

Spontaneous Representations of Children of the 6th Year of Life about People’s Emotional Experiences

Elena V. Gorshkova

Moscow State University of Psychology & Education, Moscow, Russia
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8516-6573>, e-mail: e-gorshkova@yandex.ru

The study of children’s spontaneous representations about people’s experiences is important due to the need to develop their emotional sphere, communication; the development of appropriate diagnostic techniques for preschoolers remains relevant. The article discusses the concepts of “perezhivanie”, “representations”, including emotional ones. Studies of “emotional intelligence” are mentioned, one of the components of which is the understanding of human emotions. A brief description of the methods for assessing the understanding of human emotions by preschoolers is given. The results of a survey on the pictures of 172 children of the 6th year of life, obtained according to the author’s methodology in different years (2002—2019), which are compared with each other using methods of mathematical statistics: children in general correctly determine the content of emotional experiences of people (depicted in the pictures), guided by poses, gestures, etc., sometimes indicating by what signs did they understand this. A number of diagnostic materials are published for the first time.

Keywords: representations, spontaneous representations, emotional representations, cultural-historical psychology, emotion recognition, emotion, perzhivanie.

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Спонтанные представления детей 6-го года жизни о переживаниях людей

Горшкова Е.В.

ФГБОУ ВО «Московский государственный психолого-педагогический университет»
(ФГБОУ ВО МГППУ), г. Москва, Российская Федерация

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8516-6573>, e-mail: e-gorshkova@yandex.ru

Представлены результаты исследования спонтанных представлений детей 6-го года жизни о переживаниях людей. Автор подчеркивает важность результатов такого рода работы в связи с необходимостью развития на этом этапе эмоциональной сферы, общения, а также актуальность разработки соответствующих диагностических методик для дошкольников. Рассматриваются понятия «переживание», «представления», в том числе эмоциональные. Обращается внимание на исследования «эмоционального интеллекта», одним из компонентов которого является понимание эмоций человека. Дана краткая характеристика методик оценки понимания дошкольниками человеческих эмоций. Приводятся результаты опроса по картинкам 172 детей 6-го года жизни, полученные по авторской методике в разные годы (2002—2019), которые сравниваются между собой с применением методов математической статистики: дети в целом верно определяют содержание эмоциональных переживаний людей (изображенных на картинках), ориентируясь по позам, жестам и др., иногда указывая, по каким признакам они это поняли. Ряд материалов диагностики публикуется впервые.

Ключевые слова: представления, спонтанные представления, эмоциональные представления, культурно-историческая психология, распознавание эмоций, эмоции, переживание.

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Introduction

The study of spontaneous representations of preschoolers about emotions, experiences (perezhivanie¹) of people is significant due to the need to form key abilities that allow a child to master the ability to interact with others to be included in new forms of communities and activities [15], and the development of understanding of the meaning of people's perezhivanie [20; 21], necessary for produc-

tive communication. The ability to understand a person's experiences (perezhivanie) by nonverbal manifestations depends on the completeness and accuracy of the observer's ideas about the meanings and external signs of emotions, as well as the context of situations in which they may arise.

Representation is "a visual image of an object or phenomenon (event) arising on the basis of past experience (given sensations

¹ According to N.N. Veresov [3], the translation of the Russian word "переживание" [perezhivanie] into English — "experience" — does not fully reflect its psychological meaning, therefore N.N. Veresov himself prefers to use the variant "perezhivanie" in his English-language articles. That's why this version of the 'translation': perezhivanie, — is used in this article, especially when the words "experience" [perezhivanie] and "experience" [opyt] are used side by side.

and perceptions, by reproducing it in memory or imagination)" [1, p. 406]. Unlike perception, the imagery of representation is less vivid and detailed, but more generalized, reflecting the totality of external features, similar objects of the same class, without highlighting internal, regular connections and relationships in them [1; 4; 14]. L.S. Vygotsky [4] considers representations as functional equivalents of concepts — similar in appearance and performing a "similar ... function in solving similar tasks"; but — by psychological nature, composition, structure, and mode of activity — representing only the initial stage of the development of concepts [4, pp. 122—123]. A preschooler, when reflecting, comprehending perceived reality, operates with representations, using verbal speech as a means of forming, clarifying, generalizing representations, realizing their content [1; 4].

