



Social Situation of Child's Development - the Key Concept in Modern Developmental Psychology

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Аннотация

The present study is aimed to examine the role of the concept of social situation of development, suggested by L.S. Vygotsky, to define determinants of psychological development of a child in modern developmental psychology. Its heuristic character is exposed by the fact that further elaboration of fundamental and applied aspects of developmental psychology does not make the concept less urgent. New studies still enrich its content, opening perspectives for further research.

Ключевые слова: development, social relations, cultural-historical theory by L.S. Vygotsky, contextualism, social situation of development



The idea of social-historical dependency of human psyche and its development in ontogenesis comes as one of the most important points in cultural-historical theory elaborated by L.S. Vygotsky. Superior psychological functions, distinctive for human psyche, are social in the structure, since they are mediated by a sign and its meaning. They are moulded during the lifetime by the mechanism of interiorization in collaboration with an adult as the bearer of social-cultural experience. Superior psychological functions, as it was suggested by L.S. Vygotsky, are not inborn, but set as an "ideal form" of superior generic abilities of a human being. Such approach to regularities of psychological development in ontogenesis determines an essentially new understanding of the role of surroundings in psychological development of a child. Social surroundings come as a source of child's psychological development, because they comprise the system of cultural tools, symbols and standards, that have to be mastered to develop superior psychological functions. Allowing for a certain selectivity of child's attitude to social milieu, L.S. Vygotsky formulated the principle of social situation of development which permits to concretize the mechanisms of interaction between a developing child and his social-cultural environment.

The concept of social situation of development was introduced by L.S. Vygotsky within his theory on the structure and dynamics of psychological age. Social situation of development as the essential characteristic of the age, alongside with psychological new formations of consciousness and personality, form the structure of psychological age. The author strenuously objected to understanding of the environment as a system external towards the child, as the sum total of objective stimuli which would affect the child by the very fact of their existence. T.S. Vygotsky would contrast the understanding of environment as a factor of development with a social situation of development. A social situation of development as "the unique, specific for a particular age, inimitable relationship between a child and social surroundings" (Vygotsky, 2000, p. 903). Such definition of social situation of development opposes to behaviorism understanding of milieu as a stimuli surroundings, mostly social, a factor of development.

A social situation of development, as Vygotsky put it, defines the child's way of life, his social existence, and peculiarities of his consciousness; it is the foundation of all dynamic changes, and the basis for psychological development. According to T.S. Vygotsky, a social situation of development appears as a mere system of



relationship between a child and social surroundings, hence with child's development, it comes to disintegration at the age-related stage; the transformation reflects child's new accomplishments, thus paving the way for a new social situation of development. The basic transformation of a social situation of development would emerge during the periods of developmental crisis, defining their psychological content and setting a new impetus and direction to child's psychological development.

The study of surroundings as developmental determinant for T.S. Vygotsky was the investigation of its role in psychological development of a child. For an object of development the scientist would not take a child as a separate individual, but rather a child in the unity of his social relations and attitudes towards the social surroundings. Vygotsky's approach does not oppose a child to his surroundings as two fundamentally different essences. Social background never comes as something external to child's personality, the child himself appears as a part of social surroundings.

To investigate the role of social background in child's development we have to define the meaning of surroundings to the child, child's attitude towards different sides of his surroundings, in other words, we have to expose the active-effective position of a child as regards his surroundings. Representing the relationship between a child and his milieu, the social situation of development immanently proposes the active position of a child in developing such relations. For L.S. Vygotsky, the unit for analysis of relation between a personality and surroundings was emotional experience. This would imply the internal relation of a child as a human being to different elements of reality (Vygotsky, 2000, p. 994). The character and content of emotional experience defines the way child's development is affected by a certain feature of social surroundings. In other words, "social surroundings define the child's development through his emotional experience ... child's attitude to surroundings, and vice versa, the way surroundings affect a child, are regarded through his emotional experience and activity, thus surroundings acquire a leading force through child's perception" (Vygotsky, 2000, p. 995). Laying special emphasis on the study of internal emotional experience of a child for defining the causal condition of social background in his development, L.S. Vygotsky would point to 'enormous theoretical difficulties' of such analysis, caused by necessity to develop the relevant conceptual apparatus, on the one hand, and adequate methodology on the other. At the same time, L.S. Vygotsky



maintained, clinical experience and practical work with a problem child, focused on developmental problems, irrefutably confirms the fact, that the very character of child's emotional experience acquired in his relations with social surroundings gives a clue to understanding of a particular course of child's psychological development. The concept of experience as child's subjective reflection of his objective place in the system of social relations forms a subjective element of the social situation of development (Vygotsky, 2000; Bozhovich, 1968; 1979; 1988; Elkonin, 1994).

