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Empowering Little Children
Research Based Recommendations

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EMPOWERING LITTLE CHILDREN – RESEARCH BASED RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

„Empowering Little Children“ is a collaborative research project between the University of Wuppertal, on behalf of Prof. Doris Bühler-Niederberger and Dipl.-Psych. Jessica Schwittek, with UNICEF Kyrgyzstan, and Aga Khan Foundation Kyrgyzstan. The sociological project has two central aims: 1) how Kyrgyz children are perceived by the Kyrgyz parents and society and 2) an examination of the living conditions of young children in Kyrgyzstan.

Childhood sociology defines childhood as a central part of a society, and as a variable construct. Childhood is not only considered a life phase shaped by a child's nature, but by the goals, demands and conditions of the society. This study explores the complexities of childhood in the Kyrgyz society from the point of view of the parents, children and professionals in the educational sector.

The following recommendations for early child development (ECD) programs have been derived from the analysis of the empirical data and the researchers' interpretations. Chapter One examines two main research questions; Chapter Two outlines the study’s rationale in form of two research guidelines. Chapter Three explains the methodological approach and specific instruments of data collection. Chapter Four presents the research results, and chapter Five includes recommendations based on these results. For each of the recommendations we have relied on specific sources of data, examples of which are listed in the appendix.

Data was collected during three phases of field work:
- **April 2010** – Alai region (on behalf of AKF)
- **October 2010** – Naryn region (on behalf of AKF)
- **April 2011** – Batken region (on behalf of UNICEF)

Data was collected in several towns and villages in the above mentioned regions as well as in Bishkek and surrounding areas. The total sample consists of 85 children and 65 parents.

We thank our cooperation partners from Aga Khan Foundation and UNICEF for the organization of field work and all their support. We would also like to express our gratitude to all children, families and kindergartens for their trust and honest contributions.
CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A) Families' social conditions and their perceptions of children: To what extent do families’ social conditions influence their perceptions of young children, the educational practices, as well as present and future expectations?

Parents’ strategies, routines/practices and educational goals are part of a society’s norms concerning the relationship between the individual and society, and represent notions of how a particular society works. Especially for societies in transition, as is the case in Kyrgyzstan, parents are oriented towards a variety of perspectives, values and requirements. The question analyzes parents’ attempts to stipulate historically and socially well established norms on the one hand and expectations and requirements brought forth by a changing society on the other.

Given the multitude of societies, it is impossible to define ‘ideal childhood’, one with universally acceptable beliefs and values to all societies. Even within a given society, different conditions require different solutions, e.g. in rural versus urban areas. It is, however, possible to define positive and negative aspects within a society from the child’s perspective. This leads us to the second main research question:

B) Children’s experience of childhood conditions: What are children’s experiences in the private and public space, and how do they cope with those conditions?

It is essential that Kyrgyz children’s perspectives be taken into account in order to identify specific positive and negative aspects of their childhood. Therefore, we developed research instruments for 3-7 year-olds to better understand their life world, their social networks, personal relationships, hopes and fears, daily routines, games and spaces, as well as their future aspirations.

Why this age group? From a scientific point of view, very little is known about Kyrgyz children in the kindergarten age group. During our first field trip to Kyrgyzstan it became apparent that children in kindergarten held a different position in society than children already in Grade 1. The latter age group is thought to have already entered public life; for example, the fathers of these children are more inclined to become involved in the child’s education, and they tend to spend more time with them, e.g. taking them to visit friends, relatives, or to other kinds of social events. Parents expect older children to comprehend more complex thought processes, but understand that the kindergarten age child is not yet readily able to do: the youngest children “grow like the grass on the meadow”.

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CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH GUIDELINES

Two guidelines for our research methods:

1. We found that parents’ attitudes and beliefs about abstract issues such as “education” and “childhood” may be influenced by idealizations of socially accepted norms. For this reason we designed research methods which focused on real life experiences and behavior. When parents reported how they handled everyday situations, the principles governing their actions became apparent, as well as their educational strategies. Home visits, video recordings, interviews and questionnaires were the means by which we were able to reveal parents’ actual behavior patterns.

2. The child’s perspective. We developed research methods in the tradition of “participatory research”, aimed at activating the child and providing greater consideration to the child’s own view. In this way, we were able to go beyond adult’s descriptions of children’s behavior and to include the child’s perspective of his or her own life world. To encourage interaction, data collection was carried out in groups of children.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

A) For parents: As mentioned above, concrete situations and actual educational practices was the focus of the data collection with parents:

Questionnaire: includes questions primarily about a child’s everyday life, e.g. bedtime habits, family decisions concerning children’s leisure activities, and specific situations eliciting positive or negative reactions from the parents. We included questions on how parents value children (VOC), the future aspirations they hold for them, as well as their view on the changing society. The questionnaire has been designed also to work in an open interview format, providing opportunity for individual comments and explanations. (cf. Appendix)

Three examples: We presented Kyrgyz parents with three situations which could be considered “difficult” for mothers in Germany. The Kyrgyz mothers/parents were asked to interpret these situations, specifically whether they also regarded those same situations as difficult, and how they would resolve them. (cf. Appendix)

Family video recordings: A camera and microphone were installed over the course of an hour in family living rooms and spaces where children and adults gathered. The purpose was to observe more about routine interactions between family members of different generations. Naturally, the families were aware that they were being observed, so to a certain extent they tried to adapt their behavior to socially accepted models. Nevertheless, a number of characteristic styles of familial interaction were observed.

