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Possibilities of organizing education for preschool children in the forms of children's subculture

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Abstract

The article describes the main theses of the concept of preschool children education organization in the forms of game by using fairy tales (in the forms of children's subculture), which is implemented in a number of preschool institutions in the city of Novosibirsk. It explains the role the fairy tale plays in child development and organization of preschool education according to the specifics of children's subculture. It submits the data of empirical research and formative experiment. The research of many years demonstrates that the preschool education organization under consideration actualizes a higher quality of intellectual, emotional and volitional, moral development, and the development of a child's individuality and subjectivity.

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1. Introduction

Preschool childhood is a special period in human life. Children's plasticity, responsiveness to education and learning, their openness to the world actualize the remarkable possibilities of child development concerning their intelligence, emotional sphere and personal qualities. However, this potential of preschool childhood could be realized, as was noted by A.V. Zaporozhets [1], only by taking into account the age-related psychophysiological characteristics and psychological specificity of this childhood stage. In this connection A.V. Zaporozhets introduces the concept of amplification which he understands as enriching child development, as a maximum possible full-fledged actualization of the resources available at a particular childhood stage.

It is commonly known that the potential of preschool childhood is conditioned by play, and primarily by socio-dramatic role-playing games as a leading activity, the specifics of children's communication with adults and

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peers, and by the psychological and new personal transformations developing in the process of playing and communication, as well as by children's sensitivity to certain aspects of their interaction with the world, conditioned by the specificity of their maturing processes [2].

Our approach to education of preschool children [3] is a cumulative one in relation to the ideas accumulated in national development psychology (Vygotsky L.S., Elkonin D.B., Lisina M.I., Rubenstein S.L., Rubtsov V.V., Kudryavtsev V.T., etc.) and at the same time is oriented to the changes inherent to childhood and growing-up in the modern sociocultural situation (Elkonin B.D. [4]. Polivanova E. [5], Feldstein D.I. [6], etc.)

We recognize that children's subculture as a part of universal culture is characterized by a particular system of activities involving the child; by the specificity of kinds, forms, means of contact prevailing in the system of communication; by the peculiarities of the value system or its structure (image of a person, sociocultural models) used by the child to evaluate their actions, thoughts, experiences; by the specificity of the world view and the mentality, and by children's ideas about the way the world is organized.

Concerning the first criterion characterizing children's subculture, it should be recognized that, despite all changes, virtualization of children's life and impoverishment of its subject content as a result, its basis remains the same – a socio-dramatic role playing game, which due to its two-level structure, basic non-normativity and free organization makes it possible to look for and pursue one's preferences and to test possibilities in different spheres of life. An imaginary situation gives a child an opportunity to realize in the game play reality situations he cannot solve in the real world, including an opportunity to be oneself; it organizes and focuses the child's activities, making his or her behavior more appropriate, corresponding to the content of the game and the role in the game the child is playing.

Children's subculture is also characterized by such communication features as intimacy, spontaneity, non-normativity, dialogueness because a freely organized activity (a socio-dramatic role-playing game) requires communication and affinity from children [7].

Children's subculture also has a special system of values. It concerns, for example, the differences in adults' and children's concepts of a "good" child. For an adult a good child is a convenient child (obedient, tidy, even-tempered), whereas a good kid for children is someone interesting to play with, someone willing to share toys, someone who does not fight. On the whole, children are more immediately and more intimately connected with the system of core values (good, truth, beauty, justice) [8]. In particular, V. V. Zenkovsky defined children's need for such a system of values as "spiritual sight" [9, p. 95], as special children's sensitivity to the "spiritually bright". The value system is presented, defined and interpreted in children's subculture in a different way – in the form of images, symbols, metaphors rather than concepts.

The specificity of children's view of the world and children's thinking is conditioned by their mythological character. Children's mythological thinking and their picture of the world are manifested in children's susceptibility to children's folklore (counting rhymes, horror stories, teasing rhymes, riddles, fairy tales etc.), in their "personification" of nature, spiritualization of their toys, in their experiencing the world as a mystery. Fairy tales play a very important role in the development of preschoolers.

