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### Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

# DEVELOPMENT OF A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN AN INTEGRATIVE CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL SPACE

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### *Abstract*

The article discusses education as an integral part of culture and a source of various services satisfying educational needs of each child. In case of a child with limited health capacities, cultural development is aimed at meeting their educational and special sociocultural needs. The article lists the latter and describes the formation of such a child's personality as a cultural subject. The sociocultural needs are met by means of supplementary education, which is a multifunctional space, where, in comparison with a comprehensive school, there are better conditions for the personality development of children with special needs. The article describes the theoretical foundations and practical possibilities of supplementary education that can help such children "blend into" culture. It focuses on the importance of meeting educational and sociocultural needs of both groups of children (with limited health capacities and typical development) in different areas of the educational environment. Among the important elements of supplementary education for children with special needs are: art, information technology, adaptive physical education, and local history. The availability and accessibility of all types of education are the key factors in the personality development of a child with limited health capacities. However, from an early age, the child's family has the greatest impact on this process, as their first and main social environment. The authors emphasize the importance of social adaptation and the interaction of family and educational communities. For a child with special needs the cultural and educational space can help develop sociocultural aspects of their personalities.

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**Keywords:** Art therapy, limited health capacities, socio-cultural development.



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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, there have been important changes in all spheres of human life, including education, science and culture. Active integrative processes lead to the emergence of a variety of new branches of knowledge, and the increasing importance of bringing up and forming the personality of a young person capable of creative self-realization in society.

At present, education is seen as an integral part of culture and a source of a wide variety of services meeting any educational need of any child. Therefore, education plays an important role in shaping and developing a child's personality, and its manifestation as a subject of culture. This in turn requires restructuring the whole educational process basing it on principles of humanization, integration, and cultural conformity. Thus, of particular importance is the social dimension of education, speaking of which Dew writes that "a properly organized educational process begins with useful active studies that have social roots" (as cited in Dyu, 2000, p. 182).

## 2. Problem Statement

These tasks become especially important when talking about children with special needs, since the imparity they have upsets the existing connection with culture which is seen as a source of forming higher mental functions. A child who is "displaced" from the social, cultural and educational space, designed for healthy average children, as a result finds themselves in a lower social position according to Vygotsky (2018). In this regard, we face the problem of finding and creating special cultural "workaround" forms that will create some favourable conditions for a child with special needs and help them to "blend into" the culture. The cultural and historical theory of Vygotsky (2018) accounts for the importance and necessity for a child's socio-cultural development. The psychologist accentuated the significance of cultural development, as it is only there that compensation of deficiency is possible (Vygotsky, 2018).

Looking at education from the cultural perspective, one cannot ignore the fact that the world trend of strengthening the dynamism of social processes, according to Mid (1988), contributes to the emergence of a new type of society with a "prefigurative culture" characterized by a future orientation, changes in the type of intergenerational relations built on collaboration of adults and children.

In his research works Winnicott (2005) touches upon the issues of the origins of cultural experience, the basics of its formation, as well as the nature of creative activity in a child. He mentions that the gaming activity forms the basis for gaining cultural experience and for the development of creative skills. Therefore, in the broad sense of the word we can consider gaming activity as a property of life.

## 3. Research Questions

The transformation of public consciousness towards humanization, as well as socio-economic and political changes in Russian society, alter the way people perceive the differences in a child's development on macro and micro levels of community life.

In recent years, our society came to realize that a physical or mental impairment in a child should not be seen as a sign of despair and defeat, but rather something that can be corrected and smoothed out on condition that necessary medical, psychological, pedagogical, and socio-economic measures are taken.

Therefore, the main issues for the research can be defined as the following: how to help a child with special needs “blend into” the culture in real life; under what conditions such children can be introduced to cultural values; what kind of content we should be using.

A comprehensive rehabilitation for children with various impairments can be provided by creating a barrier-free environment, expanding rehabilitation facilities, developing technologies to accompany a child with special needs, creating special needs teaching methods, using art technology, as well as a reasonable combination of inclusive and special education systems. All this is aimed at meeting the special educational needs of children with limited health capacities and realizing their right to inherit cultural and social experiences.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the research is to analyze the problem and search for ways of developing a child with special needs in an integrative cultural and educational space with the help of supplementary education that aims at meeting the special educational and sociocultural needs of children with limited health capacities.

