VIRTUAL AUTISM AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE CHILD'S EVOLUTION

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Abstract:*The extremely diverse incidence and symptomatology of autism generates constant concerns among specialists, mobilizes parents and community-based institutions, provokes disputes and controversies within schools when discussing the integration of children with autism into ordinary school environments.*

The Internet is playing an increasing role in education as students have the opportunity to solve the themes and to draft the papers through network transfer, and the opportunities opened up by developing huge libraries with information are important, especially for certain study objects and themes, useful for students. In addition, computer games become the most sensitive subjects of conversation between children, thus helping to establish interpersonal relationships. Another problem faced by children in need is the inability to learn. With a low motivation, unable to concentrate, with excessive hyperactivity, children are increasingly responding to school requirements. Imbalances that viewing induces in the operation of the left hemisphere and lack of normal neural network development affect logical and analytical thinking, syntax building, and discursivity.

Keywords*: virtual autism, stereotypes, repetitive behavior.*

1. AUTISM - THEORETICAL MILESTONES

The Autistic Legend says that the fairies abduct the babies of people from their cribs and replace them with children of fairies that are particularly beautiful, but do not really live in this world, but thinking of the other realm, thus explaining the precarious adaptation to environment and communication problems.

Autism is one of the enigmas that have long become the big challenge but, at the same time, the great problem of many parents, educators, specialists in pedagogy, psychology, medicine. Practical experience has identified a particular category of children with difficulties in communication and relationship with others, emotional instability, whether or not associated with intellectual deficits, stereotyped and repetitive behavior, relevant to the normal educational and social activities of these children.

Autism, with its forms, has become a reality for our society. Extremely diversified incidence and symptoms generate heated discussions, but also constant concerns among specialists, mobilize parents and community-based institutions, provoke disputes and controversies across schools when discussing the integration of children with autism into ordinary school environments.

How autism is defined will influence how it is approached, how the child is treated, how others around will perceive it.

The autistic child is isolated in his own thoughts, without the ability to communicate or to relate himself to anyone, whoever they might be. The autistic child creates a world of his own and is hiding under a hermetic envelope, which isolates him from the outside, preferring the world of illusion and security.

All definitions have only partially captured autism, which continues to lead to many confusions. Autism is "a continuum, a thorny complexity of varied and chained manifestations. It goes from a very serious extreme, where the child remains non-verbal, to the, rare, exceptional extreme, where we meet bright scientists and engineers, musicians and painters "(Peeters, 2016, 148).

2. VIRTUAL AUTISM-GENERAL PRESENTATION

New clinical case studies have found that many children who spend a lot of time in front of phone, computer, television or tablet screens may develop a new type of autistic spectrum disorder: virtual autism. The term was invented by a Romanian clinical psychologist. "I called it autism because it has the specific symptoms of children with autism, perfectly identical symptoms. It is almost impossible to make differential diagnosis if it has or does not have virtual autism or classic autism, because the symptoms are perfectly the same. Symptoms of autism include lack of social reciprocity, lack of visual contact, lack of language development, lack of play and especially social play, a role in which the child pretends to be something or something and stereotypical and repetitive games "(Marius Zamfir).

In the case of children who are considered autist because of watching TV, tablet or cell phone, there is a proper lack of development of the neurological system, due to lack of psychic, motor, sensory, affective and psychosocial stimulation. So in this case it is not about the destruction of neurological links, but about their inexistence or a reformatation of these links, due to inadequate stimulation.

Most of the time, the child receives only certain sensations (visual and / or auditory) from a virtual environment, and can not correlate these visual and auditory sensations with other types of sensations: vestibular, tactile, odor, tasteless, unable to develop accordingly. In such a child, if they do not intervene early (before 2-3 years), these problems will become more and more acute, breaks between sensations and perceptions, accentuating behaviors in the autistic spectrum, they are becoming more and more difficult, and with higher costs.

A study by the Autism Center for Children with Autism in Romania shows that 90% of children aged 2-3 years who are diagnosed with autism are the trigger factor of over-watching television programs or other forms of reality virtual.

