Methodological support for educators with “symbol pedagogy”

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Abstract  Our knowledge of social interactions, learning motivation and, increasingly, well-being is integrating into today’s emerging pedagogical paradigm. We aim to outline a pedagogical model that can help educators in the integration of children with atypical behavior by developing their social well-being. We further aim to use the results of our research to formulate recommendations for professionals (e.g. kindergarten teachers, developmental teachers) on the integration of children with atypical behavior into peer groups. In this interdisciplinary work, we introduce a possible method of inclusion, and outline a pedagogical model which we have named symbol pedagogy. We present exploratory research during which a pedagogical experiment was carried out. The participants in our research were children showing behavioral patterns indicating autism, who found it difficult to integrate with their peers due to their behavioral oddities. The results of our exploratory research indicate that the application of our pedagogical model can help the work of educators who work with children showing behavioral patterns indicating autism, and that the application of symbol pedagogy can contribute to the social well-being of these children.

Keywords:  symbol pedagogy, well-being, integration, atypical behavior.

‘Symbolic thinking … is consubstantial with human existence… Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they respond to a need and fulfil a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being.’

(Eliade, 1991, p. 12)

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Background

We are living in an era of social changes and globalization in which the paradigms and general framework of education seem to be unsuitable to meet the new challenges. The variety of challenges calls for the development of new approaches to educational research and integration of various disciplines in order to understand/tackle the contemporary problems. When defining the characteristics of the new approaches to educational research, an interdisciplinary approach that integrates our new knowledge of social interactions, learning motivation and the quality of life is necessary (Di Blasio, 2020; Csíkszentmihályi, 2015; Kopp & Skrabski, 2016; Réthy, 2013). This can be seen in the objectives of pedagogy as pursuing subjective well-being (Noddings, 2004).

In research on quality of life, the use of the expressions well-being and wellbeing has become general. It has been proved that subjects at a higher level of well-being are capable of developing closer and more fulfilling relationships, and that social relationships play an important role in the development of mental health. Research has shown the interrelatedness of positive emotions, mental health and social well-being (Tough et al., 2017). In the analysis of international literature, well-being has been shown to relate to the psycho-spiritual dimension (Pinto et al., 2017). In the international literature, well-being research has recently been connected to pedagogy. For example, new experimental curricula have been developed based on flow-psychology, research has been conducted on pedagogical well-being, and the realization of well-being in the educational process has also been investigated. Within the institutional framework, social acceptance is considered the foundation of social well-being, as the positive attitude towards the surroundings strengthens the sense of belonging (Csíkszentmihályi, 2015; Seligman, 2011).

In our research, the concept of well-being/wellbeing corresponds with the meaning of quality of life. Therefore, in our research, social well-being means a dynamic state in which people can accept and establish relationships with others, which state is characterized by the receptiveness to cooperation and the appearance of positive emotions and the spiritual dimension.

Stigmatization, discrimination and low quality of life are common problems for people with disabilities (Gondek et al., 2017; Jomli et al., 2013). There are already examples in practice of initiatives that create well-being for those with disadvantages as to social integration are being implemented (e.g. in Camphill communities), providing opportunities for independent work, recreation and the experience of belonging to a community (Molnár, 2013). It is therefore important to focus on the quality of life of people with disabilities in education and training. As a result, it is worthwhile to integrate the teaching of pedagogical methods that help to create social well-being into the initial training of teachers and the in-service training of already practicing teachers.

In our work, we strive to provide support to the important role of educators as the main facilitators in the realization of children’s well-being. One of our main principles in rethinking teaching methods is reliance on the universal features of human activities and thinking. Common features of human activities and thinking can be found in many areas, such as: dance, music, colours, relationships with animals/plants/rocks. According to some symbol researchers (Burns, 2017; Rosen et al., 1991), there is a “natural attachment” between
a symbol and the thing it symbolises. They argue that the vast majority of symbols, despite their cultural variation, may carry universally valid, consistent properties. They also argue that there is a common affinity of meaning between symbols, based on analogy from different cultures, which demonstrates the universality of symbol creation and use. The linking of symbol and archetypal word in Carl Gustav Jung’s (1875-1961) system of thought reflects the assumption and approach of “natural attachment”.

