

The influence of modern adolescents' vision of life on their perception of art

Elena M. Torshilova^a, Irina A. Polosukhina^a

Federal State Budgetary Scientific Institution "Institute of Art Education and Cultural Studies of the Russian Academy of Education"1 RUSSIA

ABSTRACT

The aim of the multi-year study, conducted by the authors of present article, is to reveal the characteristics of social-cultural portrait of 9-16-year-old children, who grow up in the XXI century, along with the influence of modern children's vision of life on their perception of art. In order to solve the problem, we used the results of the survey and testing of two types: questionnaire survey and test tasks in the conditions of an in-depth interview.

As a result of the study, the authors revealed three types of mutual influence of axiological orientations of the modern social-cultural environment and aesthetical advantages of art perception. The first stage of child's art perception actualizes a relative harmony between author's solution to the work of art and its perception by a recipient. A child perceives an integral content of a work and does not contradict its aesthetic essences. In the second type of perception, a child assigns the axiological pathos, therefore narrowing the aesthetic essences of the work but accepting it emotionally. The third type implies the choice of other life values (wealth, career, external beauty), which replace aesthetic essences of the classical art by the mass culture criterions.

The types of social-cultural environment influence on the art perception in children, who grow up in the XXI century, have been revealed for the first time.

KEYWORDS

aesthetic development, social-cultural environment, perception of art, life values, pedagogics of art.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 April 2016
Revised 07 August 2016
Accepted 30 August 2016

1. Introduction

The aim of the multi-year study, conducted by the authors of present article – specialists in theory and diagnostic of children's aesthetic development, is to reveal the characteristics of social-cultural portrait of 9-16-year-old children, who grow up in the XXI century, along with the influence of modern children's vision of life on their perception of art. In order to solve the problem, we used the results of the survey and testing of two types: questionnaire survey and test tasks in the conditions of an in-depth interview. The survey was conducted from 2000 to 2014. Over 2000 8-17-year-old children, who studied in the general-education schools,

CORRESPONDENCE

Elena M. Torshilova

✉ eka53.170@gmail.com

© 2016 Burganova et. al. Open Access terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) apply. The license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, on the condition that users give exact credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if they made any changes.

participated in the survey. Test tasks on the addressed problems were administered to over 1000 4th-8th-grade students of twelve general-educations schools; the students were 9-10 and 14-15 years old.

The study, which began in 2000 in the conditions of monitoring the axiological orientations evolution in XXI-century children, growing up in Russian social-cultural environment, allowed revealing the evolution of their life-purpose orientations from an abstract strive towards success to the choice of happiness in the family, personal freedom, calm, stability and successfulness in individual self-actualization as primary values, however, together with regrets about losing the romance and replacing it with pragmatic affirmations of well-being.

In the conditions of a test survey, children and adolescents chose from a proposed selection of reproductions of pictures, poems and fragments of fiction, and reasoned the motivation of their choice. Test tasks are an original development of the study authors.

Analysis of the preferences and reasoning of the choices, upon the correspondence of the results with the data about modern children's axiological orientations, allowed proposing a following hypothesis. The more artistically-complete the eternal, extra-temporal and global values are represented in the work of art, the more complete is their perception by a modern child, regardless of the distance in time of this work of art and the age that is reflected in it. Perfection of the artistic form of the classical work of art stimulates the development of a child's artistic-aesthetical perception, thus defining intuitive or conscious (depending from the recipient's age) inclusion in the global human cultural codes.

By registering the examples of the obvious influence of life values, preferred by the children, on the recipient's understanding and choice within the proposed works of art, the authors separate three types of such mutual influence. The first type of child's art perception actualizes a relative harmony between author's solution to the work of art and its perception by a recipient. A child perceives an integral content of a work and does not contradict its aesthetic essences. Classical work of art embodies eternal humanistic values in a perfect artistic form, and thus becomes congruent with a modern child; and the child likes the classical work of art. The second type of perception is the case when a child assigns his axiological pathos, therefore narrowing the aesthetic essences of the work but accepting it emotionally, because there is some correspondence between his vision of life and the author's. The third type of mutual influence of life values choice and art perception is the preference of other life values than the classical humanistic ones. Primarily, these are the values of wealth, career and external beauty, which a child assigns to a classical work of art by mistake, therefore interpreting it according to the mass culture criterions. However, in all three types of reaction, the fact of emotionally-positive evaluation of a classical work of art becomes a fruitful reference point for the methods of pedagogics of art and development of artistic perception and preferences in the modern children (Torshilova, 2012).