Virtual autism - theories

The child in front of the screen does not have the usual language experience, the dialogic stimulation of thought and reflection that parents, grandparents or the human environment generally offers. The visual and auditory stimuli perceived in front of the small screen are so aggressive, they succeed with such rapidity that they exceed the brain's ability to control them. The invariable effect will be the inhibition of some important mental processes. Children get used to watching television or monitors no longer wanting to understand what's happening in the world around them, they're just happy with the sensations. The experience of viewing and accessing virtual environments is not one of real space and time, of real distances and durations, but of virtual, suggested or only stimulated within this world.

The child lacks knowledge by touching and physically manipulating the materials, one of the conditions for conducting the process of knowledge and hence structuring neural pathways. Through television, the little ones are deprived of the silence and respite needed to develop the mechanisms of internal language and reflexive thinking.

The virtual environment not only does not favor an interactive participation in the process of knowledge but, on the contrary, involves a passive experience for the human mind. After prolonged viewing, children will tend to remain in the same state of passivity or non-involvement in the knowledge of the real world. Those who watch TV, "their ability to imagine games is proportional, their mental dynamics weakens." (Virgiliu Gheorghe, 2008, 67).

Since neuronal systems are being set up, connections are made in response to the effort of mental activity, introducing children to the TV environment, familiarizing them with the pleasure of viewing, is to put them at real risk of developing mental abilities.

The brain, like the whole body, needs to feed itself to develop normally. The brain's nutrition, especially in the early years of life, but not only, are stimuli to the external environment, received through the organs of sense but also by movement. Child development stage 0-2 years is called the stage of sensory-motor development. At this stage, the child reacts reflexively in activities such as sucking, hitting, grabbing. It begins to coordinate the visual, auditory and tactile information it receives from the environment (through sensations) with the motor skills it is developing. At this stage he finds that if he moves his eyes, he has access to several images and may even notice how his own hands and feet interact with various objects. In this way, he becomes increasingly aware of the existence of an external environment and his ability to act on this environment.

The first contact of the child with the external environment is achieved through sensations, which are received through the organs of sense, which at birth, even if developed, differ greatly from those of the adult. In contact with the environment, with the passage of time and experiencing new situations, these sensations are transformed into perceptions.

In the case of autism, a multitude of problem behaviors arise: lack of expressive language (speech) or even lack of receptive language (understanding); they give the impression that they do not hear or are overly disturbed by certain noises; eating a very limited range of foods or just certain food textures; they stare at the objects with their eyes on one side; are very attracted to stereotypical or repetitive behaviors; they touch in a very different way certain objects, and such examples can continue.

As a form of relationship life, the psyche reveals its nature through its relationships with: physical reality, physiological reality, social reality. Only in relation to these realities a person builds their own interiority, in the absence of such relations with the environment, the psychic life can be seriously disturbed. This is demonstrated by the experiments of isolation and sensory deprivation (Donald O. Hebb, 1947) and experiments on the behavioral consequences of the social contact deficit (Harry Harlow, 1960). In Hebb's studies, after 20 hours of sensory deprivation, subjects exhibited emotional disturbances, hallucinations, decreased intellectual performance.

The relations of the psyche with its material substrate, with the objects of the material and social world, represent both the framework of the formation and development of the psyche and the instrument of such training.

During the access to the virtual environment, the child receives only visual and auditory information, which he can not process due to his or her young age and which is not integrated with other sensations and perceptions (touch, smell, taste, vestibular sense).

The affective relationship between parents and child is influenced by the availability and empathy the parent exerts over the child's needs. It develops gradually, especially during the age of the child 0-2 years.

Infant attachment has a secure or non-security role in configuring personality and human behavior. The child was born with a propensity to attach to the caregiver, conduct his or her own behavior to maintain crucial attachment relationships for his human and psychological survival, near the caregiver.

Behavioral and behavioral distortions are the source of attachment disorders in early childhood, and can be considered the result of parents' inability to respond to the needs of child comfort, security and emotional confidence, especially in the 0-2 year period.