In his works on child psychology L.S. Vygotsky gave a brilliant description of social situation of development for different psychological ages with a special focus on crisis periods. One of the essential characteristics of social situation of development is that it involves the basic contradiction, and its settlement determines the principal line of child development and main psychological new formations of the age. Thus, social situation of development in infancy is presented by the contradiction between the maximum intensity of social contacts that defines all relations between a child and the world, entirely mediated by others, that is, socially mediated, and the minimum level of means for communication. Peculiarities of child's attitude to the world that reflect his accomplishments and limitations in development objectify developmental goals, which successful fulfillment should form new psychological abilities of a child, providing qualitative transformation of his consciousness.

The zone of immediate development is another important concept in L.S. Vygotsky's theory defining the mechanisms of determination of child's development by surroundings. The zone of immediate development comes as a gap between the level of actual development when a child solves the task unassisted, and the level of potential development, achieved with the assistance of an adult (Vygotsky, 1956). Interaction with an adult is the "next day in development" for a child (D.B. Elkonin). This interaction is regarded as a mediator between social background - the source of development - and the child himself. The study of functions, forms and means of this interaction became one of the priority objectives in research of regularities in child's development within a cultural-historical approach (Zuckerman & Polivanova, 1992; Tisina, 1986; Obukhova, 1995; Elkonin, 1989; Slobodchikov, 1991; 1994; Feldstein, 1989). In modern foreign psychology we can see significant changes in understanding of the role of surroundings in child's development. It is connected both with the search for new



theoretical models which should reveal regularities in child's development in ontogenesis, and with the influence of ideas of cultural-historical approach introduced by T.S. Vygotsky.

We can distinguish two main approaches to understanding of child's psychological development in modern psychology. The first one is the stage approach which regards development as a universal linear process of change of consecutive psychological structures (nativism, S. Freud, A. Gesell, N. Chomsky and others). Adherents of this approach stick to dichotomy oppositions: "personality-milieu," "heredity-experience." Personality and milieu are regarded as two different essences, or groups of factors regardless of their dynamic interaction or self-organized activity of an individual (Fischer, 1998). The second approach emerged due to dissatisfaction with the conclusions of correlation of stability of development and diversity of individual developmental trajectories. Systemdynamic approach regards development as a multiple mutual and uninterrupted process of interaction of different levels of the system - from molecular to cultural. It denies the dichotomies cherished in the past - heredity-milieu, individual-society, biology-culture. It is established, that the process of developmental changes can only be comprehended by investigation of relations between the individual and the context. Diversity of contexts results in a diversity of developmental individual trajectories. The subject of investigation is formed by a dynamic system of relations "individual-milieu," which changes in due course (Fischer, 1998; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998).

There are two main points grounded by the system-dynamic approach which may narrow the gap between modern foreign psychology and the approach introduced by T.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Teontiev, D.B. F Ikonin. One of them exposes the role of social surroundings for child's development. It assumes the form of social contexts, adoption of cultural experience, in particular. Another would focus on the activity of developing child, his objectives, self-regulation and self-efficiency (Bandura & Walters, 2000; Fischer, 1998). Kurt Lewin (2000) in his theory of "psychological field" would emphasize the role of human's activity in creation of his own life space. He did not just regard milieu as a certain physical and social context, but also approached it in the terms of child perception of this context. "Objective surroundings" maybe perceived by a child in different ways depending on his needs and necessities. That is why human behavior may not always depend on the social surroundings. Fundamental development process in the system-dynamic approach is regarded as a changing link between an individual and multiple



contexts around him, the individual would experience integration and differentiation of his ego and the surroundings. Thus, the individual should develop together with the social-cultural context (Vygotsky, 2000; Bruner, 1996; Rogoff, 1993; Cole, 1989; 1997).

Contextualism as well as the close attention for the system of relations between a child and his social background appear to be the most important characteristics of modern theoretical models of child development. Contextualism engaged in definition of developmental determinants, scientific interest for the system of relations between the child and his narrow or wide social surroundings, the focus on various versions of development in different national, race, ethnical and cultural conditions, a broader use of intervention, not only as practical but also research objectives - all these come as distinctive features of modern developmental psychology (Lerner, 1982; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). The study of family impact, as well as the type of family upbringing on personality development in childhood and adolescence (Baumrind, 1989; Karabanova, 2004), minute analysis of the forms of school life, the impact of unfavorable social-economical and family conditions on development of deviant behavior in adolescence (Bandura & Walters, 2000), the role of peers' groups in child development (Harris, 1995; Smirnova, 1994; Feldstein, 1989; Petrovsky, 1992) seem to gain prevalence in the research of a new developmental model "child-context."

