

"GARDEN OF CHILDHOOD" As an Innovative Approach to Training and Education of Children at Preschool Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The authors reveal an innovative approach to training and education of preschool children. This approach is called "GARDEN OF CHILDHOOD". It is based on the idea that the development of the preschool child's personality should be joyous and free "cultural self-creation" in terms of the collective co-creation, where adults and children are equal partners. The authors emphasize the aesthetic component of preschool education, arguing that it allows to develop child's abilities to generalize, to educate dialectical and originality of mind, self-solve creative problems, to be active, relaxed, not afraid of the new, the unexpected things.

KEYWORDS

preschool education, innovative approach, garden of childhood, aesthetic component, creative activity

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Introduction

GARDEN OF CHILDHOOD is an image which shows that the basic idea in such preschool institution is not training children for school, not giving them knowledge and skills, but carefully raising all children, the flower of our nation, and forming their individual perception of the world. The concept and approximate programme of such preschool educational institution called GARDEN OF CHILDHOOD have been developed in the Institute of Art Education and Cultural Studies of the Russian Academy of Education by authors L.V. Shkolyar and L.G. Savenkova.

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The scientists explain that the proposed process of education and upbringing is required for natural, free and joyous development of personality, gradual cultural self-creation in terms of the collective existence and co-creation of adults and children. It is natural that in such community children will acquire full-fledged perception of the world, even development of emotions (Ananiev 2001), logic of thinking, aspiration for learning and changing life and knowing how to bring yourself, as well as your attitude to the reality, into it.

Today it is no longer necessary to prove that the most adequate way of learning for children is going from image to notion (Bakushinsky 2009, 11). Therefore, it is important to prevent logical and notional thinking from displacing this imaginative, associative and emotional perception of the world. This is also the idea behind the work of kindergarten teacher.

Aesthetic component of preschool education allows bringing its content to conformable and creative cultural level, create harmonious preschool institution, develop child's skills for comprehension of notions, early inclination to generalisation, cultivate dialectical mind, ability to think and feel vividly, imaginatively, with expressive intonation, going beyond the limits of the usual, the ordinary, the routine (Zaporozhets 1986).

On the basis of this, the system of children's development in GARDEN OF CHILDHOOD is formed so that children, first of all, could do many things with their hands, could move, be creative in different spaces. Second, so that they could logically shape their thoughts (in words, images, sounds) on their own, understand and perceive the reality around them and special features of art, develop and self-improve. Third, so that they would learn to solve creative tasks independently; think in an original way, propose unconventional ways of solving problems, be active, relaxed in their creative work, not afraid of the new and the unexpected (Shkolyar, Savenkova 2012, 16-17).

Preschool childhood is an incredibly important stage in the formation of personality (Mukhina 2000). A child enters the big world with trust, ingenuousness, willing to interact and inclined to perceive the beauty and harmony. This is the time when children start discovering the world. Their perception becomes intelligent, purposeful, analysing. Each event of life becomes meaningful and is experienced brightly, acutely, with all their heart and soul (Davydov, Kudriavtsev 1991).

Psychologists claim that if a child cannot share his or her impressions in the form of art, tell about what is going on with them and what they think about it through some kind of creative work (in drawings, gestures, acts, figurative words, etc.), later this will lead to various emotional and even mental disorders (Hannaford 1995, 18-19). For instance, a person might find it difficult to communicate with people or find their labour of love. Thus, a child should be introduced to the creative world from the very early age. In the process of such education art is not only a standard of the beautiful, but, first of all, a moral cue and the most important condition for integral harmonious development of personality. Classics of preschool pedagogics F. Froebel (Froebel 1923) and E.A. Flerina (Flerina 1928) wrote about it.

The research studied and tested courses and types of children's activities which are one way or other related to art activities: game, perception, theatre, observation, artistic activities, construction, discussion (of a story or a fairy-tale a child has read), museum excursion, listening to the sounds of the environment,

animating fairy-tale characters, “characters” of mathematical problems and many others. This incomplete list shows that the connection between rather unrelated fields of children’s activities with artistry significantly enriches children’s world, develops their artistic and creative skills, aesthetic perception and world outlook.

This is the approach to raising children which identifies it with the notion of CULTURE and means higher level of children’s education when culture is regarded as “*superior method of arranging the elements of entity*”. It is based on the fact that culture (in the broad sense of the word) and art absorb, co-opt the accumulated from other fields of human consciousness and activities. Different kinds of creative activities in the system of child education are based on the connection with scientific liberal foundations of the education on the whole, as this is exactly the basis for “culture ecology” (Likhachyov 1991) – cultural environment of child’s development.