The intellectual-emotional development of the child is a complex process, the successive stages of which are closely interdependent and are controlled and influenced by genetic and non-genetic factors. After a long time in which the role of genetic factors in the development process has come to the attention of researchers, studies published since the 1990s have given due weight to non-genetic factors related to the child's development environment.

The consequence of this relatively recent trend is that the irreversible effects on child development of deprivation of parental affection and growth in a deviant environment brought to the attention of the scientific world in the 50s by the Bowlby and Ainsworth studies have become the object of the interest of specialists. Today, studying the organic mechanisms through which early childhood experiences shape the development and maturation of the child's nervous system is considered essential for understanding both normal and pathological development.

Bruno Bettelheim (1967) invokes for the first time, as a cause of autism, the parent-child relationship, based on the observation of cooler relationships of the parents with autistic children. These lead to psychological dysfunctions manifested by anomalies of the development of the emotional state of the cognitive sphere, when the difficulties of using the symbols become dominant in language disorders, abnormalities of perceptual and attentional abilities, difficulties in imitation of bodily actions and others. Although these studies have been very controversial and later in the 1980s, it would seem that there is a close link between the level of affectivity offered by parents and the psychosocial development of the child. Thus, any time that is not used for social and affective relations with the child, leads to a delay in its psycho-social and psycho-emotional development.

3. THE EFFECTS OF THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The world in which we live can be called an information society; it is in constant change, the computer, with everything it involves, influencing our existence every day. As far as the effects of the virtual environment on children are concerned, there are both positive and negative aspects.

It is known that education in our country predominates the informative aspect in the detriment of the formative one. Thus, the introduction of computer technologies in the school environment has had the effect of increasing the formative aspect by teaching children with an ordered, logical thinking, or, in other words, the formation of algorithmic thinking.

The Internet plays an increasing role in education, as students have the opportunity to solve themes and to draft reports through network transfer. Moreover, the opportunities that open up by developing huge libraries with information, especially for certain study objects and themes, useful for pupils, are important. The board, book, chalk, and notebook have been the classic tools of school education for centuries.

Today, the use of computer in learning allows each child to progress in study according to their ability to assimilate knowledge, avoiding the danger of being braked by a collective under its possibilities or, on the contrary, always being forgotten in the class queue and ignored because can keep the same pace.

In addition, computer games become the most sensitive subjects of conversation between children, thus helping to establish interpersonal relationships. The screens are so appealing that it is difficult for the child to come back to something else. He becomes distracted by the screen and dependent on it. The screen isolates the child from the human interactions that are required for the language communication and development skills. Also, the noise and light on the screens can generate painful emotions the child can not cope with. These feelings can lead to violent and aggressive behavior in the child.

Another problem faced by children in need is the inability to learn. With a low motivation, unable to concentrate, with excessive hyperactivity, children are increasingly responding to school requirements. Imbalances that viewing induces in the operation of the left hemisphere and lack of normal neural network development affect logical and analytical thinking, syntax building, and discursivity.

Suggestions for limiting the time spent by children in the "virtual environment".

To limit the time spent by the child in front of the TV, tablet, computer, mobile phone, parents should adhere to certain rules:

• Make a daily schedule to follow with the child.

• Establish rules for the use of the TV, the computer, and the phone by the child

• Remove any gadget from the child's visual contact.

• Offering rewards when the child respects the daily schedule.

• Building a special place in the house with exciting things that can be used when the child gets bored and wishes to play on the tablet. So the focus will be on something new.

• The TV and the computer will be closed while homework is being done.

• TV shows, computer games will be chosen with discernment.

• Physical activities, walking will be of great significance. Physical activities have a major impact on the emotional development of the child.

Emotional health is very important for the development of the child and can be greatly stimulated by movement. With the help of sport, the child grows physically, mentally and emotionally fulfilled. Sport stimulates interactions. With the help of it, children will learn to be patient with others, to wait for their turn, to be responsible, to respect for others, to be accountable, to cope with unexpected situations, to adapt more easily. And last but not least, they will make friends of the same age with them and with similar passions.

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