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## *Child and Childhood in the Context of Child Science*

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Dziecko i dzieciństwo w kontekście wiedzy o dziecku

### STRESZCZENIE

W artykule zostały określone pojęcia „dziecko” oraz „dzieciństwo”. Zwrócono uwagę na istotność badania biologicznej, duchowej oraz społecznej natury dziecka, a także na zależność jego rozwoju od wpływu „dorosłej kultury”, dziecięcej subkultury oraz czynników osobowościowych. Ukazano, że w kontekście wiedzy o dziecku badanie problemów dziecka powinno być rozpatrywane na poziomach: jednostki, indywidualności, osobowości, podmiotu aktywności. Skoncentrowano się na wprowadzeniu dyscypliny „wiedza o dziecku” do specjalności pedagogicznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dziecko; dzieciństwo; wiedza o dziecku; nauki o dziecku; kierunki badania dziecka i dzieciństwa

### SUMMARY

The article deals with the notions of “child” and “childhood”. Attention is paid to the importance of research into the biological, spiritual and social nature of child, and to the dependence of its development upon the influence of “adult culture”, children’s subculture and personal efforts. The paper emphasizes the need for a comprehensive study of the problems of the child and childhood in terms of age, history, culture. In the context of child science, the child should be considered as an individual, individuality, personality, subject of activity. The article draws attention to the need to introduce the discipline “child studies” into pedagogical specialties.

**Keywords:** child; childhood; knowledge about the child; child science; directions of child and childhood research

## INTRODUCTION

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been proclaimed the century of the child and marked by a brand-new recognition of childhood by the adult world (establishment of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) (1946), adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), celebration of the International Children's Day in Ukraine since 1998, etc.). Childhood started to be treated as a global philosophical and culturological phenomenon, crucial for the understanding of man and humanity. Therefore, nowadays there have been made attempts at studying this phenomenon comprehensively and within various branches of science. Changes in the status of the child and childhood in society call for new approaches to the interpretation of these notions.

It is not only the world community that takes interest in the problem of the child and childhood – each nation strives to provide adequate child-oriented education. For instance, in Ukraine democratization processes have led the notions of the child and childhood to become tangible factors in the economic, socio-political and cultural life of society (children's books publishing; goods and services for children, particularly education-related, which constitute a significant market share; children's organizations and associations of the political, social or religious kind).

Child-oriented education is impossible without thorough consideration of modern children's psychological, psycho-physiological, and personality changes. Pushing the child towards consumption, separation from its nation's cultural traditions and history, unequal access to educational resources in the urban and rural locations have led to changes in value orientations, cognitive, emotional and personal spheres. It is important to address this issue interdisciplinarily as this will help create a coherent system of beliefs about regularities of a child's personality formation in the society and outline an integral child-related direction in science and education.

### THE IMAGE OF THE CHILD AND CHILDHOOD IN SOCIETY

More often than not, the concept of child refers to a person who has not reached adulthood (full age), social and psychological maturity. Depending on legal traditions, the period called "childhood" **differs in every country and is determined** by the age of discretion, the ability to dispose of property, obtaining a secondary education certificate, readiness to enter into a marriage, military service, etc. That is, the concept of child refers to a "non-adult", "immature" person, and the term "childhood" focuses on being a child during a particular period of life with certain limitations and peculiarities. There is no unanimity on the duration of childhood because of religious and cultural differences in the understanding of age boundaries.

Throughout human history, the concepts of child and childhood have been defined by social, class, regional, and family factors. Every epoch possessed its socio-cultural understanding of childhood, determined by the nature of the society's attitude to children and the adult-child relationship. In the narrow sense, childhood is a sequence of acts of personal maturation, while in the broad one, it is a group of children of different ages representing a certain contingent of society.

Perception of the child as an object of adults' pedagogical efforts is typical of most nations and in sync with the main goal of education – transfer of the cultural experience of humankind. Thus, the relationship between the child's and the adult world is that of subordination and the child acts as a consumer in it. The child has the potential to acquire experience, and the process of growing up involves a transition from absolute dependence to independence, or, in other words, from irresponsibility to responsibility. On the one hand, childhood is being studied from the point of view of social inequality, power and discrimination by adults (sometimes children are called a "social minority", on the model of gender, racial, socio-economic, and ethnic minorities), while on the other, it is viewed as a social component that determines children's involvement in public life and the effect this involvement has on children's lives. It would be reasonable to say that the child is recognized as the subject of social interaction, capable of acting at its own discretion, having its own voice and opinion. Being a child today means being protected against economic, political and sexual influences.