Communication of a child in joint activity with an adult or with other children is an important condition for the formation of representations [4; 16] as generalized visual images: "generalization is impossible without communication, and vice versa" [4; 15, p. 111]. Along with the provision on the role of the child's social experience as the main factor of development [4] and the conclusion that "every change in a person caused by upbringing has not an individual, but a social character" [2, p. 84], some authors claim that spontaneous representations are "a vivid embodiment of a child's unique subjective experience" [16, p. 62].

Spontaneous representations of preschoolers are more often studied in line with the development of figurative and theoretical thinking as prerequisites for scientific and theoretical concepts [16]. The function of figurative-theoretical development of objective reality is also performed by emotional, aesthetic, artistic images [13] and emotional representations [7], formed based on personal experience of perezhivanie in different social situations.

Each conscious emotion is associated with intellectual processes — with perception, representation or thought about the subject to

which it is directed [14]. The completeness and accuracy of the child's emotional representations are determined by the degree of awareness of own perezhivanie and of other people.

Emotional cognition of a special kind reflects reality in the form of "synthetic emotional-gnostic complexes" [7, p. 259]. They merge external and internal experiences: both the external picture of the environment (sometimes with exaggerated signs that reveal the personal meaning for the child of surrounding events, people, etc.), and "components in the form of organic sensations and representations" that reflect internal changes, excitement in the child, depending on the positive or negative meaning for him of the current situation situations [7]. Every emotion generates a unique set of bodily sensations [21].

Expressive movements are a "component of emotions" (Rubinstein [14]). Therefore, emotional representations include not only affective and intellectual moments, but also the image of expressive movements — how movements look from the outside and how they are felt from the inside (Bernstein). The subject's perception and understanding of a person's perezhivanie based on their emotional representations presuppose "the ability to feeling into another's movements" [17, p. 42].

"Perezhivanie" (a common name for unmediated psychological experience) is not reduced to affective states but is a complicated complex of psychological processes that "includes emotions, cognitive processes, memory and even will" [5; 24, p. 48]. L.S. Vygotsky distinguishes between the activity associated with the occurrence of the perezhivanie and the content (what is experienced) [5; 22]. N.N. Veresov clarifies, that in Vygotsky's texts there are two different meanings — perezhivanie "as a psychological phenomenon / process that can be empirically observed and studied, and ... as ... a theoretical tool for analyzing the development process" [24, p. 46], which allows to explore the role and influence of the environment on the psychological development of the child [3; 22; 24; 25].

The child's perezhivanie are more often studied in connection with the development of

his emotional sphere. Feelings, emotions (as well as forms of cognition) are a cultural and historical product; the child personality is transformed through his social activity [22], directed by adults. To influence the emotional sphere of the child, "effective expressive means of everyday communication between people" are used [7, p. 270]; over time, they become the means of the child himself in communication — as an intermediary link in the structure of his emotional processes, causing their restructuring, intellectualization, creating the possibility of experiencing both directly perceived and imagined actions and events of vital importance for the child and the people around him [7].

Thus, the child's *perezhivanie*, which are the basis of his personal experience, become the source of his emotional representations, including non-verbal manifestations of emotions. These ideas are formed spontaneously, including due to the spontaneity and immediacy of the child's *perezhivanie*, and are used by him, more or less consciously, in recognizing other people's *perezhivanie* based on understanding emotions, taking into account the context of interaction in social situations familiar to the child from personal experience.

