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Reconstruction Of Lost Forms Of Interaction As A Condition For Transition From Traditional To Innovative Education

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Abstract

The presented results of a survey of moral judgments among the children and teenagers in contemporary Russia allow for a conclusion that the young people’s understanding of their relationships with the elders and sometimes with their peers is based on the positions that are explicated in the conceptual model of “vertical” subordination. To address this challenge, this paper raises the issue of the necessity to retrieve the lost relationship patterns of partnership, within the Adult – Child and Child – Child constructions, which is a prerequisite for projects involving innovative education.

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1. Introduction

The contemporary level of the society’s technological development lays higher claims on the level and quality of educating the younger generation. Meeting this challenge requires not only a revision of the curricula but also a special attention to the organized forms of interaction among all the participants of the educational process.

The requirements of the education as it is practiced these days necessitate the educators’ community to revise the evaluation criteria against which to measure the efficiency of the current educational system. The amount of information acquired by the students is not only and not

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primarily the indicator of effectiveness. These are some of the most important indicators of effective learning: the student’s ability to work in the situation of indeterminacy (when the algorithm of actions is absent, when a question is not clearly formulated, when there is a lack or excess of conditions offered to solve a given problem), motivation for research, and skills to solve complex issues in teamwork. The innovative developing education focuses on these criteria in the assessment of effectiveness.

Under the term “innovative developing education” we understand a new type of educational practice which modifies the traditional ways education is practiced because of the gap between the existing norms and the new social expectations. (V.I. Slobodtchikov 2004; for a review of the bibliography on the issue, see: P. Danilin, N. Kryshtal’, 2008)

An illustration of the difference between the traditional and the non-traditional education systems may be the array of actions that a child typically performs within each of these systems. G.A. Zuckerman and A.L. Wenger explicate these actions and single out the key elements of the traditional lesson’s discourse: to verbalize a rule, to memorize (a rule), to learn to act (in accordance with a rule), to repeat (a rule). The key elements of the non-traditional lesson’s discourse are the following: to derive (new patterns, new meanings, new rules), to try (acting in a new way, according to a new pattern), to understand (contrasts), to doubt (here it means “to be aware of one’s lack of knowledge”), to agree (and to disagree – to be able to contend, to argue one’s point). (G.A. Zuckerman and A.L. Wenger, 2010. P. 68)

A comparison of the strategies of the traditional and the innovative education systems is discussed in the article by V.Y. Lyaudis, Innovative Education: Strategy and Practice (Innovatsionnoye obuchenie: strategiya i praktika, 1994. PP. 13–32)

However, the realization of the urgency of change, pronouncement of the respective social need, even fully-designed projects do not necessarily indicate that the system is ready for reforms. This becomes evident when certain facts are considered. At the level of social system, facts are registered that the interest for progressive, innovative education decreases as soon as the author of the concept passes away. According to D. Freiberg, for instance, this was unfortunately the case when the introduction of the concept of “humanitarian psychology” into the educational process was attempted after the death of K. Rodgers (K. Rodgers, D. Freiberg, 2002). A system is not always comprehensible to different person. An external influence (in the pedagogical sense as well) does not always cause a radical ongoing restructuring of the system. The same tendency is also manifest when we consider how lasting the skill is that has been acquired earlier and that can be retained, sometimes, only when the “external” support of both the organizational and contextual components is systematically provided.

It is logical that at this point one has to confront such issues as the factors, reasons, and conditions that foster a system’s readiness for change.

We believe that the concrete forms of interaction between the teacher and the student contribute significantly to promoting of this readiness – moreover, we should speak here of a particular form in the context of particular culture.
The traditional form of interaction in the Teacher – Student construction, when it is not balanced by other forms of interaction, in some cases hinders the acquisition of new material. This is the case when “Napoleon’s motto”, To desire means to be able to, does not work.