As a transformed form of a myth specially addressed to a child, a fairy tale has special functions in thinking, allowing children to actualize and define for themselves their theoretical questions about the way the world is arranged in a figurative, symbolical form and to solve the problem of uncertainty (to explain events, to make choices, to make decisions). There is an interesting remark made by P. Florensky in this respect about children's thinking - "Children's thinking is not weak thinking, but a special type of thinking, and besides it can have any degrees of perfection, including genius, and even predominantly related to genius ..." [10, p. 56].

According to V. Ya. Propp [11], the structure of a fairy tale allows it to perform functions of a special system of thinking; its images and contents serve as a means of analyzing the logic of events and actions of fairy tale characters, as tools to interpret real events, to substantiate judgments, requirements, to justify various actions etc., they use used as symbols and personifications of good, evil, cunning, time, space, measure etc., and thus they become comprehensible to a preschooler. The structure of a socio-dramatic role-playing game, according to D. B. Elkonin, and the fairy tale structure, according to V. Ya. Propp, are identical. This is why a fairy tale could be a tool for developing a children's game: it enriches the space of an imaginary situation in the game, filling it with

meanings, events, introduces a child to a system of values, relationships, actualizes children's creative potential, bringing them to another level of a game, such as plot development, and generally helps children to adapt to the cultural space.

A fairy tale contains diverse knowledge about the world in the mathematical, environmental, linguistic, familial, philosophical, physical and axiological aspects. Such knowledge is interwoven in the design, the storyline of a fairy tale and is inevitably mastered by children when they experience it and dramatize it in their role-play. By role-playing a fairy tale and dramatizing it together with an adult, a child simultaneously masters the concepts, knowledge, and skills the plot introduces, and learns to understand the meaning of the events in it. A socio-dramatic role-playing game based on a fairy tale requires a child's of understanding and knowledge; it is realized in the context of values peculiar to the archetypes of folk culture [12].

Another important thing is that a child can be free to choose a plot and to transform it according to the problems and meanings of his or her individual and age-related development, to make decisions, reflect on the game process and his or her relations with their peers, and on the socio-cultural grounds of their choices and actions made in the course of a game. A game organized by means of a fairy tale requires integrated and comprehensive development of a child's individuality and personality [13]. Dramatization of a fairy tale will inevitably require spontaneous, intimate, affinity-based acceptance, cooperation, co-creation, dialogue, a form of communication from both an adult and children. Therefore a fairy tale as a transformed form of a myth as if it was specially created by culture itself for children as a way of thinking, is at the same time the most effective way to organize their education.

2. Method

These provisions form the basis of the concept and method of organizing preschool children's education that have been used in a number of kindergartens in Novosibirsk for more than thirty years. According to the above approach, lessons with children (speech, cognitive, emotional-volitional and moral development) mostly take the form of a socio-dramatic role playing game with an adult organized by means of a fairy tale in the course of dialogue interaction between children or children and adults.

It is important that the subject content of the programs for main educational areas (especially those concerning social and communicative, cognitive, speech and artistic and esthetic development) and the sequence of its mastering by preschoolers (development of elementary mathematical concepts, scientific ideas about the world, written speech, sensor, socio-cultural development form the syllabus offered to preschool children) are organized according to the logic of formation of a respective knowledge area, concepts, way of their understanding (thinking) in the history of human culture, instead of the logic of their comprehension in modern science, i.e. it reproduces the logic of development of natural-science and humanitarian knowledge.

There are also a number of requirements for a lesson following the model of a developing dramatization game: a fairy tale has to keep its specific character as a peculiar literary text, i.e. it is not just a form of "packaging" for the educational and developmental material. The necessary material is inserted in the contents of a fairy tale according to its "logic" and stylistics; the educational content could be inscribed into a fairy tale and included in children's activity respectively a) as a rule for actions of the fairy tale characters, b) as a material for its construction (correct decisions or errors in the contents result in logical changes of the fairy tale plot); c) as conflicting situations requiring investigation, development and check of various hypotheses (a condition for solving such problems is children's experimentation organized by means of a fairy tale, d) as a certain kind of cognitive tasks – riddles the solution of which indicates a fairy-tale character's social importance; e) as a way to create conditions to carry out a mental experiment based on visual or ideal models.

