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THE ROLE OF TEACHERS' READINESS FOR ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN FORMING PRESCHOOLERS' ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

Abstract. *The article considers the impact of the level of professional and personal readiness of the teachers of preschool education institutions on the process of children's environmental awareness formation. We have assumed that the ways in which the educational process is organized (forms, methods, means) and behavior of adults surrounding children directly affect the results of environmental education of the younger generation.*

Experimental research included members of the teaching staff, parents and pupils of the preschool education institution. Observations on the educational process and teachers survey have revealed that they prefer traditional activities and do not pay sufficient attention to creative activities, games, reading literature and integrating ecological education with other areas. Nature is rarely seen by adults as a means of shaping a child's general culture and personality traits. To test the success of ecological education, there were used techniques to determine children's attitude to natural objects, their active environmental position and environmental behavior. Consequently, the results of the experimental study have shown that children of senior preschool age rarely have a clear position on the observance of the rules of behavior with natural objects, low and medium levels of environmental awareness predominate. In order to successfully overcome these problems in preschool education, it is necessary to stimulate teachers to choose innovative, interactive forms and methods of ecological education, to use the means of nature in all types of education and upbringing.

Key words: *preschool education institutions, children of preschool age, ecological education, environmental awareness.*

Introduction

Recently ecological education and upbringing have undergone change in their direction towards the ecocentric concept, which takes into account the value of the natural environment, the uniqueness of the Earth's biosphere. In Ukraine, ecological education began to develop from the mid-1960s. Much attention was paid to its development in the Soviet period, but ecological

education and upbringing had a pragmatic focus on preserving natural resources necessary for economic development. But from the 1990s until about 2000, the issue of ecological education and upbringing was hardly addressed, as political and economic issues were prioritized in Ukraine. However, in the world, ecological education and upbringing have been successfully implemented. Taking into account the above mentioned, there is no doubt that special attention is needed to this process as a necessary element of the work of preschool education institutions [1]. Formation of a new consciousness of citizens is possible only if this process begins as early as possible, even in preschool childhood.

Various aspects of the issue of ecological education and upbringing have been explored by such modern educators as A. Volkova, N. Horopakha [2], O. Zakhliebnyj, I. Zvierev, N. Kot [3], O. Kudriavtseva, N. Lysenko [4], V. Marshytska, S. Nikolaieva, Z. Plokhij [5], N. Ryzhova, N. Yarysheva [6] and others. Necessity and conditions for successful formation of initial ecological representations in preschool children have been proved by numerous psychological and pedagogical studies (Z. Plokhii, N. Poddiakov, N. Ryzhova, P. Samorukova, O. Terentieva, I. Haidurova and others). Psychologists (L. Wenger, L. Vygotskyj [7], V. Davydov, O. Zaporozhets [8], V. Mukhina, M. Poddiakov, S. Rubinstein) have also shown that the system of knowledge of preschool children can exist in the form of ideas, not concepts. Z. Plokhij's studies substantiate and prove that the component of environmental consciousness formation is childrens' representations on internal relationships in nature [5]. The first attempts to determine the content and structure of environmental representations for preschool children belong to K. Ushynsky, A. Gerd, Ye. Vodovozova, V. Gretsova and other classics of pedagogical science.

Formulation of the problem

The aim of our study was to identify the most acute problems in the formation of environmental awareness of senior preschool children. We have assumed that methodological and psychological readiness of teachers and other adults surrounding children to ecological education and upbringing directly affect the effectiveness of this process. Thus, due to the lack of active use by teachers of modern methods and means, there may be an unwillingness of preschoolers to adhere to the rules of interaction with nature.

Course of study

The experimental base of the study included senior groups of Lokhvytsia Institution of Preschool Education (Nursery) № 1 "Teremok"; in addition to children teachers and parents participated in the experiment. The first stage of the study was conducted in order to diagnose formation and readiness for the formation of environmental awareness of all the subjects of the

educational process in the institution (teachers, children, parents) in the course of ecological education and upbringing.

In order to determine the level of awareness of the goals and objectives of the ecological education the teachers were proposed a questionnaire. The first question was to determine the main tasks of preschool education. Teachers among the main tasks of preschool education named: achieving literacy (33,5 %); full physical development (25,4 %); learning the basics of moral behavior (22,1 %); basics of ecological culture (14,6 %); aesthetic development (4,4 %).

