This article analyses the possibilities to model social skills education in the schoolgirl with moderate intellectual disability, basing it on the individual’s strengths. A strengths perspective refers to the identification of a child’s social skills and an orientation towards the child’s strengths and individual potential, while modeling the educational process. The schoolgirl’s individual strengths and problem areas in social skills education that are typical of schoolchildren with moderate learning disabilities are identified using a case study. It is noted that the research participant has communication and emotional contact needs, basic interaction and nonverbal communication abilities; emotional abilities, recognition of some social situations, and emotional expressiveness abilities. The participant also undertakes spare time hobbies, and individual behavioral strategies in complex situations. Along with the strengths, some typical difficulties of schoolchildren with moderate learning disabilities in social functioning are also characteristic: poor peer communication abilities, inappropriate expressed communication initiative and inadequate emotional and behavioral expression. Due to which she is unable to avoid conflict situations; has poor self-control; poor group performance, and problem solving abilities, and is lacking in social cognition skills the most. The research revealed that 1) the research participant – a schoolgirl with moderate intellectual disability – has not only inabilities, but also strengths in almost all social skills areas. 2) It is proved that the schoolgirl’s social skills education can be modeled, basing it on the available strengths (the need to communicate, basic nonverbal contact and communication abilities, and etc.).

Keywords: social skills, strengths perspective, moderate learning disabilities.

Introduction

Relevance of the problem. When describing the specifics of socialisation for people with learning disability the majority of authors highlight their social skills deficits (Bielecki, Swender, 2004; Matson, Minshawi, Gonzalez, et al., 2006;) and the lack of adaptive behavioural skills (Matson, Anderson, Bamberg, 2000; Matson, Kuhn, Mayville, 2002; and etc.) as one of the most distinct features. The relevance of social skills education for learning disabled children is accentuated (Gevorgianienë, 1999; Freeman, Alkin, 2000; Hunt, Goetz, 1997; Fisher, Meyer, 2002; Kamps, Kay, 2002, and etc.); however there is a lack of identification of the methods for social skills (Dymond, Orelove, 2001; Gresham, Elliott, 2001), which would enable the authors to recognise not only problem areas, but also the individual’s available social skills. Therefore, in educational practice, as well as in scientific research, there is a great divergence towards the deficit model of these schoolchildren. The social skills education of these schoolchildren is not purposeful nor is it based on the educators’ intuitive insights.

Social skills teaching/learning abilities and needs are individualistic (Gevorgianienë, 1999); therefore, there can be no common in ways to pedagogically influence children. In attempting to enable these children to learn social skills it is essential to recognise the individual’s existing social skills (Gresham, Elliott, 2001; Lane, Menzies, Barton-Arwood, et al., 2005; Quinn, Osher, Warger, et al., 2000; Warnes, Sheridan, Geske, et al., 2005). Within this research, it is argued that opportunities for social skills education should be based on a strengths perspective. The research problem is specified under the following questions: what social skills (strengths) does a schoolgirl with moderate learning disabilities have? How should educational guidelines be modeled in order to enhance an individual’s strengths, in overcoming problems in social skills?

Object of the research – opportunities for modeling social skills education based on the
individual strengths of a moderately intellectual disabled schoolgirl.

**Research objective** – to reveal the opportunities for modeling social skills education, based on an individual’s strengths, whilst applying the case study of a moderately intellectual disabled schoolgirl.

**Research sample.** The research objective identified the sample selection. When applying a purposive sample principle, a moderately intellectually disabled (PPT conclusions) schoolgirl M. (age – 15 years) of the 9th grade from a special school was selected. The consent to select M. for the case study was received from M’s caregiver. The caregiver themselves, as well as other family members, also agreed to participate in the research. Also, the pupil’s class teacher, physical education teacher, and two social workers from care homes took part in the research. Data anonymity was guaranteed for the research participants; the essence, objective, and proceedings of the research were explained.

**Research methodology and methods.**

The viewpoint of this research is that social skills are a complex multidimensional construct, constituted of mutually integrated (overlapping) and complementary structural components. These comprise 1) interaction skills; 2) communication skills; 3) participation skills; 4) emotional skills; and 5) social cognition skills. Each of these structural components consists of sets of social abilities linked in tight systematic relations (Jurevičienė, Kaffemanienė, Ruškus, 2012).

