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# Axiological aspects of childhood in elementary school pupils

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We all carry in our hearts the images and memories of our childhood. They have a kind of halo of our most pleasant experiences. The energy, freedom and informality of child games; the naughty adventures and pure friendship. Childhood is a subject of many literature, music and other works of art and almost all authors describe their childhood looking through pink glasses.

We say that childhood does not finish the moment we start going to school. Its length is measured not only by age, but also by the development of psychological and personal qualities and the activities the young person performs and the fact that they could be laden with the flavour of his childhood. Childhood has been subject of scientific research and division into periods only the last 200 years. The research was usually the work of specialists in the fields of psychology, physiology, ethnography, ethnology, sociology and philosophy. It was some time later that pedagogues joined them.

From historical point of view the concept of childhood is linked not with the biological status of immaturity but with certain social status and number of rights and duties, as well as the activities performed and accessible for the children of this age.

There is no unified definition of childhood neither in pedagogy nor in psychology. The term “childhood” however is widely used on different levels and with different meaning. As far as the individual is concerned / on the individual level/ childhood is defined as a stable consequence of acts leading to the growing up of the person, his becoming mature. Generally speaking, however, /having in mind all children/ childhood is said to be the total number of children of different ages that form the “up-to-adult” part of the society<sup>1</sup>.

**What is actually childhood?** Is it the process of the physical and psychological development of a young human being, or is it the process of gradual acceptance of certain social norms, roles, positions established in a given historical period? It also be said to be the period of *enculturalization*, of initial unconscious acceptance of the norms of cultural environment the child was born and brought up in, the surroundings of value orientation and social attitudes in the course of the child's communication with adults – parents or teachers. Could the childhood be said to be the period when the different stages of self-development are outlined; creative self-development, values of constant personal choice, and the course of confirming and discovering our own life path?

Contemporary psychological researchers always bear in mind the up-to-date scientific works in the field of childhood but also pay attention to the fact that despite the numerous analyses, no entire concept of child development has been created<sup>2</sup>.

A. Запорожец insists on the studying of the psychological development as a process of self-development and unfolding of the inner child activity contradictions. And so, even today the idea of the childhood as a kind of education on its own has not acquired the status of a methodological concept.

I believe it is essential that psychologists and pedagogues should pay special attention to this side of the analysis and concept of childhood.

And may be it is not necessary – is not it easy to see that childhood is a period with authentic psychological specifics which has its right to exist and we have to take into consideration. Of course, no one today, at least not openly dares to state that is a “little” adult.

It is stated in the works of Д. Кудрявцев<sup>3</sup>, that the idea of childhood as an education on its own has a long history, although it may seem to many original and futuristic. In scientific pedagogy this view was first introduced by J. J. Rousseau but its foundation were disclosed in 19<sup>th</sup> century. The concept was later developed in the sphere of the theory of free education/К. Вентцел/. A special contribution in its forming was given by the Polish pedagogue Я. Корчак. And as far as genetic psychology is concerned, it accepts the ideas of childhood as an education of its own as an axiological orientation mark of the scientific work of 20 century /П. Блонски, А. Валон, А. Запорожец/. Neither psychology nor pedagogy however has turned the idea in a good enough basis, which to become the foundation of new paradigm of child development. Д. Кудрявцев criticizes the concept of different authors and explain the processes that take places in the preparation of the child for the school activities, and the school activities as a preparation for adult life, etc. Meaning that they only prepare the so called “convenience child” derives from the English phrase convenience food. It turns out that the so defined “specific child abilities” have to be started to be something “intermediate”, only serving to simplify and clarify but not defining at things from their “adult” point of view. The author adds that such attitudes in adults concerning childhood derive from the real life situations of children in the system of social /and educational/ institutions. They feel obliged to assert the specifics of childhood from “outside” – through the image is always imposed on the child.

In order to escape the existing situation Д. Кудрявцев suggest the possibility childhood be viewed as an education on its own with its whole diversity. And it has to be represented by this characteristic on all level of analysis – from physiological and psychological to sociological and historical.

Uniqueness of childhood is a result from a historical transformation of childhood into a world-wide phenomenon/ В. Вернадски/, a world wide source of accumulating and generating self- development of culture and kind, viewed from historical aspect childhood gains its own “macrocosmology”, seizing to only “a developing product” of “developing society”. This is what the general theoretic task of the historical study of childhood is. Completing the task is connected to defining unique social function which childhood has in system of historical culture.

The French scientist Ф. Ариес is considered to be a founder of “history of childhood”. His book *“Детство и семейный живот в стария режим”*<sup>4</sup> is a starting point for the further research on that matter. The author believes that childhood was not accepted as a stage in one's development, which is characterized by unique psychological and emotional needs. His research is based on analyzing paintings, showing children. The main thought of the book is that children's life experience is not the same in different countries and though different centuries<sup>5</sup>. Stages of childhood are product of history. Childhood length through different historical periods depends on the level of social development, as well as the development of culture and science which are closely linked to the growing-up of the young person. In primitive societies, for example, children of young age take part in labor activities which practically ends their childhood. That is why this period of our life has to be studied on the background of the laws of human society development<sup>6</sup>.