The second question revealed the teachers' understanding of the concept of "ecological culture of the personality": 14,3 % of teachers consider it as a responsible attitude to the environment; 14,7 % of them include in the concept of "ecological culture" elementary knowledge about relationships in nature and respectful attitude to its objects; 35,3 % of respondents reduced the concept of "ecological culture" to "instilling love for nature"; 11,8 % refer to the concept of "ecological culture" knowledge and observance of the rules of behavior in nature; 23,9 % were not able to answer the question.

Another important aspect of the teacher's work is the methods and forms of implementation of the educational process. Analyzing the teachers' responses, it can be stated that in getting children acquainted with nature in the senior group, such forms and methods that provide direct perception of nature are preferred: excursions – 30,4 %; walks – 32,8 %; observations – 36,8 %. Almost all respondents widely used the methods of visual (87,3 %) and verbal (71,2 %) impact on children; 17,5 % use work in nature; 63,7 % – tasks related to taking care of nature objects; 33,9 % use the game method when working with senior preschoolers. However, the use of these forms and methods only partially provides for nurturing a caring attitude towards nature [9].

Finding out what means of ecological education is preferred by teachers of the senior group, we have revealed that most of them prefer nature (75,1 %); 53,5% use arts; use educational potential of fiction 67,8 %; 45,3 % of teachers named folk pedagogy; and only 16,4 % – environmental fairy tale.

The next question was about an integrative approach to ecological education. In a number of pedagogical studies, it is determined that the process of ecological education includes different directions and spheres of a child's life. It has turned out that the overwhelming majority of teachers, in addition to studying nature, realize its tasks in the classes of literacy, music and fine arts (82,2 %), carry out ecological work (24,6 %). 15,7 % of the surveyed teachers do this work at mathematics classes. Almost none of them see an opportunity to carry out environmental education at physical education classes. Some teachers underestimate the importance of conducting ecological and country studies with preschool children (8,1 %), traveling along the ecological paths (19,3 %), and Health Days are held only by few teachers (7,8 %). Insufficient attention is paid to children's

creative activity. Only some teachers (9,5 %) implement it for the purpose of children's ecological education. Teachers of preschool age children prefer practical methods of working in nature. Senior preschoolers systematically complete tasks related to taking care of nature objects, work in a living corner, land plots. Unfortunately, focusing on intellectual preparation, teachers have forgotten that for children the most important factor that drives social experience is emotional, and emotions play a significant role in effective mastering of different knowledge and skills, affect attitudes to natural objects. As Z. Plokhii notes, ecological education is an integral part of moral education [5, p. 93].

A separate direction of the experiment was diagnostics of the levels of environmental awareness of senior preschool children. In the course of the study we have defined criteria of ecological education of senior preschool children: content (the amount of practical knowledge about nature); motivational (emotional-value attitudes towards interaction with nature, personal desire to communicate with it); operating (providing assistance to individual objects of nature, availability of environmental skills) [4]. Based on these criteria, their indicators and results of the preschoolers' examination, the following levels of environmental awareness were established: high, medium, low.

In the course of the study, we used a number of diagnostic procedures to determine the levels of environmental awareness of preschool children, in particular: conversations with children, observation of their behavior in nature in everyday life and specially created pedagogical situations, analysis of the results of children's activities, questionnaires. Taking into account the parameters and channels of forming the subjective attitude of children to natural objects, we have grouped these diagnostic procedures into three tasks. The first task was to find out emotional-value impacts in the interaction with nature; the second task was to elucidate intellectual manifestations in interaction with nature; the third task involved the study of activity manifestations in the interaction with nature.

Task 1 "Imaginary situation". Purpose: to identify manifestation of emotional experiences in relation to living objects of nature that have been in distress, personal concern for their fate. Children are offered a situation.

"Imagine that on a cold winter evening, when it is snowing, you go home and see a little puppy near your house, shivering with cold and mourning. How would you have acted in such a situation?"

