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SELF-IDENTIFICATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN
MODERN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The present article considers the phenomenon of self-identification. Primary school age (from 7 to 11 years old) is an appropriate period to observe the dynamics of self-identification. This is the moment when children are able to reflect and draw their conclusions about themselves and verbalize their own characteristics. In the article, the authors present the results of the study, in which they make an attempt to portray a primary school child growing up in the modern social contexts through the characteristics and representations of children themselves, their interests, preferences, and inclinations for certain objects and subjects. The authors' objective is to reveal peculiarities of self-identification and worldview at an early school age. Data collection, projective conversation and content analysis are used as the methods appropriate to the age characteristics of primary school children. The authors prove that the child's views on himself/herself as a person are characterized mainly by positive modality and orientation to the present moment of life. Children aged 7-9 years old differentiate personal objective features positioning themselves in the system of family relationships, in the peer group and school community. By the end of junior school age (10-11 years old), children distinguish their own subjective characteristics. Leisure is the main activity for most of children. Along with the educational activity, play is of great importance at primary school age. In the overwhelming majority of cases, children see the mother, parents and family as the main objects of love..

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1. Introduction

The information society is an important factor that affects the nature of an individual's social development. It brings significant changes to the way children form ideas about themselves interrelating their own characteristics with other people's assessments. This correlation allows us to talk about changes in the self-identification of modern children.

Identification is the process that reflects the desire of a person to adjust to the system of interpersonal interactions. T. Shibutani speaking of "social matrix identity" proves that human behaviour consists of a number of adaptations to life conditions, but each person must come to an agreement with himself, as well as with other characteristics of the world (Shibutani, 1998). Self-identification as a process starts with the development of a personality in early childhood (Bozhovich, 2008). The purpose of self-identification is creation of a self-image, recognition of one's personal and subjective characteristics, and adequate orientation in social relations (Baron, 2011). R. Burns, G. Epps Edgar, E. Erikson underline that through the filter of self-identification a person better understands the relationships between and with people around, and the whole world (Epps & Smith, 1984; Erikson, 1950).

According to the ideas of O.B. Chesnokova, J. Eccles, V.S. Mukhina, S.I. Rozum, in early childhood the child begins to differentiate between denotation and connotation (Chesnokova, 2002; Eccles, 1999; Mukhina, 1999; Rozum, 2007). At this moment, the child is already able of identification, which leads to establishing relationships with another person on positive emotional principles. At the age of 3-6 years old, the child begins to make a difference between the internal attitude towards himself and external ways of expressing attitudes in compliance with the child's ideas about interpersonal relationships and the incipient ability to reflect. Gradually, the child acquires social categorization at the verbal level. By the end of preschool age the child begins to differentiate stable long-term relationships from their situational manifestations. In this period of time, the self-concept that is formed in the network of interpersonal relationships begins to play an important role in social cognition which is the reconstruction of these relations in the child's subjective space. The child gets access to the ways of learning not only other social subjects, but also himself.

In the structure of modern knowledge on this subject, there is an obvious lack of empirical material which reflects children's ideas about themselves and the world around them. This makes it difficult to understand the inner world of children, their subjective attitudes to the world around them, and thereby makes it difficult to find a way to understand individuality and to build adequate ways to educate and socialize. For example, in the works by O.A. Karabanova, there is an attempt to systematize the empirical data reflecting psychological and social features of primary school children (Karabanova, 2014).

So, primary school age (from 7 to 11 years old) is the most interesting in regard to completeness and dynamics of self-identification. This is the moment when children are able to reflect and draw the conclusions about themselves, and thus can verbalize their own characteristics.

2. Problem Statement

The problem of self-identification is one of the essential ones in childhood psychology and pedagogy nowadays, as teachers and parents want to know how they can understand their children better and help them become adjusted to the modern social environment. This question deals with the issues of self-

consciousness development at primary school age and self-identification peculiarities of primary school children (aged 7-11). It also encompasses the evolution of children's ideas about themselves and the world under the influence of the social factors of personal development and schooling.

3. Research Questions

The present study discusses the following issue:

What are the child's views of himself/herself as a person?

Which activities predominate in the primary school children's circle of interests?

What objects (subjects) attract primary school children mostly?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to reveal some peculiarities of self-identification and worldview at an early school age. Also, we intend to follow the dynamics of self-knowledge evolution at this age. The authors have made an attempt to make a portrait of a primary schoolchild growing up in the modern social contexts.

