The Comparative Research of Adolescent’s School Moral Atmosphere Perception in Modern Russia

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Abstract

In the age-approach framework (L.S. Vygotsky, D.B. Elkonin) teenagers’ moral atmosphere perception in the secondary school can be considered as the essential feature of social situation of development. The peculiarities of moral atmosphere perception in the secondary school were investigated. 486 adolescents took part in two empirical researches: in the 2007-th and in the 2000-th. Differences in school moral atmosphere perception among adolescents from two types of state school (comprehensive and magnet) and private school were revealed. The transformation of teenagers’ perception of school moral atmosphere (PMA) in Post-Soviet Russia, depending on the historical and social contexts, are discussed.

Keywords: school moral atmosphere, adolescent’s moral-value orientations, social situation of development, perception of the school moral atmosphere, moral culture

1. Introduction

In cultural-historical theory by L.S. Vygotsky’s Social Situation of Child’s Development (SSD) is considered as the structure that includes the child’s objective position in the system of social and interpersonal relations and the child’s perception of the social expectations and requirements that set “Ideal Form of Development”, defining the most optimal developmental trajectory in the historical and cultural context [1; 2].

Training at school remains the significant sphere of the modern Russian teenagers’ life. The school context of teenagers’ social situation of development includes the features of school organization, affects

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direction, contents and nature of development of child’s identity, the development of personality system of values and consciousness. It is well-known fact that features of particular school as an Educational institution, influence on teenagers’ behavior, their emotional status and formation of child’s moral qualities (A.S.Makarenko, V.A.Sukhomlinsky, Ya.Korchak, K.Rogers, A.Bandura, L.Kohlberg).

Global transformations of society in Post-Soviet Russia have affected the system of education. New types of non-state (private) schools have appeared among widely spread state comprehensive schools and schools for specific purposes (profound learning of foreign language, mathematics, etc.).

2. The role of the adolescent’s perception of school moral atmosphere (PMA) as the essential feature of the social situation of development

The presented research is based on the concept of the Just Community, offered within L.Kohlberg’s moral development theory [3]. The concept of school moral atmosphere (MA) as the set of values, norms and rules, regulating communication and interaction of associates, was proposed by researchers that develop L.Kohlberg’s ideas [4]. It allows to clear the peculiarities of PMA as the set of values, principles of interaction and the democracy level in school community that can be considered as an essential component of the social situation of development [5]. The analysis of the social situation of development is the methodological background to study adolescents’ development. We assumed that teenagers’ perception of school moral atmosphere (PMA) depends on the historical and social contexts of the social situation of development (SSD).

3. Research goals and methods

The research was aimed 1. to investigate the peculiarities of teenagers’ perception of the school moral atmosphere (PMA) in modern Russia; 2. to compare pupil’s perception of their school’s moral atmosphere in the 2000-th PMA study1 and in the 2007-th PMA study2, that reflect the current system of school education changes; 3. to compare teenager’s PMA in state comprehensive, state magnet and private schools.

The subtest "Questions of you and of your school", from the set of techniques of SMAQ - School Moral Atmosphere Questionnaire [6] to study the teenagers’ perception of the moral atmosphere (PMA) in school communities was used. The subtest of SMAQ-questionnaire includes three scales: "School Assessment", "School as Community", "Democracy". Each of these scales reveals, implicitly suggests and measures stage changes of the teenagers’ PMA which corresponds to the stages of moral personality development according Kohlberg’s theory.

4. Participants

487 adolescents took part in two empirical researches. 259 pupils from 8 to 11 forms, aged from 13 to 17, from three types of Moscow schools - state comprehensive, state magnet, and private school -- took part in the 2007-th PMA study2: 131 girls and 128 boys. 227 pupils from 8 to 11 forms, aged from 13 to 17, from three Moscow took part in the 2000-th PMA study1: 87 boys and 140 girls.

5. Results

5.1. The transformation of teenagers’ perception of school moral atmosphere (PMA) in Post-Soviet Russia

The school community is estimated as community of instrumental relations (92,2 %), i.e. as establishments where knowledge (a scale "School Assessment") is acquired, prevail. Teenagers consider their school as a tool to get good education that is important for their future. The majority of the seniors, who took part in our research, were actively included in social relations (79,0 %) – the relations of friendship, sympathy, equal rights. The pupils comfortably feel that they are a part of their school. 68,6 % of teenagers shows high level of emotional identity with the school community. Being a pupil of the school is honorable: high status is attractive
by itself as the sign that I myself is as important person. Help with academic failures, positive mass-media attention, school achievements in sports competitions fill the pupils with the pride of belonging to this school. Only 7.9% adolescents think that studying at this school is a waste of time, they attend school due to fear of being punished, for fear of possible conflicts with their parents, or just for "nothing to do".

