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THE STUDY OF ATTITUDES OF CHILDREN OF SENIOR
PRESCHOOL AGE

Nadezda M. Zyryanova (a)*, Marina S. Egorova (a), Alina A. Pankratova (a), Oksana V. Parshikova(a), Svetlana D. Pyankova(a), Ylia D. Chertkova (a)

*Corresponding author

(a) Lomonosov Moscow State University, Mokhovayast. 11/9, Moscow, 125009, Russia;nzyr@mail.ru. +7-916-298-5486

Abstract

The article describes the results of the Moscow longitudinal study of attitudes of senior preschool children. The study has been conducted for more than 25 years. Its objective is to analyze the impact of changes taking place in the country on the lives of preschool children and on their perceptions of it. This study is an example of a modern approach to studying the characteristics of young children. The primary method of the study is the qualitative analysis that enables to “hear the voice of a child” and look at the life of children with their eyes. To date, seven surveys (reviews) have been performed, each of which included interviews with senior preschool children: the children talked about how they live currently, what they think about what is happening, and about what they see their life in the future, about what they like, what they dream about, what they fear, what they know about politics and the economy, what they want to become when they grow up, etc. The results of this study testify to the impact of social changes on a number of children’s perceptions about the world and themselves, as well as the stability of certain representations. It is also shown that, in general, the well-being of preschool children does not depend on social changes. Family members such as parents constitute a buffer that protects children from the negative consequences of crises.

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Keywords: Senior preschool age, worldview, attitudes, social changes, structured interview, qualitative analysis.



1. Introduction

The study described in this article was initiated in the winter of 1992, to reveal how market reforms in Russia affected the attitudes of young children. Then a few more reviews were conducted: during periods of relative stabilization of the economic situation (May 1995 and spring 1998), after the banking crisis and the devaluation of the national currency (autumn 1998). The next review was performed in 2000-2001 (when there were many significant events such as resignation of Boris Yeltsin from the position of president of Russian and the appointment of Vladimir Putin as the President, the Second Chechen War, the catastrophe of the submarine Kursk, the terrorist attack in Moscow, the fire on the Ostankino television tower, the approval of the national flag, the national anthem and the emblem of Russia). In 10 years, in 2010, another stage of the research was carried out to assess how the children's concepts of the world were affected by the events of the decade, and to find out whether children born in the twentieth century were different from their peers of the past. In 2016, after the accession of the Crimea, military operations in Ukraine, deterioration of relations with the United States and European countries, mutual introduction of sanctions, devaluation of the ruble, another stage of the study was launched. Thus, each review was conducted after certain significant events in the country. Based on the results of the first reviews, the book "From the life of preschool children. Children in a changing world" (Egorova et al., 2001), was published, as well as a number of articles (Zyryanova, 2010, 2017; Egorova et al., 2012; Egorova et al., 2016).

2. Problem Statement

It is possible to conclude that crisis changes attitudes of children on some themes, but does not mention the general balance of their existence.

3. Research Questions

1. Can we fix the world images of the preschool children in the period of economic crisis?
2. How the fundamental changes in the country affect the worldview of children?
3. Do give qualitative methods of the analysis an opportunity to compare world images of modern preschool children (born in the new century) with their peers, born at the end the 20th century?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of investigation is to analyze the impact of changes taking place in Russia on the lives of preschool children and on their perceptions of it.

5. Research Methods

Participants of the study are children of six years old, attending kindergartens in Moscow. Children of this age already have some life experience and can tell about it. But, and it is very important, six-year-old children are open-minded, sincere, they tend to say what they think, rather than what adults expect from them. The planning of the conversation with the child was based on general principles of interviewing small children, which are considered in a number of works (for example, Brubacher et al., 2015, 2016; Hritz et al., 2015; Roberts, Lamb & Sternberg, 2004). A 60-minute conversation is held with each child, which

involves a free story of a child on the question asked, immersion in topics he is more interested in. The conversation starts with the establishment of contact with the child, for which a small conversation is conducted on general topics (“What is your name?”, “What were you doing?”, etc.), then the topic of the conversation is told to the child and he is asked to say everything that he knows. The conversation is conducted in free form; the questions to the child are mostly open-ended. During the interview, the interviewer supports the child, shows interest in what the child is telling. The child can ask again the interviewer, he may not to answer the question, if he does not want to or does not know the answer. When the child is silent, additional questions are asked to him to give him the opportunity to consider the issue from a different angle. But if the child says “I do not know”, the interviewer does not insist on answering. The child may be distracted during other interviews on other topics, get immersed deeper into one of them.

