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ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 146 (2014) 313 – 318

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

Third Annual International Conference «Early Childhood Care and Education»

Moral Judgements of Contemporary Adults (Parents, Teachers, Tutors)

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Abstract

The article presents the results of the analysis of adults' moral judgements, directly connected with the process of socialization of the younger generation in big-city life. The comparative analysis we have carried out allows us to discuss the question of homogeneity/heterogeneity of the joint team of tutors, to elicit significant differences for each category and to raise the issue of possibility of mutual substitution among the roles of tutors, teachers and parents.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Russian Psychological Society.

Keywords: moral judgements; normative and value regulation of activity

Dealing with the practical issues of educating and fostering development of the growing generation makes it necessary to give more precision to the theoretical model of the processes that are implied in the general notion of socialization. An effective explanatory model should not only include stable key elements identified in the description of a scrutinized fact, but also represent the object under analysis as a complex, multi-valued and changing system [1]. Constructing such a model requires multi-dimensional and broad-scale research. This article discusses one aspect of socialization – learning and implementing social norms.

As factual data evidence, adults and children do not always use ethical norms as guide for their acts [2]. This does not relate only to the level of learning norms and values; “formal” learning is often the case. Why does not always “knowing a norm” lead to regulating one’s activity according to this norm? What is a system of normative and value regulation like? What is the role of the block of norms and values in the single system of regulation of

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human activity? We will address a particular question in the context of this broad problem area – the issue of norms and values transmitted by adults who are directly involved in educating the younger generation.

Our discussion will start with the identification of the features distinguishing the initial content of the set of norms that the children must learn. An array of norms and values is created to regulate relationships. Reasonable conservatism, opposition to nonconformity is one of the conditions to implement this function. The issue of the norms' content is thus the issue of the correlation between the sets of the prohibitive and the recommending norms in the entire system of activity regulation [3]. The prohibitive norms restrict the range of activity and determine the echelon of functioning by conventions. Normatively predefined reaction of a community to violations of the prohibitive norms is one of the ways of regulating relationships, in general, and of educating, in particular. Violation of prohibitive norms leads either to “expiatory” punishment to compensate for the damage, or to “admonitory” punishment, used as a warning [4]. “Recommending” norms have, as a rule, an idealized form. Such patterns cannot be put in action always and everywhere, since they often suggest acts that do not comply with reality or with a relationship construction associated with a particular period of social development (e.g. models of relationships in fairytales). Other “recommending” norms, inversely, are characterized by an additional reference to certain individuals (persons of reference) and certain situations. In spite of all this, following certain norms and rules does not guarantee effective activity in unconventional, changeable conditions. Consequently, a set of norms and values that adults establish for the children to learn is not stable and univocal in its content and does not encompass all possible cases in real and potential human activity.

The problem of the content of the norms that a child must learn is further complicated by the controversial views of the educating adults themselves concerning such a regulatory structure. The research we have undertaken addresses this issue. We have used as a prototype J. Piaget and his colleagues' investigation of children's moral judgments [4]. The respondents were offered seventeen situations for reflection. The adults were asked to write down their answers to the “open” questions. This procedure is described in detail in our article analyzing moral judgments of children and teenagers [5].

In processing the data, we considered: 1) whether the direct answer corresponded or not to a particular set of norms; 2) whether the argumentation corresponded to the direct answer.

In the indicated piece of research by Piaget, certain descriptive oppositions were used to categorize the respondents' judgments; on the basis of these oppositions Piaget singles out two stages of development: heteronomous and autonomous morality.

Heteronomous morality requires respect for adults and the rules as such. Adults teach the already-established rules as immutable. This proceeds along with social coercion and imposition of a certain opinion regardless of an individual's needs and abilities. The corresponding type of justice is based on retributive responsibility (in case of an infringement all must be punished if the guilty person is not known). Expiatory sanction is established as the form of maintaining “justice”. The responsibility is transferable and objective (corresponds to the damage). The authority is seen as the absolute.

The stage of development corresponding to autonomous morality is based on changeable rules and takes into account the change of circumstances and of the abilities of the participants in a collaborative activity (including games); the highest morality in this case is not a declaration of equal rights but an opportunity to exercise these rights. Such a set of norms presupposes a voluntarily accepted solidarity. Sanctions are admonitory (“Don't do so again..., or you won't play with us anymore”) rather than expiatory. When punishment is used, circumstances and conscious intentions of the guilty person, rather than the calculated damage, are taken into consideration. There is an understanding that authority ruins trust.

This classification was created within a particular culture and therefore its terminological application has certain limitations. We will use different designations for the normative structures worked out by Piaget: the block of heteronomous morality shall be designated as the “first” normative block; the set of rules relating to the autonomous stage shall be designated as the “second” type of norms.