The first fundamental change both in Russian and foreign psychology as regards the role of milieu in child development appears in new understanding of the object of development. In previous studies an individual used to be considered separately from the life contexts, in dichotomy "individual-surroundings," now the focus is set on personality which is functioning and developing as a part of a complex system "human-surroundings" (Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). This change narrows the gap between foreign and Russian developmental psychology where the system of relations "child-adults" is the object of development (Vygotsky, 2000; Venger, Slobodchikov, & Elkonin, 1988). But there is still difference, because though foreign researchers would recognize the unity of a developing individual and his social surroundings, they are prone to consider the individual child functioning and development as dependant on social, cultural and physical characteristics of his surroundings. Thus, in modern behavioral theories social background is regarded as a source of information or as a source of stimulation or reward. The child would establish two forms of causal dependency in learning, which helps interact with the environment



more effectively. One form is dependency between outward conditions, situations and their impact on a child, another is dependency between a certain way of behavior and its consequences (Bolles, 1972). As a result, social surroundings appear to be more predictable and controlled.

The concept optimal milieu was also initially established for surroundings as a source of stimulation (Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). Optimal stimulation is characterized by a preferred level of stimulation and the level that is most effective for development. It was demonstrated that the most effective level of stimulation was diverse stimulation of the average intensity level (Wohlwill, 1973). At the same time, there was exposed dependency of the optimum of stimulation on the age, individual features, early child experience, learning, maturity, etc. Sensitive periods also come as an important factor which determines the content characteristics of an optimal background. At the same time, it is suggested that optimal milieu can be specially created either by a certain arrangement in the process of learning (reward manipulation) or by the child himself which may arrange and control his surroundings. In the physical world the child is active in structuring his surroundings, arranging his perception, memory, intellectual and other cognitive processes, which leads to successful development of cognitive and social competence and egoidentity. With social surroundings the first initiative belongs to "intimate adult" and only later the child becomes an active subject in arranging his social environment (Bowlby, 1988; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975; Mac-coby, 1992; Ainsworth, 1982; Rogoff, 1993). The affection theory exposed the role of a close relative in development of child's cognitive activity and curiosity in the world investigation, his intellectual and personality development (Bowlby, 1988; Ainsworth, 1982; Crittenden, 2000). Here the concept of "working model" is of special interest. It is being shaped in infancy to determine mother's image in the form of child's expectations about her behavior. The "working model" performs the function of child direction in the situation of social interaction and prediction of the content and forms of cooperation with an adult relation.

Environmental effect can also be distinguished as the one "organizing" and "activating" events. The first type marks the events that form child's predisposition to a certain type of behavior. The second is comprised by activating events that play the role of a starting signal which triggers a particular type of child's reaction on the environmental pressure. "Organizing" events form the essential



factor of child's development, while the effect of "activating" events can be estimated by the whole history of his development including those personality dispositions shaped under the influence of "organizing" events (Magnusson & Stattin, 1998).

One more category - significant events - comprises environmental pressures which effect the processes of development and further life of a child, the "cause" which triggers distant consequences. A number of factors define the events that should be important for child development: individual peculiarities, history of development, readiness for perception of these significant events.

An important peculiarity of modern understanding of social surroundings is that it focuses on the role of social-cultural factors. Milieu in most cases is also regarded as a social-cultural background (Cole, 1989; 1997; Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). At the same time there are essential differences in causal models that interpret the role and meaning of milieu in development.

There are three main causal models that clarify the regularities of psychological development in childhood: the mental model which emphasizes the role of intra-psychic processes in development (perception, thinking, emotions, values, plans, etc.), the biological model focuses on the role of anatomy and physiology of cerebrospinal system and heredity, and the model that underlines the role of environment in child's development. All three models emerge from the conception of unidirectional causality (behaviorism maintained by Watson, the theory of operant learning introduced by Skinner, the theory of maturing). Such unidirectional model of causality is peculiar in the way that an individual and his surroundings come as different essences. Alternative models of causality are the models of classical and modern (holistic) interactionism.

