

The Features of a Social Situation of Development of Children under Modern Russian Conditions

Alfiya Sultanova, Irina Ivanova

From the standpoint of cultural-historical approach in psychology, which had been proposed by L. S. Vygotsky and which was developed in Soviet and Russian psychology, ontogenesis of children needs to be studied in the socio-historical context. Analyzing the ontogenesis it is necessary to take into account both the internal processes of child development and external social conditions. For designation of this indivisible and complex combination L.S. Vygotsky introduced the term “social situation of development”. In connection with the rapid social change in modern Russia it is necessary to analyze anew the specifics of the social situation of development, typical for different age periods. From our point of view, nowadays many external and internal components of the social situation of development are changing. The most important interrelated changes include:

- 1. Deterioration of mental and somatic health of children of any age.*
- 2. Changing the motivation and the structure of value orientations of children and adolescents.*
- 3. The transformation of the institute of family and marriage, which leads to changes in child-parent relations and conditions of family upbringing.*
- 4. Modifications of the information environment (proliferation of computer technologies, increase of mass media influence, etc.).*
- 5. Increasing of social environment’s demands to children (generally in education), along with insufficient account of age-appropriate psychological and physiological features of the child.*
- 6. Modification of children’s mode of life as a result of urbanization processes, safety requirements, increasing of the migration and etc.*
- 7. The change of cultural environment in connection with globalization processes (generally with decrease of the popular tradition’s influence).*
- 8. The changes of the educational system (diversity of the educational institutions, unevenness of teaching staff’s skill level etc.).*

In our opinion, these changes are insufficiently considered as in elaborating practical methods of work with children as in carrying out of scientific researches. Meanwhile, these factors may have determinative significance, because the social situation of development determines as the dynamic of psychic ontogenesis throughout each age period, as the qualitative original psychological formations at the end of the period.

From the standpoint of cultural-historical approach in psychology, which had been proposed by L.S. Vygotsky and which was developed in Soviet and Russian psychology, ontogenesis of children should be studied in the socio-historical context. Analyzing the ontogenesis it is necessary to take into account both the internal processes of child development and external social conditions. For designation of this indivisible and complex combination L.S. Vygotsky introduced the term “social situation of development” (Vygotsky 1984).

Thus the social situation of development is a special combination of inner processes of development and outer conditions, typical for every age stage. There are two determinative characteristics of social development – environment (objective characteristics) and a child’s attitude to it (personal characteristics). Meanwhile social environment shouldn’t be understood like the factor mechanically determining the process of development. According to L.S. Vygotsky, a child’s development is a unique way of development. It happens not blindly, but purposefully. The world of culture, the world of ideal shapes is the source where a child gets samples and compares them with his own actions. At the same time an adult is the third party between a child and the world of cultural forms. An adult gives the behavioral stereotypes, which are assigned in the process of the development.

The social situation of development determines both the dynamics of psychic development during the relative age period and psychic formation, unique for that age period appearing by its end. By understanding the social situation of development, formed by the beginning of some age, it is possible to analyze how new formations, typical for that age appear, and consequently how the child’s personality changes.

Each age stage is characterized by a unique status of a child in the system of relationships accepted in the society. The child's status is characterized by objective conditions (social, economical, legal and others) on the one hand, and the needs of society on the other hand – existing comprehension in the society about age abilities of a child and what a child should be like (historical-cultural and chronological characteristics of a child's age, assigned in the society). There is a definite system of rights, which a child uses and duties which he or she should do. Every child, despite his or her individual development and the level of readiness faces the social position accepted in that society, when he or she reaches the definite age, and thus gets into the system of objective conditions, which determine the character of his or her life and activity at that age. Also it is crucially important for a child to answer those conditions. The success of the process of development will depend on that fact.

Thus the complex of external conditions is a very important factor for child development, and its change inevitably should influence on the course of ontogenesis. Meanwhile during the latest decades serious changes in all sides of the life of society have taken place. Quick changes within the short period of time in all spheres of people's life (economic, political, socio-cultural and others) can produce strong influence on life of a person, especially in the period when her or his personality is developing. So, due to rapid social changes in modern Russia it is necessary to analyze the specifics of the social situation of development, typical for different age periods again. From our point of view, nowadays many external and internal components of the social situation of development are changing. The most important interrelated changes include:

1. Deterioration of mental and somatic health of children of all age.
2. Changing the motivation and the structure of value orientations of children and adolescents.
3. The transformation of the structure of family and marriage, which leads to changes in child-parent relations and conditions of family upbringing.
4. Modifications of the information environment (proliferation of computer technologies, increase of mass media influence, etc.).
5. Increasing of social environment's demands to children (generally in education), along with insufficient account of age-appropriate psychological and physiological features of the child.