It is important to understand the great role that supplementary education has for socio-cultural personality development of a child with special needs. Vygotsky (2018) was sure that from a psychological perspective, it is incorrect to segregate such children, but it is essential to ensure their communication and socializing with typically developing peers.

#### **5. Research Methods**

In accordance with the aim, the following research methods are used, namely: studying psychological and pedagogical resources, analyzing the experience of how children with special needs socialize and develop socio-culturally by means of monitoring their behaviour.

At present, the dynamic development of society and culture necessitates the objective need to search for various ways to help a child with special needs “blend into” the culture. These ways focus on the new requirements of society, on forming a “subject of culture” who cannot only be a “user”, but a “doer” and an active creator of the social environment.

The sociocultural aspect of the purpose of our research is realized through creating and organizing a system of supplementary education institutions as a multifunctional space, where, compared with a comprehensive school, there are more and better conditions for the personality development of children with special needs, together with their typically developing peers. In cultural and educational institutions of supplementary education, to a greater degree than at school, it is possible to develop cultural, communicative, reflective, emotional, creative expressions and reactions in children with special needs. This becomes possible when supplemented with well-organized psychological help in different forms of interaction between a teacher, a psychologist, and parents (Medvedeva, 2019).

Currently, supplementary education is seen as an alternative education model that facilitates and activates personality development resources in children with disabilities. There, by using various types of activities (artistic, sporting, intellectual, local history, tourist, military, patriotic) and providing

psychological help it becomes possible to meet their special educational and sociocultural needs, as well as make a child a subject of culture.

As far as children with special needs are concerned, their cultural development is aimed at meeting not only special educational, but also sociocultural needs in different areas of supplementary education, which is as follows:

introducing a child with special needs to cultural values (awareness of the values of nature, person, moral standards, rules of behaviour, aesthetic attitude to the world and oneself);

development of cultural, communicative, reflective, emotional, creative sides of personality;

mastering practical pre-professional skills in different forms of art (painting, singing, dancing, theater, handicrafts); information technology, robotics; in various sports, tourism; local history, etc.

Following the aim and the indicated methods, we carefully studied the special education process and analyzed the results of a 2-year experiment aimed at meeting special educational and sociocultural needs of children aged 5-9. The experiment itself was carried out in a number of institutions providing supplementary education in Moscow of the following types: art school (State Budget Educational Institution Secondary School №1363 (SBEI SS №1363) and Children's Balakirev Arts School; adaptive physical education institutions (Children's Health Center "Neptune", Center for the Support of Family Education "Coast of Hope", Club of water sports "The Element", sports club "I swim"); local history, sports and fitness institutions (Academy of Children and Youth Tourism and Local History, Tourism and Sports Union of Russia, All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Historical and Cultural Monuments).

The experiment (search and research stages) involved 2,000 children of two age groups: older preschoolers aged 5-7 and primary school students aged 7-9. Among them there were 600 children with special needs: 75 of them visually impaired, 20 hearing-impaired, 160 with speech disabilities, 75 with musculoskeletal disorders, 180 children with neurodevelopmental disorders, 85 children with impaired mental functions, and 1,400 of their typically developing peers. Apart from that, 112 parents, 15 teachers and tutors from institutions of supplementary education, as well as 10 psychologists took part in the experiment. To study the problem stated in the research we chose children with special needs of preschool and primary school who attended supplementary educational institutions as well as a comprehensive school or gymnasium. The Psychological, Medical and Pedagogical Commission confirmed the children's diagnoses. Supplementary education teachers, tutors and psychologists attended continuing education courses and learnt about the types of existing impairments and the special needs that children may have.

The corrective and pedagogical work with children in institutions of supplementary education was organized in three stages.