5. Research Methods

In the course of the research we used data collection methods appropriate for the age characteristics of primary school children, namely projective conversation with the subsequent factual generalization of the data array which was obtained by content analysis. This was done with the help of the technique developed at the Institute of Childhood of the Russian State Pedagogical Institute under the leadership of Alexandra Gogoberidze. Three positions were chosen as the criteria for the analysis: self-identification, value orientations, attitude towards school. To assess each criterion children were asked the following questions.

- A new boy/girl has come to your class. What will you tell him/her about yourself? What kind of person are you?

- What are you good at? What do you like to do?

- What do you like most of all?

6. Findings

The responses of 35 children (7 to 11 years old) studying at 5 primary schools in the Sverdlovsk region were analyzed. As a result, the following data were received.

6.1. Children's ideas of themselves as personalities.

The answers received showed that 7-11-year-old children clearly expressed their attitude towards themselves and determine its modality both positive and negative. Some ambivalent responses were received only in the sample of the children aged 9 years old in 13% of cases, which could be attributed to the individual development crisis. For the whole sample of the respondents aged 7-11 years old it was found that in 86% of cases the children tended to have a positive attitude towards themselves. However, 11% of the children in statements about themselves reflected a negative attitude towards themselves as personalities

and low self-esteem. They mentioned their qualities, such as flippancy, weakness, mischievous, etc., indicating a strained relationship with parents and teachers. Analysis of the children's answers belonging to different age groups within primary school stage showed that self-esteem problems revealed themselves most clearly at the age of 8 and 9. It was during these periods that the children in 20% and 13% of cases, respectively, expressed a negative attitude towards themselves and identify their own negative characteristics (never wear a school uniform, don't listen to parent, etc.).

In general, the analysis of the responses of the 7-11-year-olds showed that they characterized themselves from both objective and subjective points of view. In this regard, the proportion of answers of 7-8-year-olds indicating the subjective features was 45%, while for 9-year-olds this indicator reached 73%. The children of primary school age were clearly aware of their family and family relationships (sister, brother, son, daughter, granddaughter, etc.), gender identity (girl, boy), social relations (pupil, schoolgirl, schoolboy). The turning point in the reflection of personal characteristics came at the age of 9, when children equally perceived themselves subjectively and objectively and mainly referred to their personal traits manifested in interaction, communication, and activity (playful, active, cautious, etc.). It was important to note that the 7-8-year-olds also attempted to describe their personal characteristics with the emphasis on the qualities of the subject of activity (a hard worker, lazy, neat, etc.) and emotional characteristics of a person (merry, favourite, a teaser etc.). The answers given by the 10-11-year-olds showed that at this age children made distinction describing themselves as subjects of activity (play often, like retelling, play football and different games, surf the net, etc.), subjects of development (try to get excellent grades) and as objects of influence (a puppet, silly thing, easy-going, etc.). The children also characterized themselves from the point of view of the intellectual and creative personality spheres (inquisitive, like drawing, telling by heart, well-read, good memory, etc.) and pointed out some physical and bodily qualities (plump, mobile, a slob, etc.).

Despite the variety of personal characteristics which the interviewed children named there were practically no indications of volitional qualities and attitudes to material values in their answers. The children didn't give any characteristics which reflected understanding of their qualities through the prism of the opinions of others: parents, teachers, peers. This might be due to the high level of self-knowledge autonomy.

6.2. Children's circle of interests.

The primary school children were asked two questions "What are you good at?", "What do you like to do?" to find out the peculiarities of their self-identification in the field of various activities.

The children aged 7-11 years old singled out the following activities as most interesting and enjoyable: leisure activities, studies, communication, play, work, recreation. None of the children interviewed indicated that they liked visiting museums, cinemas, theatres, travelling, etc. On the whole, the sample recorded that throughout primary school children of all the ages called their favorite leisure activities ("I like skating", "riding a bicycle", "going rollerblading", "I like dancing", "I like drawing, because it's interesting", etc.). According to the children's answers, many parents wanted their children to attend some hobby groups and clubs. About 62% of the children indicated in their answers that they were very fond of drawing, dancing, singing, and chess just because they were encouraged by their parents.