In the process of development, the child interacts with the surrounding environment, things, phenomena created by previous generations of people. This interaction is two-way. Firstly, the child does not passively adjust to the world of surrounding objects, but acts and acquires achievements of humanity, appropriates them. Secondly, adults are bearers of what the child acquires during its lifetime as they educate and teach it. Personal activity (activities), which is mediated by relationships with adults, is the driving force behind the formation and development of the child as a member of society. The "global images" of childhood are linked to certain ideological notions defining the idea behind a human being, as well as ever increasing individualization and separation of children from the inter-generational social order (Kjørholt 2013).

The analysis of existing concepts of childhood has led scholars to a unanimous position on recognizing the inherent value of childhood as a structural element of society; also, it has brought up such issues as expanding the age boundaries of childhood, increasing the state's role in supporting a unique and original function of childhood in socio-cultural processes. Childhood is perceived as a self-sufficient, distinctive, temporary, transient period in the life of a person which has a personal significance. Particularly valuable and important is the period of preschool childhood, which covers *the age of infants* (up to 1 year old); *early age* (2–3 years of age); *proper preschool age* (4 (junior preschool age), 5 (middle pre-

school age), 6 (senior preschool age) years of age), i.e. the period before going to school (preparation for school).

Childhood is a period of ontogenetic development of a person from birth to adolescence (10–11 years of age), biological in nature and mediated by socio-cultural factors, upbringing and learning which intensify physical and mental development of personality, formation of higher mental functions, socialization, preparation for future life. It is during childhood that the foundations of activity and personal values that determine the quality of future life are laid. Preparation for adult life is provided in the course of education and upbringing and is the result of assimilation by an individual of the experience of humankind and the achievements of material and spiritual culture (Luparenko 2015). **A. Bohush treats childhood** as a dynamic social formation which encompasses the time from birth to adulthood, has specific features, its own subculture and is built on specific social ties and relationships (Bohush 2010).

We share the view that childhood is a special period in human development from birth to adulthood and a dynamic social phenomenon determined by children's status in the social structure of society as well as state policy in the field of childhood protection. Childhood is described at three levels: theoretical and methodological (as a social and public phenomenon); social-specific (as a specific age from birth to adulthood, which has its structure, features, subculture); concrete-empirical (studying children's status from the viewpoint of factual material on children's problems) (Kryvachuk, Kostyshyn 2014).

With the development of culture and the change in social conditions of life, childhood is not shortened. Conversely, it becomes more significant and prolonged as complex physical and mental efforts, assimilation of social traditions, exploration of the world, comprehension of the depth and completeness of life start to take place. Therefore, every child needs to be given an opportunity to spend its childhood in "normalcy". The task of every historical epoch is to see to it. For this purpose, human society has created child's subculture which encompasses peculiar cultural forms created by adults (fairy tales, works of art, fiction, toys, etc.) and the so-called children's world created by children themselves during sociogenesis. The child's subculture exists according to its own exclusive and original laws and principles within the dominant culture of society and occupies a relatively autonomous place in it. It reveals traditions and habits (philosophical, religious, ritual), peculiarities of the educational process and is based on physical, mental and emotional characteristics of the child. The child's subculture is a relatively holistic phenomenon consisting of the following components: children's perception of the world; value orientations; behavioral norms and patterns of interaction; interests, hobbies and ways of spending time; slang; folklore (Luparenko 2015).

So, childhood as an important and integral period of personality development performs the following functions in the social system:

- 1) transmissive, related to raising awareness and mastery by the child of experience, traditions and values of its people and nation;
- 2) ideological/informational, implemented through the formation of a system of knowledge that helps the child build its own worldview and determine its place in society;
- 3) axiological, associated with the perception and critical assessment of various phenomena and processes, values and norms of behavior in society;
- 4) normative and regulatory, which promotes formation and regulation of the child's relations with social environment;
- 5) reproductive, which lies in the preservation of an established system of social relations handed down from generation to generation;
- 6) descriptive, focused on research of social realities and a supporting basis for the formation of children's objective activities;
- 7) life-orientation (pragmatic), which manifests itself in the applied nature of sociological knowledge, formation of vital competences for solving personal life problems on a daily basis;
- 8) socio-technological, connected with the introduction of innovative social technologies, aimed at improving individual social processes and optimizing social interactions;
- 9) prognostic, which facilitates scientific forecasting and evaluation of future trends in the development of the child socio-demographic group (Samoilenko 2009).

Today it is important to disclose regularities, nature, content and structure of the "Child's Development in Childhood and Childhood within Society", discover hidden possibilities of this development in the self-development of growing individuals as well as possibilities of such self-development at each stage of childhood and determine "peculiarities of the Transition from Childhood to Adulthood" (Feldstein 1995).