In our investigation, each adult expressed his or her judgment about the seventeen situations that had been offered; this enabled us to raise not only the issue of the presence or absence of this or that type of norms in a certain group, but also the issue of “stability” of each type within this group. *The situations offered for discussion were thematically divided into eight blocks: 1) “Communal and transferable responsibility” (1 – 3); 2) “Immanent justice” (4 – 6); 3) “Equality and authority” (7 – 10); 4) “Issues of equality among peers” (11 – 12); 5) “Plausible lies” (13); 6) “Moral realism. Objective responsibility” (14); 7) “Nature of communal sanctions: precautionary or expiatory measures?” (15); 8) “Clash of retributive and distributive points of view” (16 – 17).* (See brief description of the situation in the attachment).

The plots of the situations offered for the respondents’ reflection included constructions when adults and/or children followed and/or violated a certain type of norms. The mode of the question in the offered situations directed a respondent’s stance in a certain way – he or she was asked to: a) give evaluation; b) express opinion, attitude; c) give a suggestion to an adult; d) predict further events; e) suggest and comment on a necessary or suitable act; f) react to something (to answer from the first-person perspective when the respondent could identify with the protagonist of the story); g) analyze the situation, explain the reasons for the acts of the participants.

The investigation involved 55 adults: 20 – parents of the preschoolers from the Children Club “Orlyonok” (Moscow); 19 – teachers of a boarding school; 16 – tutors of the preschoolers from the Children Club and tutors of the boarding school. Socio-demographic distribution in the entire adult group was the following: 74.5 percent of women and 25.5 percent of men.

Table 1 presents the results of the analysis by categories of the content of the adults’ judgments with regard to the norms of the first and the second types.

Table 1. Frequency of responses of the first and the second types in all situations. The data are classified by three categories of respondents.

Situations	Judgments based on the norms of the 1 st type				Judgments based on the norms of the 2 nd type			
	Parents	Teachers	Tutors	Significance	Parents	Teachers	Tutors	Significance
1	0.250	0.316	0.625	0.054	0.500	0.421	0.250	0.306
2	0.300	0.211	0.250	0.813	0.050	0.053	0.063	0.986
3	0.100	0.053	0.125	0.748	0.500	0.421	0.188	0.145
4	0.600	0.211	0.375	0.045	0.000	0.000	0.000	N/A
5	0.000	0.000	0.000	N/A	0.000	0.000	0.000	N/A
6	0.150	0.158	0.063	N/A	0.000	0.000	0.000	N/A
7	0.450	0.316	0.438	0.649	0.250	0.421	0.313	0.518
8	0.050	0.105	0.188	0.420	0.100	0.368	0.438	0.056
9	0.100	0.316	0.313	0.198	0.400	0.526	0.438	0.721
10	0.100	0.053	0.000	0.422	0.550	0.158	0.125	0.006
11	0.000	0.053	0.063	0.546	0.000	0.000	0.000	N/A
12	0.000	0.000	0.000	N/A	0.650	0.579	0.688	0.792
13	0.650	0.684	0.750	0.810	0.000	0.000	0.000	N/A
14	0.050	0.053	0.125	0.633	0.750	0.684	0.375	0.054
15	0.150	0.053	0.125	0.604	0.300	0.158	0.063	0.175
16	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.653	0.250	0.684	0.563	0.020

17	0.050	0.053	0.188	0.280	0.350	0.053	0.000	0.005
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The table reflects only those responses that could be clearly referred to either the first or the second normative type. It quotes the frequency of responses in each type and in each category of the adults; it also quotes the divergence value determined by the *phi-criterion*. It should be noted that responses meeting a strict criterion, when a clear answer would be supplemented by an argumentation corresponding to the given type, were not received for every situation. There were fairly many responses that could be referred to the statements of a “mixed” type.

In the first type of norms, the statistically significant divergence (0.054) was received in Situation 1, where the mother punishes all her children, including the guiltless one, for violating a prohibition (communally distributed responsibility). Comparison demonstrates the minimal value in the parents’ group and the maximal in the tutors’ group. At the same time, there is also a noteworthy fact of a statistically significant divergence of judgments in response to Situation 4 (0.045), where the children steal the neighbors’ apples. In this situation, the parents resorted to the norms of the first type more often than the teachers and the tutors. A comparative analysis of the data relating to these situations gives grounds for the assertion that “the necessity to punish for a misdeed” remains a social norm, but such a function tends to be delegated to someone else.

Analysis of the judgments belonging to the set of norms of the second type has demonstrated that statistically significant divergence (0.006) is received in Situation 10; in its plot, the father violates the equality principle by sending only one (“the obedient”) child shopping all the time. The parents’ group displayed the highest degree of orientation on the norms of the second type, while the tutors’ group displayed the lowest.

Situation 14, where a respondent is asked to decide if the child is guiltier when incidentally breaking many cups or when breaking only one cup deliberately, also gave a statistically significant divergence (0.054). The highest result (indicating the necessity to consider the intentions when judging about the misdeed) was demonstrated by the “parents”, while the “tutors” displayed the lowest.