In foreign studies, the understanding, recognition of emotions, their identification by people, children are considered as one of the components of "emotional intelligence" (J. Meyer, P. Saloway, D. Caruso, D. Goleman, R. Bar-On, M.A. Manoilova, etc. [9]). There are also many supporters of this trend in Russian psychology. However, the purpose of the article is not to review research on emotional intelligence. We are interested in whether there are diagnostic methods for preschoolers in this area of psychology and the data obtained from them on the peculiarities of children's understanding of other people's *perezhivanie*? In foreign publications, the problem of diagnosing emotional intelligence is of great importance; in numerous models of emotional intelligence there are components such as the ability to understand emotions and to control them [10]. But there are very few such studies for preschoolers; more often they relate to developing technologies [8]. In domestic research and foreign Russian-lan-

guage publications there are developments on preschoolers (T.D. Savenkova, Yu.A. Afonkina, O.A. Tokareva, A.V. Sery, M.S. Yanitsky [19]; M.A. Nguyen [12]). However, such methods as expert assessment, survey and questionnaire are criticized, which do not always allow obtaining objective, reliable data. In addition, a significant "part of diagnostic tests for children belongs to the category of projective procedures that have complexity and ambiguity of interpretation of facts when processing results" [19, p. 155]. The disadvantages of the methods considered should also include an unverified data evaluation system [12] or its absence, the presentation of the results of children 5—7 years old without age differentiation [18].

Interesting are the methods of correlating images of individuals and human figures corresponding to a verbally given context ("history") [23]; recognition of basic emotions by mimic and pantomime reactions in statics and dynamics, correlating them with the sound of the voice by the similarity of the transmitted moods [18; 19]. However, the generalized description of the stimulus material does not give a complete picture of the methodology.

There are relatively few techniques that can be used to assess the emotional representations of preschoolers [12; 23]. Most of them reveal children's recognition of emotions by their faces (in photos, pictures) [11], apparently because it is easier for children to perceive *perezhivanie* by facial expressions, than by gestures, poses of the depicted people, by their relationships. Perhaps this is because facial expressions are universal, and gestures may differ in different cultures [20]. However, facial expressions are only one of the channels of nonverbal information about a person's *perezhivanie*. And the diagnosis "by persons" does not provide complete information about the emotional representations of children.

None of these techniques allowed us to answer the questions: can preschoolers recognize people's *perezhivanie* by gestures, poses and other non-verbal signs (except facial expressions)? Can they understand the context of the situation and the nature of the relationship between people by non-verbal

signs? That is, these issues were not studied, and therefore their study turned out to be relevant.

The study described below was conducted with children of the 6th year of life. The age of children is chosen as one of the earliest, when the development of speech allows them to formulate answers to given situations (in the pictures).

The purpose of the study is to identify the presence and features of spontaneous representations of children of the 6th year of life about the experiences (perezhivanie) of people associated with orientation to nonverbal signs (poses, gestures).

Hypothesis: spontaneous emotional representations of children of the 6th year of life in general correctly reflect the meaning of people's experiences with orientation to external nonverbal signs.

Features of sampling, organization of research and applied methodological tools

Characteristics of the subjects: 172 children of the 6th year of life — pupils of the middle age groups of kindergartens in Moscow and the Moscow region. Children interviewed in different years made up seven samples of subjects. The average number of children in the group is 25 (mean sq. deviation — 7.7); boys and girls are about equally.

The scheme of the study. Diagnostics (survey by pictures) was carried out as seven ascertaining “slices” in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2016 and 2019 using methods of quantitative (frequency, statistical) and qualitative analysis of the results.

The method “Emotional interactions” was used [6] (idea, development, and approbation by E.V. Gorshkova). The research data reflected in the article were obtained by the author and students under his supervision at MSUPE from 2002 to 2019.

Procedure. The child was presented with pictures and asked to tell what is depicted on each. With monosyllabic answers, he was asked additional questions about the actions, relationships of the characters, and by what

signs he understood it [6] — this made it possible to judge his understanding of the characters' experiences, the emotional content of the situation.