When empirically identifying the structure of social skills of a pupil with moderate earning disability and modeling guidelines of social skills education, a strengths perspective paradigm was considered. The main assumption of the strengths perspective is that people have many strengths (resources) – capacities, abilities, experiences, qualities, and roles, which define a person and his/her quality of social functioning. The most important strength is the ability to grow and change (Saleebey, 2006; Weick, Rapp, Sullivan, et al., 1989, and etc.). Thus, strengths (available abilities), within the social skills of the pupil, are identified, based on the guidelines for social skills education that are being modeled.

A case study (content analysis of the data gathered via observation and interview methods) of the individual expression of social skills of the pupil respondent was conducted. Applying a semi-structured interview method, an examination of the pupil’s family members and pedagogues was performed. This referred to content analysis data obtained from the observation protocols of the pupil’s social skills and interview texts. The social skills structure of the pupil respondent were identified and social skills education guidelines that were oriented towards the pupil’s strengths and needs, were modeled.

**Review of research on the social skills education of children with moderate learning disability**

The majority of researchers note that the lack of social skills is one of the most distinct features of an intellectual impairment. (Bielecki, Swender, 2004; Gresham, Sugai, Horner, 2001), This manifests itself in verbal and nonverbal communication problems; an inability to make and maintain relations with peers or others; the inadequate expression of emotions or behaviour; difficulties in expressing desires and adapting to social environments (Kampert, Goreczny, 2007, and etc.). A review of research highlights the efforts of scientists from various countries to create models of social skills education for those with learning disabilities. For some time, life-like themes were dominant in educational programs for schoolchildren with learning disabilities; social skills were taught using daily occurring situations (Gevorgianienė, 1998). Later, Stephens (1978; as quoted in Sargent, 1989) supplemented communication and social cognition skills education with the education of eating, taking a trip to school and back home, and personal hygiene abilities. Sargent (1989) focused on the development of social cognition (cultural education), social effect, and communication skills. According to the author, social cognition includes the development of societal traditions, values, social norms, communication skills (communication initiation, reaction to communication); social effect and other skills.

Presently recommendations for the adaptation of general education programs for intellectually impaired schoolchildren in Lithuanian schools¹ tend towards greater pupil independence. This focuses on the ability to take care of oneself, manage in one’s environment, to cooperate with

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¹ Recommendations for the adaptation of general programs of primary and basic education for the education of schoolchildren with special needs, having moderate, profound and severe intellectual impairment (2009). Vilnius.
others; participate with others in spare time and in occupational activities, possess a sense of usefulness; help a pupil to meaningfully fulfill daily tasks and make decisions that are adequate to the situation. One should also understand the meaning of one’s actions; be thoughtful of one’s moods, preferences, and actions. It is noteworthy that these recommendations are the first attempt to integrate the educational objectives of children with moderate and profound disorders into general programs. Even though the program provisions are oriented towards practicality and functionality, it still has to be noted that they lack accents of purposefulness and a clear content for social skills education. Social skills education for pupils with intellectual impairments in Lithuanian schools is not the province of special education and there are no methods for social skills education. Usually, social skills education is integrated into programs of other subjects (educational activities). However, such social skills education is not sufficient for schoolchildren with moderate learning disability. Such integration of social skills education into other subjects, perhaps is sufficient for schoolchildren with typical development; nevertheless children with intellectual impairments need a much greater scope of purposeful education and help from pedagogues. According to Gevorgianienė (1999), it is necessary to personalise the education of social skills for impaired schoolchildren and concretise those social abilities that are to be developed. The author highlights the necessity to individualise tasks for social skills education.

Gevorgianienė (1999) formulated social skills education for pupils with moderate learning disability in special schools. The essential objective of educating for communication abilities is the organisation of communication among pupils and teaching them to express benevolent attention towards one another. A pedagogue becomes an active mediator, helping schoolchildren to understand interrelationships (interactions), learn to listen, ask, and help in collective activities and to adequately express emotions when celebrating the other person’s success. As the author noted, the most important feature of a pedagogue when communicating with schoolchildren should be attentiveness and sensitivity to the pupil’s initiative. Here verbal and nonverbal communication and emotional support is necessary, that would accentuate a person’s value. Also when other pupils and oneself are interpreting (paraphrasing) their verbal and nonverbal communication meanings. The author proved that when applying interpretative methods, though slowly and on an elementary level, abilities are rather difficult to such pupils. Yet self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-value (emotional skills) — are being taught. However, education in communication and benevolent attention to one another, can be effective only to those who possess sufficient development of expressive language. Therefore, the author notices that it is of great importance to the teach basic abilities of linguistic communication by allowing pupils to communicate and participate in collective activities. For example to reply to questions, inquire, ask, object, express sympathy and joy, discuss, and not to interrupt. During participation in collective activities, it is important to teach how to share, help one another, and adjust one’s own desires with those of others (Gevorgianienė, 1999).