It was important to emphasize that while the overwhelming majority of the children noted the sphere of leisure as the most interesting and productive for them, there was a stable tendency of changing their interests in relation to the selected activities. Let us dwell in more detail on the dynamics of the children's interests in the fields of "Leisure", "Studies and Cognition", "Communication", "Play", "Work", "Recreation". Responses related to the field "Studies and Cognition" took the second place after the sphere of leisure and make up 30% in the hierarchy of interests in the 8-year-olds which was the peak of children's attention to cognitive activity within primary school age.

The examples of such answers were: "I like mathematics, problems are very easy", "I like answering the teacher's questions", "I like solving crosswords, learning about cars", "To be honest, I like the multiplication table". We should like to note that when students expressed their love and interest for learning, it was mainly expressed in their love of mathematics. According to the children, this subject was comprehensible to them, it was easy to learn and, in connection with this, there was interest for mathematics and desire to do it.

At the age of 7 to 8 years old some dynamics towards increasing in the number of answers related to studies and knowledge – from 20% to 30% – was observed. The comments of the children showed that it was the teacher who helped to create a positive motivation for learning by means of interesting tasks. Further on, by the age of 9 years old, the number of answers revealing the interest of the children for cognitive activity and studies reduced almost three-fold. At the same time, the children at a qualitatively new level assessed their interest and success in learning activity; e. g. "I like to study because each new lesson you can cover some new topic and get some new information". It was not that the children lost their motivation for learning, rather they took their studies as a routine activity and referred to it quite distantly. By the age of 10-11 years old the number of answers connected with cognition and studies became even smaller – only 5% of the children noted an interest in studies against the background of good learning results ("Also, I do the tasks successfully because I'm good at learning").

Responses reflecting the interests of the children in the sphere "Communication" were presented unevenly. While the children aged 7 and 9 years old showed an active interest in communication, the children aged 8 and 10-11 years old in 5% and 10% of cases respectively pointed out communication as an attractive activity. For example, "Well, I don't know, I have many friends in my yard and I feel like going for a walk after school", "You can talk a lot with the guys." It was interesting to note that younger schoolchildren did not point out communication in social networks. They indicated contacts with peers which potentially led them to interaction in various spheres.

Responses related to the sphere "Play" occupied 10% and 11% in the array of statements by the children aged 7 and 9-year-old respectively. For example, "I like to play toys, they are played" (the child of 7 years old), "I like to play different games ... I like to visit my friend, Augustus, in Sysert and play war games there" (the child of 9 years old). In our sample the children aged 8 and 10-11 years old showed no interest in playing, including computer games.

The answers pertaining to the sphere "Work" took 10% and 12% in the array of the statements by the children aged 7 and 10-11 years old respectively. The children aged 8 and 9-year-old did not generally call work an interesting activity. Yet, the children aged 7 and 10-11 years old showed interest in working in the context of helping another person and getting a positive result, e. g. "I'm good at tidying up", "I'm

good at helping someone.” The children’s answers showed that they were focused on the successful result of their labour, including its social significance, but not on the work as such.

Statements characterizing interests of the children in the sphere of “Recreation” were completely absent at the age of 7-8, and began to appear by the aged of 9-11 years old. At the same time, the children gave answers in which they expressed the desire to “do nothing” meaning passive rest. Examples of the children's responses are: “I like using my telephone. And sleeping”, “I like surfing the Internet. Most of all I like watching videos on YouTube In some cases children give these answers in the context of “I’m good at it doing”, and less often in the context of “I like doing it.” It was alarming that children characterized their interests in the sphere of recreation mentioning only the procedural part of it and not reflecting on the unproductive nature of such a pastime. A detailed analysis of the interview protocols made it possible to ascertain that such children were often left to themselves when planning their day and rest as their parents were busy or preferred passive rest in their spare time.

Thus, the research showed that primary school students had the most part of their interests in the sphere of “Leisure”; interests in the spheres “Studies and Cognition”, “Communication”, “Work”, “Play”, “Recreation” were represented to a lesser extent and are less mobile .

6.3. Objects (subjects) that mostly attract primary school children.

To understand the children’s inclinations and vectors of sympathy in the surrounding environment they were asked the question: “What do you like most of all in the world?”.