The data shows that pupils have an ambiguous perception of school social organization (a scale "School as Community"). Teenagers, perceive their school mainly as a community of social contract (56.1%) that means responsibility of both pupils and teachers in school life, i.e. complying with the regulations is necessary for the school to function as an integrated community. "What I can do for the school", rather than "What the school can do for me" is the main principle of the pupils' behavior. At the same time almost half of the respondents (46.6%) agree that school is an authoritarian community where power relationships dominate. In other words, this group of the teenagers often blames the teachers for their own failures, and is afraid to become an object of mockery by their classmates. According to the answers of 39.9% of pupil's surveyed, the principle of "concrete reciprocity" means help only to their close friends on whose support they may rely on. All other pupils are ignored. Teenagers are ready to support some teachers' initiatives only if "they can receive something in exchange".

Approximately the fifth part of subjects (21.0%) perceive the school community as democratic where the majority of pupils can affect school events. Teenagers of that group consider that teachers are honest with pupils, accept interesting ideas of pupils and are open to discuss any problems. It is worthwhile to note that only 19.3% of the teenagers who took part in our research, had the feeling of belonging to school community when the school was perceived as one big family where both pupils and teachers cared about each other.

The age differences are revealed. The younger teenagers more often agree with the school description as community where "force relations" are accepted (M-U, p = 0.003). The school is characterized as community where the pragmatism relations are obvious (M-U, p = 0.043). The senior teenagers, in comparison with younger, are more satisfied with the social relations in school community (M-U, p = 0.023). They more often agree with the description of the school community as "one big family" where all care about each other "it is possible to rely on everybody" (M-U, p = 0.041).

Gender distinctions are cleared - boys reject school more often than girls (M-U, p = 0.014), and girls demonstrate more often emotional identifications with school community, than the boys (M-U, p = 0.004), i.e. they are proud of belonging to this community.

5.2. The comparative investigation of the adolescents’ perception of their school’s moral atmosphere the 2000-th PMA study1 and in the 2007-th PMA study2.

Table 1. The number of teenagers with high level estimates of the School moral atmosphere perception in the 2007-th PMA study2 and in the 2000-th PMA study1 (%).

| PMA indicators                  | 2000-PMA study1 – 228 subjects | 2007-PMA study2 – 259 subjects |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| "School Assessment"            |                                |                                |
| rejection                      | 7.7                            | 7.9                            |
| instrumental extrinsic         | 90.4                           | 92.2                           |
| enthusiastic identification     | 83.7                           | 68.6                           |
| social relations                | 75.6                           | 79.0                           |
| "School as Community"          |                                |                                |
| power assertion                | 61.4                           | 46.6                           |
| concrete reciprocity           | 68.1                           | 39.9                           |
| relations and sharing          | 61.7                           | 19.3                           |
| social contract                | 62.4                           | 56.1                           |
We compare the data obtained in the 2007-th PMA study2 with our data obtained in the 2000-th PMA study1 on the sample of 228 subjects [7]. Both the tendencies to be constant and to be changeable were found. Constancy reflected in the fact that school was estimated as community of instrumental relations (90.4 % and 92.2%), good social relations (75.6 % and 79.0 %), low level of school rejection (7.7 % and 7.9 %).

Significant changes were identified in the evaluation of the school as a community. In the same time we obtain the stable perception the school relationships as relations of social control and the considerable reduction the number of pupils who feel enthusiastic identification with school community (83.7 % and 63.6 % in 2000 and 2007, respectively). The clearest changes in PMA were revealed in concrete reciprocity, relations and sharing and democracy. Only 19.3 % of the respondents perceive the school community as the community where the relations of friendship, sympathy, equal rights are prevailed. The possible explanation of this fact may be the wide spread of new forms of teenagers’ communications in social networks. The decrease of the concrete reciprocity means that the school relations are distant and individualistic, and learning cooperation is replaced by pupil’s isolation. The ineffectiveness of an authoritarian pedagogy reflects in the reduction of power assertion. We assumed that there is the result of moral values transformation in Russian society.

5.3. The investigation the PMA of the adolescents from three types of schools - state comprehensive, state magnet, and private school

Pupils of different types of school took part in our research: private school, comprehensive school and school with profound learning of foreign language (magnet school). PMA of private school and magnet school are the most similar.

Adolescents of both schools characterize the school community as community with low level of democracy where pupil’s opinion doesn’t play any role, and teachers deceive pupils. Teenagers consider that they can't rely on schoolmates and teachers; the school is a place where anyone can be exposed to sneers, and one need not to hope that somebody will care.

