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## The Problem of Child's Mental Development and Childhood in Scientific Works of A. Zaporozhets

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### Abstract

The views of A. Zaporozhets, a famous psychologist of the 20th century, concerning child's mental development and childhood have been revealed in this article. The general scientific (historical-pedagogical analysis, generalization, retrospective, chronological), historical and genetic, comparative, problem-target, axiological and prognostic methods have become the basis for carrying out this study. A. Zaporozhets looked on childhood as a unique, valuable period. A. Zaporozhets noticed that child's development has integrated nature. It means that child's all mental processes (perception, thinking, imagination, emotions etc.) develop in cooperation and relationship. A. Zaporozhets investigated the physiological bases of psychic, the peculiarities of child's thinking, speaking, will, feelings, imagination, memory, attention and perception, character and temperament. Besides, A. Zaporozhets studied the origin and nature of emotions, the peculiarities of the formation of thinking at different stages of early and preschool development, regularities and conditions of transfer from visual-operative and visual-imaginative thinking to verbal, reasoning thinking as well as the possibilities of forming children's generalized ideas about surrounding reality. The periods of childhood (infantile, pre-preschool, preschool and primary school age) which were determined by A. Zaporozhets and the specific features of children's education at different stages of age have been characterized. The scientist made a conclusion that children's age mental development, which depends on gaining general social experience, has deep organic basis, which creates necessary background for development and depends greatly on the peculiarities of functioning of appropriate organic systems which realize different kinds of children's activity. A. Zaporozhets emphasized that the development of child's cognition starts from perceptible cognition, then rises to corresponding concepts, and finally it returns to reality and practice. The results obtained in the works of A. Zaporozhets laid the foundations of new understanding of emergence and functions of mental behavior regulation.

**Keywords:** Child, Childhood, Mental Development, Integrity.

### 1. Introduction

Modern science considers childhood as a original, unique and valuable period of children's life. During this period, their socialization, preparation for life and development of all mental processes occur. It's necessary to underline that this development has integrated nature – it means that all mental processes are interrelated and interdependent.

L. Vygotsky [12] was the first to launch the idea of integrated nature of the process of child's development, and his followers confirmed this idea with the results of their numerous researches. A. Zaporozhets was one of these followers. He studied and analyzed the peculiarities of child's integrated development basing his work on the ideas of cultural-historic approach launched by L. Vygotsky. Working out the theory of the development of children's perception by means of formation and improvement of perceptive actions and determining the periods of childhood were among the achievements of this prominent scientist.

### 2. Literature Review

The analysis of the scientific works of the research topic has shown that modern scientists investigate various aspects of the scientific heritage of A. Zaporozhets. The problem of artistic sensibility in the scientific heritage of A. Zaporozhets has been studied by D. Aranovskaya-Dubovis and K. Homenko [1]. The views of A. Zaporozhets on preschool child's development have been investigated by D. Aranovskaya-Dubovis and Ye. Zaika [2], Ya. Kolominsky and Ye. Panko [6], Ye. Kravtsova and G. Kravtsov [7], V. Kudryavtsev [8]. Besides, N. Pidnyakov [9], N. Titova [10] have revealed the humanistic basis of children's education in works of A. Zaporozhets. The study of ontogeny of person's psychic in works of A. Zaporozhets has been described

by V. Zinchenko [15]. Moreover, L. Venger [11], M. Ielagina and A. Ruzskaya [5] studied the general contribution of A. Zaporozhets to the development of psychological science. However the problem of views of A. Zaporozhets on childhood and a child has not been considered yet.

This research is an integral part of the scientific-research program of the Department of Pedagogy at H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University.

The aim of the paper is to reveal the views of A. Zaporozhets on childhood and child's mental development.

### 3. Method

A complex of methods has been used to carry out this research. The general scientific methods (historical-pedagogical analysis, generalization, retrospective, chronological) have been the basis for investigation of the dynamics of the psychological views of A. Zaporozhets. The historical and genetic method has enabled the authors to analyze the development of ideas of childhood and attitude to children in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the period of conducting active investigations by A. Zaporozhets. The comparative method provided the opportunity to compare A. Zaporozhets and other scholars' ideas about child's development and childhood, to distinguish similar and different ideas. The problem-target method has enabled the authors to compare literary sources and scientific materials which revealed the development of the ideas of childhood and child's mental development in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The axiological method has contributed to substantiation of value attitude to childhood, its integrated nature and children during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The prognostic method has enabled the authors to outline the perspectives of creative use of the A. Zaporozhets' ideas about childhood and children's mental development in modern educational practice.

