Maltseva Anastasia Sergeevna,
Teacher-Psychologist,
Municipal Budgetary General Education
Institution Secondary School "MOYA SHKOLA"

EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GESTALT METHODS IN SCHOOL PRACTICE

Abstract. The article examines the possibility of applying Gestalt methods in the practice of school psychological support. It substantiates the relevance of this approach under conditions of increased workload and stress in the school environment, and reveals the key mechanisms of the therapeutic effect (awareness, contact and boundaries, completion of unfinished situations) taking into account the age characteristics of children and adolescents. A Gestalt intervention program for students aged 14–17 and a system for evaluating its effectiveness, including quantitative and qualitative methods, are presented. The results of a pilot study on a sample of 30 students are provided: a decrease in anxiety levels, improvement in group dynamics and the social status of several students, and an increase in emotional literacy and awareness indicators are demonstrated. Based on the obtained data, recommendations for integrating Gestalt techniques into school prevention programs, as well as training for teachers and parents, are formulated, and promising directions for further research are outlined.

Keywords: Gestalt approach, Gestalt methods, school practice, psychological support, awareness, emotional literacy, self-regulation, school anxiety, anxiety diagnostics, Phillips test, sociometric study, emotion diary, contact and boundaries, unfinished situations, group dynamics, social status, adolescents, effectiveness evaluation, pilot study, psycho-pedagogical support, communication skills, "I-message", anti-bullying activities, prevention, psychological resilience.

The modern school environment places high demands on students, often becoming a source of stress and emotional difficulties. Under these conditions, the importance of psychological support oriented not only toward eliminating problems but also toward developing emotional literacy, self-regulation skills, and the construction of constructive relationships is increasing. One of the promising approaches in the work of a school psychologist is the Gestalt approach, which emphasizes awareness, the experiencing of actual reality, and the restoration of the ability to make full contact with oneself and others.

The theoretical basis of Gestalt therapy is founded on the ideas of F. Perls, P. Goodman, and R. Hefferline, who posited that a person develops and heals through awareness and the completion of "unfinished situations" [3][4]. In the context of school practice, this means working with the child's actual experiences – fear of evaluation, feelings of isolation, or conflicts with teachers or peers. The key mechanisms of the therapeutic effect are:

Awareness – the ability to notice one's feelings, bodily reactions, and needs "here and now." For children and adolescents, this becomes the foundation for developing emotional intelligence.

Contact and boundaries – the ability to build relationships, assert one's needs, and respect the boundaries of others. In the school environment, this directly influences the reduction of conflict and the improvement of communication.

Completion of situations – the processing of unfinished emotional episodes that hinder current academic and social activities.

These mechanisms are especially significant for children and adolescents, as they help not merely to "alleviate symptoms" of anxiety or aggression, but to form stable skills of emotional self-regulation [6][9]. At the same time, Gestalt techniques are easily adapted to age-specific

characteristics: game-based and art methods are used for younger schoolchildren, while discussions, work with metaphors, and boundary work are used for adolescents. This differentiated approach aligns with modern requirements for psycho-pedagogical support, as established in the professional standard for teacher-psychologists [7].

Systematic evaluation of the results of psychological intervention is necessary to confirm its effectiveness and to further adjust the program [7]. Within the framework of the pilot study, the effectiveness of applying Gestalt methods was evaluated in several directions using a complex of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Criteria and Assessment Tools

Reduction of anxiety levels. The B. Phillips "School Anxiety Diagnostic Technique" [10] was used for measurement, allowing the identification of the overall anxiety level and its individual components. Diagnostics were conducted before the start of the session cycle and after its completion to compare indicators across scales.

Subjective dynamics in daily life. Tracked using a questionnaire for parents, recording changes in the child's behavior at home.

Improvement in communication and group dynamics. Assessed through observation of student interactions within the group (recording positive and negative contacts) and a sociometric study revealing changes in the students' social status within the class.

Increase in awareness and emotional literacy. Measured through students' self-assessment on a 10-point scale ("I understand my feelings") and analysis of emotion diaries. The diaries were evaluated for the frequency of entries and their substantive depth – the ability to distinguish emotional nuances, accurately formulate feelings, and establish a connection between emotions and bodily sensations.

Feedback from participants and teachers. Collected using questionnaires for teachers (Likert scale) and semi-structured interviews with students. This made it possible to identify the most useful exercises, changes in relationships, and skills applied by children in everyday life.

The Gestalt intervention program was tested on a sample of 30 students aged 14–17 over half an academic year and included 12 group sessions lasting 45–60 minutes. During the sessions, awareness techniques, boundary work, and expression of emotions through imagery and action were applied. When selecting techniques, the principles of productive thinking and contact organization described in classical works on Gestalt theory were taken into account [1][2].

Results of the Study

The obtained results indicate a significant positive effect of the program:

Anxiety reduction. 80% of the children noted a decrease in anxiety levels, and the average reduction in indicators according to the Phillips test was 25% [10]. Students reported that it became easier for them to prepare for tests and worry less before answering at the board.

Teacher evaluation. 65% of teachers recorded positive changes: increased initiative, reduced outbursts of aggression, and a more constructive reaction to criticism.

Parent evaluation. 70% of parents reported calmer behavior of children at home: they cried less over homework, were more willing to talk about school, and slept better at night.

Sociometric changes. The sociometric study showed that 40% of students who initially had an isolated or rejected status moved into the "accepted" or "preferred" categories.

Growth in awareness. In their emotion diaries, participants began to describe 40% more nuances of feelings, learned to formulate their experiences more accurately, and connect them with bodily sensations. The average score on the "I understand my feelings" scale increased from 4.2 to 7.8 out of 10.

These results are consistent with data obtained in studies on group psychotherapy and child Gestalt practice [8][9], confirming that work within the Gestalt paradigm contributes not only to a reduction in symptoms but also to the development of stable skills in self-understanding and communication.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the obtained data, it is advisable to integrate Gestalt exercises into prevention programs, for example, into adaptation training for new students or anti-bullying activities. It is also important to train teachers in the basics of the Gestalt approach, in particular, the "I-message" technique for the constructive expression of feelings and needs. Training sessions for parents on the topic "How to help a child recognize their feelings" will help create a unified supportive environment at school and at home. An emotion diary, which children can keep independently or with the support of a psychologist, can serve as a useful self-help tool.

Promising directions for further research include:

Studying the long-term effects of Gestalt methods by tracking dynamics over 6–12 months;

Developing standardized programs for different age groups;

Integrating the Gestalt approach into the general system of psycho-pedagogical support in schools, including work with students with special educational needs, where awareness and regulation skills are particularly in demand.

Thus, Gestalt methods represent a valuable resource for school psychological practice, allowing not only the resolution of current emotional problems of students but also the formation of vital skills necessary for successful adaptation and development in the modern world.

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