

CHILDHOODS AND INTERPRETATIONS: RESEARCH ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES ON CHILDHOOD

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Abstract: This study deals with the theoretical interpretations of childhoods in the twenty-first century, and presents the results of an exploratory research on students' attitudes towards contemporary childhood discourses conducted in Hungarian secondary schools. In a narrative literature review, the developmental and the new social paradigms of childhood are discussed. In the quantitative part of the research, the participants' (N=806) attitudes were measured by a four-dimension questionnaire. The results of the exploratory research show that there are three dominant themes in childhood discourses highly accepted by the research participants: childhood as a development, the motif of initiation and the social and cultural relativity of childhoods.

Keywords: childhood paradigms, attitude research, social constructivism

1. Introduction

The social and cultural changes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century set new challenges for schooling. In a late modern or postmodern context, school functions have been changing. A deeper understanding of the learning processes provided by cognitive neuroscience research studies indicate that the traditional learning environments might not support successful learning (OECD 2001, 2006a, 2006b, 2008). The totalitarianism of modern age values and scientific theories have been questioned by the postmodern. Changing family structures and relations, the plurality of values and the changing concepts of childhood urge answers to the question: how schooling can cope with these changes and become authentic? Although, social sciences have gained a deeper insight into the social functions and dysfunctions of schooling and the understanding of childhood, we probably have less knowledge about how these processes are perceived and interpreted by the children and youth. The purpose of this study is to present the results of an explorative and descriptive research about students' attitudes and views on the interpretations of childhood in the twenty-first century. Exploring the voice of the children and youth might have crucial role in evaluating social processes and school development.

2. Childhoods in the twenty-first century

To draw disciplinary boundaries in childhood studies seems to be neither simple nor unambiguous. Philosophy, history, pediatrics, pedagogy, sociology and anthropology all have contributions to a deeper understanding of children and childhood. However, there were undoubtedly and essentially significant milestones in the study of children and childhood across human history, though the twentieth century is said to be a turning point in childhood studies (see Qvortrup et al., 2009 and Goddard et al., 2005).

The aim of this section is to provide a narrative literary review about the concepts of childhood studies. Basically, these studies have two thematic aspects (see Jenks, 1996; James and Prout, 1997, Qvortrup et al., 2009 and Goddard et al., 2005). On the one hand, those - dominantly psychological and pedagogical - theories that focus on the developmental stages of children, and aim at identifying and describing these phases, and consider them as guidelines for education or socialization are called the developmental (or evolutionary) models of childhood. These mainly developmental theories reigned childhood theories in the twentieth century (Jenks, 1996 and James and Prout, 1997). On the other hand, there was a paradigm shift in the second half of the twentieth century, the significance of social positions, cultural context and individual differences as social variables that determine childhoods appeared in

scientific discourses. While children, in scientific discourse, before the 1960s and 1970s were ‘human becomings’, they became ‘human beings’ (see Jenks, 1996; James and Prout, 1997., Qvortrup et al., 2009 and Goddard et al., 2005).

3. The ‘human becomings’ paradigm: the evolutionary or developmental models of childhood

As it was superficially listed above, the evolutionary model of childhood refers to those psychological and socialization theories – dominantly developmental approaches – that consider childhood a phase of ‘natural growth’ (see Jenks, 1996; James and Prout, 1997 and Woodhead, 2009). These theories put the focus on biological and social development as central motives of the early years of humankind. ‘Development’ – as Woodhead (2009) writes in his study – seems to be a ‘core construct in Western societies’ (46.). On the one hand, development means change, on the other hand, development implies that changes follow ‘an ordered, rule-governed plan’ (Woodhead, 2009,46.). In this sense, development usually indicates a progress resulting in physical and psychological growth. As a consequence, ‘development, ‘rationality’, ‘naturalness’ and ‘universalism’ are the key themes of this paradigm. From a developmental perspective, childhood is associated with simplicity and irrationality, while - as a consequence of a developmental progress - adulthood implies complexity and rationality. As James and Prout (1997) summarize “*[c]hildhood is therefore important to study as a presocial period of a difference, a biologically determined stage on the path to full human status i.e., adulthood* (10). To illustrate the roots of the concept of “natural growth”, Jenks (1996) evokes evolutionist anthropological views from the nineteenth century. Nineteenth century social thought was determined by the assumption that different from the ‘civilized man’ considered to be savage. In this analogy, the child was observed as different from adults and less developed, thus child was perceived as savage. The path from primitive thought (meant to be childish/savage) to rational thought (meant to be a rational adult) embodied development. From the last decades of the nineteenth century there had been a growing interest in describing and understanding children’s development. Darwin’s theory of evolution was a milestone for developmental studies, and a quest began to understand the significance of immaturity of the early years in humans’ life. Developmental approaches routinized and naturalized childhood, and later, in the twentieth century, child development studies became widespread and influential (Jenks, 1996 and Woodhead, 2009).