The psychological and pedagogical sources of the funds of the state and university libraries, information of periodicals and the original works of A. Zaporozhets have become the main basis for writing this article.

### 4. Results

#### The Uniqueness of Childhood

The idea of value of childhood and a child got an interesting content in works of A. Zaporozhets and his scientific school. Preschool childhood, children's fate, their education, formation, development and happy childhood became a core of the scientific, personal lifelong interests of the scientist [13]. A. Zaporozhets took much notice of the period of childhood, indicating that "during childhood a person masters social experience, accumulated by previous generations. When imitating adults, listening to their verbal instructions and explanations, a child gains new knowledge and skills, learns to think logically and to regulate his behavior consciously" [14, p. 199]; "during childhood child's relationships with surrounding people and environment change significantly. The nature of his activity changes too" [14, p. 199]. Besides, the scientist emphasized that in childhood children's "grounds of correct attitude to people, themselves, their work are laid" [14, p. 211], abilities develop intensively, new needs and interests, features are formed, and personal orientation is foreshadowed.

#### The Peculiarities of Child's Mental Development

From this point of view, A. Zaporozhets wanted to investigate the peculiarities of child's mental development. What is more, the scientist said that child's development had integrated nature, and it is impossible to study certain mental processes separately from the others. At the same time, it is important to note that the scientist considered the mental development as self-development, spontaneous self-unfolding the inner contradictions of child's activity (for example, contradictions between child's physiological, mental capabilities which have grown and formed types of relationships with people around and forms of activity) which are the reasons for age crises.

A. Zaporozhets emphasized that veritable driving forces of development were not outside the process of development, they are inside it. From his point of view, child's universal human and individual organic peculiarities and the course of their maturation in the ontogeny are the necessary conditions of mental development, and at the same time social environment is a source of development, a reservoir of the social-historic experience through gaining which a child becomes a person [13].

So, A. Zaporozhets, when asserting that the most intensive development of psychic is during childhood, carried out a complex investigation of ontogeny of child's psychic (physiological bases of psychic, the peculiarities of thinking, speaking, will, feelings, imagination, memory, attention and perception, character and temperament). At the same time the scientist claimed that physiological and mental development is not steady and uniform during childhood, and he distinguished the specificity of development of all mental processes at different age stages of childhood.

For instance, A. Zaporozhets carried out a great complex of investigations of the development of child's thinking, emphasizing the integrity of mental processes. The scientist pointed out that "...we cannot investigate children's thinking and their development distinguishing certain operations and certain methods from it" [13, p. 199]. It was shown that this process is based on practical generalizations which arise when a child solves similar practical tasks and mean transfer of the method of action, formed while solving one task, to the others [13]. The scientist paid particular attention to the kinds of thinking which are the most typical for children - visual-operative and visual-imaginative. A. Zaporozhets studied the peculiarities of the formation of thinking at different stages of early and preschool development, regularities and conditions of transfer from visual-operative and visual-imaginative thinking to verbal, reasoning thinking. Moreover he studied the possibilities of forming children's generalized ideas about surrounding reality. With children's further development their thinking becomes relatively independent and takes the form of discursive thinking. Nevertheless, it preserves very close link with action [13].

It's important to note that the scientist took much notice of correct development of child's thinking during childhood, emphasizing that "the development of child's personality, change of his life relations and the development of his activity are the basis for the development of child's thinking, transfer from direct perception of reality to deeper understanding of it" [13, p. 192]. At the same time, "the integration and coordination of certain ideas between themselves which leads to the simplest conclusions, i.e. emergence of thoughts which are relatively independent of direct perception and manipulation with a thing" [13, p. 203] occur in childhood.

When working at the problem of the development of mental processes, A. Zaporozhets emphasized the role of person's activity in this process. In the scientist's opinion, genetic roots of thinking and speaking are in practical activity. This was proved by numerous researches of other psychologists (L. Bozhovich [3], V. Zinchenko [16] and others) who assigned that thinking shows itself firstly as a practical action, and this practical intellectual action encourage creating generalizations; then first practical generalizations appear in this intellectual action. This appearance and use of the concept in the process of practical action was called a transfer.