Upon evaluating the general results of the study, the authors conclude that the method of communicating with children, based on the in-depth interview model, unlike an anonymous mass sociological survey, allows revealing the

characteristics of a much higher level of children's aesthetical development than the data of sociological surveys and existing routine ideas about spiritual crisis of development in the modern social-cultural environment. Based on this, the authors state the flaws of pseudo-cultural policy, which develops the offer oriented on a profitable mass request, which is, therefore, raised by such offer and not defined by it.

Improving the modern system of aesthetic mentoring and development of children and adolescents, as well as developing new methods of pedagogics of art, requires renewing psychologists' and pedagogues' ideas about what modern children think about the world and their future, what is their attitude towards art, what underlies their artistic choice, how well their perception of art is developed and how they understand, why to communicate with it (Alekseeva, 2009; Savenkova, 2011; Fomina, 2015). The aim of the multi-year study was obtaining such information in the conditions of finding its temporal and age dynamics (Torshilova et al., 2011). Present article presents one of the small aspects of the conducted study, participants of which were over 2000 children and adolescents 4-17 years old, since 2000.

2. Materials and Methods

The results of the studies, described in present article, are a part of a multi-year monitoring and testing of the types and levels of the aesthetic development in modern children and adolescents in correspondence with the evolution of their vision of life and art. Due to the fact that the aim of the study, brief results of which are presented in the article, is the mutual influence of adolescents' axiological orientations and their interpretations of the works of art, materials and methods of obtaining the results are divided into two groups. Methods for obtaining the ideas about the axiological orientations evolution in the modern adolescents were surveys in form of several questionnaires about their life-purpose orientations, ideal of a civilized personality and functions of art. Materials and method of obtaining the data about the characteristics of modern adolescents' perception of art were pairs and triads of pictures reproductions, poems and fragments of fiction prose, which were selected as the test examples. The recipient had to select among the presented examples ones that he liked most, rationalize the motivation of his choice and (in case of choosing from the classical portraits) write a story about the person on the portrait. The method of selecting the stimuli is based on the principles of psychological or experimental aesthetics (Semiotics and measuring art, 1972; Burt, 1933; Eyesenck, 1940; Torshilova, 1988), according to which the examples of works of art have to be similar in topic or subject of the description, as much as possible (about war, about spring, about love, etc.); but they have to be different in the characteristic, the perception of which is measured. Methods and results of psychological aesthetics were validated by a cross-cultural study of 3-7-year-old Russian children, which was conducted by I.L. Child's methods, with author's consent, and which confirmed the validity of its methods and results (Child & Iwao, 1977; Torshilova, 1993). In the study described in present article, a relative advantage in the stimuli selection were artistic advantages of the works, while the key for

successful completion of the test task was their preliminary expert selection, which defined the works of arts as classical.

The chosen paradigmatic position of understanding the artistic advantages of a work of art is the modern point of view, which develops the principles of classical aesthetics and states that the carrier of an aesthetic essence is the form (Bakushinskiy, 2009; Bychkov, 2004; Favorskiy, 1965). Methods and techniques, selected by psychological aesthetics, correspond with this position.

Another principle of experimental aesthetics methods is the fact that a work of art is proposed anonymously, without the authors, the name or the time period. This provides direct perception of art by a recipient, independent as much as possible from a child's knowledge of art and others' professional and common opinions.

During the evaluation of the obtained results, it is necessary to discuss advantages and disadvantages of the methods. Advantages of the experimental aesthetics practice in general include the fact that participants in the survey and testing are not anonymous children and adolescents, as in sociological surveys, but real modern children and adolescents, who sit in front of the experimenter and grow during the study, if it is longitudinal. Therefore, the researchers have an opportunity to check the sincerity and truthfulness of their answers and to expand their representation of the child, if there is a need in his or her individual characteristic. As far as the validity of the obtained answers goes, it is provided also by a number of other circumstances, which makes the procedure different from classical testing. A mandatory condition of aesthetic testing is explaining to the child that his perception, like any perception of art, is not divided into definitely correct or incorrect, although there are relative norms of style in each time period. And, of course, each participant of the survey is told that there will be no organizational conclusions upon the results of the conversation with him, apart from the information about his achievements. Because of this, the researcher has a right to think that he usually reveals a child's sincere reaction, and not something that is made up or some correct, in the child's opinion, perception of the test examples, conforming to the experimenter's expectations. Moreover, the experience demonstrates that when children encounter test tasks, related to art, or surveys, in which they are asked about the essence of life, they become calmer, because they understand that the experimenter is not interested in their knowledge of the school program, their grades and behavior. On the contrary, the majority of children and adolescents are currently lacking an opportunity to speak with an adult about something interesting, and to talk with a person, who is not evaluating him and is ready to listen. The sincerity of responses is also confirmed by the correspondence of responses' content, opinions and artistic preferences in students of different schools. Therefore, it is possible to consider that the general factor of such unanimity is the influence of the social-cultural environment, similar for all people of one generation. However, obviously, the integration of a child's characteristics or his eventual fortunes also report the individual traits of his general and aesthetic development.