According to numerous authors, different characteristics of mental impairment, of linguistic communication, and communication experiences of schoolchildren raise specific educational requirements in each particular situation. Thus, the education of skills, necessary for effective social interaction, has to be individualised (Cascella, McNamara, 2005; Gevorgianienė, 1999; and etc.). The effectiveness of education also depends on the susceptibility of the pupil, his/her ability to understand and decode information, as well as on the teacher’s ability to perceive the child’s abilities. Educational interaction is ineffective when instructions, gestures, mime, or other communication means are incomprehensible or unacceptable to the pupil (Perry, 2000). However, in teaching social skills in an individualised manner it is necessary to assess the social skills of a pupil with moderate learning disability. Although there is a great deal of research on social skills in Lithuania and worldwide this lacks a methodology for the assessment of social skills that schoolchildren with moderate learning disabilities possess, and the programs of social skills education lack clarity. There is no methodological substantiation for the social skills assessment and individualisation of education of schoolchildren with moderate learning disability.
Research findings

Modeling guidelines for social skills education, considering the identified strengths

A strengths perspective accentuates a person’s abilities (strengths), and not inabilities or problems (Saleebey, 2006). A pedagogue, according to Siitonen (1999), who is seeking to individualise education, has to be able to find the pupil’s strongest abilities, and focus on them to project teaching/learning tasks.

With reference to the data from the case study (observation, interview), the schoolgirl’s strengths (available social skills) and problem areas (special needs for social skills education) are identified. During the discussion with research participants, individual guidelines for social skills education were formulated. The following table illustrates the schoolgirl’s individual social skills structure and education guidelines.

Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength (available abilities)</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Education guidelines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>M. can be persistent, when striving to satisfy her needs; wants to behave independently.</td>
<td><strong>Abilities of interactions’ management and control</strong></td>
<td>With the application of encouragement and behaviour modeling methods, to teach adequate ways for expressing desires, and ways to recognize inappropriate peer actions.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chooses inadequate ways to reach her goals [...]purposefully stained her garment, so that she would be given a dress she desired. Is unaware how she should behave when she is being mocked [Boys are laughing at her and she is laughing with them].</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understands verbal language.</td>
<td><strong>Verbal contact and communication abilities</strong></td>
<td>Teaching to listen attentively and to implement verbal instruction.</td>
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<td>Is unable to communicate verbally in a comprehensible manner [...]becomes angry if a partner does not understand what she is trying to say.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonverbal contact and communi-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>cation abilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>M. is able to apply nonverbal signals, vocalization, and gestures to express her needs. [If she desires something, she points the finger at herself saying a-a-a or mm-mm; if she does not want something — murmurs something and walks away. // When she wants to say something, she waves her hands, points finger; stares at that thing].</td>
<td><strong>Avoids eye contact.</strong></td>
<td>Try to accustom her to maintain eye contact when communicating, expressing her needs.</td>
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<td><strong>Abilities to maintain interpersonal relations.</strong></td>
<td>Encourage a peaceful and unselfish communication with peers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Is unable to communicate and play with peers, avoids them, and makes conflicts. [Communicates only when finds it beneficial (for example, as long as the other has candies); such friendships are short-term - until she receives a candy. If she does not get any attention, ignores the company and withdraws. Everyone avoids her].</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social expressiveness abilities.</td>
<td><strong>Inadequate ways to seek attention.</strong></td>
<td>Request a more reserved way for showing interest in unfamiliar people; to behave appropriately in an unfamiliar environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Shoulders her way in, points at herself, or pulls the person’s sleeve, in order to receive his/her attention].</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Is self-confident when present among familiar people. | Flexibility, adaptability abilities  
M. does not feel the distance between herself and unfamiliar people. Is excessively tedious when seeking attention from unfamiliar people, peers or adults, behaves inappropriately [...takes things that are not hers, hides them]. | With the application of a demand, habituation, play, encouragement, and behaviour restriction methods, to teach her how to choose an appropriate behavior in conflict situations. |
| Recognises a conflict. | Conflict solving abilities  
Tends to blame others in conflict situations. Sometimes she provokes the conflict herself. Reacts defensively, does not solve the conflict [Children become angry with M. She shows them a tongue and runs away]. | |
| Willfully helps adults, whom she likes. Strives to imitate adults [...wants to adorn herself, use cosmetics. // Sometimes imitates my actions and tries to repeat]. | Participation skills  
Group participation abilities  
Is unable to act in a peer group: to play, follow the rules, share, ask for help. [She needs instructions. Sometimes undertakes initiative without being asked, but most often when there is no necessity, even if I tell her not to do this... // Hinders the work of others; when brought by the hand starts to sway, looks through the window, walks aside. If she fails, then stops doing it at all, does not ask for help. Withdraws to solitude; turns around and walks away; becomes nervous when fails.]. | Accustom to the participation in collective peer play and other activities. |
| | Emotional/affective skills  
Self-awareness abilities  
Is able to show her emotions in a picture. | Encourage her self-trust in cooperative plays with peers and other situations that are difficult for her. |
| | Self-valuation abilities  
[Shows everything in the picture: I can do this, I can do that too]. | Constantly give a positive evaluation for her appropriate behaviour, activity. With the aid of symbols, teach to evaluate her negative actions. |
| | Emotional sensitivity abilities  
Recognises clearly expressed emotions of others (cry, anger, joy). [Wants to be near, when sees that we are happy; if she sees some anger, tries to withdraw quickly. // When notices a person, whom she finds attractive, cry, express compassion and sympathy by cuddling, caressing]. | Teach to recognize and react appropriately to the feelings of others. Foster empathy for the failure, pain, etc., of another person. |
| | Emotional expressiveness abilities  
Is able to express emotions in a basic manner. Adequately expresses satisfaction, reacts to compliments (likes to be praised), gifts; becomes sad when criticized; When she is happy, she is jumping, clapping and cannot stay still. // Is happy when receives a smiling sun; smiles; laughs; cuddles; huggs; strokes hand. // She is sometimes sad and sits in solitude. // When she is angry, she murmurs to herself, babbles; shows she is offended and demonstratively walks away. | Experiences a mood change [She is sad one moment, the next she is happy, active and then suddenly passive...].  
In unfamiliar environments, the expression of emotions is uncontrollable and inappropriate (fear, anxiety, unpredicted impulsive behaviour), expresses her negative emotions in a way that is aggressive to others. When she fails, demonstrates unacceptable actions [...shows her tongue, offensive gestures and the like]. |
| | Self-control abilities  
Distinguishes in an uncontrollable, impulsive, inadequate behaviour, which causes dissatisfaction of the surrounding people. Cannot control her wishes, desires. [Cries; throws and hides things, is difficult to calm her down when she is in rage]. | Using such methods as praise, encouragement, promise to permit the desired activity, and behaviour restriction, accustom to adequately express emotions, in the moment of failure, or when observing the other person fail. |

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### Social cognition skills

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abilities to perceive social signals</strong></td>
<td>Using such methods as request, encouragement, and behaviour restriction, to accustom her to listen and follow verbal instruction, react to the invitation, request;</td>
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<td>[I show a gesture that means it is not permitted, but most often she keeps on touching, “speaking to.” She does not care if someone is sleeping, she continues to crunch something until you tell her to stop. (//) Pretends she does not hear; looks through the window on purpose. Sometimes you need to constantly repeat and remind, in order she would hear or pay attention. Does not obey; does not react to the invitation; reacts only when persistently required.</td>
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### Abilities to recognize social norms

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<td>M. seeks attention in inadequate ways (...) persistsently stares at strangers, waves to them, comes near them. (//) Does not keep the distance; touches; takes their hands, greets everyone in this way; persistsently stares, waves. (//) When in store, puts orange, sweets in her pockets; if there are sweets on the table, she eats all of them.... Secretly eats confectionery.</td>
<td>Clearly formulate behaviour rules, define boundaries of acceptable and intolerable behaviours. Teach socially acceptable behaviour: act in a more reserved way when present in unfamiliar environment, and when showing interest in unfamiliar people.</td>
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### Abilities to assess social situation

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<td>Stubbornness, disobedience is characteristic of her; lacks adequate situation assessment abilities ({A \text{ boy fell over, so she found it very funny. If someone experiences a failure, she will laugh at him/her}}).</td>
<td>Accustom her to recognise the essence of a situation.</td>
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### Orientation in complex situations

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<td>Inadequately reacts to unfamiliar people, does not orient in situations ({\text{She acts as she pleases, and not as needed. ... If she desires something, no one would stop her...}}).</td>
<td>Accustom to adequately react to environmental signals.</td>
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### Solving problem situations