In Jung’s (2011) formulation, the etymology of the word “archetype” is a compound of the words arché “beginning” and typos “type”, with the meaning of primordial image. Jung introduces the concept of archetype to describe images that are naturally present in the collective unconscious. Archetypes are said to produce archetypal patterns. In international research, the term archetypal symbols is used in studies which emphasize the universality of the meaning of archetypal symbols which is traced back to Jung’s work (e.g., Burns, 2017; Rosen et al., 1991; Újvári, 2001). Symbol libraries (Adkinson, 2018; Hoppál et al., 1997; Pál et al., 2001) refer to symbols whose meanings are shared across cultures. For example, the symbols of snake, egg and water often represent renewal, and earth, blood, horse and fire often represent vitality.

We introduce a pedagogical investigation which has been implemented in practice, to which we refer to as an exploratory research hereinafter. The contemporary relevance of our research lies in the fact that the integration of children with atypical behaviour is one of the greatest pedagogical challenges for both theoreticians and practitioners. Behaviours that reflect a failure of emotional communication during interactions – frightened, hostile, bizarre, confused or helpless - are considered atypical behaviours (Tóth et al., 2017) in our research. Children and students with atypical behavioral patterns pose difficulties for teachers, kindergarten teachers and educators, which leads to the question what pedagogical model may help the integration of such children and teenagers. This paper is a pedagogical exploration, in which we attempt to outline a possible way, based on an interdisciplinary approach and our practical pedagogical experiences. In this interdisciplinary work, we outline a pedagogical model which we have named symbol pedagogy. Symbol pedagogy is a pedagogical method that can help develop well-being in school and in a given community. In this way, symbol pedagogy can facilitate the integration of children with atypical behavior, thereby helping the work of educators working in practice.

**Purpose**

The aim of our research is to create social well-being with the help of symbol pedagogy in child communities where a child with atypical behavior is integrated. The aim of symbol pedagogy is to help the integration of people with disabilities or integration difficulties. This may be due to, for example, autism, disabilities, hyperactivity, social disadvantages, different habits of different cultures. The fundamental goal of symbol pedagogy is to facilitate social well-being in peer groups where children, teenagers or youngsters with atypical behavior are to be integrated (Hevesi, 2019). For example, compared to typically developing subjects, people with autism are four times more likely to experience depression in their lifetime (Hudson et al., 2019).
Symbol pedagogy applies playful activities and group activities. One of its important aspects is to visualize reliance on universal features of human activities and thinking. We use archetypal symbols in these playful activities that symbol researchers (Adkinson, 2018; Hoppál et al., 1997; Pál et al., 2001) have found to have the same meaning in three or four cultures. For example, circle games, candles, live animals (dogs, horses etc.), dance, music, mandala painting, painting river pebbles and discussing the meaning of other archetypal symbols (e.g. world tree, bird, water, sun, snake, cave).

Studies have been conducted on the motivation and feelings of participants in therapies based on archetypal symbols, such as dog-assisted, equine-assisted, art and music therapy. The researchers found a link between improved well-being and experiential therapies (Barnet-Lopez et al., 2016; Elmaci & Cevizci, 2015; Lechner et al., 2007; Longhi et al., 2015). Therefore, playful activities used in symbol pedagogy can help develop well-being. Everyone can join these joint activities, so they can become a shared experience. The presence of positive experiences in peer communities helps members of the community to understand and accept each other.

In our present study, our research objectives are: (1) conducting exploratory research on the impact of symbol pedagogy regarding the creation of social well-being; (2) providing positive experiences for children with atypical behavior in peer communities during the intervention; (3) formulating methodological recommendations on creating social well-being for professionals working in practice on the basis of our results.

In the following parts, we discuss symbol pedagogy and the related theoretical background that underpins our research. We will then present the methodology and results of our research. When drawing conclusions, we will talk about the achievement of our research objectives.

**Symbol Pedagogy**

In quality-of-life research, experience has a pivotal role in the development of social well-being. According to Csíkszentmihályi (2015), Kopp and Skrabski (2016), positive experiences are crucial in the improvement of the quality of life. Csíkszentmihályi (2015) calls the optimal experience the *flow*. It is a positive experience, characterised by creativity and a full undertaking of life. In Seligman’s theory (2011), flourishing is the foundation of well-being; it is what makes life worth living.