Stimulus material (Fig. 1) — seven pictures (9 x 14 cm); on each — two people in a silhouette image (facial expressions, gender signs are intentionally excluded); the relationship between them and the perezhivanie of each are expressed in poses, gestures, spatial arrangement. The full set of images is published for the first time. The expressive actions [14] of the depicted little men reflect their emotions and relationships, which are mutual in some pictures, and complementary in others: 1) “Whispers — listens” (emotion: mutual interest); 2) “Teases — cries” (schadenfreude — distress); 3) “Friendship” (consent); 4) “Farewell” (goodwill at parting); 5) “Fight” (anger — fear); 6) “Crying — comforting” (distress — sympathy); 7) “Meeting” (joy).

Two types of assessment were used: 1) according to the number of correct answers [6] — to identify the result for the methodology as a whole; the answer reflecting the content of the picture was considered “correct”, often using words that coincide with the name of the picture (which was not reported to the children) and/or the emotions of both characters, the nature of their relationships; 2) a point score for each answer (published for the first time) — to analyze the varieties of answers for each picture.

Points for correct answers: 1 — the child correctly and completely independently determines the content of the picture and the perezhivanie of each of the characters; can note non-verbal signs by which he understood it; 0.75 — (answering questions) correctly determines the actions and perezhivanie expressed by them of each of the two characters, can indicate non-verbal signs by which he I got it.

Points for incorrect answers: 0.5 — the actions and perezhivanie of one character are called correctly, and the other is called incorrectly; 0.25 — incorrectly determines the perezhivanie each of both characters; 0 — completely incorrectly determines the actions

and perezhivanie of both characters; answers leading questions².

Results

Individual task completion levels were generally determined by the sum of correct answers: low — 0—3 (so less than half); average — 4—6; high — 7; the percentage of children of each level was calculated separately by year (Fig. 2).

Judging by Fig. 2, most children (in different years) revealed an average level of understanding of the content of pictures, their spontaneous emotional representations in general correctly reflect the meaning of people's perezhivanie. A pairwise comparison of these data (according to the Mann-Whitney U criterion with Bonferroni correction) revealed the absence of statistically significant differences between them (with one exception: between the samples of 2003 and 2013). A similar analysis between boys and girls showed no significant differences.

The data on the prevalence of the average level in all groups are confirmed by a frequency analysis of the varieties of children's responses: based on point estimates, the average values of correct, partially correct, and erroneous answers were calculated (Fig. 3). Most

responses with scores of 1 and 0.75 points (correct answers) indicate that children of the 6th year of life in in general, they understand the content of emotional interactions based on ideas about people's perezhivanie.

Comparison by individual pictures: based on the scores, the average values for each picture within each sample were calculated (see the table).

In half of the cases (collectively for all groups), average values were obtained (rounded) from 0.7 to 0.8/0.9 points, which also confirms: in general, children correctly understand the content of a particular picture, but this is revealed when using additional questions. Averages rounded up to 0.5/0.6 points — correspond to a partially correct understanding of the content of the picture, for example (according to maps. No. 2), the child could correctly indicate that one of the characters was crying, but he determined the actions and mood of the second incorrectly: "playing the pipe".

The table shows: in all groups, the content of picture No. 6 is most often correctly identified ("sorry for the crying one"). Less often, children give correct answers to the pictures: "farewell", "fight" and "secret"; even less often (due to errors in the interpretation of gestures) — "teases", "friendship" and, finally, "meeting".

