Correlation of Motive and Method in Action Development

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The article raises a question how the cultural-historical psychology today should be researched. The analysis of transitions of periods of childhood, periods (ages) and epochs of development, presented in D.B. Elkonin’s understanding of the essence of periodization of child’s development requires the identification of the situations when clearly appears the correlation of motive, purpose and method in the cumulative action of a child and an adult. Identifying such situations requires a change in the position of the researcher-experimenter, a consideration of the way and conditions of the child-adult interaction, i.e., a consideration of situations in which the Mediating Action unfolds. It’s required from the researchers in Nonclassical Psychology.

Keywords: non-classical psychology, cumulative action, mediatory action, productive action, goal-determination, mediation situations, motive, goal, method in productive action.


Соотношение Мотива и Способа в актах развития действия

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В статье ставится методологический вопрос о способе исследования в современности Культурно-исторической психологии. Анализ переходов фаз периодов детства, самой периодизации развития и этапов, представленный в понимании Д.Б. Эльконином, целеуказания периодизации развития в детстве, требует выделения тех ситуаций, в которых ясно выступает соотнесенность мотива, цели и способа в Совокупном действии ребенка и взрослого. Выявление подобных ситуаций требует изменения позиции исследователя-экспериментатора — не лишь отстраненного рассмотрения действия другого человека, а рассмотрения способа и условий самого взаимообращения ребенка и взрослого, т. е. рассмотрения ситуаций разворачивания Посреднического действия. Таково требование к исследованиям в Неклассической психологии.

Ключевые слова: Неклассическая психология, Совокупное действие, Посредническое действие, Продуктивное действие, целеопределенность, ситуации посредничества, мотив, цель, способ в продуктивном действии.

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In the article by D.B. Elkonin on the periodization of childhood development [21, p. 60—77] the shift of leading activities occurs as an adjustment of proportion of “motive and purpose-oriented” and “procedure and technique-oriented” aspects of a child’s action. The foundation for that adjustment is the change of proportion of the form of communication of a child with an adult and the form of action of a child with an object. Herewith, D.B. Elkonin was insisting that “communication” and “action” and therefore “motive” and “method” of the action are not heterogeneous but interconnected realities.

The key question of the article is how, from what position, what method of action consideration the very proportion of its motive and method can be observed and not merely assumed. What are the situations in which that very proportion can act as their purpose, “center”? After all, you cannot seriously believe that our Teachers had simply been assuming that “if [the child] does it, then he wants to”. To illustrate the point of the key question of the article, I’ll ask a simple question: When does a thoughtful educator notice the correlation between the motive and the method of pupil’s action? Only when he impetuously runs to the blackboard to show his solution for the assignment, or when the pupil asks a question related to the point of the assignment?2

For A.N. Leontyev the answer to the question on the correlation between an action’s motive and method lied in the term “Aim” — discernment of the relation between the motive and the aim as the action’s “Pur- pose”. In the definiteness of the aim the action’s motive and method become correlated.3 However, the very constitution of the aim of action definition and not just attainment of an aim distinct in its features, as it were, is under question; discernment of the aim’s conditions and mode of givenness also requires a special analysis, and the subject of that analysis is the differentiation between the form and the type of those actions which have a directly given aim and those whose unfurling is its revelation. Thus, description from outside, so to speak, of another person’s action that has already taken place in terms of “motive-aim-method” is not the position from which the very acts of their correlation can be discussed.

In 1978 D. B. Elkonin published the article “Notes on Development of Object Actions in Early Childhood” [21, p. 130—141] in which he analyzed the meditation experience of the object action formation by his grandson. I believe (and have already written about it), that this article reconstructs the subject and method of Activity Approach [18], it reconstructs the Position of the Researcher-Experimenter.

So, what is reconstructed? The article examines, in the words of D.B. Elkonin, “the Joint Action” [21, p. 518] of a child and an adult and, on closer reading, identifies the condition of the mediation effect — that reciprocal reversion of a child and an adult, that unfolding of it in which the action is internalized by the child. The unfolding itself acts as the research subject, i.e. it essentially poses the question how and when does the word of the adult (“the sign”) become directed towards the child. Here’s when the Position of the researcher changes: the action’s unfolding doesn’t act as premanifested, so to speak, as a revealed and “presented” to the researcher or educator reality of his method, motives, and aims.