B) For kindergarten children: It was essential to adjust the research methods for this age group, taking into consideration the variety of abilities and normal patterns of self expression. We used visual aids, drawing- and labeling-tasks as forms of data collection rather than focusing on verbal methods. The kindergarten classroom was the setting for data collection since it was a space already familiar to the children. Sessions
were led by the kindergarten teacher which provided additional familiarity and comfort to the children.

The following six exercises were conducted in two successive sessions with small groups of children, examples of which have been included in the appendix:

**Exercise 1 “Favorite persons”**: Children were asked to draw people who they considered most important in their lives. Three categories were used to evaluate the drawings:

1) who is depicted, i.e. nuclear or extended family members, friends, etc.;
2) the position of the child in the drawing, i.e. big, central, or proportional as compared to other figures;
3) expressivity in the drawing, quantity of the paper used, richness, and imagination.

We analyzed as well how children interpreted their drawings, their reasons for selecting certain people, how they described the people, and their relationship with them.

**Exercise 2 “Smileys”**: This was a visual exercise to better understand children’s emotional experiences: joys, pleasures, worries, sorrows, sadness, and anger. Children were shown wooden smileys or emoticons depicting various states of emotion. They were then asked

1) to describe the emotion expressed in the smiley,
2) whether they too had experienced a similar feeling and
3) in what circumstance. The findings of the exercise were clear: the children experienced a wide range of emotions, and were able to identify the causes.

**Exercise 3 “Helpful bug”**: To introduce this exercise about the child’s social network, a drawing of a bug was given to each child. The instructor explained that the bug has six legs to help it move forward; the children were asked to label each leg with the name of a person who helps them “move forward”. Our analysis of the children’s answers included

1) the relationship between the child and his “helpers” (family, friends, kindergarten staff etc.) and
2) what kind of contribution the helper made to the child’s life (functional or emotional).

**Exercise 4 “Places and games”**: This exercise focuses on places where children spend their time and the activities associated with those places. Children were asked to draw their favorite places and activities they like to do there. The exercise was designed to determine whether the places they chose were

1) “child-designated” or
2) spaces they actively conquered,
3) whether it was a private or public space, and
4) what made it important and attractive to them.

**Exercise 5 “Future wishes”**: This exercise was designed to evaluate children’s visions of the future, hopes and dreams, their interest in material things, idealistic goals, and what kind of profession they imagined for themselves. The questions were put forth in group discussions.

**Exercise 6 “Dollhouse – my day”**: This last exercise focuses on how children spend their time and how their day is structured. To assist with this rather difficult question, a
dollhouse was introduced. While playing with the dollhouse, children were questioned about their every day routines, duties, leisure time activities, and family rituals.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS

It is evident that children are valued and central to the Kyrgyz society. Children make up a significant core of the Kyrgyz population, family life is embraced, and in general children seem to be content and happy. Children are always among other people, they have many opportunities to learn from and interact with their peers and siblings. They also take on duties and responsibilities in the household from an early age. This gives them a sense of belonging and self-confidence.

It is a statistical fact that only a small percentage of children attend kindergarten, but those who do, find ample opportunity to learn. In general kindergarten children are very well developed. They begin to master reading and writing and display greater social and cognitive development than children who do not attend kindergarten. As the data shows, children treasure the kindergarten environment because it is a place designated specifically for them. Nevertheless, a Kyrgyz childhood can be to a certain extent “unprotected”. That does not necessarily mean that a Kyrgyz childhood is dysfunctional; rather the Kyrgyz childhood can be viewed simply as a part of the social structure of Kyrgyz society with its traditional order between the generations. The following results show the different areas of “unprotected childhood” in Kyrgyzstan:

1. Rooms and spaces: Few child-designated rooms in private and public spheres

The empirical data shows that there are few rooms, public and private, which are specifically designed for the use and needs of children. We found as well that once child-friendly rooms exist, i.e. the kindergarten, playgrounds, parks, children appreciate and treasure them. (cf. Appendix 1)

2. Awareness of public issues

Children are much aware of public issues and tensions, but their views on problematic events in the country’s youngest history are not yet influenced by ethnic prejudices and social cleavages. Rather, their future wishes signal hope for a better and more secure future: This view doesn’t yet point at resentments and revenge - this is a chance that should be used. (cf. Appendix 2)