In the model of classic interactionism an individual and his surroundings create a system where the former appears as an active goal- directed subject. Behavior is regarded as a function of personality features and environmental characteristics. Thus, the model, though with some reservation, maintains a dualistic view of individual and milieu. Social environment is analyzed separately from the individual, focusing on their dynamic interaction. Interactionism model was developed by W. Stern (Obukhova, 1995), U. Bronfenbrenner (1998), R. Terner (1982), A. Bandura (Bandura & Walters, 2000) and others. Reciprocity but not unidirection is regarded here as a main characteristic of causal links. Multidirection character of interaction "individual-milieu" would suggest a



feedback between them, the subject's activity plays an important role at that. The approach of self-efficiency, introduced by A. Bandura, contends that subject's activity manifests itself in the ability to formulate and choose goals in accordance with the estimation of one's capabilities, self-control, self-regulation, and self-reward. High self-efficiency would appear as a subject's readiness to take a risk of a certain overestimation of his own abilities required for goal achievement.

A well-known model of the "goodness of fit" (Turner, 1982) considers the psychological well-being of a child as depending on his personal features on the one hand and environmental characteristics on the other. Child's ability to adjust his own behavior and to adapt it in accordance with the situation defines the level and degree of developmental success. This approach does not take surroundings or heredity (biological status) of an individual as good or bad for his development. The result of development is defined by correlation between milieu and heredity.

In ecological and interactional perspectives subjects activity is connected with flexibility and a certain quality of self-regulation. Activity of a competent personality surfaces in his ability to estimate the problems and his own capacities to overcome them, to choose and develop links with those contexts which should develop these capacities and avoid interaction with the contexts which should limit them. The subject's activity is also revealed in his intention for self-changes or context-changes to achieve the best correlation between his own abilities and characteristics of the contexts (Ford & Ferner, 1992).

The model of holistic interactionism asserts the necessity for a complex approach to consideration of personality-milieu interaction in the developmental processes. Holistic and classic interactionism are distinguished as following. First of all, holistic approach would focus more on the unity of the system "individual-surroundings," as well as its dynamic character. Besides, within holistic approach there is a demand to analyze the integral interaction between psychological, biological, behavioral and social factors. A holistic principle would come as the main principle of holistic interactionism. It is the principle of time organization, the principle of novelty in development, of dynamic interaction, organization, integration processes, amplifications of minimal effects. Holistic principle, or integration principle, maintains that any psychological structure acquires its own meaning in accordance with its role in subject's functioning. The principle of time organization suggests a particular



rhythm and periodicity in development and difference in rates of processes on different levels of the system. Processes on the inferior levels of the system are faster than those of the superior. The principle of novelty is specified by the notion that development is accomplished in the form of system restructuring, thus development assumes the character of quality transformations of psychological structures and processes. The principle of dynamic interaction stands for the reciprocity of links, nonlinearity of effects and a particular conception of causality as interconnection and interdependence. The principle of organization would assume two forms: as a principle of self-organization of the subject and as a principle of organization of his surroundings. Self-organization as the basic feature of development lies in the foundation of individual distinctions (patterns of individual characteristics) and types of such patterns that should define individual trajectories of development. The organization of milieu, which comes as the basic characteristic of external surroundings, attracts particular interest. There are two levels of such organization. The first one is the objective organization of physical and social environment. The second one is the organization of objective environment in the perception of an individual. The second level of environmental organization is defined by the way the subject organizes the environment in his perception. We presume that such definition of environmental organization comes very close to the concept of orientating image of a problem situation in Galperin's theory. Amplification of minimal effects implies that inconsiderate deviations in individual behavior may damage his interaction with close surroundings and the whole consequence of complex dynamic correlations within the system "individual-milieu" may result in enduring negative effect of development (Karabanova, 2002).

The most important dynamic systems of personal ty-milieu relations for a child are those which suggest an immediate interaction between a child and other people. They would play a fundamental role in the process of socialization: the system of child-parent (teacher) relations and the system of child-peers relations.

Concerted child-adult activity (which may involve a parent or a teacher) more often than not is regarded as the basis of child psychological development. In the theory of cultural practice maintained by M. Cole the joint activity of a child and adult is revealed in two aspects. First of all, it comes as the form of regulation of child's behavior by the adult, and secondly, as shared behavior, emotions and experience of a child and adult suggested by



such activity, it is the first aspect which is regarded as cardinal for development. Adult's function in the first case is to provide a link between a child and the social-cultural environment furnished with particular cultural patterns, scenarios and models (Cole, 1989; 1997). The second aspect implies that forms of joint activities should develop during the life time reflecting each new accomplishment acquired by a child. In early childhood the joint activity assumes the form of primary multisubjectivity (shared emotional experience of a child and adult), with years it would take the form of secondary multisubjectivity (shared interest and focus on the objects), social abstracting and verbal

instructions (child attracts adult's attention to the objects, events, activities). Step by step joint activity would assume still more intricate forms. It would reveal psyche as creative and distributed among the participants of that activity.