A fairy tale should always contain (just like any Russian fairy tale) a moment of a socio-cultural choice, the solution to a certain important moral super-task: to help fairy tale characters despite danger or to refuse to help them; to choose a difficult, albeit honest, way or an easy, albeit sly, way; to strive for truth or profit, etc. A fairy tale should always have a hero (and an antihero) acting as a bearer of the system of values inherent to a certain

type of culture. Self-identification with such a character or hero, compassion and empathy to him or her or, on the contrary, self-contraposition to the antihero as a bearer and symbol of evil, ugly and false things becomes a condition for children's socio-cultural development, a condition for their choice of a certain socio-cultural standard (provided that all relationships with fairy tale characters should take the form of a dialogue). The type and the contents of a fairy tale (a cumulative, animal fairy tale, a magical fairy tale, etc.) should conform to the age of a child so that it could be understood and experienced by them and so that the fairy tale could involve the child in a dramatization game, to make him or her responsive to its contents. A dramatization game should follow the laws of a socio-dramatic role-playing game, i.e. it should be freely organized and non-standardized. This means that the game plot is not "rigid", it could vary depending on actions, hypotheses, suggestions from children asking for a different, previously unplanned development of a game.

Such dramatization games will require special skills from an educator: he or she has to be a "player" and at the same time a script writer and the director, and at the same time to reflect as a pedagogue on the processes taking place in the game. These skills make it possible for a teacher to guide the game not from the outside, but from within, and to determine its direction, realizing his or her educational, developmental, correctional or socio-cultural goals on the basis of "switched-on stage direction."

3. Results and discussion

In the course of the forming experiment at the stage of elaborating and introducing of the above concept in experimental and control groups we performed the diagnostics of the level of thinking development (J.Piaget's phenomena, the level of logical and visual thinking development using L. A. Wenger and D. Raven's techniques, the Kohs block design test, the creative thinking level using the Brief Creative Thinking Test based on Torrance test modification made by E. I. Shcheblanova and I. S. Averina); speech diagnostics ("Plot pictures" technique); diagnostics of knowledge and abilities level; the level of socio-dramatic role play development; value diagnostics (N. I. Nepomnyaschaya); personality traits diagnostics (autonomy, eccentricity, personality traits balance using the Luscher color test, self-evaluation, etc.). Statistically significant improvements were obtained for all these parameters in groups of differently aged children (the Mann-Whitney U criteria, Fisher's angular transformation) which become increasingly marked by the end of preschool age.

4. Conclusion

Therefore, our survey of children's personality traits in the experimental and control groups (the junior, middle and senior groups) has shown that there are statistically significant distinctions in the parameters related to the level of mental process development and personality and individuality development between children in the experimental and control groups, beginning from the second and, especially, the third year of experiment. Children in the experimental group have a higher maturity level of their visual and image thinking and logical thinking, they have better attention, perception, and coherent speech. It is a noteworthy detail that the parameters of visual creative thinking were also much higher. Children's thinking in the experimental group is notable for flexibility, originality, and extent of development. Moreover, their flexibility and originality parameters considerably exceeded the average level for 5-6 year-old children.

In the experimental groups there are significantly more children will a well-balanced nervous system, reasonable self-esteem, children open for communication, self-sufficient children, i.e. independent, active and self-reliant. The study showed that fairy tale dramatization significantly advances play development in young children. Our data also show a higher level of play development for children in the experimental pre-school group (their socio-dramatic role play development level was evaluated by using D. B. Elkonin's criteria).

Our observations show that using the proposed strategy for working with children gradually changes the educator's pedagogical position: the teacher learns to pay more attention to a child's feelings and experiences, to enter into a meaningful dialogue with a child, and, consequently, to hear children's questions and statements,

acquires skills to play children's games while remaining an adult, and learns to build a close relationship with children.

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