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<td>({\text{Laughs, throws cores of apples at us}}).</td>
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**Interaction skills** consist of a set of abilities defined as interaction management and control abilities. To achieve one’s goals, satisfy needs (Goleman, 2001; Rubin, Martin, 1994); protect one’s rights (Rapee, Wignall, Hudson, et al., 2000); resist negative effects, peer pressure (Bar-On, Parker, 2000; Raudeliūnaitė, Paigozina, 2009; Samašonok, Gudonis, Juodraitis, 2010); cope with annoyance, harassment (Rapee, Wignall, Hudson, et al., 2000), and other's negative reactions (Cornish, Ross, 2004; Rubin, Martin, 1994). The strength of the research participant in the area of interaction skills is her ability to persistently strive to satisfy her needs, her desire to behave independently. However, the pupil chooses improper ways to meet her needs and is unable to cope with the negative impact from peers. Therefore, the education guidelines in this area would be in using the pupil’s ability to achieve the satisfaction of her needs, to teach her the proper expression of desires, recognition of unacceptable peer actions, and resistance to them.

**Communication skills** consist of verbal and nonverbal contact and communication abilities. This means the maintenance of interpersonal relations, expressiveness of social roles; flexibility, adaptability, and conflict solving abilities.

**Verbal contact and communication abilities** are an initiation of the contact (Canney, Byrne, 2006; Gevorgianienė, 1999; Goleman, 2001; Raudeliūnaitė, Paigozina, 2009) and maintenance of the contact abilities – to clearly interact, do not interrupt the speaker, and listen to the partner (Cornish, Ross, 2004; Gevorgianienė, 1999; Raudeliūnaitė, Paigozina, 2009); dialogue development and closure abilities (Canney, Byrne, 2006; Gevorgianienė, 1999; Rubin, Martin, 1994). The schoolgirl is unable to communicate verbally,
however understands a linguistic language. It is necessary to teach her to maintain contact, resting on her strengths – opportunities of impressive language.

Nonverbal contact and communication abilities consist of eye contact (Canney, Byrne, 2006; Gevorganiené, 1999; Rapee, Wignall, Hudson, et al., 2000); the maintenance of an acceptable personal space, use of body language – pose, mimic, gesture (Canney, Byrne, 2006). The schoolgirl’s strength – ability to use nonverbal signals, to express her needs in a nonverbal manner, by coordinating vocalisation and gestures. With reference to this, it is necessary to develop communication skills by combining verbal and nonverbal contact maintenance and communication techniques.

Abilities to maintain interpersonal relationships. This is a need to communicate (Gevorganiené, 1999); make and maintain friendships (Elliot, Malecki, Demaray, 2001; Cornish, Ross, 2004; Samašonok, Gudonis, Juodraitis, 2010). The pupil has a need to communicate, especially with adults, seeks their attention, and can initiate interaction herself. However, she cannot be friends (communicate, play) with peers, distances herself from them, conflicts or communicates until she finds it beneficial. She should be taught to communicate with peers in a peaceful and unselfish manner, coordinating verbal and nonverbal contact and communication skills.

Social expressiveness – expression of tenderness and caring, giving compliments and able to give an expression of her needs. (Cornish, Ross, 2004; Rapee, Wignall, Hudson et al., 2000); includes verbal and nonverbal abilities in self-expression through all kinds of social roles and behaviours in various social situations; linguistic expression, oratory abilities (Malinauskas, 2004); expressive expression of speech content using paralinguistic abilities: speaking pace, voice intonations (Bellack, 1983; Rapee, Wignall, Hudson et al., 2000). Since the pupil is unable to communicate verbally, she compensates by using vocalisation, other nonverbal (paralinguistic) ways, and in using social expression that is inadequate and inappropriate to the situation. She has nerve-wracking ways of attention seeking. When teaching social expressiveness, it is necessary to constantly request a more reserved way of showing interest in unfamiliar people in order to encourage adequate behaviour in unfamiliar environments.

Flexibility, adaptability abilities (Rubin, Martin, 1994) – ability to adapt (Goleman, 2001), have trust in oneself when present among new people and new situations (Cornish, Ross, 2004; Raudeliūnaitė, 2007); to accept differences of opinion, apologize and to thank (Cornish, Ross, 2004). The schoolgirl’s strength is her self-trust when present among familiar people. On the other hand, M. does not feel the distance between her and strangers, she obsessively seeks the attention of unfamiliar people and inadequately seeks that of peers’ or adults’ (takes their things and hides them).