The examination of therapies that evoke positive emotions and that are built on motivation and based on experiences has already been connected to well-being research, as in the case of Floortime, Sensory Integration, dog-assisted, equine-assisted, art and music therapy (Barnet-Lopez et al., 2016; Liao et al., 2014). A common feature of the listed therapeutic methods is that they draw on universal features of human activity and thinking. Archetypal symbols (dogs, horses, music, forms of movement), also used in experiential therapies, can be used to evoke archaic experiences.

In our concept, the archaic experience is an ancient/natural and positive experience in which the dimensions of social well-being (positive emotions, cooperation and spirituality) may appear. It is characterized by the positive emotions that urge us to re-experience and
due to its archaic, multidimensional nature – by its holistic character. In our work, by archaic experience we mean an experience that has been related to the creation of well-being since the Neolithic Age. Fertility statuettes, cave paintings and musical instruments from the Neolithic (Haidle et al., 2018) show how fundamental ensuring well-being has been in human evolution.

The use of symbols and analogies is considered a fundamental trait of human thinking. According to symbolic anthropology, in the different cultures the use of symbols strengthens identity, as the common system of symbols unites the individuals and promotes cooperation. Analogical thinking helps create links between prior and new knowledge, which is important to build a knowledge-system that is easily retrievable and applicable (Kapitány & Kapitány, 2020).

Hereinafter, we use the term symbol pedagogy to refer to a pedagogical method that is based on analogical thinking and promotes archaic experiences.

In our research, the application of symbol pedagogy means the implementation of archaic symbols in playful activities to create pedagogical situations. These playful activities can either include elements of different experience therapies: art therapies (e.g. music therapy, pedagogical art therapy, dance therapy), fairytale, Floortime, Sensory Integration, dog-assisted and equine-assisted therapies; or archetypical symbols/play elements without a therapeutic background, for example, games with circles, earth, fire, water, grains or pebbles, games that involve touching each other.

In symbol pedagogy, we place emphasis on the common ancient symbols and the needs of experience of humankind, and also on the dimensions of social well-being, traces of which we believe can be found in Neolithic artifacts. We have found the use of the different dimensions of social well-being applicable in situations where the inclusion of a child is required. Obviously, the method needs to be adapted to the needs, interests, cultural background, age, diagnosis of the given child. We do believe that it is possible to develop a method that promotes cooperation between people with different behavioral patterns. This model is empirically demonstrable, widely usable and acceptable for all players (people with difficulty with integration, parents, professionals, representatives of co-disciplines, researchers). It makes it possible to build a macro-system that is flexible and open to other systems and networks, but – due to its self-regulatory subsystems – also closed enough to protect the participants.

**Methodology**

In our exploratory research, we examined the possibilities of creating social well-being in peer communities during the integration of children with atypical behavior. During our research we took special care of the participating children’s individual needs and peculiarities and the playfulness of the sessions. Playfulness in our research means that the activities should be positive experiences for the children. During the intervention, we chose elements of experience therapies that we and the specialists directly working with the children found applicable in the kindergarten environment (sometimes on external sites). We used elements of the following therapies: music therapy, pedagogical art therapy, Floortime, Sensory Integration, dog-assisted and equine-assisted therapies. Archaic expe-
periences were facilitated with archetypical play motifs. The archetypal symbolic elements used in our research were compiled according to the age, needs and characteristics of the children participating in the research. The research was carried out in Csongrád-Csanád county, Hungary.

A common feature of experience therapies and the application of archetypical play motifs is that they build on the child’s motivation and natural interests. We applied the Floortime therapy approach, which builds on developmental and individual differences and is an interaction-based DIR (Developmental capacities – Individual differences – Relationships) model. It focuses on intervention in early development, aiming to develop social integration and communication. The caregiver (the kindergarten teacher, for example) joins the child’s activity, and from that point initiates new playing situations. This approach builds on activities that arouse the child’s interest. by joining these we can help the child find pleasure in interaction. For example, if the child feels like jumping (sensory-integration play motif), the adult assistant jumps together with him/her, and after some time, if allowed, takes the child’s hand and they keep on jumping together hand in hand.