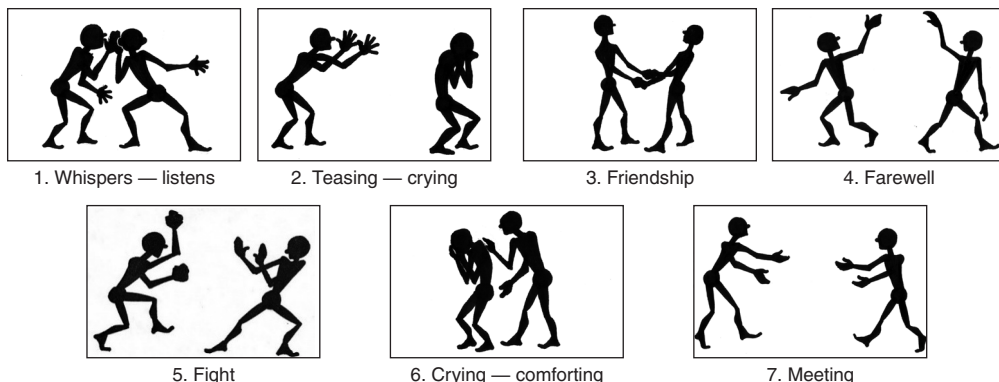


Fig. 1. Stimulus material and the order of presentation of pictures (according to the method of "Emotional interactions")

² Leading (in fact, prompting) questions were asked to the child to get at least some answer and not fix it on failure, encouraging him to continue the task (answers in these cases were not counted).

Table

Average scores for the answers separately according to the pictures — in different groups of children of the 6th year of life (in different years)

Group No. / year	Pict. No. 1 secret	Pict. No. 2 teasing	Pict. No. 3 friendship	Pict. No. 4 farewell	Pict. No. 5 fight	Pict. No. 6 comforting	Pict. No. 7 meeting
1 2002	0.66	0.52	0.69	0.73	0.67	0.73	0.58
2 2003	0.60	0.52	0.49	0.64	0.73	0.73	0.46
3 2004	0.54	0.74	0.64	0.63	0.70	0.81	0.69
4 2007	0.65	0.51	0.55	0.69	0.64	0.73	0.61
5 2013	0.81	0.58	0.75	0.85	0.81	0.83	0.70
6 2016	0.70	0.77	0.69	0.69	0.66	0.92	0.57
7 2019	0.67	0.62	0.47	0.65	0.53	0.65	0.63
Average value	0.66	0.61	0.61	0.7	0.68	0.77	0.61

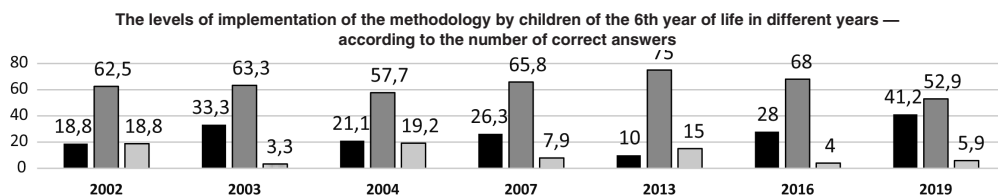


Fig. 2. Levels of performance by children of the 6th year of life of diagnostics "Emotional interactions": level designations by the number of correct answers:
 ■ — low (0—3); ■ — average (4—6); ■ — high (7)

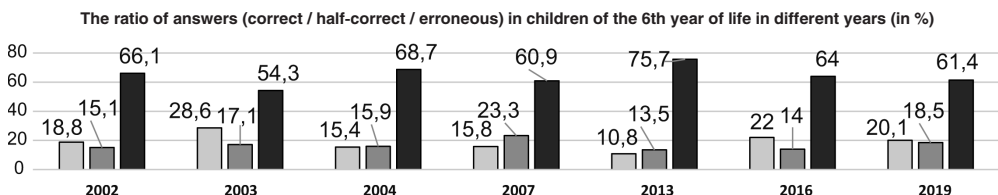


Fig. 3. The ratio of the average values of different responses by groups (2002—2019): designations of varieties of answers:
 ■ — incorrect answers (0 и 0,25 б.); ■ — partially correct (0,5 б.); ■ — correct (0,75 и 1 б.)

Comparison (according to the Kruskal-Wallis H criterion) of the results for individual pictures obtained in different years showed no significant differences in only two pictures: No. 4 "farewell" and No. 7 "meeting"; in other cases, statistically significant differences were revealed.

A comparison of the average values of boys and girls interviewed in different years for each of the 7 pictures (in points) and for the methodology as a whole (by the number

of correct answers) showed that differences are more common than coincidences, while there is no definite trend: in different years, boys have more accurate answers, that's the girls. In general, these differences are not statistically significant.

