

GENDER ORIENTATIONS AND PRACTICES OF EDUCATING MODERN PRESCHOOL TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF PRIMARY GENDER SOCIALIZATION OF A PERSONALITY

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The article discusses the role of preschool teachers in the process of primary gender socialization of girls and boys. It shows specificity of primary socialization in the preschool period, indicates some positive and negative tendencies in relation to monitoring the principle of gender equality in the contemporary Russian preschool education. It presents the results of the empiric study of content characteristics of the opinions of teachers working with children of preschool age about the future of their pupils and the real educational practice in preschool educational institutions. Based on the analysis of gender orientations of teachers about the future of girls and boys, and on the observations over the educational process in kindergarten groups a fact was established of the traditional strategy of gender socialization of preschool children, which is based on pedagogical influence strictly differentiated according to gender.

Keywords: primary gender socialization, preschool teachers, ideas about the future of preschoolers, the practice of educating girls and boys

It is known that the preschool age is the period of the so-called primary socialization, the essence of which is the understanding by the child of the meaning of norms, values and requirements put forth by surrounding socio-cultural environment. In other words, “the first task which the child, “entering” the social world must solve is to reconstruct the social world in the subjective space by means of forming an appropriate system of commonly accepted values” [7, p. 152]. And the period of the primary socialization is associated mainly with unconscious and passive mechanisms of assimilation of culture, and only the secondary socialization beginning not prior than adolescence, is characterized by greater involvement of cognitive mechanisms, critical reviewing of adopted norms and stereotypes and, as a consequence, by the possibility of creative transformation of the environment.

Another fundamental feature of preschool children socialization may be the fact that natural influences of socio-cultural environment are superseded by targeted social influences in the process of interaction of an adult (as the bearer of culture) and a child, i.e. education which, as considered by L.S. Vygotsky, is the leading source and defining beginning of a personality’s development. Thus, according to available scientific data, the process of targeted educational influences during the primary socialization is accompanied by a number of mechanisms, among which, first of all, we should mention internalization, identification, learning, social comparison with the immediate environment and the acquisition of categorization [9]. However, as noted above, it should be kept in mind that all indicated mechanisms are

not quite consciously defined and for the most part are not subjectively controllable.

Primary socialization, especially in the process of educational influences, presupposes the existence of intermediaries between the child and the social world, and this role of a mediator, in the first place, is performed by those culture bearers who belong to the group of significant others – the close adults. It is through them that the child learns about the cultural heritage, the system of social norms and values (including gender ideals and standards), and, consequently, not all cultural achievements, not all actually existing social experiences become available to the child, since his integration into the society at the earlier stages of development is considerably limited by subjective experience and activity of intermediaries – significant others. And although modern preschoolers grow up in a completely different socio-cultural environment than earlier [1], the role of significant others in their development can hardly be overestimated.

At a preschool age the number of significant others, along with parents, includes also preschool institutions personnel whose influence has a significant effect on the social development of the child’s personality including gender socialization as well.

It should be mentioned that in our country the problems of psycho-pedagogical support of gender socialization process of preschool children and the introduction of gender approach into pedagogic practice of preschool educational institutions came to the agenda rather recently, however, it is worth noting that some pertinent experience has already been gained. Thus, according to some experts, though the

educational community cannot have a direct influence on changing gender roles in the family and gender ideals of the media, it is capable of identifying and amplifying positive transformations correcting gender socialization of children towards the egalitarian model of interaction between the sexes, which, in its turn, will expand the social space for self-realization [10]. And, to this end, it is suggested that pedagogical attention should be focused on the development in the younger generation of the following self-actualizing personality features:

- self-confidence, activeness (desire to manifest one's own self in various activities);
- creativity, tolerance (flexibility in the perception of gender roles);
- peacefulness (sensitivity, empathy and reflexivity, ability to understand the condition of another person, sincerely express own feelings without any limitations from the point of view of "gender adequacy", desire and ability to care for others);
- social loyalty when both the girls and boys perceive as a norm free choice of activities, games, professions, cooperation in joint activities, exchange of managerial roles, etc.

