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**THE MODEL OF SCHOOL ADAPTATION  
OF FIRST-GRADERS WITH REGARD TO THE MECHANISM  
OF COPING WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS**

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**Abstract**

The article determines the relevance of research problems of adaptation of first-graders to school and coping with difficult situations arising in this period. The selected approaches to the study of the factors of school adaptation and the urgency of the study of coping with difficult situations as a factor in the success of entering first graders in learning environment. The analysis of theoretical provisions to the problem of school adaptation and response features children to the emerging challenges. The results of empirical research aimed at the study of the nature of children coping with difficult situations – features of frustrated reactions and ways of coping behavior; the results of research of interrelation of characteristics of school adaptation of first-graders and the nature of the response to a difficult situation. The model of school adaptation of first-graders with regard to the coping mechanism of kids with tough situations, is developed on the basis of the analysis of theoretical provisions and empirical study.

**Keywords:** school adaptation; difficult situation; coping with difficult situations; response to frustration; coping behavior.

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**МОДЕЛЬ ШКОЛЬНОЙ АДАПТАЦИИ  
ПЕРВОКЛАССНИКОВ С УЧЕТОМ МЕХАНИЗМА  
СОВЛАДАНИЯ С ТРУДНЫМИ СИТУАЦИЯМИ**

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Inclusion of a first-grader in the process of the school education represents a complex period related to entrance by the child in a fundamentally new setting and the necessity of adaptation to it. According to the provisions of the Federal State Educational Standard the personal results of mastering the basic educational program of an elementary school shall represent mastering the primary skills of adaptation in the dynamically changing world, development of skills of cooperation with adults and age-mates, ability not to create conflicts and find solutions to disputable situations.

The complexity of the school adaptation issue necessitates accurate account of all factors affecting the result thereof. The researchers refer to the external factors positive relations ‘pupil-pupil’,

‘teacher-pupil’ (I.V. Dubrovina, R.V. Ovcharova); positive psychological atmosphere in the classroom (M.V. Maksimova, L.A. Yasyukova); favorable family relations (T.L. Kryukova, M.V. Saporovskaya, A.V. Chernikov). Internal adaptation factors include cognitive motivation of a child (L.M. Novikova); formedness of all aspects of the children’s readiness for school education (A.L. Wenger, T.V. Dorozhevets, L.M. Novikova); mental and physical health of a child (M.V. Maksimova); inner cross-cultural context (L.A. Pybakova); child’s ability to adequately cope with difficult situations (R.M. Granovskaya, I.M. Nikolskaya). However, the mechanism of coping with difficult situations arising during this period as the factor of school adaptation remains underinvestigated.

During the period of the first-grader's entrance in the school setting a child and parents face different kinds of difficult situations. Following K. Muzdymbayev, we understand a difficult situation as a situation that significantly exceeds the adaptive potential of a personality, i.e., imposing requirements on a person that exceed those capabilities and resources that he usually utilizes [6].

The literature review indicates that by investigating difficult situations the researchers use the following of its characteristics:

1) imbalance of the human needs, his capabilities and conditions of activity (T. Tomashevsky, M. Tyshkova);

2) disturbance of stability of the usual mode of life and emerging necessity of changes (R. Lazarus, I.V. Dobryakov, I.M. Nikolskaya, E.G. Eidemiller);

3) emotional tension or stress (I.F. Dementyeva, I.N. Evgrafova, A.F. Kusov);

4) changes in the environment affecting or threatening the activity, relations with people, usual mode of life (L.I. Antsyferova), etc.

The researchers (D. Mayers, A. Henderson, L.I. Antsyferova, E.V. Kobzeva) emphasize that a first-grader is the most vulnerable in terms of difficult situations. Each of difficulties a child faces at school may become a serious problem to him whereof the adults may even have no idea. Experiencing difficult situations by a child hinders the goal achievement, results in origination of negative emotions; causes discomfort and may have unfavorable effects for development of a personality [1].

During the school adaptation period the first-graders face different difficulties some of which are 'common' and are overcome easily and the others are felt deeply and may affect the development of a personality and successfulness of the child's activity. In order to identify the nature of difficulties experienced by children during the adaptation period we used the serial picture procedure ('My disturbing memory', 'Difficult situations at school', 'My unpleasant event') as well as conversation 'Diagnostics of school difficulties' designed on the basis of questionnaire by A.I. Zakharov. In order to solve the task assigned we performed the study which included 112 first-graders of the municipal educational institution general educational school №3 and №6 of the city of Surgut.