Qualitative analysis of children's responses

Children of the 6th year of life, when determining the meaning of perezhivanie,

are guided by nonverbal signs of behavior, but with a different measure of awareness, which can be judged by the completeness and accuracy of the answers, and if it is difficult to find words to convey the understood meaning, by the adequate use of nonverbal means (pointing, pictorial gestures) as explanations. The children's answers to the questions — what the relationships and experiences of the characters are, by what signs they understood it — are characterized by the following.

- In some cases, the child, in determining the meaning of the perezhivanie, accurately focuses on a specific gesture, verbally calls it, connects it with the general nature of the perezhivanie (comforts him, because "he strokes the back with his hand").

- Identifies specific nonverbal signs by which he understood the meaning of the emotional state, relationships, although he cannot always verbally name them; nonverbally indicates specific external signs of behavior (repeats the gesture from the picture or points to the corresponding part of the image).

- When determining the nature of perezhivanie, relationships the child proceeds from the context of the situation, interaction (sees the whole before the parts).

- Sometimes the child connects the content of the studied picture with the preceding ones in the "comforting" and conjectures its continuation.

- In interpreting the picture, the child relies on personal experience of perezhivanie, sometimes directly pointing out their similarity ("just like with Dimka and me").

- Initially, the child can correctly determine the general nature of the relationship, but then an erroneous interpretation of individual gestures leads to an incorrect definition of the meaning of the perezhivanie, the relationships of the participants in the situation and its context in general. Perhaps the "error" in interpretation arises from the desire to evade from negative content (which may remind the child of situations familiar from personal experience).

- Incorrect verbal interpretation of individual gestures can be explained by inaccuracy of perception and / or distant external similarity of the depicted gesture with other movements (of a different content) that the child is more familiar with from personal experience.

- The child "grasps" the general content, the meaning of the interaction, but does not argue the answer ("they are friends because they are friends"; "because I think so"; "I don't know") or admits that it is "difficult for him to say".

Discussion

The absence of statistically significant differences in the results of children of the 6th year of life interviewed in different years, as well as between boys and girls in each sample indicates that the data obtained by the method of "Emotional Interactions" reflect the general trend in the development of spontaneous ideas about people's experiences (perezhivanie) in children of this age, which rely on personal experience: children in general correctly "read" the meaning of relationships, emotions of the characters depicted in the pictures if such situations are familiar to child from his own perezhivanie. Personal experiences as a complicated complex of emotional-cognitive, regulatory, mnemonic processes combined with unique bodily sensations become the basis for the formation (and subsequent refinement) of representations about people's experiences, allowing not only to understand emotions, the nature of the relationships of others, but also to empathize with them both in real situations and in imaginary ones (in the game, when perceiving art works).

Children of the 6th year of life, based on their ideas about people's experiences, demonstrate (in the survey) a different degree of their awareness, which can be understood by the presence, completeness of descriptions of non-verbal signs or their absence. Some children quite definitely formulate verbal responses reflecting the

emotional content of the interactions in the picture, and accurately indicate the corresponding non-verbal signs; others hardly pick up words, but use visual means, repeating gestures as in the picture, or point to part of the image (features of the pose, gesture); someone cannot argue in any way his answer, although more or less correctly identifies the general nature of the interaction, *perezhivanie*. Probably, these differences arise because adults surrounding the child demonstrate by their own behavior different patterns of nonverbal manifestations of experiences, as well as a different degree of attention to nonverbal features of communication. The attention of adults (in the family and in kindergarten) to positive-emotional communication with children and between children, engaging them in effective empathy, mutual assistance, community of emotional *perezhivanie* and mutual sympathy between group members [7] can contribute to the awareness of emotional representations.

Perhaps, thanks to additional, not prompting, but guiding questions, it is possible to identify not only the actual degree of awareness of the observed experiences and their nonverbal signs by the child, but also the process of awareness through their verbal definition or selection (by gesture) of elements from the general context.