In other words, we are talking about the so-called alternative (to patriarchal norms and standards) strategy of gender socialization, which with reference to psycho-pedagogical practice is brought down to the following benchmarks [8]:

- forswearing educational influences differentiated by gender; neutralization and mitigation of socially determined differences between persons of female and male sexes;
- lack of focus on their "special predestination" and recognition of interchangeability of female and male social roles;
- implementation of ideas of gender equality in different spheres of life;
- providing each person with freedom of choice, encouraging individual interests and preferences to which the person's sex is irrelevant;
- creating conditions for opportunities to be different girls / women, and different boys / men.
- bringing up gender unbiased children.

One of the positive trends in terms of psychological and pedagogical support of preschoolers' gender socialization is the emergence of a methodological guide for the organization of educational activities in preschool educational institutions under the Federal State Educational Standard of Preschool Education (ФГОС ДО), wherein the notions of "sex" and "gender" have been correctly differentiated for the first time and true interpretation of gender approach in pedagogical practice has been presented [2].

However, at the same time, according to the data available as on date, preschool institutions' teachers themselves have mainly traditional gender attitudes [5] and, according to their pedagogical views and the content of some of their preschool educational programs used by them, they implement in practice mainly the strategy of traditional rigidly differentiated gender socialization [3; 7].

Thus, as shown by the analysis of pedagogical activity experience, the modern practice of Russian preschool education is yet little focused on the norms of gender equality, though some positive changes, including the very fact of being aware of the existing state of things, are being noted.

Materials and methods of research

Considering all the facts presented above, we have organized and carried out our own empiric study, the purpose of which were the content-based characteristics of gender orientations and the actual practices of educating teachers working with preschool children (a total of 80 persons; of them, 55 teachers from Nizhny Novgorod, and 25 teachers from district centers of Nizhny Novgorod region).

Our study included two stages: in the first one, we have analyzed the perceptions of preschool educational institutions' teachers about the future of their wards of girls and boys, using a modified version of N.V. Osetrova's [4] method; in the second one we have studied real educational practices of preschool teachers by way of watching over the pedagogical process in kindergarten groups (observations were carried out during several months in 14 groups of 7 preschool educational institutions in the city of Nizhny Novgorod and the city of Semenov, Nizhny Novgorod region).

Results of research and their discussion

Using the logic of a step-by-step analysis we shall briefly summarize the results we obtained. First, we'd like to refer to the data of the table that reflect meaningful aspects of teachers' gender orientations.

So, as the data of the first stage of the study convinced us, the teachers of preschool educational institutions, with few exceptions, mainly have traditional views regarding femininity and masculinity, according to which they associate the future of the girls with their self-realization in a family as a beloved, physically attractive wife, caring mother and competent housewife, while the future of the boys – with their professional self-realization, financial competence, ability to defend their rights, to be a physically strong and self-confident personality.

Perceptions of preschool teachers about the future of girls and boys

Features/Values	Girls (X / δ)	Boys (X / δ)
Well-brought, educated	5,3 / 3,9	7,3 / 4,8
A successful professional engaged in favorite business	12,9 / 4,3	6,6 / 6,5
Happy in love	3,1 / 2,8	13,0 / 3,7
Able to make concessions to other people	6,1 / 5,4	12,4 / 5,5
Attractive appearance	7,3 / 4,9	15,9 / 2,8
Capable to set up a good family	2,7 / 3,1	9,6 / 6,1
Patriot	17,7 / 4,9	16,3 / 5,1
Self-confident	13,1 / 4,8	4,1 / 3,3
Hardworking	8,3 / 5,6	9,1 / 5,9
Capable to start one's own business and achieve success in it	14,8 / 4,0	9,9 / 5,9
Having real friends	11,1 / 4,0	10,8 / 4,9
Caring father (mother)	4,7 / 4,5	9,7 / 5,8
Physically strong, developed	16,7 / 6,9	3,4 / 1,7
Able to run the household	5,9 / 3,8	11,3 / 6,7
Delicate and responsive	6,7 / 4,5	11,1 / 5,5
Capable to provide for the one's own material well-being	15,1 / 3,7	8,7 / 5,4
Able to care for the own appearance	7,1 / 3,2	15,1 / 5,7
The one who achieved high social status	15,8 / 3,9	12,2 / 6,6
Capable to defend himself (herself), to stand up to his (her) interests	14,3 / 4,6	3,9 / 4,7
Financial viability	16,4 / 3,5	8,9 / 6,3
A truthful person	13,3 / 4,3	10,1 / 4,4

Note: X – average values data (the smaller X is, the higher the degree of quality significance); δ – standard deviation from medial values.