The data analysis allowed identifying the following difficulties experienced by first-graders: getting disapproval of the teacher (74%); fear of the teacher (52%); punishment by parents (46%); answering before the class (39%); discipline during lessons (diligence, activity, attentiveness) (37%);

school regime (the necessity to wake up on time, not to miss classes, do homework, etc.) (31%); conflicts with age-mates (23%).

The study showed that the first-graders experience difficulties in different situations related to school. At that most of them belong to the group of difficulties related to the fear to get disapproval or punishment from the teacher or parents. These chronically effective stressful situations exercise substantial effect on the entire course of the mental evolution of a child [3]. R.V. Ovcharova notes that at the beginning of the academic year the difficulties experienced by first-graders are related to immaturity of arbitrariness, inability to establish contacts with pupils and teachers, to perform joint activities [7].

Difficult situations are related to mental tension, obstacles by knowledge absorption, violation of the children-parents relations, appearance of behavior deviations, etc and in this regard it is important to take into account the nature of person's coping with difficulties as the factor of his successful adaptation.

One of the core concepts describing the state of psychological difficulty is frustration the peculiarities of overcoming which exercise significant effect not only on successfulness of the activity, interpersonal relations but on the establishment of a personality as well [5, 11]. However, the methods of overcoming difficulties do not always appear to be efficient, they often result in enhancement of negative emotions and arising frustrations in an effort to cope with which a person works out indirect methods of coping with failure that being fixed may become the stable specific personal formations.

According to R.M. Granovskaya, I.M. Nikolskaya, T.L. Kryukova, M.V. Saporovslaya in order to be able to interact with a difficult situation it is necessary to master the skills of coping behavior the sense of which is to cope with, resolve or soften, adapt to or resist the demands imposed by a critical situation [4, 8].

In order to study the peculiarities of first-graders' coping with difficulties we used the methods aimed at identification of the nature of responses to frustration (frustration responses test by S. Rosenzweig) and coping behavior methods (coping strategies questionnaire by N.A. Sirota, V.M. Yaltonsky as well as picture tests proposed by I.M. Nikolskaya).

The data obtained during the study of frustration responses are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1

The nature of the response of first-graders to frustration

| Focus of responses | O-D obstacle-dominant |          | E-D Ego-defensive |          | N-P need-unstable |          | Indicators of types of responses (%) |
|--------------------|-----------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|
|                    | Abs.                  | Relative | Abs.              | Relative | Abs.              | Relative |                                      |
| E – extra-punitive | 11                    | 9,8      | 20                | 17,9     | 25                | 2,3      | 50                                   |
| I – intra-punitive | 3                     | 2,7      | 7                 | 6,25     | 10                | 8,9      | 17,9                                 |
| M - mpunitive      | 5                     | 4,5      | 18                | 16,1     | 13                | 11,6     | 32,1                                 |
| ntegrative value   | 19                    | 17       | 45                | 40,25    | 48                | 42,8     |                                      |

The analysis of results showed that children use both constructive and non-constructive methods of responses to frustration. In terms of focus the extra-punitive responses prevail (50%) that are related to accusing external circumstances and other people which is indicative of increased insistence on the setting and insufficiently developed level of the child's self-criticism as well as impunitive responses (32,1%) related to attempts of avoiding a frustration situation and considering it in a reconciling manner. The main types of response to frustration appeared to be the need-unstable (N-P) (42,9%) and ego-defensive ones (E-D) (40,2%). The need-unstable type of response suggests presence of frustration tolerance characterized by quietness, prudence, sometimes tension and inhibition of undesirable impulsive reactions. The ego-defensive type of frustration response is indicative of vulnerability, weakness of personality that by facing a hindering situation is forced to focus primarily on protection of 'self'.

Thus, analysis of the results obtained showed that half of junior pupils tend to respond to the difficult situations in non-constructive manner which is expressed in violations of the social norms and standards, experiencing discomfort resulting in nervous irritability, anxiety and aggression as the negatives effects of the unsolved inner conflict.

The analysis of the results of the questionnaire for coping strategies showed that the most popular coping strategies are the following: 'I play smth' (49%); 'I beg pardon or tell the truth' (30,8%); 'I walk, jog, ride a bike' (28,8%); 'watch TV, listen to music' (27,3%); 'try to forget' (25%); 'try to relax and stay calm' (25%). The most rarely used coping strategies were 'I sleep' (0,7%); 'I'm going mad' (2%); 'I pray' (2%); 'I talk to myself' (2%); 'bite my nail' (2,7%).