The use of symbol pedagogy means the insertion of play elements containing archetypal symbols in a pedagogical situation. The symbols, collected by symbol researchers (Adkinson, 2018; Hoppál et al., 1997; Pál et al., 2001), which can be called archetypal, can carry universal meanings because of their „natural attachment“. For example, circle games can reinforce a sense of belonging to a community; sitting on a horse can help people experience victory and thus increase self-confidence; playing music can symbolise community cooperation. When using symbol pedagogy, the DIR approach is used. This means that the primary goal is to get the child interested and then involved in the task. For example: in a horse-riding session, children first walk around the horse, then pet and feed the horse, and finally get on the horse.

In the two pedagogical experiments, the method of intervention - the use of archaic experiences - was the same, but the technique of delivering the intervention was different (see Table 1). In study period 1, the technique for implementing the intervention consisted of a one-week sensitisation camp followed by a one-day reminder sensitisation day for the children in the experimental group (7 days in total). During the study period 2, the professionals working with the children in the experimental group used archetypal symbols in their sessions (over 3 months). Examples of elements that could be included in the sessions were circle games, activities with pebbles, water, fire, earth, music, activities with horses and dogs, free painting. The musical effects used in our intervention meant that we used music and music-making to represent water, seasons, animals, times of day and emotions. In addition to listening to music by the composers accepted in music therapy (Bach, J. S., Mozart, W. A., Vivaldi, A., Haydn, J., Liszt, F. Liszt, Saint-Saëns, C., Chopin, F.), the children were also able to play music with musical instruments.

The children included in the sample were pre-school-age children (3-7 years old) diagnosed with ASD during the 2012/2013, 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 school years in two cities (Szeged and Hódmezővásárhely) in Hungary (Central Europe). During the sampling
procedure, within the non-probability sampling group this examination can be categorized as purposive sampling, which is common in well-being research for a narrower population.

In our research, being diagnosed with ASD meant that the two typical impairments of autism (impaired social interaction and communication; and restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests and activity) could be observed during the diagnosis. People with autism often exhibit atypical behaviour. This is due to the fact that they may have impaired emotional cognition and expression, difficulty in social relationships and communication, delayed and/or abnormal language development, routine attachment and engaging in repetitive or stereotyped behaviours or interests. Repetitive behaviour is characterised, for example, by the repetition of favourite sounds, words, phrases, questions, songs, repetitive activities with objects. Maladaptive behaviours may also be repetitive (e.g. tantrums, aggression towards others, biting oneself, grinding one’s teeth). Stereotypical movements are movement patterns that are characterised by constancy, repetition without an obvious purpose (e.g. rocking the body in a sitting or standing position, “flapping” the hands). Repetitive activities – most notably maladaptive behaviours – can be highly disruptive to the key relationships of individuals with autism (e.g. with parents, siblings, peers, teachers) and can hinder successful integration (Barnet-Lopez et al., 2016; Lowth, 2015).

In our research we tested the following hypotheses:

H1: Musical stimuli can promote the acclimatization of children with atypical behavior when arriving in the group.

H2: Children with atypical behavior pay attention to their peers’ play in free play situations after archaic experiences.

H3: Children with atypical behavior are more motivated to participate in group activities after archaic experiences.

H4: After archaic experiences, children with atypical behavior express their feelings.

H5: Establishing relationships with children with atypical behavior can be promoted with archaic experiences.

The research is based on a pedagogical experience, in the analysis of which we applied qualitative and quantitative methods. Complying with the aims of the research, we interfered in the educational process, thus varying the independent variable.

- **Independent variable** (the intervention method): use of archetypal symbols.
- **Dependent variable**: social well-being/sociality/quality of life.