During the first (diagnostic) stage, they defined the intellectual and physical abilities of children with special needs and the way they could realize these abilities (together with their parents) in the chosen type of supplementary education institution. Diagnostic activities demonstrated a low level (compared with the norm) of physical and personal development in such spheres as communication, self-esteem, personal values, expression of feelings and emotions, and creativity. This was observed in 45% of children with hearing impairments, 35% of visually impaired children, 35% of children with speech disabilities, 58% of children with musculoskeletal disorders, 55% of children with neurodevelopmental disorders and 75% of children with impaired mental functions. The rest of the children showed an average level of physical and

personal development; in doing different tasks they relied on the help of the adult, especially in the tasks on communication, measuring self-esteem, emotional responsiveness, creativity, and system of values. The study of qualitative characteristics revealed a feature similar to all the participants in the experiment who have different neurodevelopmental disorders, that is immaturity of personality (Medvedeva & Pavlova, 2018).

The second stage (corrective and developing) included individual and group classes, where supplementary education teachers, coaches, psychologists ensured the development of children's personality, formed team/group communication skills, encouraged the progress children made in different activities, raised their self-esteem, and taught them to overcome difficulties while mastering practical skills in art, sports, and tourism.

At the third, pre-professional stage, children with special needs demonstrated their success in artistic activity at concerts, festivals, in sports, competitions, including international ones, tourism, in local history, hiking, mountain climbing, etc. alongside with their typically developing peers. We also learned that in supplementary education institutions children with special needs developed successfully in a team of their typically developing peers. By taking part in teamwork (in the form of concerts, festivals, performances, contests, competitions, trips) children with special needs were able to satisfy their sociocultural needs.

In art schools, children with special needs were introduced to cultural values through works of literature, painting, theater and other forms of art. At the same time, it became possible to develop and correct the cultural, communicative, reflective, and emotional disorders. By constantly getting psychological and pedagogical support (from teachers of supplementary education institutions, psychologists, parents) in individual and group learning classes such children were able to get some pre-professional skills in various types of art (painting, singing, dancing, theater, handicrafts). Any of the socio-cultural learning technologies is an integrated one, and it helps solve the problems of how children with special needs can "blend into" the sociocultural environment.

Art therapy as a teaching technology is of key importance in working with children with special needs. Various types of art therapy (painting, music, dancing, play therapy, sand play, fairy tale therapy) allow us to introduce a child into a creative art space with different types of art. In these comfortable conditions where children feel involved in different activities they can better understand themselves and explore the world around them, develop their emotions, feelings and imagination. Apart from that, they are able to take part in teamwork and communication, realize their capacities by using compensatory mechanisms, and solve real life problems in the most efficient way (Andrusyak & Bezenkova, 2018).

Before other psychotherapeutic technologies, art therapy was used in working with people with special needs because of its beneficial effect of balancing and modifying their mental and physical states and helping to build contact. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, art therapy was used to help people with special needs socialize and to facilitate their moral upbringing, meanwhile the researchers were able to get copious information about the their inner world (Kopyitin, 2019).

The very idea of integrity lies at the core of art pedagogy and art therapy. The combination of psychological pedagogy, therapy and various types of art allows us to master new methods of teaching and upbringing, to make learning more effective, creative and affordable for every child (Demidenko & Pryadko, 2018).

Speaking about the positive impact of art on the development of a child's personality, foreign and Russian researchers (I.V. Evtushenko, E.A. Ekzhanova, I.A. Groshenkov, E.A. Medvedeva, M.Yu. Rau, E.A.Soshina, E.Z. Yakhnina, A. Masloy, E. Kramer, M. Milner, M. Naumburg, D.W. Winnicott and others) highlight the role of art therapy in developing their psychological functions and stimulating the expression of their creativity in various forms art (music, painting, declamation, theater). For instance, Milner (1950) arrived at the conclusion that every child needs artistic activities not only to shape their aesthetic ideas and values, but also as an instrument of mental development that promotes the "upbringing" of feelings. The researcher points out that the results of artistic creation are absolutely necessary for the conscious life of feelings, in the same way as verbal concepts are important for a conscious intellectual life or as internal objects for the unconscious life of instincts and imagination. Without them, life would have been blindly lived (Milner, 1950).