The problem of the child and childhood is being investigated from a variety of perspectives. Depending on the chosen vector of research, the content of the concepts themselves may vary significantly. Therefore, a more specific study is needed that would take into account approaches of various sciences. Childhood is given an assessment from the perspective of future opportunities and potential, its importance for the further life of an individual. Having similar innate abilities, each child still reaches a different level of development. This process is conditioned by such factors as the influence of "adult culture", child's subculture and the child's personal efforts.

The image of childhood is quite complicated for construction due to the obscurity of age and social boundaries. In modern society, the child is a kind of "hostage" of objectively existing social conditions. Therefore, the concept of childhood is used in the socio-practical and socio-organizational contexts. At all stages

of human development, the main task of pedagogy has been to study the process of education and its organization (regularities, principles, content, forms, methods, techniques, tools) in accordance with the requirements of a historical epoch and national peculiarities. The task of adults is to integrate disparate knowledge of the child in order to find effective ways of the child's development. Today, education must prepare the child for interaction with social reality and ensure the development of society.

Thus, pedagogy should focus on the child's personality, provide a deep study of its potential abilities and subjective manifestations, seeking means of promoting harmonious development of an individual. W. Wing Han Lamb, in particular, claims that "educating the whole child" can indeed be justified. The scholar extends the notion of "wholeness", so as to include not only integration and coherence but also continuity and adequacy (Wing Han Lamb 2001).

#### CHILD AND CHILDHOOD: AREAS OF FOCUS

To determine trends in education one has to understand the essence and nature of the child (a person during a certain period of life). Different sciences study the human being as a living organism and a personality, as a natural and historical phenomenon, as an object of upbringing and education, thus proving an inseparable unity of its physical, mental and spiritual features.

On the one hand, the child is a physical entity, subject to biological and physiological laws, on the other, it has consciousness, intelligence, will, feelings, an ability to perceive and comprehend the outside world. In the process of education and self-education, the child develops socially, establishes itself as a subject of activity, a member of society, an individual. In a nutshell, the child is an integrity that combines biological ("a living system") and social ("principles of living"), individual and unique features. For scientific comprehension, it is important to identify the relationship between inborn abilities and socially determined qualities of the child. Only a holistic approach to the study of the child as a natural (physical) entity, social individual (society, culture), subject of mental and spiritual (creative and conscious) activity can help reveal its uniqueness (Wing Han Lamb 2001).

Scholars combine data from various sciences (physiology, sociology, psychology, pedagogy) and view the child as an integral personality with certain physical, mental and spiritual peculiarities, and childhood – as an important, self-valuable period in the formation of an individual. Therefore, different approaches to understanding the child and childhood emerge, namely: physiological, which treats the child as a human being who has not yet completed its physical development, and childhood – as a period of personal growth implying the development and improvement of reflexes; sociological, in accordance with which a child is viewed as a social being, and childhood – as a process of its socialization; theological

– a child is a unique person, who forms relations with the world on religious foundations of Christianity, while childhood is a period of unification of the child and the world during which its spirituality is formed. In this context, S. Luparenko proposes to study childhood in the philosophical, psychological, sociological, cultural, historical-pedagogical, comparative-pedagogical, ethnographic, and ecological planes (Luparenko 2015). Bohush considers historical, sociogenetic, ethnographic and psychological-pedagogical aspects of childhood to be essential to its understanding (Bohush 2010).

In the sociogenetic coordinate system, three coordinates of studying childhood (age, history, culture) are distinguished:

- the first coordinate allows us to conduct research diachronically, build a “historical vertical” of the phenomenon of childhood, trace formation of the child’s personality from the standpoint of historical psychology;
- the second one provides a synchronic analysis of childhood in the ethnographic plane, “ethnological horizontal”, i.e. scrutinizes the child’s identity through existing cultures, ways of socialization;
- the third coordinate involves studying regularities of ontogenesis, a psychological dimension of personality associated with initiation of the child into sociocultural patterns, life and activity of different social groups, both adult and children’s (Abramenkova 2008, p. 21).

