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The Development of Moral Consciousness in Older Preschool Children Through Problematic Contradictory Situations

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The problem of moral consciousness development in preschool children is of particular importance due to the vagueness of value orientation in modern society. The lack of tools for developing work with children defines the timeliness of the topic. The purpose of the study is to investigate the applicability of problematic contradictory situations in work aimed at the development of moral consciousness in older preschool children. The study involved 40 children aged 6 to 7 years. Methods of T.V. Avdulova were used to study the structure of moral consciousness in children. The ascertaining stage results showed different degree of moral consciousness components formation in surveyed preschoolers: the emotional component as the most formed, the behavioral component as the least formed. Out of 5 moral norms (help, generosity, honesty, obedience, empathy), the most mastered by children were the norms of help and generosity. At the formative stage, the hypothesis was investigated that problematic contradictory situations can be an effective means of moral consciousness development in preschoolers. The control stage results indicate the positive dynamics of all moral consciousness components in children ($U = 35$; $R = 0.67$; $P = 0.00005$). The conditions for application of problematic contradictory situations for the development of moral consciousness in children are as follows: formulation of moral dilemmas, in which the unknown is the aim, conditions or way of action, similar to the child's experience; introduction of problematic contradictory situations in different types of children's activities; structuring a sequence of lessons based on the degree of mastery of moral norms; application of an algorithm that provides reaching a productive solution mediating opposite options during resolving each problematic contradictory situation.

Keywords: moral consciousness, development, preschool children, problematic contradictory situations, dialectical thinking.

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Развитие морального сознания у детей старшего дошкольного возраста посредством проблемно-противоречивых ситуаций

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Проблема развития морального сознания у детей дошкольного возраста приобретает особое значение в связи с неопределенностью ценностных ориентиров в современном обществе. Актуальность темы определяется дефицитом инструментов для развивающей работы с детьми. Цель исследования — изучить возможности использования проблемно-противоречивых ситуаций в работе, направленной на развитие морального сознания у детей старшего дошкольного возраста. В исследовании принимали участие 40 детей 6–7 лет. Для изучения структуры морального сознания у детей использовалась методика Т.В. Авдуловой. Результаты констатирующего этапа показали разную степень сформированности компонентов морального сознания у обследованных дошкольников: наиболее сформирован эмоциональный компонент, наименее сформирован поведенческий компонент. Из 5 моральных норм (помощи, щедрости, честности, послушания, сопереживания) наиболее освоенными детьми оказались нормы помощи и щедрости. На формирующем этапе проверялась гипотеза о том, что продуктивным средством развития морального сознания дошкольников являются проблемно-противоречивые ситуации. Результаты контрольного этапа свидетельствуют о позитивной динамике всех компонентов морального сознания детей ($U = 35$; $R = 0,67$; $P = 0,00005$). Условиями применения проблемно-противоречивых ситуаций с целью развития морального сознания у детей старшего дошкольного возраста являются: разработка моральных дилемм, неизвестным в которых является цель, условия или способ действия, близких к опыту ребенка; включение проблемно-противоречивых ситуаций в разные виды деятельности детей; выстраивание последовательности занятий в соответствии со степенью освоенности моральных норм; использование при разрешении каждой проблемно-противоречивой ситуации алгоритма, позволяющего прийти к продуктивному решению, опосредствующему противоположные варианты.

Ключевые слова: моральное сознание, развитие, дети дошкольного возраста, проблемно-противоречивые ситуации, диалектическое мышление.

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Introduction

Today, value orientations in our society are changing and moral standards are inconsistent, so the problem of children's moral development has become more relevant. The issues of developing and shaping moral consciousness at preschool age are taking on particular importance. The Federal State Educational Standard for preschool education indicates the need for children to learn "the norms and values accepted in society, including ethical and moral values" [17, p. 10].