In connection with the problems of development that a child with special needs has, they need help that would smooth out and eliminate their personal underdevelopment, which impedes their socio-cultural development. Solving the problems of children's development should be based on the compensatory function of art, which focuses on maintaining and restoring a child's psychical balance through music therapy, dance movement therapy, voice therapy, visual art therapy, etc. The compensatory function of art was first mentioned in the works of Z. Freud and then further studied by E. Kramer, M. Klein, M. Milner, C. Jung, representatives of humanistic psychology (R. Assagioli, A. Maslow, C. Rogers, V. Frankl, E. Fromm, etc.), modern scientists and art therapists (Rosal Marcia, L. Turner-Schikler, V. Exline, Joanne Alison and others). In the majority of works the researchers state that art therapy is helpful when used as psychological and pedagogical support in supplementary education as it can smooth out the difficulties in the development of different sides of their personality (communication, emotional-volitional sphere, self-awareness, creativity) and facilitate the socio-cultural development of children with disabilities.

Foreign scientists (psychologists, psychotherapists, art therapists) contributed greatly to the development of art therapy as such, which is today widely used in Russia's institutions of supplementary education. Their theoretical investigations and hands-on experience laid the basis of many practical studies related to psychological assistance of children with special needs by means of art.

For example, Naumburg (1973), an American psychologist, teacher, artist and one of the first major theorists and founders of art therapy, believes that "art therapy" practice is based on the fact that a person's most important thoughts, feelings and experiences are the product of the unconscious. Therefore, they can be expressed in the form of picture images, rather than with the help of words. While taking part in such activities, a person learns to break down their own barriers and acquires the ability to freely express their own fears, emotions, needs and dreams. In doing so they gradually begin to realize the contents of their own inner world (Naumburg, 1973).

The premier English child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Winnicott (2005) notes that children perceive visual activity as a game, from which they get some experience, which is of fundamental importance for the development of cognitive and emotional spheres.

Palomba and Rutten (2008) speak about the use of art therapy in psychiatry. The authors show that the elements of "madness" are present in each and every person and, having identified them in ourselves, we can find an approach to people who are in another "psychophysical" state.

They describe in detail how, for instance, by making collages, graphic drawings, and working with clay, one can try to penetrate the inner world of people with mental health condition, as well as gain deeper knowledge of themselves (Palomba & Rutten, 2008).

Van Dooren (2009) points out that art therapy is widely used in the Netherlands to treat patients with both mental disorders and psychological problems. The scientist shows how to use various types of artistic activity, substantiating the choice of one or another treatment. Concurrently he describes the theories that have been most widely spread in the art therapy movement in the last two decades, as well as shows how these theories are implemented in practice. Special attention is paid to the stage of the so-called “clinical justification of the process”, when a group of experts is formed who will work with the patient. Later comes the observation stage, when a diagnostic test is carried out using drawings (Van Dooren, 2009).

The artist and sculptor Oedipus Asan uses the traditional Turkish ebru technique in art therapy classes with physically challenged people. This is an ancient technique of painting directly on the surface of water. It has a high psychotherapeutic potential and is an excellent tool to develop imagination, motor functions and creativity in children. The materials that are used for this type of applied art are natural; these are water, organic dyes, a thickener, horse hair. Their use in itself has a relaxing therapeutic effect (Matsukevich & Asan, 2019).

Valenta and his colleagues (2014) from the Czech Republic share the results of a psychological and pedagogical experiment aimed at establishing the effectiveness of the use of art therapy techniques (drama therapy and music therapy) when working with parents of children with special needs.

The scientists highlighted the effectiveness of art therapy methods for studying and improving the quality of life of parents taking care of children with mental deficiency, cerebral palsy, autism spectrum disorders and other complex disabilities (Valenta et al., 2014).

Arzykulova and Alymbaeva (2018) also single out art therapy among many other methods of dealing with anxiety and deviant behavior. The method is effective for expressing one’s feelings and emotions, indicating the state of one’s inner self, reducing the level of aggressiveness and anxiety, gaining self-confidence, receiving positive emotions, teaching constructive communication skills and behavioral patterns (Arzykulova & Alymbaeva, 2018).