Conflict solving abilities – to recognize conflict (Cornish, Ross, 2004); figure out the reasons for misunderstanding or conflict; calmly express one’s opinion; accept failure (Raudeliūnaitė, 2009); solve quarrels and conflicts in a peaceful way (Canney, Byrne, 2006; Cornish, Ross, 2004; Gevorganiené, 1999; Goleman, 2001; Raudeliūnaitė, 2007). The schoolgirl’s strength is to recognize conflict; however, her problem is that she sometimes provokes conflict herself (and does this on purpose when inadequately seeking attention, and due to the lack of flexibility and adaptability); tends to blame others in conflict situations, reacts in a defensive way, and does not solve conflict. The education guidelines – employing her ability to recognise conflict, to teach her to choose an appropriate behaviour in conflict situations by applying methods of request, training, play, encouragement, and behaviour modification Participation skills are defined by abilities used in group participation (Cornish, Ross, 2004; Raudeliūnaitė, Paigozina, 2009) – ability to ask, discuss, suggest, accept, and offer help; invite to join; show initiative; share available means and instruct others (Cornish, Ross, 2004; Elliot, Malecki, Demaray, 2001; Rapee, Wignall, Hudson et al., 2000; Raudeliūnaitė, 2007; Samašonok, Gudonis, Juodraitis, 2010). The pupil’s strength is in the area of participation skills. She willingly and participates in activities with adults since she has a need to receive their attention (she helps adults who she likes). She is able to imitate adults in a bid to appear independent. However, it is problematic that she cannot portray the same skills within her peer group. She is unable to play, follow rules, share, or to ask for help. Guidelines for learning skills in this area are in identifying what she desires and her ability to participate in adult activities. She should learn how to attract attention appropriately and to participate in collaborative
play with her peers. She needs to be able to follow rules (play, behaviour), and to experience success in peer activities. As a motivation for participation in group activities and to encourage her to perform acceptably in a group, she could be allowed to experience more attention from adults, more joint activities with adults that would give her the possibility “to act as an adult” (for example, to teach her how to use make-up in a moderate way).

**Emotional / affective skills** consist of skills such as self-awareness, self-evaluation, emotional expressiveness, self-regulation, and emotional sensitivity. Self-awareness consists of the abilities to recognize and name one’s feelings (Canney, Byrne, 2006; Cornish, Ross, 2004; Gevorgianiené, 1999); and abilities of emotional self-perception (Goleman, 2001). Self-evaluation is closely related to self-perception, and involves the ability to evaluate one’s own strengths and weaknesses; and trust in oneself (Cornish, Ross, 2004; Goleman, 2001; Raudeliūnaitė, 2007; Samašonok, Gudonis, Juodraitis, 2010). The pupil has elementary abilities in recognising her emotions (‘angry’, ‘happy’) and to “name” them by pointing at a representative picture. She is able to demonstrate in a picture, what she has learnt.

**Emotional expressiveness / self-revelation abilities.** She is able to express feelings verbally and nonverbally Cornish, Ross, 2004; Malinauskas, 2004; Rubin, Martin, 1994; Rapec, Wignall, Hudson, et al., 2000). The schoolgirl is able to simply express emotions, she adequately reacts to praise (likes being complimented); when she receives a present or a sweet she appropriately expresses satisfaction but becomes sad when criticised. However, she has mood changes; has an inadequate reaction to fear or anxiety, and is unpredictable showing impulsive behaviour when she is in unfamiliar environments. Sometimes, this occurs when she experiences failure, she expresses negative emotions and behaves aggressively towards others. Her emotionally expressive problems are closely related to her lack of self-regulation abilities.

**Self-regulation** (Bar-On, Parker, 2000) / self-management, self-control abilities (Goleman, 2001; Raudeliūnaitė, 2007; Samašonok, Gudonis, Juodraitis, 2010) This involves the management of the expressions of one’s emotions (anger, envy, distrust, excitement, fear, anxiety) and control impulses; repression in frustrating situations; acceptance of another’s refusal without anger, frustration; to be able to react constructively to remarks, accept critique (Gevorgianienė, 1999; Samašonok, Gudonis, Juodraitis, 2010; Rubin, Martin, 1994); cope with unanticipated changes (Cornish, Ross, 2004). and to appropriately calm down (Raudeliūnaitė, 2007). The schoolgirl displays uncontrollable, impulsive, and inadequate behaviour, that invokes dissatisfaction from the surrounding people. She is unable to control her wishes and desires. When modeling guidelines for the education of self-control abilities, it is necessary to consider the pupil’s abilities. Is she able to recognise and express emotions in an acceptable manner. Therefore, coordinating such methods as encouragement (praise, promises to allow her to pursue a favourite activity) and behaviour restriction (for example, prohibition of a favorable activity or ignoring poor behaviour) will accustom her to control herself in conflict situations and to manage her emotions and behaviour after experiencing a personal failure or observing another fail.