Biological and cognitive development were considered to be natural and universal passages to adulthood, and intellectual, moral and personal developmental theories were constructed. The models of Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson about cognitive and emotional development, and socialization theories monopolized childhood theories by depicting childhood exclusively as the period of learning to participate in the society, and growing up from an immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial and acultural state. In addition, power relations were also implicated in these theories since the stages or milestones of the growing process were determined by scientific observations from an adult perspective (Jenks, 1996; James and Prout, 1997 and Woodhead, 2009).

4. The ‘human beings’ paradigm: the new paradigm

Developmental studies were criticised harshly by the emerging new Childhood Studies in the second half of the twentieth century. On the one hand, developmentalism was said to aim at universalizing the different cultural forms of childhood by laying down universal theories about ‘the child’. The attitude behind singularity was charged with suggesting overgeneralization of childhood that pales cultural differences. On the other hand, developmental studies were also accused of objectifying the children who – probably - were treated as de-personalized objects in the research process by which these studies reinforced power relationships. Research conducted with children in order to gain a deeper insight into the physical, emotional and cognitive progress perceived the child as ‘human becomings’ rather than ‘human beings’ (Woodhead, 2009). The twentieth century was said to be the century of the child. By this proclamation, the concept of a child-centred society has emerged that implied special focus on childhood sciences, education and on legal and welfare institutions (James and Prout, 1997). Although the biological facts of birth and infancy still strengthened the evolutionary paradigm of childhood, a “challenge to orthodoxy” has appeared (James and Prout, 1997, 14.). The developmental model – as Jenks (1996) argues – contemplated childhood as an elementary form of organization. In this sense,

childhood was a universal, preparatory period of human life, a process of natural maturing. The theories of Philippe Aries (1962) and Lloyd De Maus doubted this hegemony of the evolutionary model by rejecting universality and naturalness. Philippe Aries' assumption - claiming that in medieval society the concept of childhood did not exist, and it was only between the fifteenth and eighteenth century when childhood as a concept emerged, - fostered new attitudes in childhood study and doubted the 'motif of universality'. Lloyd De Maus stated in his theory that however childhood is universal, parents have changed. A new paradigm in childhood studies appeared (Jenks, 1996). These interpretations suggested that childhood is a social construction of a particular historical, cultural and social context.

James and Prout (1997) call these narratives the Emergent Paradigm, according to which childhood must be interpreted as a social construction. The theory of childhood as a social construction provides the interpretation of the context of children's life. This paradigm also suggests that it is biological immaturity that is universal and natural characteristics of human beings, while children are active participants in the construction of their social life. The term childhood – supposing that it is single and universal in nature - cannot be interpreted, only childhoods can be described since it is the 'structural and cultural components of societies'. Studying social relationships and cultures by exploring children's voice change the passive status of children and see children as social actors (Jenks, 1996; James and Prout, 1997 and James, 2009).

5. Synthetizing childhood theories

In the previous sections of this paper, we highlighted the thematic aspects of childhood studies. Developmental theories and the narratives of the new paradigm – as it was detailed – basically put children in different positions, and thus – in certain aspects - they seem to be contradictory. Qvortrup (2009) offers two interpretations of childhood that – in our interpretation – might temper the above described dichotomy. Qvortrup (2009) suggests that childhood can be interpreted as a 'period' and as a 'permanent structural form'. The term 'period' describes one's individual childhood, the individual's personal transition to adulthood. It signs a length of time in one's life, and this particular life phase can truly be a development.