The elaboration of the theory of development of children's perception by means of formation and improvement of perceptive actions is one of the main results of the researches carried out by A. Zaporozhets. The scientist paid great attention to the study of perception of pieces of art, music, the visual perception of things, movements and activity. He and his colleagues (D. Aranovskaya-Dubovis and K. Homenko [1], G. Granik and O. Kontsevaya [4] and other scholars) carried out the researches of children's perception on the basis of fairytales, fables, children's performances, illustrations of pieces of art. The analysis of forming the aesthetic perception of preschool children and primary schoolchildren led the scientist to the conclusion about the existence of children's expressive movements which serve as "support" for characters of stories when a child nearly becomes a participant of events which take place [13, p. 10]. More complex forms of emotional empathy and imaginary action in imaginary situation, which become independent of external action, form on this basis. At the same time, this support can facilitate the understanding (of a fairytale, for example), but it can also be an obstacle (for example, for understanding a fable as a special inner action is necessary for understanding it).

After revealing this phenomenon, A. Zaporozhets began to study the role of movements of hands in the process of tactile perception of the forms of different things. In his works the scientist revealed the active character of processes of form perception, identified different ways of creating images, pointed out the necessity of child's independent action with a thing and insufficiency of passive hand movement along the contour of a thing for forming full image. For this reason, in the scientist's opinion, child's perception is in gradual mastering more and more complex perceptive actions, and the development of perception is determined by general development of child's practical activity. For example, the perception of a baby of the first months of life is characterized by recognition of old and new objects which differ from each other by

shapes, colour, size etc. Starting from his third-fourth months of life, baby's simplest practical actions, connected with taking things, manipulations of them, moving in space, begin to develop, which influences the development of perception of forms and shapes of objects. Later, starting from the second year of life, a child (being under adults' influence) begins to master the simplest instruments, change an object using the other one. Now a child can perceptually anticipate dynamic interrelations between his own body and objective situation; besides he can anticipate transformations between presentive relations – and this all promotes clearer and more adequate perception. At junior preschool age child's grasping movements and practical manipulations are very important in his perception and acquaintance with objects. At middle preschool age various ways of visual and tactile acquaintance with objects, which mostly aims at determining the peculiarities of certain details which are evident, begin to distinguish and differ. The perception of preschoolers and junior pupils has more integrated nature; complex types of visual analysis and synthesis, the ability to break down a visual object into parts and then to combine, unite them in whole are formed. Children become capable to restore the system of interrelations of different parts of an object that they perceive. At the same time A. Zaporozhets emphasized that mastering the sensor standards, which are common in certain social environment, and the ways of their using are very important for the process of children's perception [13].

Besides, A. Zaporozhets noticed that children's mastering some new actions starts from their investigation the conditions of carrying out the task, and only after it the performing begins. The indicative link plays a decisive role in this process. Child's systematic and full study of the situation, his determination of aspects, which are essential for carrying out a task, influence the success of performing the action, ease and frequency of mastering it. That is why adults' organization of child's full orientation in a task is the most effective method of mastering new actions [13, p. 15].

At the first stages of mastering, the orientation has expanded external nature and includes different movements and manipulations with the objects which a person will have to interact with. At the next stages the orientation gradually retreats to the internal plan and becomes inconspicuous. From this point of view, A. Zaporozhets made the conclusion that "... mental processes are indeed indicative actions which are performed on the internal plan" [13, p. 15]. The results obtained in the investigations by A. Zaporozhets laid the foundations of new understanding of emergence and functions of mental behaviour regulation.

While investigating the peculiarities of formation of person's perception in childhood (especially in preschool childhood), the scientist noticed that the development of attitude to literary work makes its way from child's direct naive participation in events which depict to more complex forms of aesthetic perception which (for the correct assessment of the phenomenon) need an ability to take a position independently of them, as if looking at them from the side.

So, a child is not egocentric in his perception of literary work. Gradually he learns to take a position of a character, to support this character in the mind's eye, to be pleased with the character's success and to get upset because of the character's failures. The formation of this inner activity at preschool age allows a child to understand the phenomena which he does not perceive directly and to understand the events in which he does not take part, which has crucial importance for further mental development [13, p. 73].