The issue of moral consciousness development in children has been dealt with by J. Piaget, L. Kohlberg, L.S. Vygotsky, L.I. Bozhovich, D.B. Elkonin, T.V. Avdu-lova, N. Eisenberg, L. M. Padilla-Walker, G. Carlo, B.L. Volling, A. Mahoney and others. They have proposed various approaches to describe the structure of moral consciousness and developed methods for diagnostic assessment and development of children's moral consciousness [1; 2; 7; 8; 9; 13; 15; 26; 27; 29]. However, there is an obvious lack of the means necessary for developmental work with preschoolers. Therefore, the purpose of our study is to explore the applicability of problematic contradictory situations in work aimed at the

development of moral consciousness among preschool children.

Moral psychology has traditionally been developed within the framework of the main psychological schools: behaviorism, psychoanalysis and cognitivism, the methodological contradictions of which have yet to be overcome [9; 11; 13]. Russian researchers understand moral consciousness as an integral structure that includes cognitive, emotional and behavioral components. The development of moral consciousness is associated with a subject's adoption of behavior models. Preschool age has been found to be crucial for the moral development of a person [1; 7; 8; 11; 20].

The conditions for the development of moral consciousness in children is of particular importance. According to J. Piaget and L. Kohlberg, moral development is directly related to the level of cognitive development, and the age from 2 to 7 years — the stage of "moral realism" — corresponds to the pre-operational stage of the child's intellectual development [2; 15]. Vygotsky also emphasizes the importance of intellectual development, but at the same time notes that "it is much more important ... to organize the child's mind in order to help him prevail over all impulses and inclinations" [7, p. 263].

All researchers place the main emphasis on the role of education in the development of moral consciousness among children [1; 2; 7; 8; 14; 27; 29]. However, many questions associated with the methods used in moral education remain open to debate. Vygotsky's criticism of the main approaches to children's moral education is relevant today. Criticizing the authoritarian system based on rewards and punishments, the author pointed out that these methods "serve as a means of rough mechanical influence and at best teach only the virtue of submission, only one moral rule – to avoid the unpleasant" [7, p. 274]. At the same time, Vygotsky criticized free education, he called it "risky" and emphasized that it is "by no means suited for the education of moral behavior" [7, p. 275].

Modern pedagogy offers a wide range of methods for the moral education of children [10]. Both traditional methods (reading general fiction, conversation, observation) and innovative forms, like organizing social events and creative activities, exist [14]. At the same time, it must be noted that literary works or life situations in which "what is good and what is bad" is obvious, remain the primary medium for the children's moral development [18].

Our study is conducted in line with the structural dialectical approach (N.E. Veraksa, A.K. Belolutsкая, I.B. Shiyan, O.A. Shiyan, etc.) [28]. The main scope of studies in this approach focuses on the development of dialectical thinking, but in recent years, increasing attention has been placed on the emotional and social development of the child [4; 6; 16].

Situations involving compliance with moral norms are often contradictory: ideas about moral norms and assessments of actions can not only differ, but also be in mutual opposition. "In the social life of a person, there are often moments when his own interests turn out to be opposite to the interests of others or the existing norm," writes O.A. Shiyan [23, p. 40]. Such situations are attributed to problematic contradictory situations the resolution of which requires dialectical thinking [5]. Research by A.K. Belolutsкая, T.N. Le-van, O.L. Kholodova describes how adults experience difficulties in resolving ethically contradictory situations [3]. In contrast, studies show that preschool children can resolve such situations by demonstrating "dialectical social intelligence" [21; 23]. In such situations, it is possible to overcome the limitations of methods based on the child's awareness of his or her emotional experiences, which are criticized by E. O. Smirnova and V.M. Kholmogorova. They make it possible to "remove fixations on one's own Self through the development of attention to others, a sense of community and belonging thereto" [19, p. 99]. The resolution of problematic contradictory situations involves children identifying their position and the opponent's position, experiencing opposite feelings and making a free choice. This supports the idea that that problematic contradictory situations with ethical content can be used as a means of moral consciousness development in children.

Problematic contradictory situations are viewed in our study as situations that contain contradictory aims,

conditions or ways of action and do not have an unambiguous solution. The resolution of such a situation requires dialectical thinking, as it assumes the identification of opposite circumstances and the search for a qualitatively new solution, including the simultaneous existence of opposites.

