

Mother's Face of Developmental Psychology

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Материнское лицо детской психологии

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Abstract. The paper is devoted to the memory of Liudmila Obukhova (1938–2016) — the chef of the department of developmental psychology in Moscow State University of Psychology and Education. L. F. Obukhova was both an outstanding researcher and extraordinary personality, taking maternal care of her disciples and colleagues. She contributed a lot for the development of cultural-historical psychology.

Keywords: *L. F. Obukhova; developmental psychology; a child in the culture; J. Korczak; L. S. Vygotsky; J. Piaget*

Аннотация. Статья посвящена памяти профессора Людмилы Филипповны Обуховой (1938–2016), заведующей кафедрой возрастной психологии Московского государственного психолого-педагогического университета. Л. Ф. Обухова была не только выдающимся ученым, но и необыкновенной личностью, по-матерински заботившейся о своих учениках и сотрудниках. Подчеркнута роль Л. Ф. Обуховой в развитии культурно-исторической психологии.

Ключевые слова: *Л. Ф. Обухова; детская психология; ребенок в культуре; Януш Корчак; Л. С. Выготский; Ж. Пиаже*

If our developmental psychology were presented in faces, its maternal face would undoubtedly belong to L. F. Obukhova. There are many founding fathers in psychology. And Liudmila Obukhova was both the founder and a real mother of our developmental psychology. Exactly 5 years ago, on July 20, 2016, on a summer day as fine as today, she

passed away unexpectedly, having returned from an expedition trip to Kamchatka. Two months earlier, in May, it was a trip to China. Her trips always lectures and speeches. In Kamchatka, at the university, she spoke about my teacher V. V. Davydov. She also showed the film she had made about him. She came home to Moscow to celebrate her 78th anniversary on July 22nd, and the next day she was supposed to be back on a plane to Japan to attend the World Congress of Psychology. And suddenly her life way was interrupted. People usually say that about the young, but Liudmila Obukhova stayed young forever, leaving this world, which she had flown far and wide, “on the fly.”

The world for her was always, above all, the world of childhood, in which most adults were only guests. Most — but not Liudmila Obukhova. She did so much to prepare professionally not only psychologists but also adults in general for living in this world, so that they would not be just guests.

Developmental psychology, having lost Liudmila Obukhova that day, was literally orphaned. I am speaking not only about the whole universal community of her students, but also about all those who were brought up on what she had done, through her books, lectures, articles. With her help, they were able to become those adults who understand the nature of childhood and the meaning of what is going on in the children’s world. It is impossible to be truly mature without such understanding; the concept of *maturity* without the concept of *childhood* is meaningless. Liudmila Obukhova was a mother to them, too. A young mother of adults. Obukhova’s motherly nature was apparent in everything — her tremulousness, attention, great tenderness, and generous tolerance, ability to listen and wait, to come to the rescue when you were too embarrassed to ask for help... She had a gift to love as only she could. Everyone who was lucky enough to call himself or herself Obukhova’s children — as students, undergraduates, graduate students, colleagues — will attest to it. There were legendary four deaf-blind Ilyenkov’s children, pupils of A. I. Meshcheryakov (sadly, only two are with us today), whom Ilyenkov got places at the psychology department of MSU and also housing in Moscow. When these children were passed on to L. F. Obukhova, they found not only a curator but also a mother. The kids of Ilyenkov and Obukhova...

However, I want to say the main thing. The cultural-historical psychologist L. F. Obukhova did not categorically accept *the child and culture* concept. For her it could be only *the child in culture, inside culture*, in maternal bosom of human inside humans. After all, culture can also be defined as a form of care about one human by another one, albeit in absentia. Only a notch on the tree was needed for a man to get out of the woods. Otherwise, he would have wandered, poking around, guided by the impulse, and maybe he would have stayed in the forest. Does the sky help a man? Yes, it does! He did not hang the stars in the sky, but he guessed to read in their arrangement a geographical map, with the help of which the early navigators and foot travelers did not disappear in the world, and got where they needed. “If stars are lit, it means someone wants them to be...” It also works with the ruler used by a student not to put thousands of things to each other (although this is also a measurement) to estimate their size... A motherly care of culture is all around us! People take care of each other within the cultural world they have cre-

ated, and by doing that they work on themselves and do not blindly submit to external circumstances. This is the meaning of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory.

After all, in order to comprehend and accept this care, the child has a lot to learn. Especially in order to respond with care to care. Liudmila Obukhova, the embodiment of maternal care, devoted her life to working on this problem.

Symbolically, her birthday coincided with that of Janusz Korczak. They both possessed the secret of the emergence of human sociality. The secret is not that everyone behaves in the same way. Even colonial animals do not live their lives like that (and if they did, it would be as Bernard de Mandeville describes in his *Fable of the Bees*), not to mention the so-called social animals. Sociality is when people become and remain human in any, even non-human, circumstances. It is an immunity from the inhuman behavior, from the wildness into which it is very easy to fall, without leaving the community of people. Sociality is an immunity that is gained anew every time. Sociality is not simply a set of individuals living together, incapable of doing much without the other. This also includes herds, flocks and even colonies. It's a sense of community when you're alone. Also a heart beats somewhere far away and is inaudible. It's the thought that has penetrated the nature of what you do not even suspect the existence of, for example, of a particular sociality that cannot yet declare itself in a commonly understood language. That is about child sociality (of course, by origin and nature always child-adult).

Children's sociality mixes in itself many things: the social and the individual, deeply personal; meaning and significance, normativity and sometimes that seems like an anomie. Adults strive to put everything in order — transparent and convenient, first, for themselves. They are not aware of the fact that they act in a clichéd pupil way, i. e. not in an adult way at all. By doing that, they are repressing the child's eternal craving for himself or herself, no matter how unusual it may appear. The outstanding psychologist D. B. Elkonin wrote about this craving in his scientific diaries. L. F. Obukhova also studied it with her students and followers. In essence, it is also what all of Janusz Korczak's books are about.

This means that it is not necessary to draw any additional ethical consequences from the cultural-historical approach. Liudmila Obukhova wrote:

If today Piaget's theory is presented to us as a rational, quite objective scientific system corresponding to the natural-scientific approach to the study of the human psyche, then L. S. Vygotsky's theory forms the basis for a new view of human nature and development — a highly moral and fully humanistic view that may be correlated, oddly enough, with the religious ideas of Creation and Love. It is with this new approach the solution of the problem of learning and development is connected. (Obukhova, 2016, p. 231)

I have written about this before, but let me repeat myself. We are happy in the profession we live in if we are born into a field of amazing love of our teachers for our own and for each other. Liudmila Obukhova's dialogues with her teachers (that are documented in a series of articles — you can search Psyjournals for L. F. Obukhova's page) are amazing and prove that she expressed this love like no one else. And she generously gave it

to others. Others, without realizing it themselves, could no longer do anything below the degree of this feeling. Liudmila Obukhova simply fell in love, loved and gave her love to everyone around her. Without this one cannot understand the specificity of her scientific and pedagogical gift.

It was also a form of her mother-daughter care, but already about science.

References

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