We carried out a two-group pedagogical experiment, which meant 40 examinations (\(N\) experimental group = 27, \(N\) control group = 13). The intervention was executed in the experimental group either during a one-week sensitizing summer camp, and on the reminder sensitizing day, right before the school year began; or by the children’s caregivers in the familiar peer group (see Table 1). In both cases there was a 3-month period between the pilot and the follow-up. The intervention was executed in the experimental group; in parallel with this, in the control group the children were looked after in the traditional way, with traditional methods.
Table 1
The distribution of the intervention occasions in the examined period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigation periods</th>
<th>Intervention techniques</th>
<th>ARRIVAL (A)</th>
<th>FREE PLAY (FP)</th>
<th>GROUP ACTIVITY (GA)</th>
<th>Total time of intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A session</td>
<td>FP session</td>
<td>GA session</td>
<td>h/6 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st investigation period (3 months)</td>
<td>sensitizing days (6 days)</td>
<td>20 min/day</td>
<td>40 min/week</td>
<td>180 min/6 days</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>professional kindergarten care (12 weeks)</td>
<td>- 2x5 min/day</td>
<td>- 2x10 min/week</td>
<td>- 2x45 min/12 weeks</td>
<td>- 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd investigation period (3 months)</td>
<td>professional early care (12 weeks)</td>
<td>- 10 min/day</td>
<td>- 20 min/week</td>
<td>- 90 min/6 days</td>
<td>- 24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The exploratory techniques were the following:

- The Sociality Assessment Sheet was filled in by three independent coders (hereinafter: external observers), on the basis of the two video recordings – 1. and 2. – shot during the pilot and follow-up. The Assessment Sheet examined the behavior of the children in the research individually, using 312 items. It was set up on the basis of Hungarian and international research and diagnostic tools, also taking our experiences into consideration.

- Questionnaire I. was filled in about the examined child by the caregiver (hereinafter: internal observers), using 20 items. Our diagnostic tool was set up on the basis of the Social Responsiveness Scale Questionnaire.

- When interviewing about the background data possibly influencing the results of the research, we used the questionnaire Background data on the child participating in the research (45 items). The questionnaire was set up on the basis of corresponding Hungarian and international literature.

We carried out three kinds of analyses. The (1) complex analysis has three components, which are the analysis of the results of the exploratory research. During the (2) complementary analysis, we examined the items of the Sociality Assessment Sheet that – due to the different measuring technique – could not be tackled together with the items of the complex analysis. During the detailed analysis (3), we analyzed the detailed observations of the Sociality Assessment Sheet, in order to get a deeper exploration and understanding of the examined area. The investigation was mainly multifocal, based partly on the observation of the children, partly on the judgement of the caregivers. As for statistical analysis, data were processed with the IBM SPSS Statistics 19 program and analyzed with descriptive and mathematical statistic methods.

The present research is multi-focused, based on observations of children (analysis of video footage taken by external observers) and on the perceptions of professionals.
working with them (internal observers), who were interviewed using a questionnaire. The analysis is detailed and meticulous, analysing the social situations qualitatively, from several points of view. In our research, we used primarily the observations of outside observers, followed by the perceptions of professionals, and most of the measurements were used to characterise children. Likert scales which were used to characterise social behaviour in the observation aspect and in the questionnaire, allowed for the comparison of data from several perspectives and also for the creation of new variables from existing data.

In testing the first hypothesis in our complex study, we analysed the effects of music on the following: the development of children in the intervention’s (hereafter: children’s) attention, their confidence in interacting with others, their imitation of their peers, the variety of their play activities and their spatial location in relation to their peer group. In our complementary studies, we used data from external observations to analyse children’s participation and activity in group activities initiated by the group leader, their voluntary participation in group activities, and the nature of group activities (e.g. tasks involving movement, table games).

The second hypothesis was tested by examining several areas of attention to peer play in free play situations in the complex study of children in the intervention. Based on data from external observers, children’s play in the group, their attention to their peers’ play, the ways in which they engaged in it, their imitation of their peers’ play and the variety of their play activities. Data from internal observers were used to examine children’s attention to their peers. In detailed studies, we observed: how children in the intervention mimic their peers, what play activities they engage in, and where they are located in the room (central or peripheral play).

To test the third hypothesis, our complex study based on external observation analysed children’s facial expressions in social situations, their attention to peers and adults, and the extent to which they imitate these people. Data from internal observers were used to examine children’s social needs, their participation in group activities and their ability to follow the gaze of others. In our complementary analyses, we first used data from external observers to assess children’s participation and activity in group activities initiated by the group leader, and their voluntary participation in group activities. In the context of detailed studies, we investigated the nature of the group activities initiated by the group leader.