“The dynamics of child development lies in major changes in an individual's dispositions, as we know them from several models of child development [...]: from [...] immaturity to maturity from [...] incompetence to competence, from [...] incapacity to capacity, and so on. Since these and most other changes described by developmental psychology are invariably depicted as movements from a less to a more desirable state, it seems to coincide with normatively stipulated anticipations of improvements as the child accomplishes the transition to her/his adult life phase”. (24.)

Permanent structural form – besides the period interpretation – symbolises that childhood might change historically but also remains permanent in societies. Childhood might change in different historical periods (that can be the development of childhood), but must remain identifiable and recognizable in societies. Considering childhood a permanent structural form abstracted it from the individual level (Qvortrup, 2009).

Interestingly, however developmental narratives – as opposed to social construction narratives – have been criticized because of their normative, universal and hierarchical nature, the concept of development - as a transition- reappears in the structural form approach too.

6. Constructions of childhood in the twenty-first century: contemporary discourses about childhood

Buckingham, in his book about the consumer child, evokes social constructivism to understand, define or – alternatively - redefine social problems. Social constructivism – as Buckingham (2011) argues – implies that in contemporary societies the moral contents of 'right' and 'wrong' are not clearly defined. The social and cultural context of a hypothetical problem can alter its evaluation. Social problems are constructed through this 'framing' process, and identified as phenomena, but these assumptions are changeable (Buckingham, 2011). In this process, there are so called 'claim makers', who construct or alter the judgement of the perceived social problems. These claim makers can be politicians, the media

or scientific researchers who make problems or themes (that can alternatively become problems) publicly visible. Childhood in this century are absolutely framed by such themes that can be interpreted as either child-friendly or child-abusing. These ‘popular’ frames surrounding childhood are hurried development, consumerism and media culture.

7. The image of the hurried child

Previously in this study, we have already evoked Qvortrup’s (2009) interpretation claiming that childhood can be a period (i.e. an individual developmental phase) and a permanent structural form within societies. Concerning the individual developmental aspect of childhoods, Elkind (2001) proposes that, in certain social classes, the natural process - (or we might say perceived as natural in a social context) of development in childhood is accelerated. Elkind (2001) introduces the concept of the ‘hurried child’. The term ‘hurried’ refers to the phenomenon that children are forced to grow up fast by the pressure on early intellectual achievement, and an adult like behaviour is promoted by the media. In this narrative, in the Cold War era, the launch of the Sputnik in the Soviet Union was a symbolic criticism on American education and motivated strong curriculum movements in the United States. Early intellectual development became desired and widespread in middle class families. Later, as Elkind (2011) discusses, standardizations of educational achievements and international assessments similarly foster to achieve intellectual and cognitive developmental stages earlier.

Besides education, another catalyst of this ‘hurrying’ process is the media. The behavioural patterns and values that are conveyed through commercials, advertisements and programmes made for the young audience manipulate and motivate children and youth to behave like adults and act as adult consumers. These processes increase children’s stress level, toss them toward premature sexuality and cause mental and health problems (Elkind, 2011). Elkind’s narrative about the hurried child – in our interpretation – depicts the ‘myth of lost innocence’. This theory put children in passive positions suggesting that they are victims of their social context.

8. The image of the consumer child

In Qvortrup’s (2009) model, childhood is also a permanent, recognizable and identifiable structural form within societies. Although, in the twenty-first century, there are narratives that claim that the borders between childhood, youth and adulthood is eroding. Similarly, these discourses centre on childhood consumerism and argue that the harmful and violent contents and sexual materials taint children. Children – again - are portrayed as passive, innocent and incompetent victims of the material world who are corrupted and exploited ‘Toxic childhood’ or the ‘loss of childhood’ are usual terms of this discourse (Buckingham, 2011). Probably, the above superficially listed images of children are the oversimplifications of the social context of contemporary childhood. This study attempts to highlight that in the interpretation or ‘framing’ processes (see Buckingham, 2011) the study of the social and cultural context can be crucial. Similarly to Buckingham (2011), – we strongly agree – that children are neither ‘passive victims’ nor ‘empowered social actors’ (226). As Buckingham argues children are in a relatively low position in the hierarchy of claim makers, however, we definitely believe that exploring how they interpret childhood and the social and cultural world are one of the key elements of gaining a deeper insight into twenty-first century childhood. On the one hand, as James and Prout (1997) summarize:

“[C]hildren are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.” (8.)

Although on the other hand, as Buckingham (2000) also argues, there is a need to understand the extent - and the limitations - of children’s competences as participants in the social world.