3. Incidents of verbal and physical aggression

Children frequently reported experiences of physical and verbal aggression – they are victims as well as offenders. Our findings show that there is too little attempt to deal with this problem. Children’s emotional state is put at risk, as experiences of aggression are the most frequently stated reason for negative emotionality. Greater efforts must be made on behalf of this problem, and socially acceptable ways of solving conflicts should be installed within institutions. (cf. Appendix 3)
4. Coping – Children’s strategies of handling „unprotectedness“

Children apply various coping techniques in ‘unprotected’ situations. For example, they seek out and inhabit spaces for themselves, thereby taking care of their own needs for play and privacy. They also develop fantasies of future power as an imagined tool to control social nuisances against which they are unprotected and helpless now: i.e. dangerous traffic, drunkards, social conflicts etc. The most commonly used strategy however is “fitting in”, accepting a subordinate position, submitting to the expectations and hierarchy of family and society. This becomes evident in the way they depict themselves in the drawings. The important adults are depicted larger; whereas the child is the smallest. Power of elders over the young can also be seen in the way the children characterize their relationships to the people around. Their future wishes mirror parents’ expectations and display submission to their demands. (cf. Appendix 4)

This concept of childhood is embedded in the family, age, and social hierarchy of the Kyrgyz society – as far as this is the order of a collectivist society. Still, it can be argued that Kyrgyzstan made decisive efforts and succeeded in many ways to become a democracy. In this regard, the family focuses too exclusively on subordinating the child. A democratic political system, an achievement-oriented educational system and competitive market require individual motivation, self-orientation and social skills. But the development of these skills seems to be neglected in families and even to some extent in educational institutions (c.f. below). It is therefore evident that the realities of socialization and public social goals are incongruent. To some extent this is the case in all countries: most children in most societies face several fields in which multiple sets of rules and values are valid; those of the private or familial sphere nearly always differ from those in the educational domains or other public institutions. It shows that children are usually able to differentiate quite well between their various surroundings. Therefore, our recommendations focus foremost on the public institutions, in this case kindergarten. For a society to follow the idea of democratization, public institutions such as a kindergarten need to foster skills that are consistent with democratic values. With regard to childhood this includes actively supporting the UNCRC, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which demands equality, physical and psychological integrity and the child’s participation in decisions concerning his or her life.
CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

Whereas the results (cf. Chapter 4) focus merely on the problematic aspects of an "unprotected" childhood in a transitional society, the following recommendations are solutions to what can be done now for children in Kyrgyzstan, and how children's lives can be improved. It is important to mention that our research shows that kindergartens in Kyrgyzstan play a crucial role in supporting a more child oriented approach. They also can influence parents' behavior and attitudes, and even the social standing of children in communities. We recommend using this institutional potential, and suggest expanding it as far as possible, with particular emphasis on kindergartens, the primary focus of this project.

A. Training of social skills: conflict training, verbalizing- and bargaining capacities

Empirical basis: Children were quite forthcoming in reporting negative emotional experiences – sorrows, sadness and fear related to aggression, physical and verbal punishment within the family and among peers, both at home and in kindergarten. Children did not however report incidences of verbal or physical aggression from kindergarten teachers. Out of 85 children, 29 reported verbal aggression and scolding, and 32 children reported physical aggression and / or corporal punishment by family members and peers. The number can be estimated even higher, since children were never explicitly asked to talk about experiences of aggression, but did so voluntarily. Physical and verbal aggression is often the most common means of settling conflicts or disagreements. Other verbal and social skills in resolving disputes are not normally learned at home; bargaining and discussing issues with children are neither common within families nor among peers. In fact, many parents practice undemocratic educational methods, and conflicts are resolved according to hierarchy -- the more powerful person is right. This finding is validated by video recordings of family interactions, by interviews with parents, and by input from the children themselves.

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Introduction of social training programs in kindergarten so that children
1. learn less aggressive methods of problem solving.
2. learn to better control their own impulses of aggression and anger, and develop bargaining skills and verbal expression. Kindergarten staff need to be more sensitive and pro-active towards aggressive actions among children and initiate more socially acceptable behavior.

B. Learning strategies, self centered learning, group learning, intrinsic motivation

Empirical basis: Children in Kyrgyzstan showed little self-motivated, explorative learning and behavior. More common was learning by rote such as reciting poems, and a strong focus on presenting tests, copybooks and marks given by teachers. No child demonstrated the personal use of a newly acquired ability such as writing letters and
notes, reading messages, etc. This was also observed in some kindergarten classrooms; children often sat alone at small tables, or attended classes where they received instruction in teacher-centered teaching format and completed problem-solving assignments formulated by the teacher. This may be the reason why Kyrgyzstan’s PISA results have been substandard, since PISA requires a more pragmatic educational approach, focusing on the child’s ability to apply knowledge rather than simply reiterating a body of “fixed” knowledge. Children in kindergarten are praised for reciting poems and songs and completing required tasks. Extrinsic motivation and conformity are fostered but not explorative behavior, critical thinking, or questions.