The fourth hypothesis was tested in a complex study, which first analysed, based on external observations, whether children appear confident in their interactions with others; how their facial expressions show that they feel comfortable in social situations and whether their emotions are reflected in their faces. Based on the data from the internal observers, we observed children’s self-confidence, their confidence in others, their confidence in interactions with others; how they expressed their feelings and how their facial expressions showed that they felt comfortable in social situations. In our detailed study, we used external observations to investigate children’s ways of expressing confidence in interactions with peers and how their facial expressions show that they feel comfortable and express their emotions in social situations.

In testing the fifth hypothesis in our complex studies, we analysed children’s attention to the adult, peers and their toys; their confidence in interacting with others; their imitation of peers and their toys and of adults; and finally, their ways of engaging in peer
play, based on external observations from the data of the three phases (arrival, free play, group activity). Data from the internal observations were used to examine children's social relationships and their quality, the characteristics of their interactions with peers; their attention to peers' activities and their imitation of others' actions. In the complementary studies, we analysed children's acceptance of peer or adult-initiated contact, initiation of contact with peers or adults, and children's involvement and activity in group situations. In detailed studies, comparisons were made in four aspects during arrival, free play and group activity periods. The criteria tested: children's attention to peers, imitation of peers, confidence in interactions and children's play in groups.

Results

Checking our first hypothesis, we examined whether musical stimuli can promote the acclimatization of children with atypical behavior when arriving in the peer group. The results of the complex analysis have shown that musical experiences (listening to musical pieces related to seasons, times of the day, nature, and emotions) may have influenced the children's attention, confidence of interaction, variety of playing activities and attitude towards their peers in the experimental group. During detailed analysis, we could observe the rapport of the children with their peers; however, this finding was not attested by the analysis of the other examinations; the assumption of the hypothesis could not be confirmed.

Checking our second hypothesis, we examined whether children with atypical behavior pay attention to their peers' play in free play situations after archaic experiences. Interpreting the results of the internal and external observations in the complex analysis and the results of the detailed analysis, we concluded that our data confirm the assumption in both (one of which was multi-focal) cases.

Checking our third hypothesis, we examined whether children with atypical behavior are more motivated to participate in group activities after archaic experiences. Interpreting the results of the internal and external observations in the complex analysis and the results of the complementary and detailed analyses, we concluded that our data confirm the assumption in all three (two of which were multi-focal) cases.

Checking our fourth hypothesis, we examined whether children with atypical behavior express their feelings after archaic experiences. Interpreting the results of internal and external observations in the complex analysis and the results of the detailed analyses, we concluded that we could not examine the phenomenon described in the hypothesis; the data we obtained from the sample did not provide us with enough information to either justify or falsify the hypothesis.

As our fifth hypothesis, we assumed that establishing relationships with children with atypical behavior can be promoted with archaic experiences. First we examined the complex analysis of the internal and external observations, the effect of the background data and the related complementary analyses, which was followed by the comparison of the stages of arrival, free play and group activity during a complex comparative analysis. Interpreting the results of the complex, the complementary and the detailed analyses, we concluded that our data confirm our assumption in all three (two of which were multi-focal) cases.
The impact of background data was analyzed in relation to the data obtained from internal and external observations. It could be seen that the number and age of siblings had a significant influence on our results in each case. The next most influential factors were early development and the impact of pre-school and family. On the basis of the results, we can recommend that children with atypical behavior should meet other children as early and frequently as possible. In order to promote personal development, earlier special help is also recommended.

As for the diagnostic tools used in our research, the ones used for examining the effects of music and the expression of emotions need a full revision, especially for better sensitivity. In other cases, the diagnostic tools proved to be useful. Yet, a revision and preliminary testing is recommended for further use.

Discussion

In our research, the examination of musical effects was not suitable, as for the examination of the phenomenon to be measured finer diagnostic tools would have been necessary. In the corresponding literature, the difficulties of the examination of the area and the need for finer diagnostic tools have already been indicated. Yet, research in the field has been encouraged, as results have shown that music may promote socialization, improve communicative skills and cause positive changes in behavior (Eren et al., 2013). During our investigation we also noticed positive changes in building rapport with peers.