9. Exploring children’s attitudes

9.1. Research objectives

In the previous section, those fundamental theoretical assumptions were discussed that form social discourse about the concept of childhood. Nevertheless, childhood studies seem to have less knowledge

about how children themselves approach to these narratives. One way to explore children's voice can be measuring their attitudes towards scientific assumptions. In the following, the results of an exploratory and descriptive research are discussed. The goal of our research was to reveal, describe and interpret sixteen-year-old youths' attitudes and views on the social functions of school, childhood narratives and on the future of schooling. Our research has a quantitative, questionnaire-based segment and a qualitative segment in which focus group interviews were conducted. Present study focuses on one particular segment of the research: attitudes towards childhood discourses.

In the quantitative phase of the research, the focus was on attitudes and views to identify basic cognitive, emotional and behavioural relations. By attitude, we mean "unobservable psychological construct which can manifest itself in relevant beliefs, feelings, and behavioural components (Hogg et al., 2003, 103, and see also Smith and Mackie, 2004 and Fiske, 2006), therefore the three-component view of attitudes was applied.

Since our study is exploratory, at this point of the research process, we prefer to form research questions than strong hypotheses. Our questions were the followings:

- Q1: How do children approach contemporary childhood discourses?
- Q2: Which themes or motifs of childhood studies can be identified as strongly accepted interpretations of the research participants?

9.2 Exploring the social context: the research design

In the literature review, the relevance of the social and cultural context of childhoods were emphasized. Therefore, while constructing research design, we had two objectives to achieve. First, since attitudes are described as associations between an attitude object and its evaluation in the memory, attitudes in some cases might be neither accessible nor conscious (Hogg et al., 2003). Behind attitudes there might have underlying constructs that form them, namely values (Schwartz, 2012). In order to capture these underlying constructs, we also examined the basic value preferences of youths. Second, mapping value orientations aims to reveal whether there are characteristic values of a generational unit in a society. To measure value priorities Schwartz's (2012) Portrait Values Questionnaire was used. A four-dimensional questionnaire was developed to measure attitudes and explore views. In the first block, the attitudes towards sociological narratives of childhood was measured.

9.3. Research participants

The Hungarian compulsory education system is highly selective (see Balázs et al., 2011). The results of the National Assessment of Basic Competencies study reflect that there are remarkable differences in student achievements, socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds. Low status students – those with unfavourable economic, family and cultural backgrounds – regularly achieve lower academic results and have less positive school attitude. These differences do not come out only on individual levels but can be discovered between schools, as well. Between-school differences are relatively high implying that in the different school types (i.e. in grammar schools, vocational secondary schools and vocational schools) students' background are basically homogenous. We hypothetically assumed that there might be between-school differences in students' attitudes and value preferences, hence school type and governance (i.e.: state or church) were considered to be basic variables in sampling. By simple random sampling, fifteen secondary schools were selected, and in every schools, two tenth grade classes were chosen to participate in the research (N=806 students). *Table 1* presents the exact sample rate.

Table 1. The rate of research participants by gender, school governance and school type (N=806)

		Gender	
		Boys	Girls
School governance	State school students	327	302
	Church school students	84	93
School type	4-year grammar school students	74	191
	6- or 8-year grammar school students	139	125
	Vocational school students	198	79

9.4. Results

9.4.1. Exploring value preferences

The value orientation of the youths was measured by Schwartz's (2003) Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ). The questionnaire consists of 21 items that are short verbal portraits of different people. These statements are wishes, aspirations and goals that imply different values without identifying them (Schwartz, 1999). Participants are asked to evaluate the verbal portraits on a six-point scale by deciding "how much each person is or is not like" them. In his value theory Schwartz identified ten motivational basic values. The ten basic values and the key motifs of them are listed below (see Table 2). Schwartz assumed that these values are in dynamic relations, and can be arranged along a motivational continuum in a circular structure. Closer values imply similar underlying motivations while distant values probably have antagonistic underlying motivations. At this point, it can be important to note that further research (see European Social Surveys and Prazsák, 2010) concluded that values have less antagonistic structures than Schwartz assumed. Hypothetically antagonistic values can be observed simultaneously both within individual and social value structures, as well.

Table 2. The ten basic motivational values by Schwartz (based on Schwartz, 2003, 268-270.)