An age-related dominant was identified as a result of the analysis. First, the category of “People” went in all the age groups. The range of values was from 50% to 73% depending on the age group. Most of the answers were presented in the group of the 9-year-old children, the least was in the group of 8-year-olds. The children said that they loved their mother, father, sister, their relatives, and “well, classmates”. One boy (Yegor, 10 years old) confessed that he loved the girl named Yana. The second place (17%-30% of the answers depending on the age group) held the answers implying “I like doing something”. The responses of the 7-year-old children were “Doing crafts. Playing with friends. Watching TV and playing with Dad's tanks. Reading”. The children aged 8 years old said: “Playing board games, drawing”. The children aged 10-11 years old “like attending physical education lessons”, “I like English”. Consequently, we could see the dynamics during the younger school age: the 7-8-year-olds gravitated towards joint activity or imitation of adults, while by 10-11 years old they liked some cognitive or school activities. In rare cases the children called animals (13%), cartoon characters (1%) as objects of their love, and 2% of responses were “I like nothing”.

Let us look more closely at the age characteristics of the vectors of sympathy and propensity for objects (subjects) in children of different age categories.

The children aged 7 years old were characterized by the fact that they loved their parents more than anything else in the world, namely their mother (present in all answers) and father (in 2 answers). One child gave an ambivalent answer “I love my Mom”, and at the same time “I don’t like it when my mother shouts at me”. There were two times fewer answers in which the 7-year-olds expressed their love for one or another kind of activity. At this age the children preferred playing, watching TV, and doing some crafts.

The children aged 8 years old loved their parents more than anything in the world, namely their mother (found in all answers) and father (2 answers), family (1 answer). There were three times fewer answers where the 8-year-olds expressed their love of a certain activity and objects, for example, “playing board games, drawing”, love for themselves and cartoon characters (minions).

Most of all the 9-year-olds liked their mothers (present in 6 answers out of 10), fathers (2 answers), family (1 answer), sister, relatives and a friend (1 answer each). In the second place, there were the answers in which the children expressed their love for animals (dogs, a hamster). In the third place, the 9-year-olds called love of some things.

The children aged 10-11 years old loved their mothers, first of all, (5 answers out of 7), fathers (4 answers), family (1 answer), parents, relatives and classmates (1 answer each). And only in this age group we found a representative of the opposite sex as an object of love. The older the children became, the less often mother was singled out as an object of love, and love for mother and father was expressed more as a parent couple, and for the family as a whole.

So, for the younger schoolchildren, the object of love was their parents. While the children aged 7-8-year-old chose their mother only (sometimes their father), the children aged 10-11 year old expressed their love for the family and parents in general. None of the children chose a teacher as an object of love although the children spoke approvingly of their teachers in all the cases. As for the preferable activities, drawing, watching TV, playing, and walking were mentioned. The least frequent objects of love were animals, food, things, love for oneself, cartoon characters.

7. Conclusion

The child's views of himself/herself as a person are characterized mainly by positive modality and orientation to the present moment of life. The children aged 7-9 years old differentiate personal objective features, thereby positioning themselves in the system of family relationships, in the peer group and school community. By the end of junior school age (by 10-11 years old), the children distinguish their own subjective characteristics. It allows to talk about fixed mechanisms of self-knowledge including reflection. It is noteworthy that the children demonstrate the understanding of their personal qualities through the prism of the opinions of others: parents, teachers and peers. In other words, they outline the range of their own characteristics in the evolving self-concept.

At younger school age, the children are interested in various spheres of activity, at the same time their interests are unstable. Most the children choose leisure as a preferable activity, and mention different types of leisure activity: sports, art, etc. We found out that this situation is due to the fact that parents encourage to take up a variety of activities. In the second place of preferences there is an educational-cognitive activity. However, only one third of primary schoolchildren name studies as their favourite activity. Educational activity gradually gives way to another type of activity – communication with peers. On the one hand, the role of a teacher and his/her authority serves as a source of positive motivation for learning and stimulates the desire to learn new things. On the other hand, we can state that school as the main institution for socialization of 7-11-year-olds does not ensure a stable motivation of children for learning as a central activity at primary school age.

Along with educational activity, play is of great importance at primary school age. Junior students can successfully perform their work, but do not like to do it, because the family and school environment is almost devoid of work. In our sample there are no children who are attracted by the sphere of culture: visiting museums, theaters and travelling. With such a mosaic of preferable activities, children name activities that unfold in a “live” social environment and did not show liking for studies in virtual (digital) reality.

The answers of the children aged 7-11 about the objects (subjects) which attract them most allow to make the conclusion that these are different kinds of activity. Pets, food, things and cartoon characters are selected rarely. In the overwhelming majority of cases, children love their parents and family. Primary school children do not choose their teacher as an object of love, although the statements of children about their teacher are always positive. This suggests that the family plays a great role in the evolution of the child's self-identification.

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