Thus, socio-psychological portrait of a girl in the future is endowed by teachers with the following qualities: the ability to build up a good family, the ability to be happy in love and be a caring mother, to be cultured and educated, the ability to run household, to make concessions to others, sensitivity and responsiveness, the ability to take care of her appearance and, subsequently, to look well, and somewhat less often – diligence.

In other words, teachers tend to view the future of their girl pupils only through the prism of private (family) sphere, and their activity is associated with caring for children and spouse, creating home comfort, housekeeping and caring for their appearance, which, along with being educated and cultured is considered to be a significant enough attribute of the modern woman. However, a girl's education turns out to be practically out of demand outside the family circle because such qualities as professionalism, the ability to set up their own business and succeed in it, the ability to provide material well-being and to achieve social standing are not among the priorities of the future life of the girls from the point of view

of teachers. Besides, such features as honesty, self-confidence, ability to defend their interests are considered to be not typical and not significant, and such feature as patriotism is not considered to be topical at all.

Thus, teachers view girls not as independent members of social life, but as a kind of addition to their husbands and children, guardians of a family hearth, i.e. their future is perceived by them exclusively from the standpoint of the traditional stereotype of femininity.

The socio-psychological portrait of boys in the future is endowed with different features, such as physical strength, the ability to protect themselves and defend their interests, self-confidence, high-level professionalism, being cultured and educated, the ability to provide for their material well-being, financial solvency, and, less often, being hard-working. At the same time the features that move into the background are: the ability to build up a good family, being a caring father, honesty, sensitivity and responsiveness, the ability to run the household, the ability to achieve high social standing, willingness to make concessions to others, the ability to care for their own appearance and to look

attractive. And, as well as with girls, the feature of patriotism is not called for.

However, it should be noted that the views of teachers regarding the future of the girls were on a whole rather similar whereas regarding the boys we have observed that the teachers from the regional centers showed a tendency to deviate from their stereotypical perception as they associated their future life not only with gender-normative features of masculinity, but also with those socio-psychological qualities and values that do not belong to the traditional standards of male gender roles. So, according to their point of view, in addition to physical strength, self-confidence, ability to defend themselves and defend their rights, a modern man should also set up a good family and become a caring father, be sensitive and responsive and be able to run the household. And the ability to provide for their material well-being, financial viability, ability to set up their own business and succeed in it move into the background.

We associate this fact with the socio-economic situation in the district centers, where it is not always a man who may realistically be the main breadwinner in the family and where there are no conditions for successful business, as well as with personal experiences of the subjects (they are all divorced mothers) who dream of a life partner oriented not only on professional self-realization but also on his family and domestic responsibilities.

Yet on the whole teachers of preschool educational institutions showed the predominance of traditional stereotype views on masculinity.

Based on the obtained data, it is quite logical to expect that such opinions and attitudes of teachers as regards their pupils are reflected in their ongoing educational practice. We have found a proof of this in the course of the second stage of the study when observing organization of pedagogical process in kindergarten groups (the help in making the observations was rendered by psychology students of NNSPU named after K. Minin).

So, it was found out that for girls there is a restriction in their activities beyond cultural and hygienic skills and domestic labor, there are demands for obedience and diligence, they are oriented on interests related exclusively to home and family whereas boys are encouraged in intellectual activities, physical strength and competence (especially during outdoor walks),

stimulated in professional interests (in the process of playing, drawing, reading literature), while as a rule care for their looks is neglected and appeal to their feelings and emotions is extremely rare.

Conclusion

Thus, as our study shows, the absolute majority of preschool educational institution teachers, both in their beliefs and in actual pedagogical practice do not tend to adhere to a widely declared in the public discourse of contemporary Russian society in general and Russian educational system in particular, democratic principle of gender equality and accountability for individual specifics of each child regardless of its sex. On the contrary, quite a number of teachers prefer to focus on traditional gender norms and standards, guided by the principle "according to the gender of the child", reinforcing gender stereotypical interests in children and, therefore, act as agents of rigidly differentiated gender socialization.

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