The use of problematic contradictory situations in developmental work assumes their introduction in various types of activities that allow children to understand and express their attitude to the objects being studied, and "to realize oneself as a subject of solving various kinds of problems" [24, p. 68]. The leading method for moral consciousness development is ethical conversation, during which "opposite positions can be presented interactively" [23, p. 44]. Favorable conditions can also be created in gameplay, where all the capabilities of children are revealed to the fullest extent possible [25].

Program of the study

The study included three stages: ascertaining, formative and control.

The study involved 40 children aged 6 to 7 years (21 girls, 19 boys) developing within the norm for their age.

At the ascertaining stage, the methods of T.P. Avdulova were used to assess the moral consciousness of preschoolers [1].

To assess the cognitive component of moral consciousness, the "moral dilemmas" method was used. The children were offered eight dilemmas on five moral norms: help, generosity, honesty, empathy, and obedience, and asked questions: What will the character do? Why? How should one act? Why? The levels were determined according to the following criteria: the accuracy and argumentation of answers (orientation to mutual benefit, external evaluation, empathy and respect for the feelings of others).

To assess the emotional component of moral consciousness, a test was used that involved discussing ten pictures: Who is shown in the picture? How do the characters feel? Why? What do you feel? Why? What would you do to change the situation? The level of empathy was determined according to the following criteria: the adequacy and intensity of the emotional reaction and the desire to change the situation.

To assess the moral behavior, the "honest maze" method was used, where the winning child was given stickers to share with other participants. Levels were determined by the number of norms observed independently or by prompting.

The assessments showed the following distribution of children by levels of moral consciousness: 6% of children showed a low level, 67.5% of children showed an average level, and 17.5% of children showed a high level.

The results of the study revealed that the emotional component was formed in children better than in others

(only 7.5% of children showed a low level). The behavioral component was formed worse: 37.5% of children showed a low level. Most of the children showed an average level in all components. Out of five moral norms, those mastered most by the children were the norms of help and generosity.

The methodology of the formative experiment was based on the following hypothesis: we believe that problematic contradictory situations can be an effective means of developing moral consciousness in children under the following conditions:

1) children are provided with problematic contradictory situations that require the resolution of moral dilemmas, in which the aim, conditions or course of action are unknown;

2) problematic contradictory situations in different types of activities are introduced;

3) the system of lessons is structured according to the following principle: each lesson is devoted to one moral norm and the sequence and quantity of lessons are determined by the level of mastery of that norm;

4) an algorithm for the resolution of each problematic contradictory situation is applied which includes: a statement of a problematic issue; formation of a contradictory situation; substantiation of opposing judgments; return to the resolution of the problematic contradictory situation with the help of a scheme; resolution of the situation; symbolic experience of the situation.

To fulfill the first condition of the hypothesis, the problematic contradictory situations were formulated in such a way that they put children in situations of moral choice while not departing far from the child's sphere of experience. The unknown in such situations is the aim, conditions or course of action, as per with the classification of problematic situations by A.M. Matyushkin [12]. The children were presented with problematic contradictory situations in which:

1 – the aim of the action is unknown (for example, the children are asked to resolve a situation in which the adults say that a road must be crossed on a red light, but not on a green light, that is, the advice of adults contradicts the road rules known to the children);

2 – the conditions of the action are unknown (for example, what tasty food to give to a child with allergies, where the aim is obvious and it is necessary to identify all relevant circumstances);

3 – the unknown to be learned is a course of action (for example, how to tell the truth without harming a loved one. Where the conditions and aim are defined, it is necessary to find a new way to solve the problem).

To fulfill the second condition of the hypothesis, the children were involved in different types of activities: 1 – discussion of life situations (“Distribution of food on a hike”, “Give help or catch a train”) and cartoons (“Masha and the Bear”, “Once upon a time there was a dog”); 2 – dramatization game. To ensure that each child had the opportunity to actively participate, the lessons were held in groups of nine children.