6. Modification of children's life style as a result of urbanization processes, safety requirements, increasing of the migration and etc.
7. The change of cultural environment in connection with globalization processes (generally with decrease of the popular traditions influence).
8. The changes of the educational system (diversity of the educational institutions, unevenness of teaching staff's skill level etc.).

Later on we'll consider these factors in more detail.

In Russia, over the past decades, there has been a tendency towards the deterioration of the mental and physical health in children of all ages. For example, for the period of 2001-2008 the incidence of diseases of the nervous system in children has increased by 29.6% (Federal State Statistics Service 2010). "Absolutely healthy" children in Russia make up only 21.4% of all school going children (Golikova 2010). According to the Health Ministry of Russia, the number of normal births is less than 38.6% and there is also a high instance of concomitant diseases in pregnant women (ibid). This pathology of pregnancy and childbirth primarily affects the status of the nervous system of the fetus. Meanwhile perinatal brain damage is a risk factor for negative development of a child and difficulties in social adaptation (Sultanova & Ivanova 2009).

It is necessary to notice that not only the pathology of nervous system can negatively influence on ontogenesis course. According to researches of the Russian authors, development of a child with a somatic disease proceeds in the changed social situation of development, and it defines specificity of a mental ontogenesis (Nikolaeva 1987).

So, the current statistical data show that a group of unhealthy children includes a considerable portion of the total child population. This fact should be taken into account when formulating training and educational processes and also in the development of corrective and remedial programs.

Another important factor that should be taken into consideration is changing the motivation and the structure of value orientations of modern children and adolescents. After the disintegration of Soviet Union social values were radically reconsidered and high ideals were replaced by pragmatic, utilitarian ideology. The children's organizations disappeared, but teenagers' desire to be included in different

social relationships remained. As a result many amateur teenage and youth groups appeared, and they were not oriented to socio-important goals and rather often deform the development of a personality (Feldshtein 2005). Since then the motivational sphere of children and teenagers has strongly changed. In the domestic literature there are the researches devoted to this problem. For example, academician D.I. Feldshtein compared the systems of leading motives of teenagers in 1950-1970 and after 1990. He found out considerable differences: in the past the social importance was dominating motive, and most of teenagers identified themselves with the whole group and sacrificed their own interests for the sake of the collective. Making a trade choice, these teenagers were focused on social value of profession, on personal qualities, typical for the representatives of that profession, on norms of relationships, typical for that professional circle. After 1990 the individual benefit became dominating motive of children and teenagers. Making a trade choice, these teenagers were focused on a financial factor, on the possibility to earn much in the future. At the same time, it is known that during the whole life all deeds and actions of a personality correlate with its value orientations, which were formed in childhood and fixed in teenage period.

Thus one of the most actual tasks for psychologists and representatives of related sciences is the search for such forms of life activity of teenagers, which let them become a responsible and useful subject of social life.

Also the social changes in our country have led to the transformation of family relations also. According to many experts (Eidemiller & Ustickis 2008), the features of modern Russian family are:

- increase of conflict relationships;
- decrease in satisfaction of family life (especially in women);
- weakening of family solidarity; it is necessary for family members to make many efforts to save their family.

Nowadays families have the “double burden“: the normal crises of families that are related to family life cycles, combined with the crises that are associated with social changes. Furthermore, individual changes, such as changing value orientations, also affects family relationships.

These factors led to the crisis phenomena in families such as: a disbalance of family structure and functions, the increase in the number of divorces and single parent families, antisocial lifestyle of some families, worsening of the quality of life; deterioration of conditions of the maintenance of children, increase of psycho-emotional overload in the adult population, the spread of ill-treatment of children in families.

This crisis of a modern family is one of the major causes of child distress and negatively affects the state of childhood in our country, leads to growth of a social orphanhood and increase in number of specific organizations, such as: children's homes and orphanages.