It was also evident that highly standardized testing and evaluation of children’s abilities was stressful for many parents. When mothers reported interactions with a child which were difficult or made them angry, they would often justify it as follow: “my daughter made me furious when she made errors in a reading task”; or “it made me angry when he didn’t want to do his homework”; or “I yelled at her because she wasn’t able to solve a math exercise”. These comments concerned children aged six years and younger!

**RECOMMENDATION #2:**

Group- and self–centered learning methods should be introduced, encouraging children to take the initiative to explore subjects on their own in an interactive style. This fosters children’s natural curiosity, and helps develop intrinsic motivation. In this way, success is related to a child’s own activity rather than to external incentives such as teachers’ marks. By providing more opportunities for explorative behavior and self learning children can develop their own interests, and learn how to apply knowledge in their life worlds as well. Self-centered learning can be applied to traditional contents e.g. nature, handicraft etc. and is not dependent on the classroom. Kindergarten should also avoid highly standardized evaluations of children’s accomplishments in subjects like math, reading, reciting or writing. Informal appraisal should be given for good accomplishments in these domains but “bad marks” and other forms of punishment are counterproductive, putting too much pressure on both the children and families.

**C. Space for child’s self-presentation**

Empirical basis: During the kindergarten fieldwork, teachers frequently advised children to draw more quickly and accurately. Children were discouraged from adopting an unconventional approach, i.e. coloring clouds yellow instead of blue. A child was praised only when he or she “did well” according to the teacher’s ideal.

This was evident in the family home as well. Parents remarked favorably about children’s successes in copybooks and good marks, but there was little or no appreciation for children’s creativity.
RECOMMENDATION #3:

More appreciation should be given to the child’s own perspective and creative products. To foster the child’s individual abilities and originality, adults should to some extent avoid simplistic “right” and “wrong” judgments about the child’s self expressions and creativity. Rather, a child’s individual products such as drawings, stories and ideas can be used in conversations with the child about his or her views concerning life, and particularly fantasy life. Fantasy is important to the child’s ability to make sense of his or her world. It helps promote cognitive development by fostering creative problem solving skills. Aside from this cognitive aspect of children’s fantasy, giving space to children’s self expression also gives them the feeling that they are valuable members of society: there is room for them and their lifeworld. This enhances their feelings of self-efficacy which pedagogical psychology states is crucial for successful learning.

D. Dealing with public problems in kindergarten

Empirical basis: We found evidence that even children as young as kindergarten age are aware of public conflicts. Kindergarten teachers told us about two topics frequently discussed among the children:

1) The conflicts that took place in southern Kyrgyzstan, June, 2010. Siblings and cousins of the kindergarten children who attended the university in Osh at that time were bused back to their home villages because parents were increasingly worried about their safety. During our fieldwork close to the Kyrgyzstan / Tajikistan border, we observed that children were aware of the conflicts between the two countries. Soldiers posted at the border had the right to stop and question people, and this further contributed to children’s anxieties and worries. Unlike many adolescents and adults, kindergartners showed an astonishing openness in their interpretations of those conflicts, neither ethnically-motivated nor accusatory judgments.

2) Another source of children’s concern had to do with the fact that their parents worked in neighboring Russia. Teachers reported that this was often the topic of their conversations. On the positive side, when children were told their parents would soon return for a visit, discussions often turned to what kind of presents they would get. But there were clear signs that the separation from parents was emotionally painful, made more so because they didn’t have a lot of opportunity to talk about it with their relatives who took care of them. So a typical comment by the child’s care-giver might be: “he cries sometimes because his parents are away; it makes me upset.” Children’s awareness of public issues was also evident by the fact that many of them imagined having the power to someday solve problems and conflicts by becoming president, a priest, soldier, or having wealth in adulthood.

RECOMMENDATION #4:

Children’s awareness of the public issues should be taken seriously! They are the next generation in power of the country, and as such making policies concerning political, ethnical and economic issues in the society. By implementint “Educating Citizens Programs” democratic values can be fostered in children.
E. Children with special needs:

Empirical basis: It was our impression that programs to assist children with special needs – the learning disabled, the mentally challenged, or those with “special backgrounds” - were almost non-existent in rural areas. When visiting families with these children, we found that on the one hand they were often treated with love and kindness, but on the other hand there was a fundamental lack of knowledge about how best to deal with the challenges and need for cognitive development and physical care. General practitioners and kindergarten staff provided good will, but often little or no expertise. Adopted children presented difficulties as well because parents often worried about the superstitions, stigma, or shame sometimes associated with an adopted child. Families mostly kept the information from their child; nevertheless people in the village often knew if a child was adopted. This exposes the adopted child to a range of potentially negative emotions, not to mention bullying from other children.

RECOMMENDATION #5:

Institutions such as kindergartens, nurseries or other educational institutions should have at least one professional available for counseling parents. Early education is extremely important for children with special needs and can yield substantial success for the children and their families when initiated at an early age. Related to this point are other „special backgrounds“ such as adoption. In these cases, counseling by a professional child psychologist should be available for the parents and children.