M. Cole marks three main approaches to consideration of the content of joint activity of a child and adult and mechanisms of its influence on psychological development. The first approach was formulated in the eco-cultural theory introduced by C. Super and S. Harckness. The basic concept of this approach is the notion of developmental niche of a child which is very similar to the notion of developmental context (Cole, 1989; 1997). Developmental niche is defined by cultural traditions in children upbringing, their inclusion into every day practical activity of their social environment. Developmental niche comprises: 1) the system of physical and social conditions of child's life (that is, physical and social context of his activity), 2) cultural traditions in children upbringing, 3) psychological features of parents and their perception of children.

The second approach would consider cultural practices as a link between a child and the socio-cultural environment. By cultural practices we mean "the forms of activity suggested by normative expectations, patterns of behavior" (Cole, 1997, p. 215), where all objects and activities are social. Cultural practices, as defined by M. Cole, have a lot in common, both in content and function, with the notion of ritualization suggested by E. Erikson (1996).

The third approach is based on E.S. Vygotsky's conception of the primary role of learning for development and the idea of zone of proximal development that defines the ability to acquire the new social-cultural experience and develop new psychic faculties (Vygotsky, 1956). The notion of the zone of proximal development became very popular in developmental psychology. It reveals essential conditions indispensable for child development -



cooperation and joint activity with the adult, as well as its heuristic potential. Guided by the notion of the zone of proximal development, J. Valsiner distinguishes various niches of psychological development regarding the level of adult involvement in child's activity and different forms of interaction between them (Valsiner, 1987). The zone of free movement defines free interaction of a child with different objects of environment, his receptivity to different objects and events, his willingness to try different ways of action. The zone of supported activity is shaped within the zone of free movement through regulation and encouragement, suggested by adults who would direct certain activities of a child and support them with regards to the actual level of his development.

L.S. Vygotsky's idea of sign mediation in superior psychological functions and the role of child-adult communication for the formation of superior psychic functions was developed in Wertsch works (Wertsch, 1985). His special attention was addressed to semiotic means of communication used in joint activity and intercourse, the processes of denotation and re-denotation of different situations by partners in communication. Wertsch includes that problem into a broader socio-linguistic context and employs the idea of dialogue character of the work of literature introduced by M.M. Bakhtin. This leads the author to consider the process of child-adult communication as a complex process of polyphony of voices adapted from social-cultural contexts which may introduce ambiguity in the communication situation.

Rogoff considers child development for all age stages in indissoluble link with the context. The contexts are inseparably connected with socio-cultural forms of activity, including people active participation socially constructed practices. Joint problem-solving in the process of active interaction forms the basis for development of its participants through perception of the content of socio-cultural practices and adaptation for them. Rogoff uses the metaphor of "apprenticeship." Here a child plays the role of the apprentice who takes part in socially directed, regulated forms of activity. He would play an active, constructive role in this process, but his actions are controlled by social regulation (Rogoff, 1993).

A considerable scientific interest for the notion of the "zone of proximal development," all studies aimed to specify the content and character of child-adult interaction, their positions and roles in interaction, as well as semantic forms and means of effective communication testify to topicality of the actual task to specify the borders of the zone of a proximal development and concretize child-



adult cooperation description for optimization of his psychic development.

In accordance with ecological model developed by U. Bronfenbrenner, the study of family influence (as the nearest context of child development) should take into account its links with broader contexts - mezo-, exo-, and macro-systems. It is necessary to take into account the influence of economical situation in a family, the number and quality of child preschool institutions, specificity of school education, other social institutes and links which would affect functioning of the family as an integral system, socio-cultural environment and historical time (Bronfenbrenner, 1998).

Modern psychology regards the system relations "child-peers" as a context considerably defining child development (Harris, 1995). Child behavior is considered as a function of his links and relations with peers. It was demonstrated that low level of social competence, scantiness of communication and contacts with peers, loneliness and rejection from the peers leads to social dezadaptation, deviant behavior and personality disorganization. The idea that peers as parents are the most important agents of socialization gains wider recognition. Thus, G. Harris would contest the leading role of parents in child's personality development. He would suggest an altogether new theory of socialization indicating the specificity of socialization process as depending on the contexts of communication and interaction. The parent's role, exceedingly important in early childhood, with years makes way for interaction with peers, which becomes, as Harris maintains, the principal socialization stream in adolescence. Intra- and inter-group processes of communication with peers, rather than didactic interaction with parents, would determine the propagation of cultural experience and personality development under the influence of environmental contexts. The author believes that versatile character of child's and adolescence's groups would explain the fact that child development assumes rather a universal character than varies within a broad range of parental behaviour within and between different societies and cultures (Harris, 1995). On the other hand, socio-cultural surroundings will set the norms, values, and rules of peer group functioning, through which distant contexts may influence the close ones. So nowadays the idea that both aspects of communication (child-parents and child-peers relations) determine the psychological development of a child becomes widely established.