Under these conditions the number of divorces dramatically increases. Meanwhile, the divorce is a particularly difficult situation in which a family becomes a source of trauma. Despite high attention of the Government of Russia to the problem of divorce and taking some measures, such as: strengthening of the positions of demographically oriented programming in the country, admitting the Presidential program of stimulating birth rate, the law about the maternity capital; the statistics about divorces is not optimistic. According to Goscomstat data, there were 54 divorces to 100 marriages in 2007. The percentage of divorces to the registered marriages now makes 57.54% in our country (Federal State Statistics Service 2010). No matter what the reasons of divorces are, this event is traumatic for a child. The consequences of the divorce can be different for children, depending on the stage of their development, age and sex; but in any case children suffer before and after the divorce.

The transformation of the structure of family and marriage is a serious threat for children's future, because just in childhood the main trends which determine the fate of a child are formed. And it is very difficult to change these trends in the adult age.

Also a huge influence on formation of a child's personality is produced by media sources, press, radio, TV and the Internet. It is connected with global macro-social changes: the world of the beginning of XXI century is often defined as an informative society, where information becomes one of the economic and social resources. The continuous information growth puts the task of orientation in a complicated informative flow. This is a difficult task that the child cannot solve without

the assistance of adults. The growing role of mass media in the process of socialization, especially on teenage and youth stages, is mentioned both by foreign and Russian investigators (Feldshtein 2005, Abramenkova 2008). Modern mass media determine the space of a child's development and socialization to great extent. It should be noted that during the last two decades the plot of TV-programs, films, articles etc. has changed. Many TV programs, shown at day time, require emotional maturity and, children before school age should not watch them. As adults are busy at work, it's often difficult for them to see what programs their children watch. A huge amount of programs, demonstrating violence, aggression, criminal films can produce a negative effect on a child's psychic, formation of a wrong picture of the world. Violence on screen increases the risk of aggressive behavior and can cause an emotional trauma in a child. Besides, a TV-set produces a negative effect on vital activities (sleeping, physical training, games in the open air and so on).

Mass media become for a child not a source of information but a source of easy impressions, a habitual source of idle time spending. TV and computer begin to substitute a real game and real communication. The use of information technologies leads to the reformation of traditional kinds of activity. For many children computer games have become more important than games with other kids, books and text-books. According to Russian sociologists, the number of teenagers, who read books regularly, decreased over the past decades from 50% to 18% (Morozov 2009). These factors lead to the fact that during the last decade there is a crisis of game culture, especially of role games; the image of an ideal adult is disappearing; children's motivation gets westernization and mercantile features. According to the data of poll among educators, today children have "the main goal in life – to buy something, that other children do not have" (Vul'fov et al. 2007).

As we noted, nowadays deformation of the family structure and deterioration of family communication lead to the lack of the feeling of an integrative family. Teenagers and young people frustrated in family life tend to virtual environment. The main activity at that age is communication with peers, but the virtual communication cannot replace the real one. On the one hand the transition to postindustrial society, formation of new informative environment, improving technical achievements, changes in culture give new possibilities for a growing person, but also, on

the other hand, these phenomena may be the factors of risk for normal process of development.

The modern social situation of development of a child has another important feature. The social environment's demands to children are constantly increasing. First of all, the limits of age requirements to different skills and abilities of children go down. The skills which were advisable for children of 6-7 years (for example the skills to read and count) in the 80ies of last century, is now required from the children of 3-4 years. Many methods and technologies targeted to intensification of the education processes of early age children are developed (for example, "reading from the cradle"). Among them there are methods with use of films which should be shown to babies many times a day. Such methods ignore the fact that the leading activity of a child at infantile age is situational-personal communication with an adult, and the methods have "not developing but destructive character" (Smirnova 2009).

Practically since the birth of a child parents put a task to give their child knowledge, adequate to time requirements. But often they don't have pedagogical and psychological competence and follow all offered innovations, overload the child's nervous system and, in fact, break the normal development. Modern educational market promotes early learning. Many developing centers for children have been opened, explaining to parents the necessity of early education. In kindergarten we can frequently see 3-4 year old kids, which sit at desks. But the leading activity of a child of preschool age is play (Leontiev 1983). At play a child receives the knowledge about the environment, develops the creative imagination, and gets the necessity to regulate relationships with other children; the norms of moral behavior and moral feeling are formed. A role-playing game produces huge influence on the formation of a child's personality. But modern children practically have no time to play; and if they don't go to a kindergarten, they have nobody to play with them. Besides, market offers various toys. A toy has to help a child to comprehend the environment, to teach him to do goal oriented actions, and to help the development of thinking, memory, speech, emotions and imagination. Usually the parents think that only didactic toys (for example, kits for memory training and so on) may have developing function. But emotional-personal spheres of a child are ignored; their attitude to the world and other people is also ignored. Another modern trend is that a toy more and more becomes an independent object, which is

practically a full replica, like a robot. Traditional toys became a rarity. Often parents choose a technically complicated monster, forgetting that a toy is a model of the world or another person for a child and that a kid can identify himself with a toy.