For realizing something a child needs to act relative to an object which he perceives. Real factual acting is the only form of activity that is affordable for a child. In order to acquaint with an object, a little child needs to take it in his hands, touch it, put it into his mouth etc. While growing up, an inner activity of imagination becomes possible for a child, besides practical contact with reality. A child can act not only in his real life but in thoughts, not only in circumstances which are perceived directly but also in imaginary circumstances.

A. Zaporozhets considered a fairytale to be important for the development of mental processes. For example, the scientist emphasized: "A game and listening to fairytales create favourable conditions for emergence and development of this fragile form of a child's mental activity. There are some kinds of transitional forms from real factual acting with an object to reflections on it here. When a child begins to master this form of activity, new possibilities for his/her cognition become available. ... Other ideas, which cannot reach child's mind as they are presented in intellectual form, can be realized by him and touch deeply when they change into artistic image. ... The moral essence of an action, if it is presented not in the form of abstract consideration but in the form of real concrete action, can be understood by a child very early" [13, p. 77].

Furthermore, A. Zaporozhets investigated the question of origin and nature of emotions. The reflection of reality in the form of emotions is "preconceived" reflection. In the course of it special emotional impressions which distinguish and often exaggerate the peculiarities of objects, situations, impressions which determine their essence and value for children emerge [13, p. 19]. A. Zaporozhets revealed the stages of emergence of children's emotions. First they form in the course of practical activity, child's real interrelations with surrounding people. A child has certain emotions after performing some action that was estimated by adults. Then a child moves to emotional anticipation of the results of his/her action, their feeling as emotionally deep images, and that enables a child to correct his behaviour, to regulate it according to expected results. So, A. Zaporozhets managed to do a lot for understanding the features and principles of the development and functioning of emotions.

There was one common thing in the studies of mental processes by A. Zaporozhets - it is that the scientist considered the development of them all as mastering the specific kind of actions which are directed at solving certain tasks. For instance, in perceptive processes they are actions directed at highlighting and fixation of external features of objects; in intellectual processes they are actions which lead to distinguishing and generalization of relations, in emotional processes they are actions through which assessment of essence of a situation for a person is undertaken [13, p. 19]. The formation of all kinds of mental actions takes place in a child's conscious practical activity and includes transfer from external forms of orientation, which emerge in the process of mastering the activity, to their inner forms.

It's important to notice that while working at the theory of cultural-historic development of higher mental functions A. Zaporozhets introduced a new element into the context of this theory - "child's mastering the specifically human actions which are an earlier (in comparison with a symbol) source of emergence of higher mental functions" [13, p. 8].

In general, the question of human action became the central problem of the investigations carried out by A. Zaporozhets. In this field he worked out an integrated and original theory - the theory of psychology of action. The question of action was studied in the sphere of human motorics, sensibility, perception, thinking, emotions [13]. Having this in mind, A. Zaporozhets analyzed the theory of cultural-historic development from the position of psychology of action, as he thought that a child discovers the world not through theoretical consideration but through practical action. In the process of elementary actions with objects a child gets to know their various features and begins to take them into consideration, to adapt his motor capabilities to them. The emerging way of action, in which cognitive and practical components are merged, is reflection of an object in real life. Only a bit later perception and thinking become relatively independent, act as preparatory stages in solving practical tasks and then they act as special activities with their own motives, aims and tasks [13, p. 9-10].

### **The Periods of Childhood**

Besides, A. Zaporozhets distinguished the periods of childhood (infancy, pre-preschool age, preschool age and primary school age) which are characterized by certain relation of the processes of maturation of the nervous system and mental development the specificity of which is mostly determined by the specificity of a kind of children's activity that is common for a certain period. Approval of qualitative uniqueness and timeless value of different periods of childhood, unique capacities which emerge during them for formation of certain mental processes and qualities is the central idea of the theory of child's mental development which was worked out by A. Zaporozhets [13, p. 22].