ASIDE FROM KINDERGARTEN:

The recommendations stated in Chapter 4 focus on ECD institutions as stakeholders in the attitudes and behavioral skills which young citizens of a democratic society should possess. That being said, the family is the primary means by which young children are educated, shaping their view on the world and their place in it. Parents in rural Kyrgyzstan often have a rather authoritarian educational style: physical punishment and pressure of high expectations are the means to compel a child to “fit in” to the family hierarchy. Little attention is given to children’s individuality, future hopes and opportunities. Following are ways in which kindergarten staff and education professionals could expand the scope of their responsibilities beyond the classroom, how they could provide educational assistance and counseling for parents.

1. Sanction physical punishment, verbal aggression and threats. Children reported that the primary reason for negative emotions – anxieties, sadness, anger -- was due to aggressive behavior by peers and family members (cf. Chapter 5). Although our research shows that many children have experienced aggressive behavior, they did not regard it as ‘normal’ or ‘banal’, but rather a cause for anxiety and fear. Parents should be taught alternative forms of discipline, and positive educational strategies, i.e. communicating with the child, explaining points of view, bargaining, verbalizing capacities, to replace acts of aggressive behavior.
2. Foster leisure time activities within the family: One of the most popular family activities is watching TV. TV may be informative and entertaining, but it can limit interaction between people. We have found that children value and derive great pleasure from family activities such as fishing trips, going to the lake, park or the bazaar, board games or handicrafts. These kinds of activities should be fully encouraged.

3. Monitor children’s participation in household duties: many children reported feelings that they were a valued part of the family when given duties and responsibilities in the home. The opportunity to contribute in this way can instill a sense of pride, fostered self-confidence, personal strengths, social skills as well as cognitive and motor abilities. Involving children in the housework gives children the opportunity to learn skills which will be useful in their adult lives. Our concern, however, is that there may be instances when expectations become too demanding, especially if a child has to care for younger siblings. Children are not always able to protect younger siblings from danger, or be sensitive to their needs. Parents should not underestimate the potential for failure when children are put in situations which exceed their capabilities.

4. Provide children with ‘friendly’ spaces in the private domain: along with the recommendations that kindergarten should provide space and appreciation for children’s products and perspectives, we recommend to foster children’s self esteem and self reflection also within the private sphere. For example, children often keep their personal belongings and toys in a plastic bag stored under a couch or bed once they are finished with playtime. We found that children’s drawings were rarely displayed in the home. Giving even a small corner in one of the rooms to the child where he or she can have the freedom to arrange and decorate as they wish would give the child a feeling of importance within the family.

5. Tackle expectations of parents towards their children’s future accomplishments (education, economic success, social status): According to our statistical analysis in the parents’ questionnaire, 97 % expressed a desire for that their child achieve a university degree, and aspire to a prestigious professional career such as medicine, banking, or business, etc. They also expressed their aspirations for improved economic and social status. For example, “I hope S. will build a large house where we can all live together”, or “I think O. could be an ambassador”. Such high expectations to a higher educational, social and / or economic status for their children were commonly expressed even among parents with the most basic educational background and economic resources. Few parents were aware that they might not be able to financially support their children’s educational endeavors. Parents sometimes held unrealistic expectations that their child would be among the top ten students in the country, and that he or she could attend university on a full or partial scholarship. Though a small percentage of children could inevitably succeed, the chances for most are slim at best. A downside of such high expectations from parents would be the child’s fear of academic failure as early as kindergarten. Parents should take care not to exert too much pressure or place unrealistic demands on their child. We believe that limiting or removing a child’s fear of failure will improve the way for his or chances for success.
APPENDIX

The following appendix represents a small collection of the empirical data from the research project „Empowering Little Children“. The selection cannot cover the complexity and manifold aspects that could be seen in the overall data collection, instead it is meant to highlight and illustrate the most important findings as described in the research based recommendations. All data material may be used for scientific purposes only.

The appendix is structured as follows:

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APPENDIX 1 – CHILDREN’S PLACES

When children are asked where they spend their time and where they like to play, many of them report what can be called „non-child-places“; that is, places that are not specially designed for them, such as the street, the backyard or the guestroom. This matches with our observation that in the houses and gardens there is seldom a place that is designated to the child. We visited 30 households, and only in four of them there was a children's room. In some other cases the child would own a plastic bag or box as container for his/her belongings. This is interesting as it didn’t seem to be due to shortage of space, sometimes there were several spare rooms reserved for guests.

Elisa (5), commenting her drawing: "I like to play in the road, there are rocks, I’d like to have an apple garden as well. I like to play skipping rope on the street.”
The favourite place of some girls in Sopokurgon (Alai) was the “Sorū”, a place that is only available to them during summertime.

“I like to play in the kindergarten, play with my friends: Aiperi, Diana, Nursaida. I also play at home” – In what rooms do you play? – “Inside, it has a little room where the children play, I don’t sleep in this room, I like to play alone.”