Contemporary viewers on the discussed period are based on the changes that have taken place in the society and culture of the so called “new democracies”. An accent is put especially in Russia on the childhood phenomenon in its development from nature to culture, or as a stage of human development achieved by the means of self-identification<sup>7</sup>. The general models of representation of the image of childhood

corresponding or non-corresponding to the ideas of tolerance, as well as children's subculture and its specifics are studied and analyzed.

General and specific problems of sexual and role identification, the formation of culturally-based sexual behavior and mechanisms of its acquirement, as well as interdisciplinary analysis of gender images of childhood created and reproduced by the mass media are given a special place in modern research.

А. Кислова<sup>8</sup> for example, attempts to philosophically consider the fact of childhood place in the main cultural periods and the different values it was characterized with during these periods. She views the 4 types of “excusing” the childhood, from the times of archaism to post-modernism. During the period of archaism the childhood was excused for its place – in the world of adults. Christianity considers the childhood to be the fulfillment of the divine beginning and respectfully of the real life. In the culture of our time childhood is excused theologically: children are excused by the fact that they are going to become adults. And finally by analyzing the post-modernism stage in cultural development, the author concludes that childhood here is excused by being “other”, but such “other” that is ontologically essential to the adult. The forming of social identity in the course of socialization is also dealt with.

More and more authors these days, without respect to their views and methodology they use in studying childhood, tend to agree that the formulation of childhood as “happy and irretrievably gone time” is only true in its second half. No matter how positive in emotional respect this period is, it still turns out to be extremely difficult and dramatic period of human life.

Ш. Амонашвили points out: childhood should not be accepted to be as careless and heavenly period of life. It only seems to us, adults, that children have no troubles whatsoever and only play and have fun. This is not completely true. In children's life just like in adults', there are lots of problems – complicated, difficult or even impossible to solve. These problems make children suffer, fight difficulty, overcome it and be happy about doing so. Complicated relationships are formed between children themselves and children and adults. What we see as tiny problem, is a serious enough to the child – it is the sense of his life. Adults who cannot notice how difficult children's life is, the numerous aspects and various contents of their life, can make great mistake in bringing them up<sup>9</sup>.

Real childhood is a movement ahead, never stopping process of growing up. The child wants to be an adult, to grow up faster. Children have to be walked along with, followed in their need to grow up. This leads us to the conclusion that the main goal of education has to be help children grow up and support every move they make on their way to becoming adults. This is the only way in which we can provide them with a real childhood. If we only let the children play, to prevent them from doing any work, we risk to slow down the process of growing up and make the childhood its self duller as it is not happening at its natural course and for its natural aim.

By artificially isolating the child from real life, from his aims and needs, by the simplifying and the making easier, of games, fun, hedonistic and emotional side of life we deprive the child from everything important in his natural growing up as life does not only consists of pleasure and games.

Childhood is also the time when abilities are discovered and developed. Characteristic of many is the fact that functions potential abilities and their mechanism can show up at a strictly defined time in one's life cannot be preserved. The development of one function or another cannot be postponed for a more convenient time. It would mean artificially, stopping his development, what have been

missed, could never be retrieved. Nowadays children go to school having great potential abilities under their belt. But in order to make them real and practically useful, to turn them into real personal qualities and teach them the pupil how to be a human, a special forming, educating, developing, and pedagogical process is necessary.

In his analysis on the matter what childhood is И. Кош accents on the normative and moral side of the phenomenon discussed. In his opinion, the most reputable, methodically developed and liable to experimental check in many countries theory of the moral development of the person was developed by Л. Колберг. She improves the idea of Ж. Пиаже and supported by Л. Виготски that the development of a moral consciousness in a child goes along side with his mental development and distinguishes its phases, as every phase corresponds to a certain level of morality conscious<sup>10</sup>.

The appliance of the comparative and historical study of the style of socialization in children from different countries and civilizations, needs a different analysis of:

- the goals and tasks of education;
- its means and methods;
- the agents and institutions of socialization;
- the results and efficiency of socialization.

A child's image always possess at least two sides: what is the child nature like /or what the child has been given by God/ and what the child should become as a result of training and education.

In western culture L. Stone speaks of 4 alternative images of the newborn child:

- a) the traditional Christian concept, in accordance with which the child carries the scar of the original sin and can only be saved from it by mercilessly suppressing of the will; strict obedience to the parents and spiritual leaders /educators/;
- b) from the point of view of socio-pedagogical determinism child is believed to be neither good nor bad by nature; the child is “*tabula rasa*” on which the society or the educators can write whatever they want”
- c) from the point of view of natural determinism /or heredity theories/a child's personality and abilities are predetermined by his genes; this concept is not only typical of vulgar genetics only but also of medieval astrology;
- d) the utopianism and human's fit concept which states that a child is born good and beautiful but is later changed influenced by the society. This idea is usually associated to Romanism, but was also defended by some humanists in the age of enlightenment, who interpret in this way the old Christian dogme of children's innocence.