To implement the third condition of the hypothesis, lessons were held in a certain sequence. The diagnostic results showed that out of five moral norms the norms of help and generosity were those mastered most often by the children, so the first two lessons were devoted to these norms. Three lessons were devoted to each of the following norms: honesty, obedience and empathy.

Let us give examples of the problematic contradictory situations that we developed:

– The norm of generosity: the children need to distribute a limited set of toys among themselves – there is a contradiction between the norm and one's interests.

– The norm of help: there is a boy in the yard who did not help anyone, but when he lost an important thing, he asked for help – there is a contradiction between the norm and one's attitude.

– The norm of honesty: the child knows that his friend broke someone else's thing and did not confess, and wonders whether he should tell adults – there is a contradiction between the norm and one's attitude.

– The norm of empathy: homeless cats live in the basement of a house and because of them, fleas and an unpleasant smell appeared – there is a contradiction between norms.

– The norm of obedience: the adults ask the children to perform an act that contradicts the rules they have learned – there is a contradiction between norms.

To fulfill the fourth condition, we used the algorithm for the resolution of problematic contradictory situations proposed by O.A. Shiyan in the analysis of fairy tales [22]. We adapted it for the analysis of problematic contradictory situations with ethical content. The algorithm includes the following steps:

1) statement of a problematic issue that arises from the content of a situation and helps to identify mutually exclusive relationships, for example: “imagine a situation where you and your parents are in a hurry to catch a train that is about to leave. An elderly man comes up to you and asks you to lead him to another platform at the station”;

2) formation of a problematic contradictory situation using a provocative question, to which opposite answers can be given: “What to do in this situation? Maybe you don't need to help, because you might be late?”;

3) substantiation of opposing judgments: “We get two groups of opinions. Let us organize ourselves as follows: those who are in favor of helping the man sit on one side, and on the other – those who are not in favor of leaving and helping the man.” When the children have settled, each group provides their arguments;

4) turn to the resolution of a problematic contradictory situation with the help of a diagram: “Now let's present our options in a scheme (a scheme is shown with white and black squares, from which arrows lead to a grey square). In the white square we will write the option – “Help the man”, in the black one – “Do not help the man”. Let's come up with a solution to the situation that will suit everyone, and write it in the grey square”;

5) symbolic experience of the situation: "Let's try to role play this situation." When distributing roles, it is better to offer the role of an elderly person to a child who did not want to help, and offer roles of passengers running late to children who wanted to help.

6) resolution of the problematic contradictory situation— dialectical transformation: "We came to the conclusion that the most appropriate option is to find other adults who are not late for the train and will be able to accompany the man to his platform. That way you will not miss the train but you can still help."

Based on the above, we have prepared a developmental program that consists of 14 lessons with a common structure: greeting, introduction of a problematic contradictory situation, conversation, dramatization game, summing up, and saying goodbye.

The children were selected for the experimental group (EG) based on the assessment of their moral consciousness. The EG included 18 children who showed low and medium levels of moral consciousness development. The remaining children were placed in the control group (CG). A control experiment was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the program developed. The significance of the differences was assessed using the Mann–Whitney U test.

Results of the Study and Discussion

Analysis of the data showed that there was no change in the moral consciousness indicators in the CG, while there was a positive trend in the EG. The results are presented in Fig. 1.

For the EG, at the control stage, the number of children with a low level of the cognitive component of moral consciousness decreased to 11.5% and the percentage of children with an average level increased. The children defined the essence of the situation more accurately and gave detailed arguments. One child demonstrated a high level (he was able to formulate generalized norms: "It's unfair that someone has a lot of presents, while someone else doesn't", "The person is in pain, so you need to help

first", and gave arguments for empathy and respect for the feelings of others).