The photo shows Asel on the bench under which her toys are stored.
But whenever there exist “child-designated“ places, children treasure them, as theaw places signal that the child is welcome here:

This boy from Alai shows us his favorite place around the house; the monkey bars his father has built for him.

Asyia (5) drew the kindergarten as her favorite place, she likes to play there with her toys.

Alimbek (6) “I like the monkey bars at the kindergarten and the school- playground.”
Public spaces that are accessible for children’s play and recreation are rare and often far away. Children regard it as a special treat when their parents take them there.

Tahmina (4): “It’s the park and playground in a village in Tajikistan, I go there with my family on my birthday. In the park are a lot of toys, a lot of things to play, swings, monkey bars.”

APPENDIX 2 – CHILDREN’S AWARENESS OF PUBLIC ISSUES

Children in kindergarten frequently talk about political conflicts as well as about parents who are in Russia as labor migrants. Aside from that, their comments and drawings prove awareness of other kinds of “unprotectedness” in everyday life:

A) “Unprotectedness” in everyday life – children’s fears

Dilshat (5): “I have to cross the road when I go to kindergarten. I am afraid of big cars.”
Adilet (5): “I want to be a policeman, I’ll stop drunk drivers, policemen teach others. If there are drunk people driving cars, it’s bad.” – Have you seen it? – “Yes, I have.”

Alimbek (4): “I don’t want to be a drunk man! Drunk men are bad and quarrel with other people!”

Oldjobek (6): “I want to be a soldier, I want to help to people when there are accidents, they are very strong and can help people.”

**B) Political issues**

Sultan (5): “In April there was a supermarket in Bishkek, they broke the windows, I’ll catch these bad people!”

Kutman (6): “In the future I want to be a soldier. – Why? – The military zone is close by. I want to stand at the border cross point and let people in and out.”

**C) Migration:**

*This girl from a Batken village is showing her favorite place in the house, it's a shelf with photos of her parents who are both abroad for work in Moscow.*
APPENDIX 3 – EXPERIENCE OF VERBAL AND PHYSICAL AGGRESSIONS

Out of 85 children, 29 reported verbal aggression and scolding, and 32 children reported physical aggression and / or corporal punishment. Data concerning this issue was mainly derived from the smiley exercise in which children were given wooden faces with different emotional expressions. The following quotas show typical answers children gave when negative emotionality was depicted by a smiley:

Aidana (5): “The pink smiley cries, when my father beats me I cry, if I don’t listen, if I don’t do what he said. The blue one is angry, when I beat with my friends I am angry.” – Is there anything else that makes you cry? – “When someone pushes me.”

Diana (6): “The blue smiley! It’s crying, I cry when someone hits me, when someone takes my things.” – Who hits you? – “My father, grandmother, brother, my mother doesn’t hit me, she loves me.”

Artur (6): “This smiley is like me. Because I don’t like to beat other children. And my little sister. I like her. I don’t like to beat her.”

Tahmina (4): “The dark blue smiley; it’s crying. I cry when my younger sister beats me. If I don’t give toys to her she beats me.” – What do you do then? – “I also beat her.”

Nurbulot (6): “The green smiley is angry, I’m angry when someone beats me. My grandmother’s son (grandson), his name is Beksultan, and he beats me. I don’t know why.”

Marcel (5): “The dark green smiley, it’s angry, like me when I beat with children, when someone starts to beat me I also beat. When someone says bad words.”

Aisirek (5): “This smiley is crying. I cry when my mother beats me. When I beat my little brother my mother beats me. Then I cry.” – What do you do then? – “The next time I will not hit my brother.”

Kanikey (6): “The pink smiley, it is upset, I’m upset when someone quarrels and beats me.” – Who does that? – “My sister in law and brother, they have a baby, if I don’t play with him, if I don’t take care they yell at me.”

Indira (5): “This is a green smiley, it is crying. When someone beats me I cry too, when I fall down, and when I’m hungry.” – Who beats you? – “My friends.”
Also family relations may be characterized by this issue. Here the result of the bug exercise with Begaim (5) is shown:

Translation:

Mother: Scolds the boys who annoy me. When my mother’s friend’s daughter beats me, my mother protects me.

Father: Says good words to me.

Brother: He has friends, when someone treats me bad, he scolds and beats them.

Sister: She gives me money, buys ice-cream

Grandfather: Says ‘don’t touch my granddaughter’ when someone annoys me. Takes me to the park, buys ice cream.

Grandmother: Buys me clothes, buys ice-cream, says she loves me.
APPENDIX 4 - COPING WITH “UNPROTECTEDNESS”

“Fitting in” is the concept we describe in the recommendations as a coping strategy of young children to meet expectations that are held towards them. Fitting in is an active strategy of the child on the one hand, and on the other hand it represents the main goal of parents’ educational practices. Children mention “being a good girl / a good boy” as a good quality of a child’s behavior and they know what it asks from them:

Tahmina (4): “My elder sister. She brings me to kindergarten and to the home, we visit to her school, she cooks food. My little sister, she’s a good girl, she doesn’t cry.”