One of the central problems of individual development of a child in ontogenesis, regarded within the system-dynamic approach, is the



synchronization of psychological abilities and behavior of an individual with the requirements, opportunities and restrictions imposed by distant and close social environment. Synchronization is accomplished in time perspective (retard or acceleration in development) as well as in content perspective (correspondence of environmental opportunities to subject's interests) (Magnusson & Stattin, 1998). Social situation changes during the life time mostly due to activity of the child himself and his partners in interaction, which makes the task of synchronization even more important (Lerner, 1982).

To make a conclusion the following characteristic features of modern developmental psychology should be marked: the importance of systemdynamic approach to a study of regularities in child psychic development, the importance of a context in development, the focus on investigation of the system of social relations of the child, consideration of the role of child's activity as an impulse for development, repudiation of the idea of absolutization of the universal character of development, and growing interest for individual trajectories of development.

Vygotsky's ideas of the role and structure of social situation of development as a source of development received further development in works of A.N. Leontiev, D.B. Likonin, L.I. Bozhovich, M.I. Lisina, V.V. Davydov, D.I. Feldstein, L.F. Obukhova, A.V. Petrovsky, and others.

The notion of specificity of child's development as the process of gaining social-historical cultural experience in cooperation with an adult comes as an important proposition which reveals the role of social environment in psychological development of a child (A.N. Leontiev, D.B. Flkonin, A.V. Zaporozhets). Social environment is regarded not only as an external condition but as the original source of development, since it contains material and spiritual values which represent the abilities of a human being that an individual should acquire in the process of development. Such understanding of the role of social environment determines the principle of sensible activity as the motive power of psychological development (Leontiev, 1972; 1975; Elkonin, 1989). Joint activity with an adult shapes the initial genetic form and structure of psychological abilities, development and interiorization of the new forms of psychological activity (Leontiev, 1972; Galperin, 1998). This approach does not regard a dichotomy "child - milieu" as the object of study. It rather considers a child within the integral system of his social links and



relations in which a child and his social environment will share events and experience (Slobodchikov, 1994).

As it was shown by A.N. Leontiev, social situation of development, taken as relations between a developing subject and his surroundings, indicates the objective place of a child in the system of social relations, as well as requirements and expectations imposed by the society which set an ideal form of development (Leontiev, 1972; Elkonin, 1989). A mediation pattern, which establishes the content and forms of communication and interaction of a child with adults and peers as competence medium, comes as a basis for mastering of the "ideal form" (Elkonin, 1994). Social situation of development is presented as the system of relations between a child of a certain age and social reality. It comes as the starting point for all dynamic changes which take place in his development during that period. Personal (partial) attitude of a child towards a given social reality is realized through his activity which expresses the leading type of his attitude to the world and active selective position (Elkonin, 1989). Admitting indisputable significance and fruitfulness of the term leading activity we should mark certain aspects which demand further investigation. First of all, it is the question of genesis and development of leading activity, interconnection and interdependence of social situation of development with the dynamic of formation of leading activity. Secondly, it is the question of reflection of concrete specificity of social situation of development in the character of child's leading activity and abilities to compensate the deficiency of social situation of development by the potential of leading activity. In other words, it is the question of activity nature of child endurance and vulnerability, and resources of tolerance to unfavorable factors of development.

Social situation of development defines the goals of development for each age stage. Achievement of these goals comprises the very content of development. New achievements in child development gradually come in conflict with the once established social situation which leads to destruction of former and institution of new relations with social environment, that is to a new situation of development. Newly established contradiction between new and more complicated social demands and expectations imposed on a child on the one hand, and his abilities on the other, is settled by advanced development of psychological abilities (Elkonin, 1989). Spasmodic change of social situation of development appears to be one of the important components of age crisis in development. A profound theoretical and empirical analysis of changes in social situation of



development was undertaken by K.N. Polivanova (2001). It was shown that the crisis comes when a child discovers the ideal form of the next age period. His perception creates a transitional social situation of development which is characterized by a specific correlation between the ideal and the real form, when a new formation becomes individual in the process of transformation of a result action into a testing one. The age crisis develops in the logical succession of perception of the new ideal form, mythologization, conflict, and reflection and settlement resulting in the formation of a new social situation of development of a stable age.