2. Contextualization of the Problem

Innovative education, in its different modifications, presupposes, first of all, that a student takes an active position. Not only taking but also maintaining this position is important: when the goal-setting, organization, control, coordination, and evaluation of the current activity become, beginning from a certain stage of acquisition, the functions of the student him/herself.

This naturally poses the question, whether the person is ready to take this active position. It should be stressed that such a readiness is not only predicated upon the personal qualities or the meaning and the nature of a given cooperative activity but has also to be supported by a certain framework of norms and rules of a certain social group that occupies a place in the structure of a certain society.

We are going to discuss one of the regulatory mechanisms of a person’s activity – the framework of norms and values. Any culture has a set of norms and values that regulate relations within it by laying a network of functional limitations on the diversity of people’s activities. We assume that such a regulatory mechanism, created in the culture of a certain society, predetermines the dominating form of people’s interaction upon the whole and the form of interaction between the teacher and the student(s) in particular. The cultural context determines the level of development and, therefore, encourages or restricts these or those forms of interaction.

As one explores the particular issues of how different forms of interaction are established when a person acquires new (objectively or subjectively) information, it is not less important to characterize the sub-communities, in which the socialization of the individual, as well as other, more subtle processes of acculturation, takes place.

Culturologists and ethno-psychologists point out that every community, regardless of the level of its technological development, comprises two different patterns of social organization: the “vertical” pattern of subordination and the “horizontal” pattern of partnership. Psychologists, thus, always have to consider following questions: “Who promotes this or that set of norms in a given community over a given period of its development?” “What is the ‘testing ground’ for acquisition and development of various activities?” “Which relations – complementary or competitive – exist among the normative constructions created and promoted by each of the sub-communities under consideration?”

To explicate this, we employ M. Mead’s paradigm (Mead, 1988) with three basic schemes for Adult – Child interaction:
1. Adult teaches  
2. Adult ↔ Adult  
3. Adult ↔ Child

Child  
Child  
Child ↔ Child

The descriptive constructions suggested by M. Mead determine several directions of analysis. The first, which is rather well developed in modern psychology, is represented by a number of questions concerning the agents who convey existing experience and who create new forms of experience; the forms of conveying experience to the younger generation; and the role of adults and children in the formation of an individual.

However, this descriptive construction implies questions of other sort: What makes it possible for each of the presented constructions to have a certain margin of safety? What enables it to function in changing conditions? When do these changes (external and/or internal) become destructive for the established system? What propels transition to another phase? These questions are directly conducive to identifying the conditions necessary for innovative changes. In this regard, it is interesting to mention a fact discovered by V. Abramenkova (Abramenkova, 2008): she has shown that in the communities of the first type, where children generally learn from adults (the post-figurative type of culture, according to Mead), the children's sub-community (the community of children without interference on behalf of adults) is entrusted with solving the majority of issues of socialization.

We have here, therefore, a different picture: the sources that influence the formation of a person are initially numerous, they vary by structure and by the content of activity. At the same time, there is an organic integrity arising from the collaborative functioning of different social bodies of which a given child is simultaneously a member.

The question of distribution of functions among and inside these theoretically singled out groups remains open. It is nevertheless complemented by a question about the nature of relationships among the different elements of the integrated system. Against this background, the Teacher – Student construction is a particular case that stresses functional roles, among a wider range of patterns of the Adult – Child and Child – Child relationships.

It is possible, as researchers observe, to develop the forms of organization of role-plays in education “now and here” but they can also be borrowed from other types of previous social activities of both children and adults. In the work by G.A. Zuckerman and A.L. Wenger (Zuckerman, Wenger, 2010), it is shown that, in terms of organization, a group of children quickly develops as a form of cooperative activity if the group incorporates children who already know how to organize the process of learning new things.

Numerous investigations of how different forms of cooperative activities of preschoolers develop enable us to point out with much confidence that the forms of organization that are used in this or that form of school education are not the product of this particular period and this
particular form of activity. The majority of these forms is either borrowed or is derived from the constructions that were acquired before.