Kojo (6): “It’s me and my mother, she brings me to kindergarten and to the home.” – Anything else? – “She brings clothes.” – And yourself? – “I’m a good boy.”

Alimbek (6): “I drew my little brother, he doesn’t cry. A bee is flying, and me. I’m a good boy.” – What does it mean? – “A good boy works, is tidy.”

Aisirek, (6): “This is my little sister, I buy her some good things, I don’t beat her, she likes me and I like her, and myself, I’m a good girl, when mother says something I listen to her. I get water, I must listen, that’s a good girl.”

Karina (5): “The green smily, it’s the sun, it’s angry. The kids look at the sun, they are bad kids.” - What are bad kids? – “They are naughty, don’t obey their mother, they don’t eat rice, they go out and don’t listen to mother, so the mother scolds them.” – And what’s a good child? – “Good child brings water, without parents telling them to, they wash the dishes, I wash dishes and bring water.”

Two typical family drawings in which the child positions him-/herself in accordance with the family age-hierarchy.
When asked for future plans and wishes, children’s answers clearly display an awareness for expectations that are held towards them which are in line with the data from parent-interviews in which parents formulate high demands for the child’s future status and wealth. We interpret the following comments as a means of “fitting-in” by the children.

Guldana (5): “I will marry. I’ll clean the house, have a baby.”

Zesim (6): “I want to be a doctor. I can take care of my mother.”


Tahmina (4): “I want to be a doctor, I’ll treat parents, relatives, other people.”

Achtan (4): “I want to be an engineer, I will earn a lot of money, I will buy a car, a Jeep, I will drive my car to Bishkek.”

Aside from “Fitting-in” children assume gaining own future power to cope with public (and maybe personal) problems and shortcomings:

Artur (6): “I’ll be the President! Because to be a president is very good. I will work, I will help to people.”

Salkar (6): “I want to be a priest because they visit other people, they tell them to be good people.” (Kindergarten teacher comments: After conflict priests called all people to be tolerant, they have much influence in the villages.) “I have met one, I’ll study hard, my uncle is a priest, he knows all religious people in the village.”

Muratbek (6): “I’ll be a president, to stop conflicts and wars. I’ll tell them not to fight, not to quarrel by radio, by TV, all people will listen to me, president is the most important person in the country.”
1 "What happens in the evening before your child falls asleep?"

**answer categories to each option:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Often</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>rarely</th>
<th>never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- one of the adults tells a story, or sings a song at child’s bed, or talks about day at child’s bed etc.
- (INTERVIEWER PLEASE NOTE: “what precisely”):
- child goes to bed on his own when he/she is tired
- child goes to bed with siblings
- other, PLEASE NOTE “what precisely”

2 “What happens during preparation of meals”

**answer categories to each option:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Often</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>rarely</th>
<th>never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- child helps
- child is involved in decision about what to cook
- I explain to the child how to proceed, origin of ingredients, recipes, tell stories connected to meal/food

3. Do you make any efforts to prepare your child for school entrance?

**answer categories to each option:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Often</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>rarely</th>
<th>never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- teach letters and numbers
- read books
- talk about school and child’s ideas about school
- teach school rules

4 “How do you celebrate the child’s birthday?”

**answer categories to each option:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Often</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>rarely</th>
<th>never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- Give a little gift
- Invite relatives
• Prepare a special dinner
• Child invites friends him-/herself
• Decoration, birthday cake etc.
• other, PLEASE NOTE “what precisely”:

5 “How did you decide about child’s name?”

answer categories to each option:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>very important 1</th>
<th>Important 2</th>
<th>not so important 3</th>
<th>Unimportant 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

• Because it is a traditional name in our family/community
• just a nice name which we knew from newspaper or books or friends or films etc.
• special meaning of name that were connected to our ideas/hopes/wishes concerning that child
• other, PLEASE NOTE “what precisely”: ____________________________

6 “When you decide about family activities in leisure time, what is important for you?”

Please put the following statements into an order of importance, 1 = most important, 4 / 5 = least important

• It is important to be together in the family
• It is important to keep contacts with relatives and neighbours
• It is important to do things where the child can make new experiences
• It is important to do things where the child has fun and feels good
• other, PLEASE NOTE “what precisely”: ____________________________

7 “What are your leisure time activities?”

answer categories to each option:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Often 1</th>
<th>sometimes 2</th>
<th>rarely 3</th>
<th>never 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

• A Television
• B Excursions into the nature
• C Visiting friends and relatives
• D Family games (board games, ….)
• E Sports
• F Culture (music, dance, choir etc.)
• G Religious services, religious associations
• H other, PLEASE NOTE: “what precisely”: ____________________________

25
8 “What does your child like best of these activities? Pick two of the above!”

| A | O | B | O | C | O | D | O | E | O | F | O | G | O | H | O |

9 “Think of the last time the child made you really mad?”
   What did he/she do? What had happened?