The revealedness of the action method to the educator often acts as the necessary sequence of operations. In such an approach what’s left is to set the sequence of necessary reference points — the “orienting part” of an action (P.Y. Galperin), instead of initiating its “orienting function” (A.N. Leontyev) — transforming the execution [of the action] into orientation. It is in the success of such transformation, the child’s support for the initiation of his orientation specifically that gives rise to the chance of revealedness of an actual “encounter” between the adult and the child in the action’s formation and the “encounter” within it, the correlation between the action’s motive, aim, and method.

I believe, that precisely this position, in which the very situation of the “encounter” between the child and the adult in the action's unfolding is present, is the key sought-after in the method of study in Cultural-Historical Psychology as “Non-Classical Psychology” [21, p. 471]

By introducing the term Mediative Action (MA) in my studies, I tried to recreate and reinforce D.B. Elkonin’s

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1 In process of teaching children how to read leaded by G.A. Tsukerman [15], [16] with use of D.B. Elkonin’s renewed primary book, children’s questions are putting up on the blackboard.
2 See example of “the hunt” from A.N. Leontyev’s book “Problems of the Development of the Mind”, chapter “Emergence of consciousness” [10].
3 Even though D.B. Elkonin himself don’t emphasise this reconstruction.
4 “Address” is the key term in F.T. Michailov’s works [13].
5 The very division of the action into “parts” (orientation and completion) already entails a vision of the “necessary” action till the very inclusion of the adult into the process of acting of the child, instead of the act of the inclusion itself. However, firstly, the formation of the 3rd type of orientation (the mastery of reference point formation instruments), taken not just in relation to the result-success but in relation to the method and conditions of mastering the instruments, can change the position of an educator-experimentalist. Secondly, P.Y. Galperin’s view on psyche necessity situations implies a different understanding of orientation - as, in the words of V.P. Zinchenko, orientation of a “living action” [9].
6 For example, take a look at perception of Learning Task as overcoming of solving particularly practical task in Developmental Education [21], [8].
idea of a “turn”. It is important to note that D. Elkonin spoke about the correlation between a “motive and purpose-oriented” and a “procedure and technique-oriented” aspects of action, analyzing the essence of age transitions. By reinforcing this view, I believe that MA itself as a Joint Action is only appropriate on the “turns” of activity. Thus, I insist that the answer to the article’s key question on the situation and the phenomenon, the correlation between the motive and the method, the nature of their “encounter” in action is possible exclusively in examining the transition situations, the situations of MA unfurling appropriateness. The development of action is precisely the actuality under questioning for the answer to given questions.

Because studies that examine such situations are already published8 I’ll only briefly describe the mechanism of those situations in four theses.

- In ontogenesis the notion of motive as a “subject of necessity” (especially taking the naturalistic conception of an object as a ready, self-operating thing into consideration) needs to be fully defined. For example, the emergence of the directly emotional communication in the first phase of infancy. An infant’s smile in response to the smile of an adult doesn’t occur by itself, being initially a spontaneous defensive and reflexive reaction (contraction of facial muscles). Firstly, that response needs to be initiated by “cultivating”, forming the address overcoming infant spontaneity. Secondly, not some “object” but the address specifically, the act of Calling serves as a motive. Using L.I. Elkoninova’s terminology [23], [24] we can say that the Motive is ought to be understood as a Call (understood in terms of activity) and its internalization as an Answer to the Call9.