While searching for suitable ways for a child with special needs to enter the culture, one cannot but mention museum art therapy, which is so well publicized. Museum guides introduce children to paintings, their subject matter, and expressive means. In this way, they help the children relate their real experiences and feelings to the images and scenes in the picture. This method of working with children can also be considered a form of psychosocial work and a type of social adaptation of the individual as a subject of culture (Savvinova, 2019)

Another effective art therapy is the modelling clay therapy (drawings made in clay). It contributes to the rehabilitation process; helps unlock the autistic children’s communication skills and abilities; helps specialists feel the inner world of a child with special needs; helps relieve emotional stress and anxiety; helps develop fine motor skills, tool activities, and active attention (Magomedova, 2018).

A child with special needs has difficulty expressing themselves in the usual subjects, where the verbal-logical type of thinking prevails. However, they can express themselves better through art and artistic activity, which, are based on the intact functions in the mental organization. Artistic activity creates

real opportunities for the personality development of such children enriching their sociocultural experience and facilitating socialization (Medvedeva & Pavlova, 2018).

Art is multifunctional and versatile in its influence on one's personality, and the sociocultural development of a child with special needs using art involves the following:

- understanding the cultural values, the formation of a system of social views, generalized images (of homeland, family, well-being);
- moral concepts (about love and hate, conscience and honour, friendship and betrayal);
- aesthetic ideals reflected in works of art (painting, literature, theater, music).

By being interiorized various cultural ideas and images, signs and symbols are acquired by children on the cognitive and emotional levels and are then reflected in their behaviour. These ideas and images influence the formation of their values and their relationship with the outside world and help them become subjects of culture (Medvedeva, 2019).

In the theory and practice of socio-cultural activity there exist various technologies, among which there are: cultural-protective, cultural-creative, recreational (restorative), sports and recreational, social-protective, rehabilitation and many others. Specialists and experts focus on such issues as the development of all components of motor skills and coordination of movements, the formation and development of creative abilities, as well as specific skills in various fields of decorative and applied arts and crafts.

Introducing a child with special needs to culture is not limited to the use of art. Such children, especially the ones with intact mental capacity, can get socialized and “blend in” through information technology and robotics.

On getting acquainted with different organizations using various information technologies in their work with children with special needs, it is possible to state that IT proves to be rather efficient. Children aged 5-9 with intact mental capacity were able to gain pre-professional knowledge in the field of information technology and robotics. The introduction of modern information technologies into the teaching process plays a leading role in the cognitive and socio-emotional development of children with special needs. Modern “construction kits” allow us to create optimal conditions for the modification and improvement of those skills and abilities that are necessary children's comfortable socialization. Programmable robotic toys and kits let children develop their engineering and technical skills in design and construction of interacting systems. They teach one to be inventive, to go through with anything and to stay open to new technologies. While assembling a model robot, a child develops and modifies hands motor skills, their cognitive and speech activity, their emotional-volitional sphere. Through construction, a child learns to make coherent statements and develops dialogical speech.

Practical classes where children with disabilities use robot-building kits help them acquire new skills and knowledge, increase self-esteem, give an opportunity to get a certain “product” and demonstrate it to their peers. Such demonstration of one's creative work is an important aspect of getting socialized and self-realization for children with special needs. In addition, it is a good opportunity to get some basic pre-professional IT skills for mastering a future profession in this field. Therefore, robotics is indispensable in the correction work and socialization of children with disabilities.

Adaptive physical education is another important aspect and direction within supplementary education, as it also addresses children with special needs as cultural subjects. Swimming comes first



among all the sports that children with special needs can take up. It is a most effective and health-improving means of adaptive physical education. Children with special needs, who do swimming, better adapt to independent life. Swimming helps compensate for impaired psychophysical functions. The aquatic environment has a specific effect on the vestibular, musculoskeletal, and central nervous systems; and it can provide a compensatory effect on the impaired functions of a child's body. Through tactile, temperature, muscle and other receptors the aquatic environment has a strong stimulating and positive effect on the physical rehabilitation process, mental sphere and personal development of children with special needs. Classes for such children are based on differentiated instruction, which means that the types and amount of exercises are customized to the child's age, state of health, level of fitness, and nature of functional changes in the body. Safety measures and precautions are tightened during training sessions and competitions. Exercise is also an important tool for successful social adaptation and integration of such children. At different Paralympic events, we can witness their sporting success and achievements. Apart from that, many teenagers with special needs also take part in other international competitions.