INTERVIEWER PLEASE NOTE SHORTLY: ________________________________

10 “How did you react that time?”

   answer categories to each option:

   Yes | No

- Asked the child why he/she did it and discussed with him/her
- Explained the child why he/she should not do that
- Scolded the child
- Punished the child with a slap
- Punished the child (no TV, go to your room, no dinner etc.)
- Ignored the child, did not talk to him/her for a while
- other, PLEASE NOTE “what precisely”: ________________________________

11 “Think of the last time the child really made you laugh or happy!”
   What did he/she do? What had happened?

INTERVIEWER PLEASE NOTE SHORTLY: ________________________________

12 “Imagine two mothers discussing. They held different opinions concerning children, which one do you rather tend to?”

   Please choose one of the following two statements:

- Children learn anyway, there are may opportunities for them to learn from their siblings, friends, the adults, around the village etc.
- It is necessary to create a lot of situations in which children can develop their capacities and their intellectual development may be stimulated
13 “How do the older member of your family (aunts, mother in law, mother etc.) judge about your education?”

_answer categories to each option:_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>agree strongly</th>
<th>agree more or less</th>
<th>agree somewhat</th>
<th>agree not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- They think I am rather too indulgent
- They think I am rather too strict
- They think, it is is just okay the way I educate my child
- Other, PLEASE NOTE: ____________________________

14 “Are there any disagreements between your husband’s ideas about child care and yours?”

_answer categories to each option:_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- He spoils the child
- He does not have enough interest into the child
- He does not take enough time for the child
- He is too restrictive

We would now like to speak about your expectations concerning your child’s future

15 “What school degree would you like for your child to accomplish?”

- Primary education
- Secondary education
- High school/technical or vocational school
- University

16 “What kind of profession can you imagine would suit your child?”

_INTERVIEWER: PLEASE NOTE:_ ____________________________

_INTERVIEWER PLEASE CATEGORIZE AS WELL_

- Simple profession with basic school requirements
- Professional formation or good school degree required although not University Studies
- Professional (requires university degree)
17 “What are your special wishes for your child’s future?”

Please put the following options into an order of importance from 1 = most important to 8 = least important

- He/her shall be better off one day than we are
- He/she shall develop his/her own interests and competencies
- He/she develop a strong and independent mind
- He/she shall be just happy
- He/she shall be a sustainer for the family
- He/she shall be firmly anchored in religion and tradition
- He/she shall not fall into poverty
- He/she shall not bring himself/herself into trouble

18 “How is your attitude concerning future?”

answer categories to each option:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>agree strongly</th>
<th>agree more or less</th>
<th>agree somewhat</th>
<th>agree not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- the generation of my child will be forced to work abroad
- the generation of my child will have better opportunities than we had
- everything will stay much like it is
- education will be very important to get a good job
- education will not help that much as jobs are rare anyway
- the own values and traditions of our country (people) will be an important power for the future
THREE SITUATIONS (ADDITION TO PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE)

1) Dinner situation:
A mother has prepared dinner for her family. She has cooked something really nice, but the child protests and refuses the food.

2) Supermarket
Mother and child are in a supermarket to get groceries. The child demands that mother buys him/her candies, but mother doesn’t want to do this. The child screams and cries loudly, stamping his feet on the floor.

3) Grandmother’s visit
Grandmother has announced her visit, the door bell rings, and the child opens the door for her. Without greeting his/her grandmother, the child runs back inside.

> Do you know this situation? How do you usually react in a situation like that and why? If you don’t know the situation: what advice would you give to the mother?

> These situations are situations many German mothers experience with their children and which they find difficult to handle. Are there other „typical“ difficult situations you experience with your child? Which ones? How do you then react?
PHOTO DOCUMENTATION OF DATA COLLECTION

Children are getting acquainted with the dollhouse in exercise #6
Children are drawing their most important persons for exercise #1. All kindergarten sessions have been videorecorded to facilitate data analysis.

Kyrgyz students translating data material and assisting with data analysis.

These are the smileys that were used for exercise #2.
CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PUBLICATIONS


Schwittek, Jessica and Bühler-Niederberger, Doris: „Growing up in Kyrgyzstan – Children's Issues and how to define and measure Good Childhood“ Paper for ISA World Congress of Sociology , Gothenburg, July 11-17, 2010.


SUGGESTED LINKS

Kindergarten teacher training brochure from Britain (very usefull!): http://www.smartteachers.co.uk/upload/documents_32.pdf

Teacher training for conflict-resolution lessons and techniques for children (see here preschool –grade 2 category! Useful, but requires some pedagogical academic knowledge): http://www.teachervision.fen.com/classroom-discipline/resource/3038.html

For issues concerning adopted children (may be used in advising parents and initiating work for adoption families): http://www.adoptionissues.org/groups_for_kids.html

Child Education and Democracy (may be used in advising parents and as suggestion for kindergarten lessons): http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/citizen/citizen.pdf