According to I. Kon, the nature of childhood is multifaceted and requires a multidimensional study. Thus, images of childhood should be considered:

- aesthetically, as a demonstration of a certain artistic direction, e.g. the style of the “Romanticism child” vs the “Enlightenment child”;
- sociologically, as a reflection of social, class, ecological and other features of life and education, e.g. the “urban” vs “rural”, “peasant” vs “aristocratic”, “bourgeois” vs “proletarian” childhood;
- psychologically – images of childhood as the embodiment of various psychological types of personality;
- ideologically – the topic of childhood is predominant in the works of writers committed to the ideas of antiquity, Motherland, patriarchal relations;
- biographically – as a reflection of an author’s individual features of the character and biography;
- historically – evolution of childhood images and the real life of children in the 18<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- ethnologically – the “North American” vs “Mexican” or “German” childhood (Kon 1999).

Understanding the terms “child” and “childhood” is crucial for educators as it defines their approaches to teaching and learning. Awareness of the child’s nature determines the main areas of research: one’s relationship with oneself; relationship with others; connectedness; being and becoming; questionable aspects.

So, the “new sociology of childhood” has gained popularity demanding that interdisciplinary approaches to understanding childhood also include the spiritual (Adams 2017). Contemporary childhood studies does not longer see children as passive subjects of socialization but as active and creative social agents who adopt and participate in adult culture, are socially constructed, and engage in “potential power differential relationships” with peers and adults (Tabor 2016).

So, in the scientific theory and practice, the child and childhood are the subject of polydisciplinary research involving human sciences (human studies) that focus on material/structural (pertaining to the structure of the body and individual organs), functional (related to bodily functions), systemic (defined by belonging to a system) human features during certain periods of life. This leads to differentiation of the sciences and makes their classification complicated. The primary study of the child focuses on its qualities at the levels of an individual, subject of activity, personality, individuality.

#### FUNDAMENTALS OF CHILD SCIENCE

The human being as a physiological object is the subject of biological research, its mentality – that of philosophy, sociology, social psychology; intellectual development – of pedagogy, psychology, etc. Representatives of specific sciences do not always take into account the interconnection of various manifestations: biologists and physicians do not pay attention to socio-cultural characteristics; humanities scholars leave out physiological and neurobiological foundations of human activity. However, people and culture are indissoluble. Thinking, language, activity, appearance are manifestations of the culture that a human being creates.

Comprehensive knowledge of human beings began to develop intensively in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and entailed the parallel study of physiological, biochemical, genetic, psychic, and other factors affecting a human body, in particular, that of a child. At the beginning of the century, the science of the child in Ukraine and in the world took a pedological turn. This led to emergence of a dynamic subdivision of child science which encompassed developmental and educational psychology, child psychiatry and special education, school hygiene and mental testing, juvenile delinquency and anthropology of childhood (Byford 2016). Pedology became a separate branch of knowledge, with its subject, methods, and tasks, and incorporated psychological, anatomical, physiological, biological, and sociological concepts of a child’s development. Its emergence was made possible due to the penetration into psychology and pedagogy of evolutionary ideas and development of applied branches of psychology and experimental pedagogy. It was guided by the principles of pedocentrism, a comprehensive natural development of an individual, and took into account individual characteristics of a child. Despite the failure



of pedology as a science, its ideas and postulates found further elaboration in other fields of human sciences.

Of great interest to us is the approach to human sciences proposed by B. Ananyev, a Russian psychologist. He advocated a comprehensive study of human individuality. The scholar maintained that a human being is a product of objective reality, interaction with the world, circumstances of life (social, biotic, abiotic environment). He suggested that the knowledge of humans be classified as follows: the science of the *Homo sapiens* species (“wise man”); the science of humanity; the science of a human as an individual; the science of a human being as the subject of activity; the science of a human as an individuality (Ananyev 1968).

Given such a classification of human sciences, we can now trace the development of components of child science, which emphasize the importance of childhood in human life. Child sciences are represented by:

- 1) anthropology of childhood: a) morphology (studies the somatic organization, is connected with anatomy, physiology, physics, chemistry); b) anthropogenesis (archeology, paleontology, paleosociology); c) race science;
- 2) pediatrics (child medicine), which deals with health, hygiene and physical education of children, prevention of diseases, treatment of children of all ages;
- 3) medical and biological sciences: anatomy and physiology of a child’s organism, child psychology, child biochemistry, immunology, psychophysiology, etc.

The sciences of childhood study cultural sociogenesis and the world of childhood. They are called *social* or *humanitarian*. On the one hand, they deal with the development of society (history, archeology, ethnography of childhood) in general, while on the other one, they also look into separate aspects of society (economics, political science, law, sociology of childhood, age pedagogy, child psychology). Such systems as “nature – child”, “childhood – nature” (ecology of childhood, hygiene, bioclimatology, etc.) constitute a separate group of sciences.