Emotional sensitivity abilities involve empathy, understanding another’s emotions, (Cornish, Ross, 2004; Gailienė, Bulotaitė, Sturlienė, 1996; Goleman, 2001; Raudeliūnaitė, 2007); attentiveness to other person’s words and feelings (Rubin, Martin, 1994); showing benevolent attention and an ability to participate in the experiences of others (Gevorgianienė, 1999). The schoolgirl has some abilities in emotional sensitivity. She recognises emotions that others’ express quite obviously (cry, anger, joy); yet is indifferent to the feelings of others. She needs to learn how to empathically react to failure, pain, etc. experienced by another person.

**Social cognition skills** (Gut, Safran, 2002; Hogan, Shelton, 1998). These are divided into 1) social sensitivity (perception of social signals; recognition of social norms; assessment of social situations) and 2) decision-making (orientation in difficult situations and problem solving) abilities.

**Social sensitivity abilities** (Malinauskas, 2004). 1) Perception of social signals – abilities to decode verbal information and verbally regulate behaviour (Malinauskas, 2004); recognition of social signals, ability to understand the signals that others’ transmit: tone, facial expression (Canney, Byrne, 2006); find a common topic and to understand one another (Rubin, martin, 1994). 2) Recognition of social norms – application of social traditions and norms in specific situations (Malinauskas, 2004); ability to differentiate good behavior from bad; have knowledge of what is
right and wrong (Cornish, Ross, 2004). 3) Assessment of social situations – ability to assess a communication situation (Raudeliūnaitė, 2007); perceive the environment by observing others (Goleman, 2001); understand the effect of behaviours on others, and how emotions affect behaviours; be aware that actions have consequences (Cornish, Ross, 2004) and identify whether the other person can be trusted (Corney, Byrne, 2006).

Decision-making abilities. 1) Orientation in difficult situations – abilities to analyse information and experiences, evaluate alternative solutions and their consequences; adopt the most optimal decision (Gailiene, Bulotaitė, Sturlienė, 1996). 2) Solving problem situations – ability to apply various decision-making techniques, readiness to solve problems, difficulties, reflective consideration in a problem situation, ability to analyse and to consider solutions (Cornish, Ross, 2004; Samašonok, Gudonis, Juodraitis, 2010).

Social cognition skills are closely related to the level of intellect. This explains why the research participant lacks social cognition skills. Additionally, this explains the problems in the development of all the other social skills. Social cognition, according to Sargent (1989), is one of the essential social skills, but also the most difficult to acquire for those with moderate and severe intellectual impairments.

It is noteworthy that, in analysing the pupil’s social skills, we have ascertained a few strengths (the need for communication and emotional contact, basic nonverbal communication, abilities to recognise and express emotions; recognition of some social situations, and other abilities. She has spare time hobbies (singing, moves along with the music.). She has an extremely strong need for attention and praise. Even though the girl’s communication and participation (group performance) abilities are poor (does not participate, refuses to participate in peer activities), she willingly communicates with adults who are closely related to her. She enjoys simply being close to them and especially trusts her caregiver. She imitates adults by trying to demonstrate independence and sovereign behaviour although at the same time her behaviour is infantile (for example, plays with a doll).

Her problem areas are in her poorly developed interaction, communication, participation, emotional, and social cognition skills. In order to develop these it is necessary to possess well-developed speech and social intellectual abilities. Her emotions are immature and there is a lack of self-control (she displays uncontrolled, impulsive and inadequate behaviour, which is discontenting to those near to her.). She is disobedient, stubborn and, in difficult or conflict situations – displays defensive behaviour (denial of fault, avoidance, withdrawal reactions). Considering the data from the case study, it can be stated that the girl has difficulties that are characteristic of the majority of children with moderate learning disabilities. They experience: poor communication abilities, inappropriate initiation of communication (Gevorgianienė, 1999; etc.), inadequate expression of emotions and behaviour, due to which she cannot avoid conflict situations. M. lacks social cognition skills the most; as well as, self-control; an ability to participate in activities, poor communication, especially with peers; and inadequate conflict solving abilities.