We could observe the most definite improvement in attention to peers’ play. In their concise work on autism, Matson and Sturmey (2011) mention that the positive effects of sensory integration technique have been shown on a small sample. They recommend the application of sensory integration intervention techniques, with an emphasis on the importance of providing challenging, enjoyable tasks and creating play situations that rely on the inner motivation of the children. However, obtaining the experiences provided by free play requires suitable devices. Besides subjective factors, research on integration and inclusion finds objective factors essential, too, which include special teaching tools and aids (Réthyné, 2013).

During group activities, plays and situations providing archaic experiences motivated the children to participate. It has been confirmed in international literature that the social interaction of children with autism is promoted by playing with peers in guided playing situations, during which sessions it is important to provide enjoyable, meaningful experiences (Corbett et al., 2014), thus improving the probability that the children with autism find social interactions more pleasant and attractive. Research has shown that art therapy may improve the social and communicative skills of children with autism, and dealing with animals has a positive effect on behavior, and as a result the incorporation of such sessions in the intervention of children with autism has been recommended (O’Haire et al., 2015).

The examination of expressing emotions in pedagogical situations is still an area to be mastered. In our examinations we observed that the participating children more frequently expressed joy, and they became more confident in social situations. The examination of emotions is closely related to quality of life research; detecting positive emotions is a deter-
mining factor during the examination of the quality of life (Csíkszentmihályi, 2015; Kopp & Skrabski, 2016; Seligman, 2011). Adequate quality of life, social network and integration have become interrelated terms (Réthyné, 2013), and their research is linked together.

As for our fifth hypothesis, we examined the gradual establishment of relationships with a multilayered analysis. The efficiency of Floortime therapy, which emphasizes the gradual establishment of relationships, has been proven internationally. The application of Floortime therapy in the care of children with autism has shown improvements in child-parent interaction, social communication and imitation, attention and adaptive behavior (Liao et al., 2014).

The effects of background data gained from internal and external observations were also analyzed. The analysis of the role of background data is emphasized in Hungarian and international literature: when studying an intervention method, the effects of the family background of the children with autism, the effects of their participation in early development and the effects of the circumstances of the institutional care are all analyzed (Matson & Sturmey, 2011).

The benefits of the symbol pedagogy model can be summarised as follows, based on our research experience: it helps the integration of children with atypical behavioral patterns; it is practice-oriented; it builds on the motivational base of the children/pupils; it may promote the efficiency of learning and, consequently, social inclusion; it promotes network thinking and practical work. The symbolic pedagogical model also has the advantage of favouring joint thinking between representatives of related professions and co-professions; it can be applied in multicultural education because it can be community-building/formative; it highlights the importance of the learning environment and the awareness of teachers.

Based on our research, the limitations of the symbol pedagogy model can be summarised as follows: the generalizability of our results is limited; finer diagnostic tools are necessary; only a short-term intervention is presented. The further limitations of symbol pedagogy can also be formulated in broader terms because the implementation of our model depends on many other factors. Indeed, the symbol pedagogical model presupposes a holistic approach on the part of teachers, the development of which is a longer process that our research can hardly influence. In addition, this model functions well only in a network that depends on its elements and the relations among these elements. Second, the establishment and the operation of a network is a system-level task, which not only requires high-level coordination, but is also affected by socio-economic factors.

**Conclusions**

The results of our exploratory research have shown that the application of archaic experiences during our investigation may have promoted the creation of social well-being in child groups and, consequently, we can make recommendations for professionals (e.g. kindergarten teachers, developmental teachers) concerning the integration of children with atypical behavior into peer groups.

We recommend the regular application of playful activities that provide archaic experiences with children with atypical behavior, and also providing the necessary tools in free
play situations and during group sessions. We also recommend the adoption of a gradual approach during the process of relationship establishment (providing time for acclimatization on arrival, providing time for free play, and, finally, group activities).

A further implication of the research is that there is a need for finer tools to examine the effects of musical stimuli, and also that we need deeper knowledge in border sciences in order to be able to work out a more nuanced categorization of emotional factors.