It should be noted that the study of childhood incorporates not only scientific views on the child and childhood, but also folk ideas about the educational factors of personality formation in childhood. The life of children is studied through the prism of folk culture, ethnography and folklore. Components of folk child science are folk philosophy, folk psychology, folk medicine, folk sociology and folk pedagogy. M. Stelmakhovych interprets folk pedagogical views on the child as a combination of psychological and pedagogical knowledge which reveals the driving forces and factors underlying development of human qualities at the stage of childhood, regularities of physiological sensory, emotional, volitional and cognitive processes. Child science represents traditional views on the development of children, studies an individual’s transition from birth to adulthood (Stelmakhovych 1991, p. 19). The use of folk wisdom for the purpose of ethnicization of the child, formation of its national identity remains a staple of a nation’s educational

practice, and folk pedagogy is a predecessor and an important component of scientific pedagogy. The focus of child science in Ukraine is parenthood, maternity customs and rituals, interpretation of the child's language, folk perception of the child, age-based periodization of its life, education and upbringing; the importance of lullabies and children's folklore; child protection at the national level, the child's status in the Ukrainian family, the relationship between children in the family, responsibilities of children.

The science of the child as an individual investigates such innate characteristics as genotype, constitution, temperament, gender, predispositions. Another area of research is the correlation between temperament and physical organization of the child, and its ontogenesis shared also with somatology, physiology, genetics, differential and child psychology.

The range of problems addressed by the science of the child as a personality includes the social status of a person; social functions; motivation, goals and values that make up the inner world; the child's world outlook and attitude to the environment; character and inclination. These are also studied by philosophy (ethics, aesthetics), sociology, economics, politics, law, psychology. The branches of psychology involved in the research are social, differential, pedagogical psychology, psycholinguistics, psychology of the child's personality.

Limiting the research to studying only personality does not help in the understanding of the child as an actor or a subject of activity. After all, the cognitive ability depends not only on social connections, but also on individual characteristics and physiological senses. Therefore, it is necessary to study the child as a subject of activity. Gnoseology, the theory of creativity, axiology, physiology, cybernetics, psychology of knowledge, work, and creativity; general, genetic, pedagogical psychology cover these issues (Dutkevych, Savytska 2010).

Apparently, singling out components of child science, dividing it into subdivisions is essential for a thorough and profound study of the child. At the same time, **solving practical tasks of education requires the transformation of knowledge about the child into a coherent system.** Child science should facilitate interaction with children by taking into account a variety of its qualities. It is important to properly diagnose its states, properties and potential, and achieve the balance of its general and individual (unique) features. Understanding crucial periods of development and differentiation in ontogenesis provides adults (pedagogical workers) with effective tools for education, physical perfection, and maintaining the child's health and activity in the future. Undeniable is the importance of anatomical, physiological, psychological characteristics of the child's body which shape the focus of natural sciences. For instance, findings of biology, anatomy, physiology, and hygiene make it possible to choose effective means of influencing the child and create favorable conditions for its life. Of utmost importance is this knowledge for a teacher whose task it is to provide

educational services in an institution. As a teacher influences a group of children in general and every child in particular, it is important not to ignore personal manifestations.

## CONCLUSIONS

The child as a subject of research can be approached from different angles: as a biological object, a social being, a bearer of consciousness and culture. It has unique, individual, and varying manifestations and is, **at the same time, a holistic** natural and social phenomenon. Possessing similar innate abilities, each child demonstrates a different level of development. This is conditioned by such factors as the influence of “adult culture”, children’s subculture and personal efforts. The task of each historical epoch is to ensure “normal” childhood, as this period is potentially important for the future life of an individual.

Modern ideas about coherent network-like nature of knowledge about the child and childhood are the result of evolution in scientific perception of the world. A comprehensive study of the child’s biological, spiritual and social nature requires a synthesis of knowledge accumulated by human sciences. Given the classification of humanities, we can now trace the development of the following components of child science: the science of the child as a species; the science of childhood; the science of the child as an individual, a person, a subject of activity. That is, primarily, the study of the child focuses on the system of its qualities at the levels of an individual, individuality, personality, subject of activity.

On a practical level, the knowledge of the child must be transformed into a holistic system – child science. Pedagogical workers who provide educational services in institutions will benefit the most from this transformation. In order to find effective ways for the formation, development and upbringing of children, modern educators must integrate knowledge of children.

In our opinion, it is necessary to introduce an academic discipline “Child Science” into pedagogical curricula, as its purpose is to reveal interrelations between different aspects of a complex system – the child (containing the following units: the child as a natural (biological), social, and spiritual being); **to outline regularities**, character, content and structure of a child’s development in childhood and childhood in society; and to analyze transition from childhood to adulthood.

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