Values	Key motifs, goals and aspirations
Power	<i>social status, prestige, control or dominance over people and resources</i>
Achievement	<i>personal success</i>
Hedonism	<i>pleasure, enjoying life, self-indulgence</i>
Stimulation	<i>excitement, novelty, and challenge in life</i>
Self direction	<i>independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring.</i>
Universalism	<i>appreciation, tolerance and protection</i>
Benevolence	<i>preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is</i>
Tradition	<i>respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self</i>
Conformity	<i>restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms</i>
Security	<i>safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self</i>

In the PVQ, to explore individual value orientations a mean score is calculated for the items that index the different values. In order to gain a better understanding of the value structures, an average score – on the basis of the 21 items – can also be calculated. To correct individual and group scale use differences, Schwartz suggests that centered scores are better to be used. Basically, centered scores (C) reveal variances from the calculated mean scores. Concerning our results, the average score indicating the overall acceptance or rejection of the values – the term "value-richness" is used to describe this mean by Prazsák (2010) – was 4.39 (std.=0.48). This result suggests that the acceptance (i.e.: the perceived similarity of the portraits to the individual) of the ten values is relatively high among the youths. Note that in the questionnaire, participants were asked to mark on a six-point scale their similarity to the

described portrait. In the analysis, the scale was transformed, therefore higher values indicate perceived similarity. In this study, the detailed results of the value questionnaire are not discussed since it would stretch the focus of this article. Here, we offer a concise overview of the PVQ results. Interestingly, significant differences between school types and genders cannot be described. Self-direction ($C=0,645$; $std.=0.75$), hedonism ($C=0.505$; $std.=0.76$) and benevolence ($C=0.482$; $std.=0.68$) seem to be the most accepted values, while power ($C=-0.732$; $std.=0.751,03$), conformity ($C=-1.085$; $std.=0.751,01$) and tradition ($C=-0.887$; $std.=1,01$) are the less important. (Note that standard deviation values indicate that there are considerable individual differences within the sample that rather verify individual value-richness than neutrality (see Prazsák, 2010).

9.4.2. Attitudes on childhood discourses

Besides describing value orientation, we intended to explore student attitudes towards contemporary scientific and social discourses about childhood. In the literature review, we concluded that a deeper understanding of the social context and the children's voice might be crucial to interpret social and cultural processes. In the exploratory phase of the research, based on the childhood theories discussed in the literature review, simplified statements were elaborated about childhood, and the research participants were asked to indicate the level of agreement on a five point Likert scale. The statements were arranged into three categories. In the first category, *normative or developmental approach items* referred to the innocent and idyllic nature of childhood, emphasized development by acquiring competencies necessary for adulthood, and implied child-adult hierarchy. Items in the second category labelled as *childhood as a social construct* described childhood as being diverse across cultures and societies and emphasized children's voice. Items in the third category was statements about child consumerism, media use and the social changes of childhood in the twenty-first century. (For the items of the three categories see Table 3).

Table 3. Item categories of the childhood dimension in the questionnaire

Normative and developmental approach items	Childhood as a social construct items	Childhood in the twenty-first century items
Childhood is an innocent phase in human life.	Nowadays, children have voice in everyday life.	By the media, every information is accessible to children, they can know about everything similar to adults.
I think there are certain issues in life in which adults initiate children when the time comes.	In every culture and society, it is different to be a child.	It is good that there are cosmetic and fashion products and electronics especially made for children.
Childhood is an idyllic phase in human life.		Children's lifestyle is similar to adults'.
Childhood is when adults govern, make rules and decide what happens.		It is good that children can take an active part in the media (there are special programs and shows for them).
Being a child means that there are certain things that only adults know, and are allowed to do.		Nowadays, the world is more threatening for a child.
Childhood is a way through which one learns everything necessary for adulthood		

The descriptive results clearly reveal that there are two motifs of developmental childhood theories that are significantly accepted by students. The vast majority of the research participants (73.9%) agree or strongly agree that childhood is about acquiring competencies for adult life. Equally, initiation to adulthood as a motif of childhood is highly accepted (82.5%) by the youths. Attitudes on the items such

as ‘childhood innocence’, ‘idyll’ and ‘childhood as a lack of competences and knowledge’ are more heterogeneous, for detailed distribution see *Figure 1*.