We aimed to outline a pedagogical model that may promote the integration of children or youth that do not comply with the behavioral norms of a given society. In this interdisciplinary work we introduced a pedagogical model which we called symbol pedagogy. The model applies the methods of reform and alternative pedagogies and has several novelties. It integrates the different intervention techniques into one intervention method; it is applicable in majority care; and it has an archaic, multidimensional character, which means it may help inclusion independently from ethnicity or culture. The elaboration of the method requires a deeper knowledge of other disciplines, and further research is necessary on the practical application of the method.

As for the international dimensions of our results, we can mention that several studies have dealt with the significance and possibilities of an active, play-based learning environment, and how its effectiveness can be measured (Liao et al., 2014). It was concluded that the education and awareness-raising of the educators is necessary in order to make them more tolerant towards a more sensitive, more interactive pedagogical approach. Shaping the point of view is essential when introducing symbol pedagogy. A holistic approach is needed to both communicate and understand symbol pedagogy. It is therefore worthwhile to introduce this pedagogical method to teachers or teacher trainees through training exercises. These training exercises enable participants to gain first-hand experience of the tools of symbol pedagogy. In addition, training exercises can be used to shape helping attitudes. Through the training exercises, the participants can have the experience of becoming a community, which can be one of the most important outcomes of the application of symbol pedagogy.

Creating social well-being is a complex phenomenon, only a small fragment of which has been examined in our research; complex examination is yet to be carried out. Our analyses did not provide a satisfactory answer to each question and problem, however, in many cases they highlighted new areas to be explored.

**Literature**


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**Metodička podrška vaspitačima i nastavnicima za korišćenje „Pedagogije simbola“**

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**Apstrakt** Savremena pedagoška shvatanja integriru saznanja o socijalnim interakcijama, motivaciji za učenje i dobrobiti za dete. Cilj rada je da postavimo okvire pedagoškog modela koji može da pomogne vaspitačima i nastavnicima da integrišu decu sa atipičnim ponašanjem kroz brigu o socijalnoj dobrobiti. Rezultate našeg istraživanja želimo da iskorištimo kako bismo razvili preporuke za
praktičare u obrazovanju (npr. vaspitače i nastavnike koji rade sa decom sa smetnjama u razvoju) koje bi im pomogle da decu sa atipičnim ponašanjem integrišu u vršnjačku grupu. Kroz interdisciplinarni pristup u radu dolazimo do mogućih metoda za inkluziju i definišemo model koji smo nazvali „Pedagogija simbola“. Predstavljeno je preliminarno istraživanje tokom kojeg je sproveden pedagoški eksperiment. Uče-snici istraživanja su deca koja pokazuju obrasce ponašanja koja ukazuju na autizam i koja imaju teškoća u integraciji sa vršnjacima. Rezultati našeg preliminarnog istraživanja ukazuju na to da upotreba našeg pedagoškog modela može pomoći vaspitačima i nastavnicima u radu sa decom koja pokazuju obrasce ponašanja indikativne za autizam, kao i da model može doprineti socijalnoj dobrobiti same dece.

**Ključne reči:** Pedagogija simbola, dobrobit, integracija, atipično ponašanje.

**Methodological support for educators with “symbol pedagogy”**

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Современные педагогические концепции объединяют знания о социальных взаимодействиях, учебной мотивации и благополучии ребенка. Цель работы - установить рамки педагогической модели, которая может помочь воспитателям и учителям интегрировать детей с атипичным поведением через заботу о социальном благополучии. Мы хотим использовать результаты нашего исследования для разработки рекомендаций для педагогов-практиков (например, воспитателей и учителей, работающих с детьми с отклонениями в развитии), которые помогут им интегрировать детей с атипичным поведением в группу сверстников. Через интердисциплинарный подход в работе мы приходим к возможным методам инклюзии и определяем модель, которую мы назвали «Педагогика символов». Представлено предварительное исследование, в ходе которого был проведен педагогический эксперимент. Участники исследования — дети, демонстрирующие поведенческие модели, указывающие на аутизм, и испытывающие трудности в интеграции со сверстниками. Результаты нашего предварительного исследования показывают, что использование нашей педагогической модели может помочь воспитателям и учителям в работе с детьми, демонстрирующими модели поведения, характерные для аутизма, и что модель может способствовать социальному благополучию самих детей.

**Ключевые слова:** Педагогика символов, благополучие, интеграция, атипичное поведение.