И. Кош insists that there is a corresponding manner of education to each of these images mentioned above. This idea of the original sin has a leading role in repressive pedagogy where the accent is put on suppressing child's natural beginning; the idea of socialization plays main part in the pedagogy of aim training formed personality; the idea of natural determinism is used by the principle of developing natural abilities and preventing negative; the idea of original goodness bases of the pedagogy of self-development without influences from outside.

The author distinguishes *different laws of personality* depending on the social and cultural life conditions as well as the development of society and its values. In ancient societies the better child was the stronger one, the one who can manage. In more developed society the better child is that of higher social status. There are also

eastern and western laws of personality, the Japanese model, etc. They are very different in their social, ideological and ethnical identity.

The thesis that childhood, especially that of nowadays children, does not end with children's starting to go to school and goes on through all grades of elementary school and afterwards, is leading in this report.

In Б. Лихачков's words despite the fact that in nurseries and kindergartens children are introduced to some rules of public behavior, which they will be in need of at school, essential problems occur in elementary school educations. At this stage of a child's life discipline and organization at home are very important to the child. A child meets his teachers – adults not belonging to his family and has to deal with the influences by his classmates who have different social status. One of the most important requirements to the child at this stage is the fanning of his impulsiveness in behavior, and creating of self-decupline. The combination of parents neglecting their children and abdicating from parental duties, as well as the lowering of the parents' requirements to the child can make a child's behavior uncontrollable <sup>11</sup>.

If a child wants to learn how to write and do calculations, he has to show some self-discipline, for example, he has to sit quietly and concentrate. Uncontrolable child risk not to gain basic literacy in the first three or four years of primary education and if the child cannot catch up with help by teachers and parents, his further education turns into an un tearable burden. A similar problem arises when teachers tick to the unwritten rule never to let elementary students repeat the same grade twice. The rule is quite humane but it leads to great difficulties later when children enter a stricter reality of different teachers teaching different subjects where even the little that has been achieved in elementary education can be easily wasted. \for children with problems of that kind French pedagogues have introduced the term “school-proletariat”. Such a problem turns out to exist in a number of countries.

As we have already mentioned, first going to school puts the child in an unusual and new situation. Like all new situations going to school can be thought about as a test showing how prepared the child is. If the preparation is good, the child passes, if not the negative sides of his preparation can be seen.

By asking “What is expected by a child who goes to school for the first time”.

А. Адлер <sup>12</sup> gives further thoughts on the topic of children at school. Work at school requires cooperation with teachers and classmates, as well as interest in the subject or not, usually depends on how much he likes his teacher. The art of being a teacher suggest the skill of keeping children's attention and discovering who shows no interest and cannot concentrate.

Е. Василева <sup>13</sup> has dedicated a scientific report on the topic of children at primary school. In axiological aspect she defends the right of the young pupil to be himself, to be treated not from the point of view of the adults but mainly from the point of view of the child himself. It is high time that some questions were answered, questions connected with the sense and aims of education of young pupils. Following this line of thought, as basic grounds for creating and shaping of the educational process “should be considered only the real answer to the desires, abilities, attitudes and needs of the pupil who will be allowed to be himself in a deep and profound self-study and discovery. This aim should be bound to particular pedagogical task that mark the orrientation of school education to sufficient results in developing the child entirely intellectually and spiritually, and satisfying the child's need of communication and gaining new impressions.

In a sense it could be said that the adult is just a grown-up child. In each and every one of us the traces of a hidden /already suppressed/ child's views of the

world often show up. And whether they are going to remain a part of the students' life through the hardship of school life and make it brighter depends on the natural abilities of the students' enriching personality, the various educating factors and the stand their educators – parents and teachers are going to take.

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<sup>1</sup> Фелдштейн, Д. И. Детство как социально-психологический феномен и особое состояние развития.

[www.lib.ru](http://www.lib.ru)

<sup>2</sup> Л. Ф. Обухова. Детская (возрастная) психология Учебник. М., Российское педагогическое агентство. 1996

<sup>3</sup> Кудрявцев В. “Психология развития человека. Основания культурно-исторического подхода. <http://www.experiment.lv/rus/biblio/kudrjavcev/part2.htm>

<sup>4</sup> L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien regime – 1960

<sup>5</sup> Цит. по Лихачев. Б. Педагогические исследования

<sup>6</sup> По Обуховар Л. Детство как предмет психологического исследования <http://flogiston.ru/library/obikhova> 1

<sup>7</sup> Литовская Мария , Елена Трубина. Екатеринбург, Уралски държавен университет “Детството като културен кръстопът: по пътя на самоотъждествяването” сп. “НЛО”, 2003 г. № 61

<sup>8</sup> Пак там – Кислова А, - “Перспективи на детството”

<sup>9</sup> Амонашвили ,Ш. Новое педагогическое мышление, М., 1987, с. 21

<sup>10</sup> Кон И, И. Ребенок и общество (историко-этнографическая перспектива). М., Наука, 1988, с. 113

<sup>11</sup> Лихачев, Б. Цит. пр-е

<sup>12</sup> Адлер, А. Възпитание на децата. С., ИК Здраве и щастие, 1998

<sup>13</sup> Василева, Е. Детето в началното училище. С., 2003