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EXPLORING VYGOTSKY'S IDEAS:
CROSSING BORDERS

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ABSTRACT
BOOK

SYMPOSIUM VI/2

PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE & FAMILY INVOLVEMENT / ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

Individual papers

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Importance of Social Context for the Cognitive Development of Pre-school Children

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The changes in cognitive development largely depend on the characteristics of ones living environment. Both, the characteristics of the person and a mediator are important. Vygotsky emphasises the importance of the person's social context for his/her cognitive development. The main goal of our research was to assess whether the level of child's cognitive development is connected with his/her social context. We compared cognitive abilities of children living in three different social contexts 1. two-parent family (from the birth), 2. Single parent family (3 years minimum) 3. parentless children living in orphanages. Sample of 120 children, age 6-7, tested in a year prior to entering regular 1st grade. Cognitive status was assessed by intelligence tests and school aptitude tests. Children were tested in kindergartens and orphanages in Zagreb and Osijek. We have found significant statistical differences in all test results between children living in orphanages and all other children. There were no differences in intellectual level between children living in two-parent and single parent families. At some school aptitude sub-tests children from two-parent families scored better.

The findings confirm the importance of mediators for the child cognitive development.

Keywords: child cognitive development, social context

Development of Child Communication and Family Culture

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The period of early child development is a period of "growing into human culture" through the interaction with the social world. Parent and child are active constructors of a social environmental space around each other and creators of their family life image.

Parenting is a complex multilevel process. All components come together in the bringing up of the child, the joining with society. Mothering and fathering are considered as specific gender characteristics of parenting. Existing theoretical research in the field of parenting of children with some developmental limitations are based on an understanding of multilevel phenomenology of the nature of parenting. Investigations into the field of parenting children with multiple disabilities in their first year of life are not systematic. Parenting is being studied mainly as an aspect of mothering and there is almost no scientific study about parenting, uniting both aspects.

What is the experience of parenting multiply disabled children in their early years? Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data to describe the phenomenon of "parenting" children in the first year

with multiple developmental problems. Several parental couples were involved in this process, simultaneously. Content analysis was the analytical method used.

Parental experience from having a multiply disabled child in their first year is the result of a number of events. Care for the child becomes the central event of the family's life, it is organized in context of past, present and future time. It is evident that parents' experience is necessary to arrange everyday care for the child. Experience of both parents is filled with faith in child's recovery, normalization of his/her development and expectation of progress in the development and plans for the future.

Content-analysis showed that parental experience of the situation of care reveals several meanings, which can be described from different aspects. The understanding of parental experience is important in order to create individual programs for child development.

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Part of presentation is in Russian. English translation is provided.

Keywords: child development, social environment, parenting, multi-disabled children, family needs

Mechanisms of Formation and Enlargement of the Zone of Proximal Development

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L.S. Vygotsky considers the notion of a zone of proximal development (ZPD) in two aspects: as a criterion of mentality and as a basis of methodological construction of developmental education. From Vygotsky's point of view, things that a child can do himself characterize his actual development and things that he can fulfill with the help of an adult is evidence of his "zone of near-term development". An idea that any education organized by an adult leads to the development is inseparably linked with the notion of "the zone of proximal development".

Consequently, ZPD is directly related with the development of communication between a child and an adult.

The research of particularities of the communication revealed that it is not homogenous and has some types and forms. There is a kind of periodization of communication positions in the infancy which could be represented as the following scheme: "pro-us", "above", "under", "as equals", "independent". The logics of coping with the above mentioned positions in communication by a child gives us grounds to suggest that the latter could be criteria and quotients of ZPD quantity.

For its turn the supreme important thing is the process of enlargement, formation of ZPD requiring some special psychological and pedagogical conditions connected with changes in communication of an adult

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