Local history activities are another important way of helping children with special needs “blend into” culture. This type of activities is especially relevant in different regions of the Russian Federation, where they are realized at federal and regional centers of tourism and local history. The activities include: sports and health tourism (orienteering, multi-day trips and expeditions); sightseeing and educational activities; local history research activities. This branch of supplementary education is available to both primary school children and adolescents with special needs and different forms of dysontogenesis. Tourism and local history activities are a vivid example of bringing to life the pedagogy of collective creative activity. Such activities have a great educational and upbringing potential and value as they help create teams of like-minded people: teachers, parents, students. Local history activities are realized through the following fields: tourism and regional history, physical education and sports, natural sciences, environment, military-patriotic, cultural and educational spheres. In educational tourism programmes for children with special needs, off-site training classes – hiking, expeditions, and excursions – are of great value and importance.

All types of tourism (hiking, mountain trekking, skiing, cycling, water tourism), orienteering, mountaineering raise the students' self-esteem, improve their health, enhance cognitive interests, shape moral and patriotic values, and expand the knowledge of their own country and culture.

## **6. Findings**

Acquiring social experience is a complex process, in which the personality development of a child takes place in various social relationships with adults and peers. Consequently, a child develops as a subject of culture (Medvedeva, 2019).

A follow-up study of the development of all children with special needs was carried out after two years of their attending supplementary education institutions. It showed stable positive and beneficial effects in the personality development of all the children involved in the experiment, and also demonstrated levelling of certain parameters in children with an average dynamics of the socio-cultural formation of personality. After two years of attending classes in supplementary education institutions, preschoolers and primary school children with special needs have been successful in main subjects according to feedback

from comprehensive school teachers, school curriculum data and feedback from parents. Children with special needs showed a social and personal readiness and ability to be in a new “social development situation” in middle school, and preschoolers in primary school. Moreover, 85% of the tested children continued their studies of various types of art at art schools, and 15% of children joined different art societies. In school and class life, they have become socially active, shown independence and creative initiative. Most of the children (95%) involved in sports continued their classes and successfully performed in competitions, 75% of children with special needs got more involved in travelling, and 15% of primary school pupils showed interest in excursions and local history work and independently arranged excursions for classmates in their local history museums.

These data allow us to make a conclusion that, children with special needs when participating in different artistic, sports and technology activities can cope with personal problems and shape their own personalities. This becomes possible with targeted corrective action on the socio-cultural development of the personality. In intersubjective interaction in a “multi-artistic” environment, children are able to acquire cultural values, see and notice them in their surroundings, “blend into” culture, get socialized; they are ready to manifest themselves as subjects of culture by means of art, sports, and technology. The positive changes we have seen in the socio-cultural development of children with special needs are a result of focused corrective actions, the use of various artistic, sporting and technical means, coordinated actions of experts and parents, as well as sufficient prolongability and clever forward planning of the contents and technological aspects of the corrective actions in the system of supplementary education in our country.

The undertaken study allows us to make the following conclusions.

Today, supplementary education is an actively developing sphere and resource for the development of sociocultural aspects of one’s personality. By creating a cultural and development space supplementary education can thus meet the socio-cultural needs of children with limited health capacities and shape their personalities as subjects of culture.

A child with special needs who has difficulty expressing themselves in traditional sciences can express themselves through art, artistic and local history activities, robotics, and adaptive physical education. These areas within the framework of supplementary education make it possible to create a special comfortable space for “blending into” culture, for cognition and acquisition of its values and the socio-cultural development of a child with special needs.

## **7. Conclusion**

The most important factor in the personality development of a child with special needs is the availability of all types of education. From a very early age, a child’s family has the greatest impact on this process, as their first and main social development environment. The most important task in a child’s development and correcting their impairments lies in a comprehensive support of the family with a child with special needs (Prihodko & Yugova, 2019).

At present, the cultural and educational space, organized in different forms, is a rapidly developing sphere and resource for the development of sociocultural aspects of a child’s personality. Through art, adaptive physical education, information technology, tourist and regional studies, military-patriotic and

other types of activities it becomes possible to meet all the socio-cultural needs of children with limited health capacities. This cultural and educational space helps them get socialized and be subjects of culture.

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