One obvious limitation of the research (not testing) method of revealing the level of children's aesthetic development is a child's need to motivate his choice,

and therefore, to speak. And to speak about his own impression about art, which is not available even for every adult. In order to avoid incorrect conclusions on this basis, the experimenter evaluates a child's responses not by the level of their literacy and rationality, but, on contrary, depending on the child's age, by encouraging their emotional precision and unexpected vocabulary findings.

3. Results

The study of axiological orientations in modern children and adolescents and their choice of a social ideal of a personality was conducted from 2000 to 2014. In the 1999-2000 academic year, it was based on the survey of 724 4th-, 7th- and 10th-grade students; in 2008 – 322 children 10-17 years old (in the conditions of individual testing); and in 2013-2014 – 820 5th- and 8th-grade students from twelve schools. Analysis of the results revealed the following dynamics of the life vision and axiological orientation in children and adolescents, who are growing up in the XXI century in Russia: starting from considering success and life “without problems” as a general value, through the values of self-actualization and congruence with oneself and the world, modern 10-16-year-old children and adolescents are primarily choosing freedom, tranquility and stability and helping others. They also prefer happiness in the family and regret the fading romance, but they are not interested in fame and wealth. While thinking about their own self-actualization, the adolescents of the past decade began valuing rationality and education. In general, it is obvious that the main value preferences of 11-15-year-old children in the XXI century are developed by the age of ten and do not change much. Modern social-cultural situation defines a new social ideal for the currently growing children and adolescents. In all age groups, the first places are taken by the favorite activity, self-actualization and freedom. In the opinion of a currently growing child, each person has to have a right to freely choose his life path, which is valuable by the level of self-actualization. Regarding the dynamics in children's and adolescents' preferences in the characteristics of a social ideal, establishing in our culture, in comparison with the beginning of the XXI century, the significance of such values as wealth and power decrease; they also decrease with aging. It is possible to suggest a certain feeling of disappointment in the values of material and status-related prosperity. Rational orientation on a favorite activity and self-actualization within their capacities prevail. Because of this, an urge to be different from others becomes stronger with age, but the value of helping others decreases. Therefore, the establishment of “self” is accompanied by gradual liberation from social obligations and social dependence. In comparison with the traditional values of the national culture, on the one hand, it is a sign of growing ideas about the value of each person, but on the other hand, it harms the values of collectivism and concepts of collective obligations (Torshilova, 2014).

We present several examples that prove the influence of the chosen life values on children's interpretation of the works of art.

Approximately one third of the surveyed adolescents chose A.S. Pushkin's poem “To a poet” in the conditions of the test survey; they saw only the pathos of author's defense of the creative freedom. In their words, the poet is rightfully

defending freedom from judgement of others and proposes believing only in oneself. They even managed to assign Pushkin an advice not to rely on human fame and not to be overtaken by the “superiority complex”, because it can fail you (Polosukhina, 2012). In their dreams of tranquility and stability, over a half of the children preferred C. Lorrain’s painting “Mid-day. Rest on the way to Egypt” (1661) over all other options of reproductions; they chose to name it “Calm of the world”, although we would like to remind that neither the author, nor the name of the painting were presented to them in the task. And by being completely clueless about the plot of A. Watteau’s painting “Departure to the Kythira island” (1717), they answered that these people escaped, probably from war, and they were helped by the angels flying in Watteau’s painting. Modern children and adolescents, starting from the 10-year-olds, thought that one of the first meetings, exchange of glances, of Anna and Vronskiy (L.N. Tolstoy “Anna Karenina”) are described very beautifully, and their love is romantic, which does not exist nowadays (one third of girls thought that), although they would really want it. Among five classical women’s portraits they often chose Mary Magdalen by Piero di Cosimo (beginning of the XVI century), stating that she is calm and wise and the painting can be called “Perfection of spirit”. Finally, among the modern adolescents there were those who chose A. Durer on his famous frontal self-portrait (1500). They were few, about 12%, but their choice was precise and the interpretation was striking. The adolescents feel the depth, scale and archetype of the image. We present one of the stories about the character of A. Durer’s self-portrait (writing a story is one of the instructions of the test task). The boy called it “Endangered species”. “(I am writing from the thoughts about the modern life). Nobody accepted hum as equal. He was not reach, and always walked wrapped in his brown cloak. And he was not talkative: what can you talk to people about nowadays? About money? Yes, the majority is think about it. Not about honor, not about kindness... No. People become cowardly, week and mercenary-minded. And he was lonely, and almost no one was interested in him. The was just a handful of like-minded people. He became a shadow of the former world: kindness, true life purpose, generosity...”