In recent decades, such important part of the social situation of development of children as an educational environment has changed. In Russia, like in any other state, education is one of the main factors of society progress. But the modern education is not uniform and stable. The system of secondary education in Russia is in a state of permanent reform. Only over the last 10 years there were following basic changes: children of six year age have started to be accepted in school, training term has been prolonged till 11 years, the number of studied subjects has increased, different kinds of educational institutions with different training programs have opened, at some schools the system of marks has changed, uniform graduation examination has been introduced, the tendency to test the system of examination has amplified, and so on. However, these improvements have not led to better quality. On the contrary, during the last decades the quality of education in our country has decreased. For example, there are data of a study conducted for the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA): level and quality of competent reading and literacy at 15-year-old Russian schoolboys are significantly lower than international standards; the Russian pupils on this area in 2009 have occupied 41-43th place among 65 countries. By results of research of mathematical literacy the Russian pupils have taken 38-40th place among 65 countries (PISA 2009). According to PISA, the Russian students are not well prepared for future challenges, the majority of Russian students cannot analyze, reason and communicate effectively and do not have the capacity to continue learning throughout life. The Russian researchers assert that secondary school has stopped to develop the culture of thinking necessary for further education in higher institutions. Besides, some dangerous trends have appeared: systematic decrease of requirements, produced to the knowledge of students, applied character of education, utilitarian attitude to received knowledge, the replacement of formation of thinking ability by information about a large number of new things, a large number of educational programs (parents and pupils are guided in them with difficulty), unevenness of teaching staff's skill level (Feldshtein 2005).

It's important to mention, that educational loading of schoolchildren in the Soviet school was planned in a way that there was no overloading of kids. Schoolchildren had time to go in for sports, organize their leisure, to go for a walk. At present educational overloading leads to decrease of educational and learning motivation, impair children's health. Besides, giving a child to school or kindergarten, parents often exclude themselves from the process of bringing up, leaving only economical function for themselves. The problem of adapting children to the circumstances of primary school is extremely urgent nowadays. According to researchers, until 60% of primary schoolchildren have difficulties in adaptation to the circumstances of school education (Glozman, Potanina & Soboleva 2008). A big number of children has difficulties in communication and can't cope with study program. The difficult situation in the education system demands much of teachers and school psychologists produce high level of requirements to their qualification and presence of psychological knowledge of the teachers. But sometimes qualification of teachers is not good enough; lack of professional competence of the teachers is a very actual problem (Vul'fov et al. 2007).

Another actual problem of the modern educational process is the theory and practice of pedagogical support of children -migrants and refugees in modern educational space. There are practically no books, connected with educational paradigm, adaptation, support and characteristic features of children -immigrants.

Educational overloading, decrease of the prestige of intellect in society, lack of knowledge propaganda, a big number of low quality programs in mass media, unevenness of teaching staff's skill level reduce learning motivation have a negative influence on the development of child's personality.

Thus over the past decades there have been serious changes in all spheres of society. The situation of development of children also has changed. All factors mentioned above define specificity of occurring changes. There is no doubt that the current processes have both positive and negative sides. Also it is obvious that the negative trends of modern life increase the probability of abnormalities in the child's development. Without studying of occurring changes and without deep understanding of mechanism of development of children under modern conditions the adequate educational process and the effective system of psychology-pedagogical support to the children can't be constructed.

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Sachregister

social situation of development
mental development
children
socio-cultural changes
modern society

Personenregister

Abramenkova
Eidemiller
Feldshtein
Glozman
Golikova
Ivanova
Leontiev
Nikolaeva
Potanina
Selezneva
Siniagin
Siniagina
Smimova
Soboleva
Sultanova
Ustickis
Vul`fov
Vygotsky