- Later on, during the period of internalization of object actions both in the adult’s activity (addressing) and in the child’s activity complications arise. The adult is faced with forming such an indication to the boundary (to “it’s not allowed, not like that”) wherein the parent-child attachment will not “break”, but will manage to withstand, and the child is faced with overcoming one challenge (“immediate desire”) in another10. Here are notable instances of “playful disobedience”, in the words of D.B. Elkonin [21, p. 515]. The child, looking at the adult and repeating his “warnings” (“tut-tut-tut”, “no-no-no”), is actively, looking at the adult, does what is “not allowed” — “crosses” the boundary [18], [20]. But it’s not just “disobedience”, after all, — that’s exactly how and when the purpose of the adult’s word-gestures and the very boundaryness become clearly apparent for the child.11 In playful rejection, in Challenging the adult the purpose of the adult’s word-gesture is tested and affirmed, i.e. tested and affirmed is the very Action Method. Here the Method becomes foreseeable and in that sense revealed. Such is the commencement of the Joint Action as meditation (MA).

- Another example from the repeatedly mentioned article by D. B. Elkonin on the formation of object actions. A grandson liked helping the adults and especially taking the dishes from the living room to the kitchen. Meanwhile, his action was cloven between a gaze directed towards his grandfather who was walking along with him, and holding the dishes while doing so. In these oscillations the approvals of the adult were affirming the retention, in the words of B.A. Arkhipov, of the “body axis” [1] in motion, and precisely in its retention (through the adult), i.e. in testing the action method, has been emerging and forming his relationship with the action’s motive and aim (bringing the dishes to the kitchen). The adult was the mainstay of that relationship specifically.

- My youngest daughter often used to take walks with me. When she was around two years old, she developed the following situation-game. When we were walking in the courtyard she would move away from me a few steps, then a few more and a bit more after that, all the while provocatively-emphatically looking back at me as if to say “Come on, Daddy, run up, take my hand, stop me!”. The girl did not have an “aim” of reaching some place — she was not approaching something, but rather walking away from something. And as I was running up to her, the “catharsis” of the encounter would start playing out. I believe, that the purpose of her performed action was to test the boundaries of her “I can” through me. Walking served as an affirmation of the action as hers, her own, something internalized. That very “her ownness” (subsequently “I myself”) was the motive, which had been appearing and forming as action completion. Here, in the emergence of such a motivation, the action subjectivity’s nascency is performed in ontogenesis. Such is, in my opinion, a stage of interiorization, understood and formed in ontogenesis (unlike functional genesis) a transition from testing the Mainstays of a possible action to testing its possibilities (its Field), which is happening in the new “I can” Motive. In action method’s development (and not in the method “in and of itself”) the subjectivity is formed and formalized as an action’s “motive and purpose-oriented” essence — forming “my action”.

So, firstly, precisely the method (form) of the address makes the address motivating, “calling” (and not only in infancy but throughout one’s entire life). Secondly, in costructing the MA the affirmation of mediation (in the form of “playful” rejection as well) is an affirmation...
of the semantic field, the focalization of the “turn” in a situation of a possible action. Thirdly, in “oscillations” of the action completion method the “motive and aim-oriented” directionality emerges, gets tested and retained. The “reference points” get experimented with and tested specifically, and not merely outlined, and get retained only that way, and precisely in that retainment the action method correlates with the motive and the aim. Fourthly, the interiorization (individualization) of the action method in ontogenesis happens in testing and formalizing of the action’s Subjectivity as its motive. In all of these instances the action’s completion, i.e. completeness, is realized as testing and retainment of its mainstays and its field, and not just as a “technique” of consecutive movement across the given reference points. Precisely in this testing and retainment the Motive is affirmed in the Action Method and is internalized in that affirmation, it acts as Its Own. Such are the situations and phenomena of Motive and Method’s correlation in the completion of the Action Event.14

Here it must be noted that the term “procedure and technique-oriented” in relation to the Action Method is applicable only to the functional genesis. In ontogenesis, understood as MA’s Development, the completion of an action acts as an attempt—test—retainment of its completeness.