In the scientist's opinion, certain psychological new formations are typical for certain periods of childhood. For instance, the emergence of the level of perceptive actions which are performed in the process of perception of a certain situation and showing the feelings of love, affection for the nearest adults, empathy with them in emotional sphere are typical for the period of early childhood; the emergence of the level of imaginary changes of reality in visual-imaginative thinking, spreading love, empathy to wider number of people (children and adults) are typical for preschool age; the emergence of the level of intellectual actions which are performed through symbolic system in the sphere of abstract conceptual thinking, formation of higher social feelings are typical for school age [13]. It is necessary to notice that A. Zaporozhets wanted to study children's mental development during each age stage as formation of the integrated level of behavior regulation, which is characterized by the system of interrelated cognitive and motivational-emotional qualities. The ideas of the great role of the periods of childhood promoted the formation of the concept of



upgrading children's development that means the necessity of full use of the specific conditions of each period. This concept was the basis for developing the theory and practice of preschool education in our country in the 1960-1980th.

A. Zaporozhets paid much attention to the investigation of the patterns of age development of the psyche. The question of the conditions and driving causes of mental development and the question of its stages (or levels) took the central places in his works [13, p. 20]. The scientist noticed that certain mental processes develop not independently but as features of child's integrated personality that has certain natural inclinations, lives, acts and becomes an adult in certain social conditions.

A. Zaporozhets was the first to pose the problem of interrelation of child's development and maturation in his works. Taking into account the data of children's psychology, genetic physiology and age morphology, he asserted that this interrelation has bilateral nature. On the one hand, maturation of a child's organism has stage nature and does not engender new psychological formations, but at each age stage it creates peculiar background for gaining new experience, mastering new methods of activity and forming new mental processes. On the other hand, there exists inverse relationship - maturation depends on development, which is caused by child's life and education.

At the same time, A. Zaporozhets emphasized that we could not deny the qualitative uniqueness of different age periods of child's development and look upon them as demonstration of immaturity and imperfectness of a little child. On the contrary, psychological formations which appear at early age stages have absolute value for person's comprehensive development and make their own unique contribution to formation of human personality [1].

Besides, A. Zaporozhets asserted: "... there is a false statement that spiritual advancement of mankind can be achieved by means of artificial acceleration of children's development and reduction of childhood" [13, p. 257]. In the scientist's opinion, human childhood, which is fairly long and rich in psychological formations, is person's most significant achievement and advantage. Childhood makes it possible for a child to contribute to the heritage of spiritual and moral culture created by society, to form abilities and moral qualities which are specific to humans, and due to gaining the experience of earlier generations it makes it possible to develop and move forward, improving and increasing it. For this reason, there is a special task of society - "it should not restrict childhood, but it should improve the content, forms and methods of education in order to provide with gradual step-by-step formation of ... children's physical and spiritual qualities, ... their creative abilities and high moral motivation at every age stage of their development" [13, p. 257].

Moreover, A. Zaporozhets wanted to put the results of his psychological researches into pedagogical practice. For instance, he distinguished the peculiarities of organization of educational process at different stages of person's formation. For example, educational process in first years of child's life has a peculiar character: a child gets to know objects of different shapes, he is shown their movements; adults want a child to make these movements himself, to mane the objects, and thus a child's acquaintance with objects, their features and names takes place. At preschool childhood, due to the increase of children's physical and cognitive abilities, children's elementary geographical, physical and mathematical representations are formed if proper gaining and generalization of experience by children are organized. In general, during preschool childhood the circle of ideas which are necessary for further learning school subjects becomes wider, new motives of cognitive activity which make it possible to gain new knowledge systematically and consciously are developed. The character of activity (even game activity) of junior schoolchildren changes and becomes more complex. Now adults want a child to be more attentive, to show his focusing on certain problems, to make efforts to solve learning task, to demonstrate independence, etc. A. Zaporozhets emphasized that the development of child's cognition starts from perceptible cognition, then rises to corresponding concepts, and finally it returns to reality and practice.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Thus, A. Zaporozhets paid the main attention to the study of genetic connection between child's external practical activity and the development of his inner mental activity. From this point of view the scientist, according to the idea of integrity and uniqueness of personality of a child, comprehensively investigated the development of children's perception, thinking, imagination which A. Zaporozhets considered as mastering the specific kind of actions aimed at solving certain task. In his researches the



scientist made a conclusion that children's age mental development, which depends on gaining general social experience accumulated by earlier generations, at the same time has deep organic basis, which on the one hand creates necessary background for development and on the other hand it depends greatly on the peculiarities of functioning of appropriate organic systems which realize different kinds of children's activity.

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