Attitudes towards the assumptions of the emergent paradigm of childhood draw an interesting picture (*Figure 2*). The social and cultural relativity of childhood is highly accepted (81.6%) by the research participants. In our interpretation, this is a peculiarly important result, since similarly to the theoretical assumptions of the emergent paradigm; childhood is interpreted as a social construct by the youths. However, the presence of children’s voice is a divisive item. Basically, almost the majority (45.7%) of the participants agree or strongly agree that children have influence on everyday life, but uncertainty and disagreement also characterize the research population.

While theorizing childhood we evoked social constructivism to interpret social and cultural changes that can alter the interpretation of childhood. Consumerism, media use and the vanishing boundaries between childhood and adulthood are characteristic parts of contemporary childhood discourses. Among the participant youths, childhood consumerism is dominantly evaluated positively. 56.3% of the students agreed that it is good that fashion, cosmetic and electronic products are available for children (*Figure 3*). Items like ‘media use in childhood’ and ‘children’s access to information’ have contradictory judgement. Children’s participation in media programmes (e.g. TV shows) are supported only by 30.9% of the participants. Uncertainty and disagreement are the characteristic evaluation of this item. The unlimited access to information provided by the media is also a divisive item. About the notion of the hurried child a significantly rejected and doubted attitude can be described. Although consumerism and media use have a less threatening interpretation, the overall perception of the world is rather unfavourable. The majority (53.1%) of the youths agree that the world is more threatening for a child.

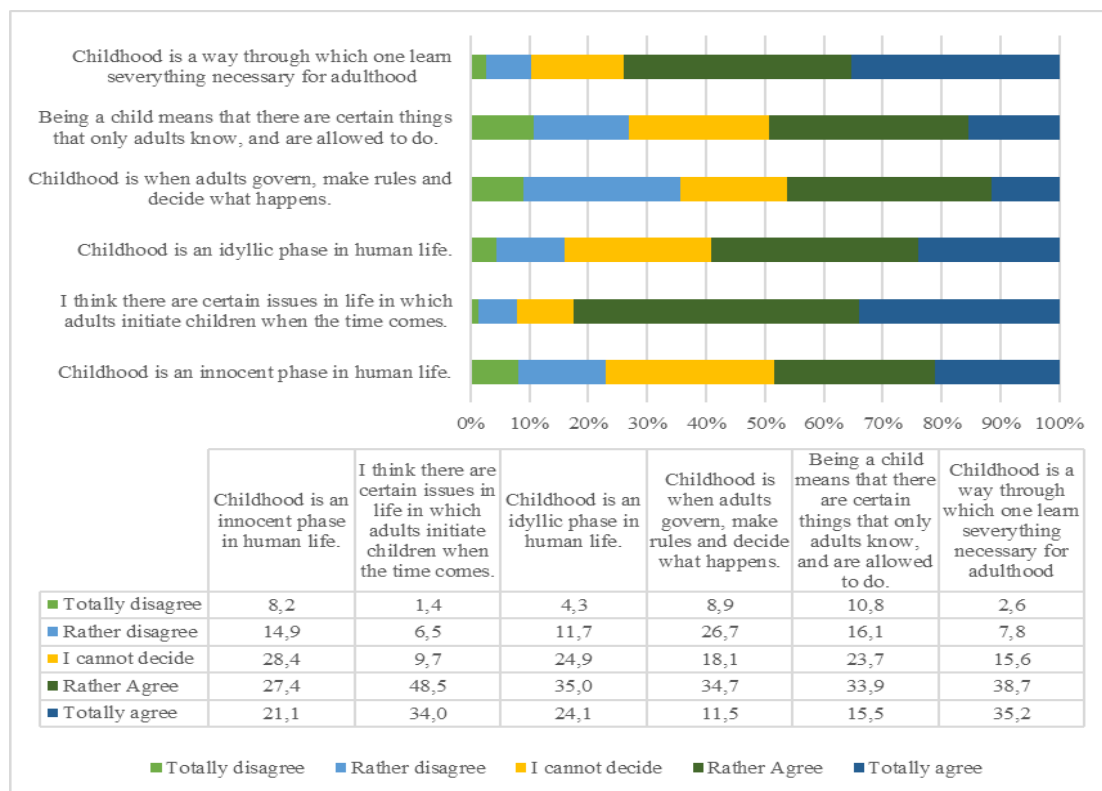


Figure 1. Attitudes on developmental childhood theories (N=806)