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The assertions on the completion-completeness of the MA (interiorization on an ontogenic scale) necessitate a return to the notions on aim definition. In the examples above (excluding the last one) the aim was pronounced in its features. Thereby, precisely its accomplishment, carrying out the behavior to a distinctly given “point”, was the criterion of the action completion. Thus, as an example, a mountaineer’s aim, the mountain top, is given and its achievement emerges in the accomplishment’s catharsis. He needs to hold on to the difficult method of achievement15. The world (“the path”) of such an action, following F.E. Vasilyuk and O.I. Genisaretsky [3], we can call simple (clearly “composed”) and difficult (demanding significant effort to reside in it).

In ontogenesis, development, all the various forms of action (resultant, playful, educational) unfold and alternate. I believe, the completeness of ontogenesis is the formation of the Productive Action [19], the “product’s production”. The aforesaid should not be understood as if the Production is the “final stage” of development. On the contrary, the recreation of an act of development in it becomes a means to reside in the World.

The world of Productive Action’s unfurling is both complex and difficult [3]. That world lacks ready, preset criteria for an action’s completeness, it lacks indications to how it should be concluded. It lacks preset “aim properties” and, unlike the actions of a mountaineer, “the mountain top” is not visible. When Van Gogh started painting the peasants boots, he couldn’t see how the final painting looks, just like Paul Cézanne couldn’t see the final form of a still-life neither in the beginning, nor in the process of painting. Here are appropriate wise words of M.K. Mamardashvili: “...when I draw something, I am not drawing something I see, I draw to see” [12, p. 173]. The same applies to S. Richter who, while performing a piece, experiments with and tests the completeness itself, the pronouncedness of the intrigue of the piece’s form, the method of its intonation16, all the while knowing its last note and chord. The same applies to a scientist or a good journalist who, while working on an article or a book, or making a presentation, is looking for, experimenting with, testing that form, and therefore that Method, which will make the intrigue of the piece more pronounced first and foremost for him and, later on, for viewers, listeners, readers. The latter will serve either as an affirmation, or a rejection of his efforts. Production is risky, it’s a Deed.

So, the Production’s success is the formation and testing of the Action, in the Method of which the pronouncedness of its completeness is manifested and affirmed, its Purpose (the “motive and aim-oriented” basis). The production’s “aim” is attainment and testing of the Action Method. Here, the connectedness between the Action Method and its Motive acts in its fullest measure.

I believe, the very unfurling of the Cumulative, Joint Action precisely is being Produced in the Mediation. The action’s Individualization is not negating but, on the contrary, reinforcing that problem. Thus, for example, when I’m writing this article I’m forming, reconstructing, and attempting to maintain anew the reciprocal reversion of my own thoughts and the thinking of Daniil B. Elkonin.

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• Accentuation and description of the correlation between the motive and the action formation method is only possible when solving the problem of action development’s analysis (in its ontogenesis), unlike the problem of “separate” action’s formation. D.B. Elkonin’s discovery of a new method of understanding childhood development’s periodization necessitates the revision and reconstruction of the Experimental-Genetic Method.

• The unfurling of meditation in the Joint Action of a child and an adult (the unfurling of the MA) becomes the object of study and experimentation. The subject of

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14 In regard to the realizedness of a cognitive act, M.K. Mamardashvili wrote: “any truly performed act of thinking can be considered an event... Aside the fact that a thought affirms a certain content, the very fact of said content’s affirmation and vision is an event...” [11, page 103].

15 Such a retention people call “volition”, scarcely noting that “support” of a volitional principle constitutes the formation of orientation — experimenting with and testing the “twists” of the path.

16 Through the terms of “Psychology of Art” by L.S. Vygotsky: he is building up a plot and not a story [4]. Story was already given (“boot”, “fish on the plate”, musical notation of symphony, etc.)
study are the transition situations, “turn” situations in that unfurling. Such a study can be called “The Clinic of Experimental Genesis”. Such is, in my opinion, the method of operation in the present day of Cultural-Historical Psychology as Non-Classical Psychology.

• In the transition situations of the MA unfurling the affirmation of the Mediator’s address is formed as an affirmation of the Purpose of the “psychological instrument”. The action’s Motive and Method correlate precisely in such affirmation.

References


References


17 That activity is very possibly homological to phenomena of “exaptation” in phylogenesis.
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