It does not seem possible to characterize directly the available variety of forms of organization. Organization is a component of a concrete activity, closely incorporated in it and therefore contextually determined in many ways. We will try to solve the problem by resorting to the results of a diagnostic at a different level of activity management. The cluster of norms and values regulates activity by creating the order of relations in the way that it limits the diversity of general activities. We suppose that diagnostic of these “filters” will give us an opportunity to discuss the restrictions imposed on the change in form they are forged by the culture of a certain community in a certain period of time.

3. The Method of Research

This research is based on a prototypical study by Jean Piaget and his colleagues (Piaget, 2006), which 1) reveals changes in child’s attitude to a rule regulating his activity in the process of mastering a specific (cooperative) type of teamwork (play); 2) exposes changes in initial norms as children introduce new rules in the process of joint activity (collective play); and 3) describes specific characteristics of these processes for different age groups. Employing the basic method of J. Piaget (suggesting children concrete situations for discussion), we established a more intricate procedure for processing their answers: all judgments expressed by the children were recorded on the tape. Hence, we could include into our analysis all versions of answering offered by the children, not only Piaget’s “definite” (non-ambiguous) judgments. We also introduced more rigid criteria for classification of the input data. Data analysis took into consideration the following: 1) whether the direct answer corresponded to a certain type of norms; and 2) whether the appendant argumentation corresponded to the direct answer. Taking all these into account, we constructed the following categorical grid for the analysis of moral judgments:

1. The so-called “first” type of norms.
2. The “non-first” type of norms, which includes: 2.1. A “second” type of norms; 2.2. A “third” type of norms; 2.3. Particular answers named for the purposes of our study of the ‘other ‘non-first’ type, which includes direct corresponding answers without argumentation as well as corresponding answers with argumentation which content is not related to norms of a collective organization. 2.4. Dubious, ambivalent answers: a) dubious answers (and/or); b) comments which change in the process of reflection; c) blended answers, where the answer and its argumentation relate to different categories; d) answers of a special type: “a constructive denial ” + formal but not actual consent.
3. Denial.

We have also identified “indirect” factors accompanying essential answers, including: a) active “declaration of the norms” before forming a judgment; b) “reference to conditions or circumstances as reasons for making a decision”; c) “a detailed commentary”; d) making “a statement of facts” before suggesting an extended judgment; e) indication of an active role of a child; f) “an emotional reaction” to the content of the situation.

To proceed further we must clarify the terms used in description. In Piaget’s prototypical study only non-ambiguous answers were subjected to statistical analysis, and respondents’
answers were categorized through descriptive oppositions, which enabled J. Piaget to distinguish
two stages in moral development: heteronomous morality and autonomous morality. This
categorizing paradigm clearly demonstrates not only Piaget’s principles as a researcher but also
his own cultural background. Switzerland is a country where society is traditionally seen as
consolidation of autonomous subjects, and this could well be the reason why Piaget called the
second stage of moral development the “autonomous morality.” In Russian culture (where
systemic networks and structures tend to seek unification through submission), this term may not
be appropriate. This consideration has brought us to introduce a modified implication of Piaget’s
normative categories, naming heteronomous morality as the “first” normative set of standards,
and autonomous morality as a “second” type of norms, with certain specifications for attribution
of the latter.

Firstly, the study revealed a particular category of answers, which we named a “third”
type. It covers judgments made by children and teenagers, which began with a phrasing:
“Contrary to the rules… I think… I believe…”, where respondents clearly positioned themselves
as a self-sufficient system. In Russian culture this construction does not form an invariable
component of the “second” type of norms but, rather, stems from it; therefore, we encapsulated
this type of responses into a separate category for subsequent analysis.

Secondly, among Russian teenagers rational thinking – which is one of the characteristics
of Piaget’s “autonomous” morality – does not form a foundation for creation of new norms,
conducive to the group’s unity and cohesion, therefore we have identified this category of
answers as “other non-first” type.