An analysis of the results of accomplishing the first task has revealed that most children showed a sympathetic attitude towards the animal. Children want to warm up, feed the puppy, help him, take him home. Among the answers were: "I feel sorry for the puppy" (23,4 %); "I want to help" (34,2 %); "I will take home, heat and feed" (12,6 %). Children are not just sympathetic, they want help. However, there were also the following answers: "I will feed and bring to my grandmother, she loves animals", "I will play with him to keep him warm and then let go". These

answers indicate a sufficient level of compassion, but lack of personal experience. Such responses as “I will feed and bring to the neighbors, because they have a puppy, and my parents will not allow me to bring home the puppy from the street” indicate cases where children’s activity is restrained by adults. The reasons for this may be different, however, unambiguously, such a situation cannot be considered as favorable for the formation of an effective attitude towards nature in children.

Task 2 “Bouquet”. Purpose: to find out children’s ideas about the rational use of flowering plants. The teacher invites the child to look at the image of a flowerbed, flowering lawn, blossoming tree and answer the question: “Where would you pick the flowers for the bouquet? Why?”. The task is performed individually during the conversation over the pictures.

Children’s answers to task 2 were ambiguous. 55,8 % of children answered that they would pick flowers from the flowerbed; 74,2 % – “in the forest on the lawn”; 48 % – “from the tree”. Their actions were motivated by the beauty of the flowers. Some preschoolers explained that it was impossible to pluck plants in the forest; “Let them grow”; “Flowers cannot be torn off trees, because there will grow apples, cherries, apricots”. Such answers indicate that children have some understanding of the importance of flowering plants in natural communities. The aesthetic value, unfortunately, is presented only from consumer positions. Such ideas need correction. The aesthetic beauty of nature contributes to the formation of moral feelings of duty and responsibility for its preservation, encourages environmental protection activities [10, p. 9].

Task 3 “Who’s faster?”. Purpose: to find out the ability of children to comply with environmental standards in a real situation. The teacher conducts a game with children with the ball “Who is faster?”. To pass the ball to another child, you must run through the ring or get around it. The victory of the team depends on the speed of passing the ball to the last participant of the game. In this case, the teacher remains only an observer. If the game is over, it is repeated until all the children have completed the task. After the game, an individual interview is conducted to identify the motive of behavior in the game.

Analysis of the data obtained from task 3 has shown that 88 % of children violated the rule in a specially organized situation. Those who violated the rule explained their actions as follows: “I wanted to be faster”, “I had to pass the ball fast”, “I was worried I would not have time”. Those who followed the rules explained their behavior as follows: “Plants will be hurt” (6 %); “Plants will not grow” (4 %). Only some children noted: “Butterflies and bees will not fly to the flowerbed”. Special attention was paid to children who demanded compliance with the rules by others (4,2 %). Unfortunately, they were driven only by the desire to win, not by environmental motives. However, the very fact of controlling the behavior of other children gives us the hope that, in conditions of purposeful upbringing, the emphasis can be shifted to the correct attitude to natural objects.

The answers to the tasks of the third series indicate that most children, knowing the rule, still violate it. Awareness of behavioral norms has not become a habit of following the rules of behavior in the natural environment. Summarizing the results of testing, it should be noted that in children of both groups dominate medium and low levels of environmental awareness.

Results

Thus, the results of questionnaires and observations on the educational process of the preschool education institution have shown some problems in the teachers' readiness to form children's environmental awareness. The questions can be grouped as follows:

1) the most common means of ecological education of preschool age children are those that provide direct perception of nature, art and activity in nature or with its individual objects;

2) methods, used by teachers in the educational process of the preschool education institution, are mainly aimed at development of the cognitive sphere and, to a lesser extent, emotional-value sphere of preschoolers;

3) creative ecological and country studies activities, fairy tales and games are rarely used in children's ecological education;

4) only few teachers occasionally conduct mass events of ecological content;

5) in the implementation of ecological education, most teachers experience difficulties of a methodological nature.

Accordingly, in preschoolers of senior groups who will soon go to school dominate low and medium levels of environmental awareness. Children with high levels make up about 4 % of preschoolers.

Conclusions

The results of the study show a correlation between teachers' professional and personal readiness to carry out ecological education and upbringing of preschool children and formation of preschoolers' environmental awareness. Therefore, it is possible to recommend the pedagogical staff of preschool education institutions to actively introduce innovative (especially interactive) forms and methods of education, to use the whole arsenal of means. This is possible provided the use of nature in all areas of education and upbringing: labor, aesthetic, physical, moral, etc.

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