Table 2. The PMA by teenagers from two kinds of the state schools (comprehensive and magnet), and the private school

| PMA indicators                    | The private school | The comprehensive school | The magnet school |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
|                                   | Means              | Std. dev.                | Means             | Std. dev. | Means             | Std. dev. |
| "School Assessment"              |                    |                          |                   |           |                   |           |
| instrumental extrinsic           | 3.68               | 0.74                     | 3.91              | 0.60      | 3.56              | 0.67      |
| enthusiastic identification       | 3.21               | 1.10                     | 3.55              | 0.99      | 3.16              | 0.81      |
| social relations                  | 3.31               | 0.81                     | 3.89              | 0.80      | 3.32              | 0.69      |
| rejection                         | 2.86               | 1.12                     | 2.26              | 0.78      | 2.43              | 0.87      |
| "School as Community"            |                    |                          |                   |           |                   |           |
| power assertion                   | 3.27               | 0.62                     | 2.69              | 0.87      | 2.90              | 0.73      |
| concrete reciprocity              | 2.93               | 0.54                     | 2.63              | 0.68      | 2.75              | 0.70      |
| relations and sharing             | 2.01               | 0.95                     | 2.46              | 0.81      | 2.09              | 0.66      |
| social contract                   | 2.84               | 0.81                     | 3.22              | 0.78      | 2.78              | 0.80      |
| "Democracy"                       |                    |                          |                   |           |                   |           |
| democracy                         | 2.02               | 1.05                     | 2.56              | 0.76      | 1.95              | 0.78      |

| Democracy                         | 61.2               |                          | 17.4              |           |                   |           |
Significant differences are revealed for two indicators of MA of school. The level of rejecting school by the teenagers from the private school is significantly higher than in magnet school (M-U, p = 0.044).

The level of power pressure in school community is perceived as more expressed by private school pupils in comparison with perception of the level of power assertion by magnet school teenagers (M-U, p = 0.014).

The essential differences of PMA the private and PMA the comprehensive state school were revealed. The teenagers of comprehensive school are more satisfied in comparison with contemporaries from private school, with social relations at school (M-U, p = 0.004). The democracy level at comprehensive school is estimated by the teenagers as highest among the three schools, and is significant above, than the democracy level at the private school (M-U, p = 0.011).

The relations of power assertion, concrete reciprocity and level of school rejection are significantly above at private school (M-U, p = 0.000, p = 0.019 and p = 0.010, respectively) in comparison with the comprehensive school.

The greatest distinctions in PMA were revealed between comprehensive school and magnet school adolescents: the former appreciate instrumental relations at school significantly higher (M-U, p = 0.000), i.e. estimate school as the educational institution where they gain good knowledge, important for future.

The teenagers from comprehensive school also estimate identification level with school community significantly above (M-U, p = 0.001) than the teenagers from magnet school. They are proud of belonging to school and more satisfied with the social relations at school (M-U, p = 0.000). Teenagers feel a particle of the school and regard the atmosphere at school, as friendly.

The relations in school community (a scale "School as Community") are perceived by comprehensive school teenagers, as more comfortable (M-U, p = 0.000) than magnet school adolescents: both the pupils and the teachers implement life rules in school community. The feeling of accessory to school community and democracy level also is significantly higher at comprehensive school in comparison with to magnet school (M-U, p = 0.000, p = 0.000).

5. Conclusions

The peculiarities of moral atmosphere perception in secondary school are revealed. Significant differences in adolescent’s moral atmosphere perception between different types of school, due to socio-economical status, school curriculum, values of adolescent’s parents were found. The indicators of MA discover the negative trend in school community transformations, connected with cultural-historical context – value split. Our results demonstrate the influence of historical, social and micro-social contexts of moral atmosphere in school.

We believe that the concept of social and psychological climate of school community, cohesion of pupils, emotional identification with school community, the structure of children’s collective [8] can’t answer the question about the nature of teenager’s orientation in relationship with schoolmates and teachers, adolescent’s communication with that form of interaction that is realized at particular school. We hope that the concept of moral atmosphere (MA) of school can be effectively used for the social situation of development optimization. The present comparative study has number of limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

The PMA as the set of values, principles of interaction and democracy in school community can be considered as an essential component of social situation of development. We assert that teenagers’ perception of school moral atmosphere (PMA) depends on the historical and social contexts of social situation of development (SSD).

The study can be valuable contribution to better understanding the role of school community for moral development of adolescents in modern Russia. More detailed investigation of reasons and mechanisms that lead to facilities of teenager’s PMA from different type schools is required to provide better basis for preventive actions.
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