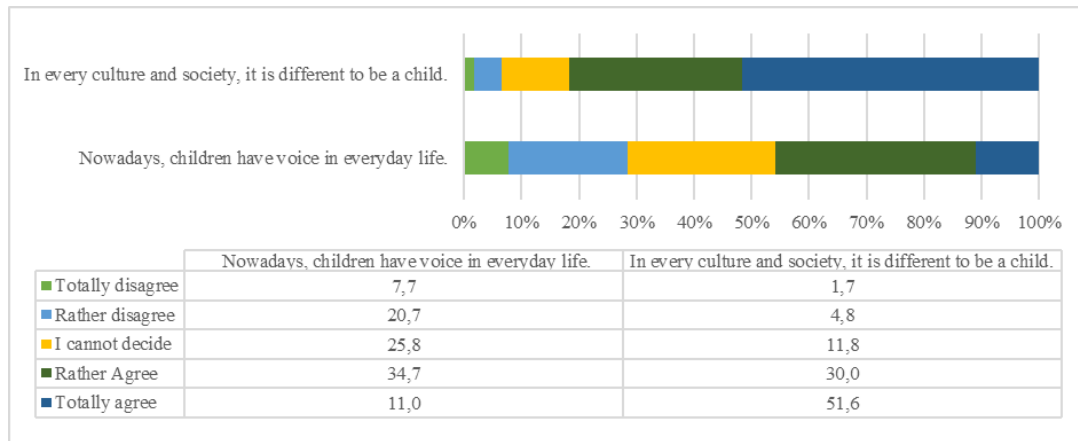


Figure 2. Attitudes on the emergent paradigm of childhood theory (N=806)

However, attitudes on childhood theories amongst the participant youths are heterogenous, three characteristic childhood themes can be described. Similarly to the new sociological paradigm of childhood, research participants agree on the social and cultural relativity of childhood, although the perception of children’s as actors in this process are divergent. Childhood as a preparation for adulthood by acquiring necessary competences was also a dominantly accepted view. The third assumption that gained absolute agreement is the motif of initiation into adulthood by adults.

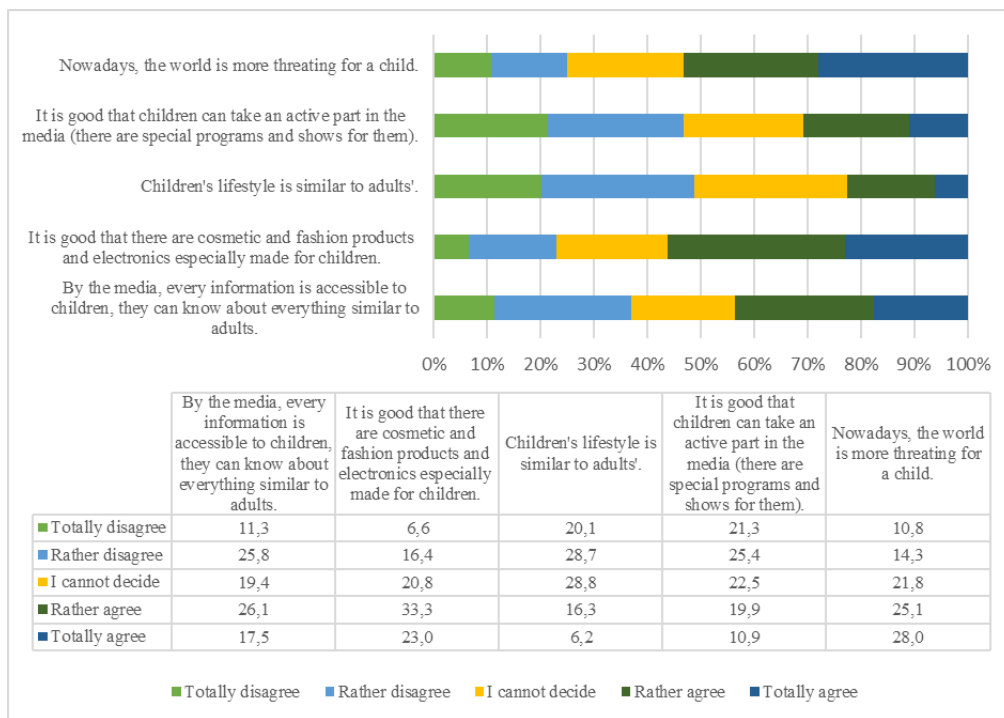


Figure 3. Attitudes on the childhood theories of the twenty-first century (N=806)

10. Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we summarized those scientific childhood theories that characterize the construction of childhood in the twenty first century. In a narrative literature review, we revealed that childhood theories basically have two approaches. Evolutionary or developmental theories – as an umbrella term – refer to those theoretical considerations that focus on childhood as a developmental period. In these assumptions, childhood behaviour is characterized by immaturity, irrationality, and these studies aim to describe universal developmental phases as stages of biological, cognitive and emotional progress. Nevertheless, developmental approaches have been criticised because of universalising and materializing childhood without revealing cultural differences. As opposed to developmental theories,

the new emergent paradigm of childhood brought new aspects into childhood studies at the end of the twentieth century. This paradigm stated that childhood should be interpreted as a social construct. One cannot interpret childhood, only childhoods can be described across nations and cultures. The new sociological approach gave children voice, and put them into an active position by revealing that children - like social agents - interpret and construct their social reality and relationships. By evoking the assumptions of social constructivism, we reviewed those themes that determine the interpretation of childhood in the twenty-first century. These social discourses – we intentionally do not term them as scientific theories – cover childhood consumerism, media use and the changes of childhood lifestyle. These phenomena are interpreted by a framing process, and the context, cultural specifications and the society dominantly influence their evaluation. However, these changes can be interpreted either as child-friendly or child-abusive, a deeper understanding can only be achieved by putting children in an active status through this interpretation process.

Hence, this empowerment was the aim of our research. In this study, we discussed the results of an exploratory study aiming to reveal children's attitudes and views on schooling and childhood theories. In the quantitative phase of the research, we intended to reveal attitudes on contemporary childhood discourses. As a background study, the value orientation of the students was also investigated. Result of the PVQ revealed that the overall acceptance of values among the participant tenth graders are relatively high. In the explored value structure, power, tradition and conformity were the less important values, while self-direction, hedonism and benevolence are the most important ones. Intending to avoid the accusation of universalisation of research participants, these results can be cultural, social and age characteristics. The Hungarian context is basically a democratic-like and European context, while research participants are in their mid-teenage years. The values structures were in harmony with the attitudes towards childhood discourses. Similarly to the value preferences, the interpretation of childhood was heterogenous, although three characteristic motives can be described. Research participants dominantly accepted that childhoods are diverse in cultures and societies. Interestingly, power and tradition were less important values, even so latent adult hierarchy in the adult-child relationship was verified by the youths. Childhood as the acquisition of adult competencies and the motif of initiation in childhood were typical interpretations. Childhood consumerism was positively evaluated, but media use and childhood media consumerism has ambiguous evaluation.

11. Limitations of this study

From a theoretical point of view, developmental and new sociological paradigms of childhood might seem to be contradictory. Nevertheless, our study intends to highlight that we strongly believe that these paradigms must be interpreted side by side. On the one hand, developmental theories have undoubtedly results in understanding and constructing childhood that should not be eliminated. On the other hand, since biological immaturity seems to be universal in childhoods, adult hierarchy probably remain constant. As Prout and James (1997) summarizes:

„[d]espite our recognition that children are active social beings, it remains true that their lives are almost always determined and/or constrained in large measure by adults and there are few instances of children becoming organized at a ‘grass roots’ level to represent themselves independently” (28.).

Correspondingly, social constructivism has its limitations. Buckingham (2001) proposes that the rejection of ‘objectivism’ can easily lead to ‘relativism’ that can be an obstacle to establish a “*real scale*” for social problems connected to childhood. Therefore, we consider further researches crucial to judge contemporary childhood discourses.

From a researcher's point of view, the research results discussed in this study are part of a more complex research. Therefore, present study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. Hence, underlying correlations, the influence of social and cultural background and gender can only be revealed by further analysis. Finally, quantitative data can ensure insight into the attitudes of a relatively large population, but children's voice must be revealed by qualitative methodology, as well. The results of focus group discussions can supplement the above discussed results.

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