of responsibilities).

On completing the experiment of teaching mentally retarded adolescents at the "Art Ceramics" studio, it was estimated that the methods improving their professional orientation were the following:

- the synthesis method that helped the students accumulate practical skills, find new situations for them to use the skills and analyze previously learned information;
- the method of association, stemming from the students' previous life experience, which resulted in connecting familiar art images in the students' mind;
- the method of experiment, which enlarged the students' toolkit of various materials for modeling, helped them discover the properties of the materials while creating their decorative compositions, promoted their practical exploration of various modeling and decoration techniques and the ways of using the ceramic objects made by them in real life;
- the method of emotional and sensory impact through emotional and imagery stimulation, empathy, surprise, assimilation, novelty, creating interest in the topic of the lesson;
- the method of complex use of different arts (music, pantomime, verbal folk art, literature), which stimulates students' creativity;
- the exposition method, involving the exhibition of ceramics, showing the techniques of working with it, reviews of successful business practices;
- the case-study method (the method of specific situations), which is learning about the real-life situations, when students have to evaluate and analyze the issue, propose possible solutions and choose the best one for the future use.

The experimental training program included seven modules each academic year. On completing a module, the student learned new things and developed new skills of working with ceramics. They completed the following courses: "The introduction to the art ceramics course", "The fundamentals of decorative and applied arts",

"Basic modeling techniques", "Traditional folk toy", "Types of ceramics by the manufacturing methods", "Basic ceramics production techniques", "Folk crafts" and others. Classes were held once a week in the first year of study and twice a week in the second year.

In the first year, classes were held once a week and in the second year there were two classes a week.

The students studied ceramic materials, ceramics utilities, the basics of color science, ornamentation and stylized design. They learned the moulding techniques (shaping clay into a ball and a cylinder, rolling out a clay layer, prunting, pasting, scratching) and the techniques of volumetric modeling of toys and making toys by parts (by the patterns of Kargopol, Dymkovo and Filimonovo toys). The students were introduced to the basics of layered ceramics, the decoration methods by using paints and sgraffiti, hollows and embossing (decorative plaquettes, tilework, panels).

Starting by doing simple assignments, the students further learned to complete more complex tasks like modeling drinking vessels using the technique of rope ceramics, sculpting animals, making pottery, etc. They learned the techniques of painting, and painted the ceramic objects they had made themselves. The children were particularly enthusiastic about making and painting whistle-blowers and souvenirs representing the Chinese symbols of the year, because they had seen such ceramics objects at fairs and in shopping centers, when going on excursions to different cities. At the studio, the students were shown some practical ways to utilize various ceramic products and explained the prospects of setting up ceramics business.

There were some key teaching goals that were considered in the course of the experiment. At the outset, it was essential to stir up the students' interest in the art of ceramics. So, the students were exposed to various ceramic objects and traditional ceramic folk toys. In the classroom, teachers used some methods to activate different sense receptors (the sense of hearing – listening to the sounds (whistle-blows, handbells), the sense of sight – looking steadily at the colourful works of folk art). The activation of perception was facilitated by the games like "Gather the toys of the kind" and "Pick the toy horse in the toy cluster".

When studying the topic "Kargopol Toy", the students learned about the unusual characters of this

folk craft - Polkan the Hero, the Harmonica-player, the Bear, the painted symbols of the Sun, plants, grains, soil, and about the special aspects of Kargopol toy colors. They fulfilled some practical tasks in order to master the techniques of making a toy by parts. At the same time, the students reinforced the previously learned theoretical knowledge and practical methods about modeling materials and techniques and about modeling from clay – how to knead, spread, pinch off, roll out clay, how to shape it into a ball or into a cylinder, how to prunt it, etc. Also, the students were taught about the manufacturing processes of making traditional folk toys (Kargopol, Dymkovo, Filimonovo), about the craftsmen and their business projects, about different jobs like the job of a potter and a ceramist.

At the lessons of handbell making, the students learned the basics of making volumetric ceramic objects like glasses, cups, saucers, handbells. They studied the technique of stuffing clay into a ready-made form. In the lessons, an emotional background was created by playing the sounds of bell ringing, both the "Rostov bells" and the small handbells); some exercises for the students to recognize the patterns of handbell painting were used, the game "Find an odd handbell" (which was the Mezen bell) was played. The students watched some videos of Russian traditional fair festivities and some documentaries about the manufacturing process and selling of the ceramics. They also studied different shapes and decorations of the handbells, while listening to their chimes. Together with the teacher, they figured out familiar patterns painted on the handbells, modeled and dried their own bells, put them into a furnace and fired them. Next they picked a handbell pattern and created their own designs, coated and painted their handbells. At the final lessons, the conclusions were made while role playing the game "A Handbell at the fair". A display of the handbells was organized and the students discussed their properties (whose handbell had the loudest sound, whose handbell made the sweetest sound, whose handbell had a genuine design). The Besides, the students told how they had made their bells, here they could use it, whether it was possible to set up a business to manufacture such handbells.