The analysis of children's pictures showed that for first-graders the efficient methods of overcoming tension, unpleasant emotions are switching to

secondary activities, telling the truth and begging for pardon, inhibition of negative emotions, escaping to dreams, relaxation. The first-graders prefer to use speech by overcoming difficult situations and the related emotions: both external (talking on the specific unpleasant or difficult situation for interpretation and response) and internal (consideration of the situation for apprehension thereof) as well as children's entertainment as distracting activities.

Correlation between the successful school adaptation and the nature of coping with difficult situations was investigated with the use of the Pearson correlation coefficient. The results of analysis are presented in the Table 2.

Table 2

Correlation values of the relationship between characteristics of school adaptation of first-graders and the nature of the response to children in difficult situations (n=112)

| Types of response to a difficult life situation | Levels of school adaptation of first-graders |                 |                 |
|---|--|-----------------|-----------------|
|   | High   | Average         | Low             |
| Adaptive  | <b>0,263**</b>                               | 0,046           | 0,094           |
| Relatively adaptive                             | 0,014  | 0,002           | 0,006           |
| Non-adaptive                                    | 0,002  | <b>0,307***</b> | <b>0,310***</b> |

Note: \* -  $p \leq 0,05$ ; \*\* -  $p \leq 0,01$ ; \*\*\* -  $p \leq 0,001$ .

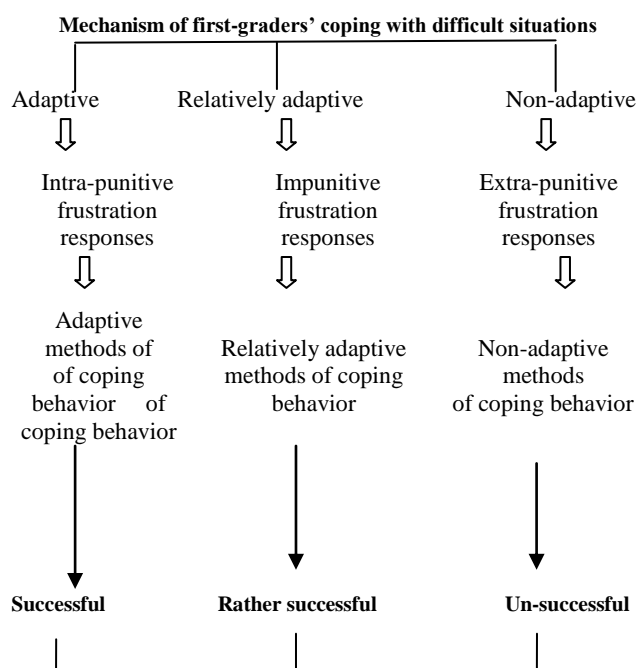
It can be seen from the table that the high level of first-grader's adaptation to school features a positive correlation to the adaptive strategies of coping with difficult situations ( $r=0,263$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ); the average level of adaptation – to non-adaptive methods ( $r=0,3207$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ); low level – also to non-adaptive methods to response to difficulties ( $r=0,310$ ;  $p \leq 0,001$ ). Thus, during the study there was established a significant correlation between the successfulness of the school adaptation of a first-grader and indicators of efficiency of the used methods of response to difficult life situations.

In the studies by M.V. Saporovskaya it is emphasized that the factors exerting negative effect on school adaptation are poverty of the problem-oriented coping in the coping behavior and fixation on the own negative emotions. However, in a situation of a chronic school stress orientation towards avoiding and escaping the problem promotes to reduction of the rate of occurrence of school difficulties in a child [8].

The literature review and analysis of empirical data obtained by us during the study allowed drawing the conclusion that the nature of children's coping with difficult situations during the period of first-graders' inclusion in the educational process is a factor of school adaptation. In her study M.V.

Saporovskaya showed that there is a correlation between the nature of the children-parent relations and the coping behavior of parents being the mechanism of positive or negative impact by parents on the efficiency of school adaptation of first-graders.

On the basis of analysis of theoretical provisions and findings of the empirical study there was designed the model of school adaptation of first-graders with account for the mechanism of children coping with difficult situations that is presented in the Figure.



**Fig.1. The model of school adaptation of first-graders**

Thus, the school adaptation period is related to emergence of difficult (challenging, stressful, critical) situations requiring different coping methods. Successfulness of first-grader's adaptation to school is related to peculiarities of his response to difficult situations – the nature of coping behavior and type of response to frustration. Successful school adaptation prevails in children characterized by the use of constructive forms of response to challenges, and unsuccessful – in first-graders preferring non-adaptive types of response to a difficult life situation which allows speaking of the methods of coping with difficult situations as a mechanism of first-graders' adaptation to school education.

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