In Situation 17 (according to the plot, the mother gives sweets to all the children; one child drops his/her chocolate in water as a result of misbehaving; the question is whether not to give anything or to share), the “parents” displayed the highest value in terms of following the norms of the second type, while the result in the tutors’ group is zero and the divergence with the teachers’ group is statistically significant (0.005).

Situation 8 (according to its plot, the mother breaks a preliminary agreement by doubling one child’s workload, while the other is allowed to go outdoors without fulfilling his/her own share) demonstrated the inverse relationship: the minimal rate of judgments with regard to the norms of the second type is in the parents’ group, while the maximal is in the tutors’ group. This divergence is also statistically significant (0.056). This means that when the respondents are asked to evaluate a child’s act or to recommend a certain action toward the child, the parents’ group tended to consider the norms of the second type; but when it is the adult (the mother) who breaks the preliminary agreement with the children, the parents’ normative reference points tended to change.

Such a distribution of the data could be explained by the parents’ desire (or the necessity) to justify the mother’s actions. This question calls for a special analysis and special investigations. The necessity of this is also supported by the result of judgment analysis in Situation 16 (the mother rewards only her favorite, obedient daughter). Instead of answering the direct question (“What do you think of this?”), the “parents” voiced declarations of equality of all children. The “teachers” and the “tutors”, however, pointed to the injustice committed, to a negative forecast (the values of divergence with the parents’ group are 0.020 and 0.080 respectively).

The investigation of sets of norms and values that we have made on the basis of the analysis of the adults’ moral judgments (parents, teachers, tutors) thus demonstrates that no explicit normative keynote could be identified in all the three groups in terms of content. The adults’ reference points include constructions of the normative sets of both the first and the second type. Nevertheless, the “parents” adhere to the norms of the second

type in the greatest measure; they are followed by the “teachers”, in quantitative terms; the minimal representation of this type is among the “tutors”. The normative set of the first type manifests itself most frequently in the tutors’ judgments.

The received data are controversial; they leave the following question in a large measure open: To what extent are the “normative profiles” of different adult groups acting as reference persons in different periods of a child’s development similar or dissimilar? At the same time, the identified differences in the three adult groups raise the issues of functional complementarity and the boundaries of mutual substitutability of the roles of parents, teachers and tutors in the practice of upbringing and education.

Furthermore, the polyphony of normative and value patterns revealed in the adults’ judgments indicates the necessity to readjust the objectives of educational practices in the current period of social change and encounter of normative sets representing diverse cultures. We believe that there is an increasing necessity to teach children to make conscious decisions with regard to the existing norms instead of blindly following the norms of this or that type, which requires a different order of actions and a different attitude on behalf of acting individuals. In this respect, the results we have obtained seem to be of importance, since they point to the fact that Moscow teachers and tutors are inclined in favor of the first type of norms, which is predicated on “vertical” relationships.

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Attachment.

Brief descriptions of the situations

1 – 3 Among group of children some of children (or one of them) did something wrong, forbidden. The violator(s) did not confess. The situations are varying: other children did not know who was(were) violator(s) or knew about it, the adult making decision about penalties could be parents or teachers. What should he/she do: to punish all children or nobody?

4 – 6. A child (children) did something forbidden and this act was not reveal. But then by chance something unpleasant happened with the violator(s), making harm for the health, belongings and so on. Why these unpleasant things happened?

7 – 10. An adult (a parent, a teacher, an educator) using own authority ask one of children to do something what have to do the other child, because the first one was more obedient and for the adult it was easier to ask him (her) to do duty of other one.

11. The group of children enforces one child to make boring (unpleasant) work for others.

12. The group of children were sitting on picnic eating there sandwiches. Unknown dog stall the sandwich of one child. What other children should do?

13. Next two situations should be compared. Whose lie is worse?

A. A boy could not draw well but wanted to do it. One time having got nice drawing, which was made by some one other told that namely he had made this drawing.

B. A boy was playing with mother's watches at home when she was out. Then he put the watches somewhere and forgot the place. When mother asked about the watches he answered that did not see the watches at all.

14. Next two situations should be compared. Who is guiltier?

A. A boy is invited to have dinner. He is ignoring the invitation during a long period. Mother having got tired to wait decided to make cleaning the dining room, put dishes on the chair near the door. Suddenly the boy decided to eat, abruptly opened the door, dropped the chair with dishes, all dishes were broken.

B. A boy staying at home alone decide to try jam, which he was not allowed to it and it was hidden far away (difficult to take). Trying to take it he broke a dish on his way.

15. More young children in school asked more old pupils to show them something in the school museum. They agreed but with the term than juniors should behave well. But during demonstration young children forgot their promising and as results broke something. The old pupils told that would never show anything. Were they right? Why?

16. Mother had two daughters. One girl was more obedient, then other one. Mother loved the first one more and all time trying to give, to cook her better things. What do you think about it?

17. Mother and her three sons are riding on a boat. All of them had a bar of chocolate. One boy behaved not appropriately and lost his bar into water. What should other family members do? To give him parts of their own bars, or give nothing?