A considerable advance in understanding of the structure of social situation of development was accomplished by L.I. Bozhovich. Following L.S. Vygotsky's ideas the author defines objective and subjective components in social situation of development. Objective component is the child's place in accessible system of social relations which are characterized by a certain system of rights and responsibilities, demands imposed on his behavior, social expectations and sanctions (Bozhovich, 1968; 1979; 1988). Socio-cultural expectations and demands have a historical nature and are developed by society in accordance with the image of childhood and cultural ideas of child psychological development. The subjective component represents the internal child's position which reflects his attitude to objective social position interpreted by the system of needs and motives. The term internal position was introduced by L.I. Bozhovich to define the active position of a child towards social reality. It is the system of internal factors which interprets and mediates the social influence and defines the child's attitude to his objective position in the society, the position which he has acquired or would like to acquire. That is why it is not enough to change the social position of a child to accomplish the change in the direction and content of his psychological development. It requires perception and interpretation of the new position by the child himself.

According to L.I. Bozhovich, internal position reveals specificity for each age group, it determines the character of child's emotional experience, his attitude to reality, thus shaping the unity and integrity of his psychological image for a certain age (Bozhovich, 1968; 1979; 1988). Internal position is the psychological new formation developed at the age of 7 (the end of preschool period), and its institution is regarded as the critical moment in personality development. Its genesis is connected with child's ability for self awareness, first as a subject of activity and then as a social subject. Awareness of his social self brings about holistic perception of the



world and his place in this world. Cognition and awareness of the subject of his own self as integrity provide conditions for active self-expression which transforms his development in principle. The role of personal development increases. L.I. Bozhovich observes that internal position is not always realized on the level of awareness of one's social self. In preschool age the internal position is often based on affective generalized experience of his place in the system of social relations and the character of his relations with significant social setting. Thus, internal position may be regarded on the level of awareness as well as on the level of affective experience. As L.I. Bozhovich maintains, it is a specific form of self-consciousness subjected to transformation during the whole life time. It determines the attitude of an individual to himself and to his social place on different age stages. But there are qualitative distinctions in personality internal position in childhood and maturity. In childhood internal position is defined mostly by age not by individual features of a child, and thus can be regarded as the age standard. Internal position in maturity is defined rather by individual characteristics than by age norms. It is based on self-determination - that is, understanding of one's identity, abilities, desires, one's place in the social system and purpose in life (Bozhovich, 1968; 1979; 1988; Bozhovich & Neimark, 1972). Self-determination in adolescence assumes rather a tentative character, which is replaced by the real character in maturity. Internal position is connected with self-consciousness and that is why self esteem as a nuclear characteristic of self-consciousness should be analyzed.

The central problem of personality psychological development for L.I. Bozhovich was represented by the question of the conditions. That is, when and under what conditions objective relations of a child become personally important, what role in the process is played by an adult (parent or teacher) and how these relations influence personality development (Bozhovich, 1968; 1979; 1988; Bozhovich & Neimark, 1972). In other words, what are the conditions required for development of internal position and what is the role of adult in that process. Regarding Galperin's theory of orientated activity this question can be reformulated in the following way. What are the goals, content and forms of subject's orientation in a standard set for a new social situation of development which should provide child's assimilation in the social situation of development and the use of its developing role? We believe that the notion of subject's orientation in situation (P.Ya. Galperin) can be



employed in the analysis of structure and dynamics of social situation of development on different age stages.

The study of regularities of social development and conditions providing for social maturity in childhood leads D.I. Feldstein to define two basic types of child's position towards society. These positions were defined by the author as the position "I in the society" and "I and the society". The first position suggests awareness of one's self and one's abilities. It is established in the context of mastering of social means, signs and symbols. The second position is connected with self-awareness as a subject of social relations in adoption of human norms of interaction (Feldstein, 1989). Alternation of these two positions defines the processes of socialization-individualization. Child's desire to acquire a certain social position leads to formation of qualitative features of the system of relations which is gradually established between a child and the society to constitute a social situation of development for a certain age period.

The new approach to definition of the social situation of development as a determinant of self development is introduced in anthropological psychology (Slobodchikov, 1994). V.I. Slobodchikov uses the term jointbeing for a community of people where specific human abilities (functional organs of subjectivity) initially arise. Joint-being appears as both the object of development and the source of development of subjectivity. Psychological development is regarded as emergence, transformation and replacement of simple forms of joint-being with others, more complex forms of joint activity. The social situation of development in anthropological categories comes as the unity of joint activity and cooperation of a child and adult, where adult appears as a medium of age stratification, symbols of the world and its spiritual meanings, which suggests the program of his participation in events. This cooperation opens the way for child's subjectivity, independence and self-development (Elkonin, 1989; Asmolov, 1996; Petrovsky, 1992).