At the control stage, most children from the EG demonstrated an average level of the emotional component (83%). The children did not always name specific emotions, often giving just a general assessment ("Good mood"), did not offer any reasoning, but to the question "What do you feel when you look at the picture?" they expressed empathy: "It's a pity", "I am glad". The children tried to improve the negative situation, but did not offer specific actions, only defining the aim: "To reconcile", "To give treatment". At the control stage, 17% of children in the EG showed a high level of the emotional component. They named specific emotions: "It's a shame", "I am sad", "I am happy", justified their answers and suggested options for changing the situation: "Share toys and play together", "Separate the kids so that they stop fighting", etc.

The number of children with a low level of the behavioral component of moral consciousness has decreased (from 44% to 33%). Most of the children showed compliance with the norm of honesty, but fewer children showed compliance with the norm of generosity.

Statistical processing of data according to the Mann–Whitney U test confirms the positive dynamics of moral consciousness in children from the EG: differences in the indicators of the children's moral consciousness at the ascertaining stage and control stage are significant: $U = 35$; $R = 0.67$; $P = 0.00005$. This proves the effectiveness of the work conducted.

When resolving problematic contradictory situations with ethical content, the children realized the possible existence of not just different, but also opposite points of view in the assessment of social behavior and learned to point out contradictions in the conditions of the situation and in the interests and relationships of its participants. The introduction of problematic contradictory situations in different types of activities contributed to emotional involvement and increased the children's activity. Structuring a sequence of lessons based on the degree of mastery of moral norms made it possible to move from the actual to the potential abilities of the

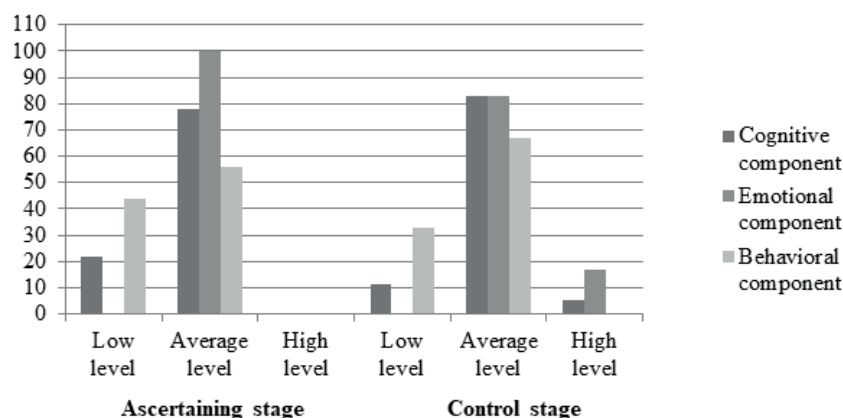


Fig. 1. Distribution of children from the EG according to their levels of development of moral consciousness components at the ascertaining stage and control stage (in %)

children. The use of an algorithm during the resolution of each problematic contradictory situation served as the basis for a dialectical analysis of situations. The visualization of opposite positions in the schema contributed to a deeper understanding, while introduction through gameplay ensured they had a full experience of the situation. It is particularly important that the children gained experience in producing modes of action that allow them to overcome contradictions, find behaviors that mediate extreme positions and, therefore, satisfy all participants.

The short duration of this experimental work must be noted. We believe that more prolonged and systematic work can cause more pronounced and stable positive changes in the structure of the preschool children's moral consciousness.

Conclusion

The development of moral consciousness in children is an important task in modern education. Preschool age

represents the first stage of a person's moral development, which determines prosocial development at later ages. Therefore, the means of moral consciousness development in children are of particular relevance.

In our study, we tested the hypothesis that problematic contradictory situations are a productive means of moral consciousness development in preschoolers. The child encounters such situations on a daily basis, which complicates the development of moral norms and causes ambivalent ethical feelings which are then reflected in the child's behavior. Artificial modeling of situations with moral contradictions makes it possible to form in children a dialectical mechanism for the resolution thereof: the ability to single out contradictions in an ethical situation and find ways to mediate them.

The results of the formative experiment showed that this work based on the use of problematic contradictory situations contributes to the development of all components of moral consciousness of older preschool children: cognitive, emotional and behavioral.

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