## **5. EXPERIMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF THE VOCATIONAL ORIENTATION OF MENTALLY RETARDED ADOLESCENTS**

Two assessments were carried out in order to evaluate the effectiveness of vocational orientation and the development dynamics of the students. The summative assessment was carried out at the beginning of the first year of studies, and the formative assessment was conducted at the end of the second year of studies. For each criterion, a comparative analysis of the results was carried out, the graphs were made, which clearly showed the effectiveness of the training at the studio. For the assessment, the following methods were used:

- 1. The students' vocational preferences were identified by using the job matrix developed by G.V. Rezapkina. This method helped to determine the range of jobs the students could do successfully. Only the students who had been recommended to work in the field of folk arts and crafts, to process natural materials, to paint and make ceramics were enrolled in the experimental study at the studio.
- 2. The value-based differential diagnostic questionnaire (after E.A. Klimov [2]) was used to evaluate the children's positive motivation to work and their work ethics. Only the students who were interested in the field of "Humanity and Artistic Images" were considered for the experimental study.
- 3. The method of manual skills assessment (after N.I. Ozeretsky) was used to assess the students' ability to use different tools. It was important to evaluate how well the students could comply with the teacher's instructions and perform actions in a certain sequence of instructions.
- 4. The test developed by N.A. Bernstain [16] was used to evaluate the students' manual speed when working with tools. The test measures the speed of manipulating small objects and assesses the object and spatial organization of movements. The main indicator in this test was the time taken to complete the task (the vertical axis of the graph is the time measured in seconds, the horizontal axis is the student's number in the group list).

In this article, we will present some of the results. The students' performance motivation at the

outset and at the end of the experiment is represented in "Figure 1" and "Figure 2".

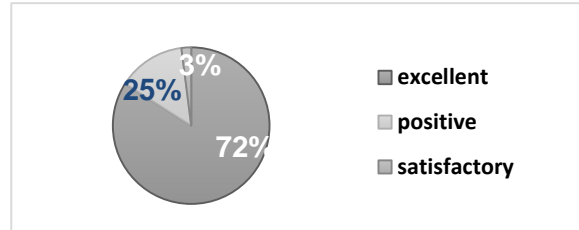


Figure 1 The students' performance motivation at the outset of the experiment.

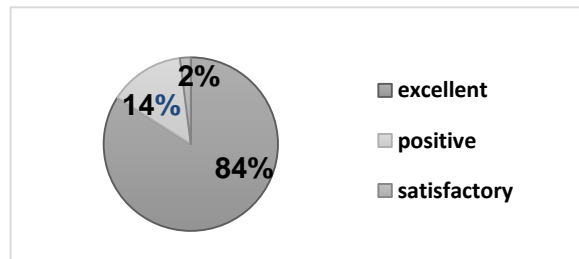


Figure 2 The students' performance motivation at the end of the experiment.

"Figure 3" represents the results of the manual speed test (after N.A. Bernstein).

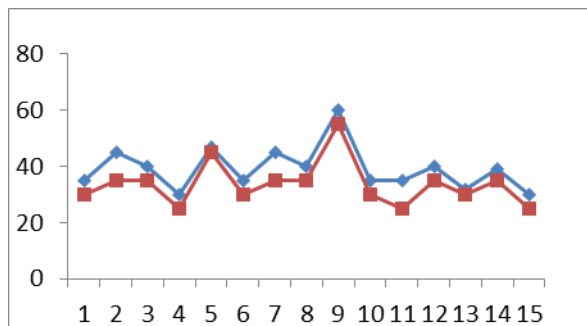


Figure 3 The results of the manual speed test.

"Figure 4" represents the results of the manual skills assessment (after N.I. Ozeretsky).

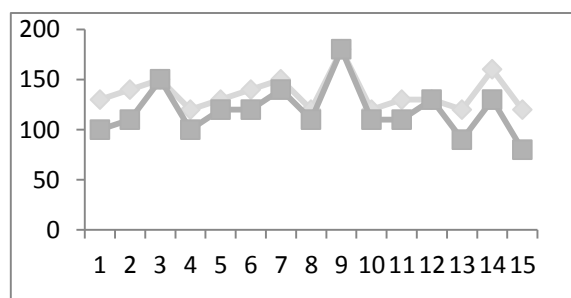


Figure 4 The results of the manual skills assessment.

The solid lines in the graphs correspond to the summative assessment at the outset of the experiment, while the thin lines represent the results of the formative assessment at the end of the experiment.

The analysis of the data shows a positive outcome in the development of the mentally retarded students involved in the study. It is worth mentioning, however, that the students' psychomotor skills performance became better in

the second year of study. That can be explained by the fact that the older the children became, the more open they became to the learning. At the same time, the tests of their mental development do not give such a clear picture of the age differences, which is explained by the diversity of the mentally retarded students at the special education school.

There was made a comparison between the test results and the survey done with the students' parents. The survey was to determine whether the children had become involved in doing art ceramics and whether they were interested in choosing a related job. The conclusion was drawn that the way of the vocational orientation had been chosen correctly. The experiment proved the positive impact of using art for professional orientation of the mentally retarded adolescents.

Teaching Art of Ceramics to mentally retarded teenage students has been practiced successfully in other special education schools of Ivanovo region, and topic has been included into the syllabus for Art and Supplementary Education teachers at Ivanovo State University.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The experiment showed that the suggested conditions and methods of the "Art ceramics" studio work have had a positive impact on the vocational orientation of mentally retarded students of the special education school. Supplementary education of such adolescents is an effective way of pre-vocational training in the art ceramics jobs.

In the contemporary social environment, when local tourism is expanding and the small enterprises related to folk crafts are supported by the government, artistic jobs are again in demand, which provides new opportunities for mentally retarded people to productively realize their professional potential, live an active social life, and find a good job.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The article has been written by a team of authors, all authors have taken equal part in the theoretical analysis of the problem and in carrying out the research. L. Yershova analysed and generalized ideas of the Russian and foreign authors on the problem of the research. A. Mikhailov summarized the data and wrote the original manuscript. A. Malygin conducted the survey among the university teachers. O. Smirnova

was responsible for the experimental design. M. Burlakova made an analysis of the survey results and contributed to revising and editing the paper.

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