The analysis of social situation of development helps to define "immediate" and "distant" relations between a child and society (T.S. Vygotsky), that is, two aspects of relations: relations between a child - a social adult as the representative of social norms and social meanings of activity, and a child - a close adult and peer relations which should realize the individual-personal relations. Social situation of development includes different spheres of relations: family, kindergarten, school, interaction with close peers, informal youth organizations, optional educational institutions, etc. Research



of the influence of microsocial situation of development which includes the types of family upbringing, family structure and child's place in it, the type and influence of educational institution became the subject of theoretical and empirical study in a number of works (Obukhova, 1995).

It was shown that the structure of social situation of development includes the objective and subjective components. Objective component represents child's place in the system of social relations and subjective component reveals the internal position of a child. The internal position of a child is realized through perception of the leading activity which determines the psychological development of new formations of the age.

We undertook a cycle of studies focused on the structure of social situation of development and analysis of its dynamics in childhood and adolescence (Karabanova, 2002). The social situation of development is subjected to considerable transformations in historical perspective in accordance with the changes in social expectations and demands impose on a child, his social position and normative development. The analysis of dynamic structure of the social situation of development allows to specify conditions of psychological development, helps to introduce preventive measure and correction of development and increase the level of child's durability.

The acquired results allow to introduce the following model of dynamic structure of the social situation of development. A social situation of development is defined by the place of a child in the system of social and interpersonal relations, his objective position and the system of expectations and demands imposed by social environment. It is determined by the variety of social contexts: child-close adult (parents), child-social adult (teachers and educators), child-peers (regarding interpersonal distance - friends, acquaintances, partners, distant peers). The role of each context changes on different developmental stages and is defined by specificity of development objectives.

During childhood the importance of different components of social situation of development (the sources of development) changes. The roles of relations child-adult and child-peers differ in their psychological function. The adult sets an "ideal form" in child's life, creates objective conditions for its acceptance and assimilation, and determines the normative zone of development. Peers create possibilities for testing and assimilating of new competence within the range of variations of standard development. Both forms of



relations: child-close adult (parents) and child-peers are important factors defining individual trajectories of psychological development.

There are differences both in the content and forms of presentation of social expectations and demands imposed on a child, they are affected by the organization of school life, the types of family upbringing and peculiarities of parent's position. The transformation of social situation of development in primary school age and adolescence is a long-termed and multidimensional process of changes in its system structure. It brings about mastering of a new objective position in the unity of motivational and operational components, which leads to changes in child sensitivity towards various social contexts, the change of position and attitude of social environment in its demands and expectation imposed on a child in accordance with his new status and new forms of cooperation.

In the process of adaptation to new social situation of development the role of self image in a new social position increases. The perception of one's self in a new role comes as activity regulator, it defines the child's reaction on certain influence of social environment and sensitivity to the components of social situation of development. Assimilation to a new social situation of development includes child's acceptance of a new social position and mastering of a certain system of means and abilities. Success in assimilation processes is defined by the readiness of the social environment to change the forms of collaboration with a child regarding his individual and personality features.

The active position of a child towards the world is realized in the system of orientated images which reflects peculiarities of his inclusion into various social contexts. That orientated images form a social situation of development and define the specificity of goals of age psychological development. The system of orientated images includes the personality-orientated image of one's self (internal position of the subject as regards his social status and social position, his self-esteem specified in the system of social contexts), orientated image of a partner and the image of interpersonal relations with the partner. Orientated image is the link that defines the possibility of realization of developing potential of child's activity. The position that a child has acquired in the system of social and interpersonal relations and the image of this position would determine the impact of social environment on psychological development on different age stages.

The child's regulation of forms of togetherness and cooperation with social environment, as well as self regulation of his own activity



in the context of interpersonal and social relations directed by orientated images define the zone of proximal regarding the change of child's sensitivity towards different social influences and cooperation with "teachers."

Thus, the structure of social situation of development can be presented in the following way: objective position of a child and the system of socio-cultural expectations, norms and requirements shape the objective component; the system of orientated images which defines interaction and cooperation between a child and adult are the subjective component. Subjective component is shared by the participants of the communication and interaction.

Interconnection between various components of the structure of social situation of development is provided by the fact that an adult comes as a medium of social demands and competences - a standard set of "ideal form" of development. The child builds up his relations with an adult in the process of active orientation and on the basis of personal- orientated images in communication and cooperation. Interdependence of objective and subjective components of the social situation of development is realized in joint activity of the child - adults, child - peers.

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