New methods of collecting and processing information brought the study onto an entirely
new level. In Piaget’s work analysis of interviews for each situation is presented as a separate
project (the study was conducted with different groups of children). In our study every child
expressed his/her judgment of seventeen situations, which enabled us not only to consider the
presence/absence of certain types of norms in each age group, but also to evaluate the “stability”
of each type of morality within one age group.

Thematically the situations offered during interviews fall into eight categories:
1) “Cooperation and development of the notion of justice,” Situations 1 – 3;
2) “Immanent justice,” situations 4 – 6;
3) “Equality and authority,” Situations 7 – 10;
4) “Issues of equality among the peers,” Situations 11 – 12;
5) “Telling a plausible lie,” Situation 13;
6) “Moral realism. Objective responsibility,” Situation 14;
7) “Type of collective sanction: preventive or redemptive?”, Situation 15;
offered to respondents during interviews contain scenarios where adults and/or children adhere
to and/or violate a specific type of moral norms.

The type of question offered for response to the situation presupposes the type of response
expected: the child is invited: a) to give an evaluation; b) to express his/her own opinion,
attitude; c) to give a recommendation to the adult; d) to give a prognosis of the situation’s further
development; e) to identify and comment on the right, appropriate action; e) to give a “first-
person” response, identifying oneself with a character in the situation; f) to give an analysis of
the situation, give the reasons of the characters’ actions.
The study involved 273 respondents, aged 7 to 17; (average 12.7±2.78), 50.2% were girls, 49.8% were boys).

4. Analysis and Results

Results of the study confirm the validity of Piaget’s observations in the majority of cases: with age the number of appeals to the first type of moral norms decreases, and children increasingly appeal to the second type of norms. However the “first” type of norms remains dominant throughout the age span. In some situations there is a marked increase in the number of appeals to the second type of norms, while in other situations there is no such increase. In interviews about Situations 9 and 11 (see Appendix 2) there is a decrease of appeals to the second type of norms (with its initial domination at earlier stages). The results also show that development is accompanied by an overall increase in diversity of responses. Throughout the age span children simultaneously appeal to different types of moral reasoning, also giving blended answers or answers that change in the process of reflection. The study shows that manifestations of certain types of moral reasoning are connected not only with the respondent’s age (experience) but also with the specific content of a given situation and the respondent’s position, or an expected type of answer. For instance, in Situation 2, where children demonstrate “freely accepted group responsibility (2nd type of norms),” and the respondent is invited to give a recommendation to the adult, there is an increase in appeals to the first type of norms.

Analysis of the answers given by children and teenagers, revealed the following situations:

1) with minimal changes within the initial level;
2) with no statistically significant changes but with an overall tendency:
   a) of a “negative” type (the reverse of Piaget’s projections): the first type of moral reasoning increases (Sit. 1) while the second type of moral reasoning decreases (Sit. 2);
   b) of a “positive” type, with decreased number of appeals to the first type (Sit. 3, 9, 17) and increased number of appeals to the second type of norms (Sit.17);
   c) with statistically significant changes of fragmentary (asymmetrical) nature, in only one of the two categories:
      - of a “negative” type: increase of the first type of moral reasoning (Sit. 2, Sit. 13b); decrease of the second type of moral reasoning (Sit. 1 and Sit. 9);
      - of a “positive” type: increased number of appeals to the second type of norms (Sit. 3);
   d) with statistically significant changes (decrease of appeals to the first and increase of appeals to the second type of norms) in Sit. 6, 12, 14, 15, and 16.

Thus, our study has not revealed any obvious shift in absolute dominants, described by Piaget for each of the situations.