In general, children of the 6th year of life can recognize the meaning of emotional experiences and interactions between communication partners with a focus on non-verbal behavioral features. They give verbal explanations, more often pointing to gestures and less often — to the features of the pose, catching the nuances of *perezhivanie*. At the same time, they are very actively guided by the mutual spatial location of the participants in the situation, explaining who is moving where (direction relative to the partner) or how they are turned (angle) to the partner.

Errors in the verbal definition of the meaning of individual gestures, actions entail errors in understanding the nature of interaction and the overall content of the relationship. In ex-

ceptional cases, the child, having voiced an incorrect interpretation of the experiences of the characters or their relationships based on individual gestures, then corrected the error based on from the “returned” perception of the holistic context of the situation depicted in the picture. But much more often errors in the interpretation of gestures arose due to the isolation and inaccuracy of the perception of individual gestures outside of their connection with the holistic content of the depicted situation or because of the external similarity with another gesture familiar to the child from personal experience. So, according to the picture (No. 2) “teases — cries”, many children did not recognize the teasing gesture (show their nose), and the position of the hands of the depicted man was probably correlated with the more well-known pictorial gesture of playing an imaginary pipe, which they could observe or perform (for example, at a *matinee*). Perhaps the gesture of “showing nose” to tease another is leaving the subculture of preschoolers or is more relevant for children of other ages.

The results obtained using the “Emotional Interactions” method do not coincide with the data of another study [18], where the vast majority (up to 75%) of 5—7-year-old children revealed a high level of recognition (by pictures) of people’s emotional states. In our opinion, such a “high” result is a consequence of an incorrect evaluation system (which, unfortunately, is not described by the author). Our methodology and evaluation system more adequately and differentially reflect the characteristics of children of the 6th year of life in understanding people’s emotions, which allows us to judge their spontaneous emotional representations.

Thus, we can state the following:

1. The hypothesis is confirmed: spontaneous emotional representations of children of the 6th year of life in general correctly reflect the meaning of people’s experiences with orientation to external nonverbal signs.

2. Children of the 6th year of life, due to personal life experience (without special train-

ing), can recognize accurately the emotional meaning of interactions and experiences of people (depicted in the pictures) — with varying degrees of awareness of nonverbal signs by which they are guided: from the ability to argue their answer with naming, indicating these signs to recognition of difficulties in such justification.

3. Nonverbal signs by which children of the 6th year of life can navigate when recognizing the emotional meaning of interactions are the relative size of the personal space of each of the participants in the situation (in the picture), their mutual location (angles) and movements (converge, move away), features of posture, gestures (including the position of the hands). These verbal explanations, nonverbal references to fragments of images most often take place after recognizing the holistic context of the situation of interaction of the char-

acters in the picture or the general nature of their relationship (the whole before the parts).

4. An erroneous interpretation of a gesture arises based on inaccuracy in the perception of external features, without considering its combination with other features of nonverbal behavior and / or by external similarity with other movements more familiar to the child from personal experience. An error in the interpretation of a gesture can distort the understanding of the emotional meaning of the situation, the nature of the relationship.

The task of the upcoming research of spontaneous representations of preschoolers about people's perezzhivanie is to compare the results of children of the 6th year of life, described in this article, with the data of children of the 5th and 7th years of life, obtained by the same method.

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Information about the authors

Elena V. Gorshkova, PhD in Pedagogics, Associate Professor, Chair of Preschool Pedagogy and Psychology, Moscow State University of Psychology & Education, Moscow, Russia, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8516-6573>, e-mail: e-gorshkova@yandex.ru

Информация об авторах

Горшкова Елена Викторовна, кандидат педагогических наук, доцент кафедры дошкольной педагогики и психологии, ФГБОУ ВО «Московский государственный психолого-педагогический университет» (ФГБОУ ВО МГППУ), г. Москва, Российская Федерация, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8516-6573>, e-mail: e-gorshkova@yandex.ru

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