The modeling guidelines for social skills education and methods for education need to be based on the actual developmental level of the pupil’s social abilities, i.e., on the available communication and other skills (strengths). This involves the desire to communicate with adults; an ability to imitate adult-like behaviour. her wish to be positively evaluated and receive attention. Therefore, individual encouragement methods are chosen, for example, for behaviour that meets requirements M. will be encouraged by giving her an opportunity to choose an activity. In attempting to develop social skills and communication abilities plus participation in activities, the pupil has to be constantly involved with collective activities with adults and peers both in informal (family), and formal settings. (school environments). In order for participation in collective activity to be successful, it is important to educate her abilities to share, to help, and to coordinate her wishes with others (Gevorgianienė, 1999).

Review of research results

As the majority of authors perceive, the different characteristics of intellectual impairment and consequently the different abilities of linguistic communication and experience raise specific educational requirements. Thus, skills education necessary for effective social interaction, must be individualised (Cascella, McNamara, 2005; Gevorgianienė, 1999; and etc.).
The first step for purposeful education is in the identification of the individual’s social skills (Bielecki, Swender, 2004; Gresham, Sungai, Horner, 2001; Lane, Menzies, Barton-Arwood, et al., 2005), because the effectiveness of education depends both on the pupil’s susceptibility and ability to understand and decode information, and on the ability of the educator to recognize the child’s potentials and identify their strengths. Family members have the most knowledge about a child’s abilities, his/her characteristics, hobbies, etc.; therefore, referring to the strengths perspective, social skills education for the child requires the inclusion of family members. The participation of family members is an educational resource for the child (Powell, Batsche, Ferro, et al., 1997). Through communication and the creation of educational environments that are favourable to social skills teaching/learning, educators can improve the pupil’s strengths of participation in peer activities. Versatile help, received from adults, assists the pupil to live in the community and consolidate their skills (Saleebee, 1996). The creation of interactions between educational and social environments enables the child to strengthen her individual social functioning abilities.

Findings

1. According to the theoretical analysis from scientific sources, when assessing the social skills of people with moderate learning disabilities often the inadequacies and deficits are emphasised. Even though, the majority of authors acknowledge the necessity for an individualised social skills education, it lacks both the identification of an individualised social skills structure, and individualised educational methods. In schools, an insufficient amount of attention is paid to social skills education (it is integrated into the areas of other educational content), and the content of social skills education is indefinite: it lacks a clear position about what and how such pupils should learn. Even though family/school cooperation is accentuated, it lacks explicitness as to how pupil’s family might participate in this process.

2. When carrying out social skills education in an individualised manner, it is necessary to assess the skills possessed by that pupil. Although a vast variety of research on social skills exists in Lithuania and worldwide, there is no clear conception of the structural components of such skills. Thus, a theoretical model of a social skills structure was prepared based on the structure of social skills of a schoolgirl with moderate learning disability i.e. the strengths (available abilities) and problem areas.

3. Employing a case study, the pupil’s individual strengths and problem areas within social skills education, were identified. It is established that the research participant needs communication and emotional contact, basic interaction and emotional expressiveness abilities; spare time hobbies, and various behavioural strategies in difficult situations. Next to the strengths, difficulties of social functioning, which are typical to such children are present: poor communicative abilities with peers, inappropriately expressed communication initiatives, inadequate expression of emotions and behaviour, with regards to which she cannot avoid conflict situations; poor self-control; a lack of group participation, and problem solving abilities. Social cognition skills are what she lacks the most.

4. The strengths perspective refers to the identification of a child’s social skills and orientation towards the strengths and individual opportunities for a child. Therefore, when modelling the content of social skills education and choosing educational methods, it is necessary to focus on the actual developmental level of the pupil’s social abilities. This includes the available communication skills (i.e. strengths); the desire to communicate with adults; an ability to imitate their behaviour and the like; individual encouragement methods that are chosen to refer to her hobbies and the need for attention and positive reinforcement.

5. The research revealed that 1) the moderately learning disabled schoolgirl, who participated in the research, has not only inadequacies, but also strengths in almost all social skills areas. 2) It is proved that the pupil’s social skills education can be modeled, basing it on her strengths as previously stated.

6. The data analysis verifies the application of a theoretical social skills model and methodological provisions of a strengths perspective for the identification of a social
Reference to a skills approach for a pupil with moderate learning disabilities.

References


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