Interviews are recorded on a digital voice recorder, then they are deciphered and analyzed: a qualitative analysis of the contents of the children’s answers is carried out. A thesaurus of their statements on topics is compiled. To identify the topics, an approach is used that is close to the general inductive method of analyzing the qualitative data of D. Thomas (2006). The primary objective of this approach is to highlight the most frequent, dominant or significant topics that are available in raw data.

The process of inductive coding consists in the following: the initial reading of the conversation text, then the identification of specific text segments relevant to the objectives of the study, then the selection and determining the focused topics, followed by the revision and consolidation of categories and the obtaining of broader categories or topics; and finally, creating the model or theory relating to the primary topic of the study (Thomas, 2006).

6. Findings

The data obtained enable to draw interesting and important conclusions not only about the children’s ideas about the world, but also about their life in Russia in the era of fundamental changes. They offer an opportunity to see how events are reflected in the worldview of preschool children, what factors contribute to the fact that children remain children in any social situation, to consider how children change with time. The initial hypothesis of the study suggested that the fundamental changes in the country affect the worldview of children, that during periods of intense social changes, children are more informed about public life, have higher anxiety and less prosperous self-concept. These hypotheses have been confirmed to some extent.

As a result of inductive analysis, the themes were selected, the children’s views of which are subject to social changes, and those on which the notions remain stable.

The ideas of preschool children change particularly discernibly during periods of dramatic and significant social changes. For example, during periods of relative stability in a conversation on politics, children of this age not only unaware of what is happening in the world, but also find it difficult to answer questions about events in Russia, they often cannot recall the surname of our president. During periods of intense social change, children become somewhat more informed, for example, in 2016 everyone knew that Putin was the president of Russia, some could say that there was a war in Ukraine, and the most informed ones could even tell about the leader of the opposition, Navalny. But, nevertheless, children have very little idea of world events in these periods as well. So, almost all of the preschoolers surveyed by us in 2016

believed that our country is the best in the world, our president is good. But they found it difficult to explain why they think so. All this shows that the events taking place in public life do not affect seriously the lives of children even during periods of major changes. Children have other affairs more important for them. As an example, one boy's gave the following answer to the question what they say at home about our president: "Nothing. We do not talk about him specifically, because we do not have time, we have our own affairs".

Other ideas of children were also revealed, which reflected changes in the life of society. Thus, for example, it was revealed that the structure of children's desires has changed: the amount of "magical" wishes has increased. It turned out that modern six-year-olds orient themselves in the world of professions better than their peers of past years. The changes in the views of children about the use of the Internet, computers, tablets and mobile phone are also notable. Attitudes of preschool children in the sphere of social life are also subject to social changes (for example, the notion of unemployment and the unemployed, of the rich and poor, etc. has changed).

Their ideas about family roles, the number of children in the family, about friendship and love, about good and bad professions, about favorite books, games, cartoons, etc were relatively stable. Thus, for example, within the framework of the theme "Family and family relations", children told about the role of men and women in the family, about sibling relationships, about the participation of grandparents in their lives, about love, marriage, and how they see their own family in future, how many children would they like to have. It turned out that the notion of male and female roles remains stable throughout the years of research and is typical for a traditional family. Most of the children would like to have more brothers and sisters. And many of them want to be older children in the family. Children from large families or those having conflicts with their brother or sister speak more often about the unwillingness to have another sibling. When asked about their future life, the children basically said that they would get married, create a family, because they would meet a good person and love him or her. Most of them would like to have two children in the future. When discussing the topic of adopted children, preschool children expressed contradictory opinions. On the one hand, almost everyone believes that children should have better life in the family rather than in the orphanage, but only a third of them would like to see a adopted child in their own family. Children who answered this question negatively said that a child from the orphanage would be alien to them, expressed fears about his or her behavior and health.

7. Conclusion

The results of the research revealed that dynamics of changes from 1992 to 2016 is different for different sides of children's life. Some children's images and attitudes did not show any significant changes from 1992. In general, it turned out that children of this age consider themselves happy, despite the crises. Obviously, in normal families, parents try to protect children from the negative consequences of crises, preserve their habitual way of life, do their best to make children live well.

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