The study has also revealed (Sit. 13a) that in some types of activity adherence to the norms of the first and/or second type does not satisfy some of respondents’ vital needs, that is, socially
significant needs at the time of great changes. More specifically, this is a need for personal and individual self-actualization (mentioned by 74% of teenagers aged 12-14 (hereafter referred to as ‘junior teens’) and 81% teenagers aged 15-17 (hereafter referred to as ‘senior teens’); the need to achieve a certain status (mentioned by 17% of junior teens and 19% of senior teens); and the need for attention from significant persons (important for 40% of children aged 8 to 11).

Analysis of individual groups within the same age span shows that statistically significant changes in teenagers’ moral judgments are observed only in certain situations.

Comparative analysis for groups of senior teens (ages 15-17) reveals a tendency for unification of results in all the groups from Moscow region. We observed only one statistically significant difference related to the second type of norms. Statistically significant differences were evident in comparing the results of some groups from Moscow region with the results of the group from remote villages in Archangelsk region, but only for some situations.

Thus results of the study demonstrate certain peculiarities of individual groups (which are especially important to consider when developing targeted programs for training in collaborative skills). At the same time they show the common “profile” of normative control system development among Russian teenagers (with negligible exceptions).

Results of the study lead us to state that for the majority of the situations Russian children, both junior and senior teenagers, tend to choose the first type of moral reasoning, while the development of the second (cooperative) type of norms does not even reach the level demonstrated by 12-year-old Swiss teenagers from Piaget’s study.

The content analysis of situations offered for discussion has shown that:

1. Russian respondents (children as well as junior and senior teens) perceive adults as people who (in interactions with children) are prone to function primarily as superiors in relation to subordinates, but not as equal partners. It must be added that the actual nature of interaction along the lines of Adult – (Child + Child) and Child – Adult produces an increase in appeals to the second (cooperative) type of normative moral reasoning. Even these groups, however, show no radical restructuring in the normative moral reasoning as a whole. It is possible that the developmental paradigm of the normative sphere is limited by foundational characteristics of our community culture.

2. The position of an adult is associated with the necessity of redemptive punishment, which propels children toward a behavioral strategy, based on avoiding punishment (lying; indirect denial + formal consent). In situations when a respondent is compelled to identify his/her judgment with the position of an adult (in order to give a recommendation), the increase in appealing to the second type of norms is minimal. If the situation is presented clearly, that is, a transgression and a culprit come clear and definite, and a punishment must follow, the first type of norms dominates. If a situation is less clear-cut (if a culprit is not suggested by the context), there is an increase in appealing to the second type of norms.

3. In situations based on the Adult – Child plotline we have observed no increase in appealing to the second type of norms.

4. In complex scenarios involving both Adult – Child and Adult – (Child + Child) plotlines, we have observed an increase in appealing to the second type of norms. Interestingly, if a scenario gives grounds for appealing to the second type of norms along the Child – Child plotline (allowing an indulgence, helping a sick brother) in Sit. 9, the indices are higher than in the situations where one of the children violates the equality principle (Sit. 8) or breaches it out of carelessness (Sit. 17).
5. The maximum increase in appealing to the second (cooperative) type of norms is observed in discussion of situations where children interact without adults present (Sit. 12, 15).

6. The situation where the plotline involves a group of children violating the norms of the second type (Sit. 11), requires an entirely different set of norms, for the purposes of the study called the norms of a “third” type, based on working out of a personal attitude, personal choice, and individual responsibility for the choice rather than on consolidation of a group.

5. Conclusion

The results we have received demonstrate that the majority (with rare exception) of Russians aged between 7 and 17 who took part in the survey are not ready for the “partnership” interaction with adults or with their peers when adults are present. However, this characteristic of position is one of the conditions of modernization of the educational system. The coactive model of educational process and promotion of competition will only push this tendency further.

We believe that the way out of this situation should be partially searched in retrieving the lost construction in which adults learn from each other in the presence of children, emphasizing partnership in interaction instead of competing for a better status. This task involves not only the teachers of elite schools, but the whole community. It is time to change our preference of values.

References