4. Discussion

Upon registering the examples of obvious influence of life values, preferred by the children, on recipient’s understanding and style choice from the proposed works of art in the test task, it is possible to trace three types of such influence from the positions of its usefulness for the development of child’s artistic perception and style. An advantage of artistic perception in all three types is the fact that a classical work of art, which is far from a modern child by its external characteristics, becomes attractive to him. The values of freedom, self-actualization, helping others, need for congruence with oneself and the world, search for calm and stability, which were revealed in the children’s preferences, not only reflect life orientations and aspirations of currently growing children, but are also included in a general system of humanistic spiritual values, which is embodied in classical art (Vygotsky, 1986). They are eternal, and therefore, they are outside of time and are correctly seen and approved in the classical art

by the modern children. Their perception, although not always precise, is addressed to a work of art, which is presented in a perfect artistic form. And in this case, intuitively but not always consciously (depending from a child's age and ability to represent his impressions), he attributes artistic advantages of classical art and becomes familiar with true beauty and depth of perceiving the world and with the perception of himself as a part of the humankind, because he integrates global cultural codes into his perception of art. This is the first type of aesthetic reaction, which shows a relative harmony between the author's idea and its interpretation by the recipient. This intuitive child's understanding of the author is presented less, when he emotionally accepts the work of art, but narrows its aesthetic essences (Pushkin's poem is much more multi-aspect than the call for creative freedom, and Watteau's characters departing to Kythira are not running from war).

The third type of mutual influence of life values choice and art perception is the preference of life values other than classical humanistic ones. These are primarily values of wealth, career and external beauty, which a child attributes to classical art by mistake and interprets according to the mass culture criterions. And in this case, the child only evaluates the cost of a character's costume on a ceremonial portrait and judges Durer's self-portrait by seeing the character's "torn" sleeve. But also in this case, a teacher can draw a child's attention to the narrowness of his perception in special aesthetic development techniques, because T. Gainsborough, in his portrait of lady Gram, and A. Durer demonstrated a different beauty than the one presented by the authors of advertisements and greeting cards, but a child still liked these portraits.

Therefore, in all three types of reaction, the fact of emotionally-positive evaluation of a classical work of art becomes a fruitful reference point for the methods of pedagogics of art and development of artistic perception and preferences in the modern children

5. Conclusions

1. The results of the conducted study confirm the hypothesis that recipient's axiological orientations affect his interpretation of the works of art and define the positive evaluation of the perceived work, if his expectations corresponded with the author's.

2. Artistic advantages of classical works of art, which a child perceives intuitively or consciously (depending from the age and individual characteristics of development), become an accompanying factor of the recipient's emotional evaluation. (Aesthetic perception of the world by children of different age groups, 2007).

3. Advantages of multi-year research experience by the psychological aesthetics methods, which is actualized in form of individual interview and constructed upon not a child's perception of art in general but on perception of a work of art presented here and now, define the validity of the obtained information and the conclusions based on it.

4. The advantages of artistic perception and style of the modern children, revealed in this study, allowed placing a hypothesis about the flaws of the

cultural policy, which is oriented on a mass request, which is, therefore, raised by such offer and not defined by it.

6. Acknowledgements

The authors thank the administration, psychologists and class tutors of all twelve schools that provided the support during the conduction of the survey and testing of the students.

References

- Alekseeva, L.L. (2009). Evolutsiya khudozhestvenno-esteticheskogo obrazovaniya na starshey stupeni shkoly. [Evolution of artistic-aesthetic education in high school]. Moscow: Sputnik+.
- Bakushinsky, A.B. (2009). Artwork and Upbringing. Moscow: Tot.
- Burt, C. (1933). The Psychology of Art. How the mind works. London: Allen & Unwin
- Bychkov, V.V. (2004). Estetika. [Aesthetics]. Moscow: Gardariki.
- Child, I.L., and Iwao S. (1977). Young children's preferential responses to visual art. *Scientific Aesthetics*, 1(4): 291–304.
- Esteticheskoe mirovospriyatie detey raznykh vozrastnykh grupp: Sbornik statey. [Aesthetic perception of the world by children of different age groups: Collection of articles]. (2007). Moscow: IKHO RAO.
- Eysenk, H.J. (1940). The general factor in aesthetic judgments. *British Journal of Psychology*, 31: 94–102.
- Favorskiy, V.A. (1965). Soderzhanie formy. [Content of shape]. *Decorative arts*, 1: 3.
- Fomina, N. (2015). Odarennyy rebenok: Problemy khudozhestvenno-tvorcheskogo razvitiya. Nauchno-metodicheskoe posobie. [Gifted child: Problems of artistic-creative development. Scientific-methodic handbook]. Moscow: VTSKHT.
- Polosukhina, I.A. (2012). Predstavleniya sovremennykh podrostkov o tsennosti khudozhestvennogo tvorchestva (testirovanie 2011 g.). [Modern adolescents' ideas about the value of artistic creative work (testing of 2011)]. *Pedagogy of Art*, 1. Retrieved from: URL: <http://www.art-education.ru/AE-magazine/archive/nomer-1-2012>.
- Savenkova, L.G. (2011). Didaktika khudozhestvennogo obrazovaniya kak sostavlyayuschaya chast pedagogiki iskusstva: novoe znanie. [Didactics of artistic education as a part of pedagogics of art: new knowledge]. Moscow: IKHO RAO.
- Semiotika i iskusstvometriya. Sbornik perevodov. [Semiotics and measuring art. A collection of translations]. (1972). In Yu.M. Lotman, V.M. Petrov (Eds.). Moscow: Mir.
- Torshilova, E.M. (1988). *Mozhno li proverit algebroy garmoniyu (Kriticheskiy ocherk eksperimentalnoy estetiki)?* [Is it possible to evaluate harmony with algebra (Critical essay of experimental aesthetics)? Moscow: Art.
- Torshilova, E.M. (1993). *Kak vosprinimayut esteticheskuyu garmoniyu russkie, amerikanskie i yaponskie deti.* [How aesthetical harmony is perceived by Russian, American and Japanese children]. *Psychological journal*, 14(2): 250-266.
- Torshilova, E.M. (2012). *Tendentsii i urovni razvitiya khudozhestvennogo vkusa detey i podrostkov v epokhu sotsiokulturnogo krizisa.* [Tendencies and levels of artistic sense of style development in children and adolescents in the period of social-cultural crisis]. Moscow: IKHO RAO.
- Torshilova, E.M. (2014). *Monitoring dinamiki tsennostnykh orientatsiy sovremennykh detey i podrostkov.* [Monitoring the dynamics of axiological orientations in modern children and adolescents]. *Materiály X mezinárodní vědecko-praktická konference «Moderní vymoženosti vědy - 2014».* Díl 22. *Psychologie a sociologie.* Praha: Edukation and Science, 2014.
- Torshilova, E.M., Zhbankova (Polosukhina), I.A. and Puchkova, N.D. (2011). *Ya i Pushkin. Razvitie literaturnogo vkusa sovremennykh detey i podrostkov.* [Pushkin and I. Developing literature sense of style in modern children and adolescents]. Moscow: IKHO RAO.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1986). *Psikhologiya iskusstva.* [Psychology of art]. Moscow: Art.Serikov, G.N., (1998). *Managing education: the System interpretation: Monograph.* Chelyabinsk: Publishing House "Fakel".
- Slastenin, V.A., (1997). *Formation of socially active person: the General concept of the study.* Moscow: Education.
- Soldatova, I.N., (2013). *Application of the technique of "Reflective essays" as a means of formation of aesthetic culture of the future specialist in Humanities.* *Scientific dialogue*, 2(14): 98-108.
- Uznadze, D.N., (1991). *Theory of setting: Select psychological labours in seventy volumes.* In V. A. Slastenin, E.N. Shiyarov (Eds.). *Modern high school*, 4: 83-96.



Yermentayeva, A.R., (2012). Improvement of psychological readiness: Monograph. Ust-Kamenogorsk: Publishing house of State University of East Kazakhstan named after S. Amanzholov.