The need for creation of such concept of child education and upbringing is related to the fact that in numerous preschool education programmes existing today there are practically *no scientific grounds for aesthetic component – child’s entering into the world of culture* – one of the most important and meaningful in the upbringing of a child. Meanwhile, child’s entry into the culture must be connected with his or her mental characteristics, ingenuous and trustful attitude to the world, inclination to contemplation and perception of beauty and harmony. Alarming tendency towards ignoring the development of emotional-perceptual and moral-ethical areas in preschool and school education contradicts human nature and generic skills of aesthetic, unselfish, “relational attention” to the world (Prishvin 1983, 247), concerned and kind attitude to nature, people and the world around us on the whole.

Materials and Methods

In the core of such education and upbringing there are three fields of universal education and upbringing originating from basics of human nature: *area of learning, area of creativity, area of practical activity*. These areas were determined by an outstanding Russian thinker V.S. Soloviev (Soloviev 1997), and a high position in them is held by aesthetic experience in the system of human world outlook formation. Hence appear 3 areas of universal harmonious education.

1) Area of creativity based on feelings and beauty.

2) Area of knowledge based on thinking and truth.

3) Area of practical life based on will and common good. (Soloviev 1997, 137).

Principles and approaches of all shared activities with children are based on moral component of the upbringing, on elevation of a child’s needs and interests, his or her emotional experiences and moral thoughts, among which are:

- Principle of developmental education.
- Priority of universal cultural development: art, communication, learning.
- Experiencing all stages of childhood in full, making it diverse, enriching and keeping child development self-valuable.
- Respect to child’s personality.



- Novelty and openness towards the world.
- Diversity of activity forms in child's creative search and solutions. Supporting children's initiatives in various types of activities.
- Comprehensive integrated education and integral poly-artistic upbringing under individual and group co-creativity implemented as an "art event".
- Universality of the aesthetic component of preschool children education process. Art culture runs through the whole process of growing up.

Assistance, cooperation and co-creativity of children and adults, acceptance of a child as a full-valued participant (subject) of educational relationships.

Such education and upbringing is based on a range of issues which do not only set one looking for ways to solve them: their statement already creates certain mental strain, entails critical view on what is happening in pedagogics of childhood, if not discovery of something new, makes one look for unusual decisions.

Introduction of various creative and artistic activities (theatre, artistic movement, carnival culture, artistic speech) into life of children in addition to music and arts is fully natural, as each kind of art allows developing child's natural talents: to see, to hear, to move, to smell, to taste, to communicate with each other. It is difficult to name other, non-artistic types of activities, which could help to fully develop the above-mentioned key abilities of a developing person. This is what defines a special aesthetic component of the whole preschool education based on integration and interaction between various kinds of arts and creative activities. One cannot but take into account that every child is at the same time an artist, a musician, an actor, a dreamer – a creator, in other words. Children's games show that dreaming is a natural form of manifestation in life, and the world of their mental images is rich and diverse.

Children's game underlies the prototype of such education where both ways of treating objects – through creative action and emotional experience – are organically combined, where a toy is a tangible, basic symbol and an educational element which helps to seize the reality of the world and its material reality (Bakushinsky 2009, 172). It is the toy, including traditional toys, that plays a significant role in the development of child's perception of the world at the different stages of his or her life, carries an original view on the world, helps to perceive the reality in a new way, develops the ability to arrange the environment, one's own world, create certain mood.

It should be mentioned that the idea of harmonious education is not new, it had been one of the key ones in 1920s. At that time (despite great difficulties in the life of the country) due to the efforts of different professionals (teachers, artists, film directors, writers, composers, choreographers) there had been created programmes, concepts, models of educational institutions for children, where teachers were called "gardeners" (Kapterev 1982). The name speaks for itself: the idea was that these "gardeners" should "grow" children, taking into account talents of each child and showing love, as if they were growing, for example, a flower. Otherwise one would not get expected results. And what about a person, why should everyone be treated the same, according to one pattern or template?

Results

Basic courses underlie the content of work for all age categories.

- **1. World through the eyes of a child:** The prime of childhood as a strategy of spiritual growth. A child is an independent personality: I am human, I was born, I am on my own, I want, I can. Human ability to observe themselves, see, hear, touch, join the world of adults, compare, tell and explain what one has seen and heard, behave depending on the situation.
- **2. Eternal values:** selection of essential phenomena (notions, words) which are passed on from one generation to another as spiritual and moral values: good, beauty, labour, justice, compassion, etc.; friendship, mutual help, care, help, etc. Notions of the meaning of life, sense of motherland, love for native land, people, wise thoughts according to child's perception.
- **3, 4. Living world. Cognition of the world:** Beauty and benefit of nature. Relationship with nature has developed valuable qualities in people: wisdom, diligence, aesthetic feeling which allows animating natural phenomena. Cognition of the world through learning the part and the whole: tree – forest; water – river; stone – rock; grass – field; sand – desert, seed – fruit. Serious observation of objects and phenomena and perception of their qualities and characteristics by all sense organs. Learning signs and characteristics of different materials through the process of their exploration and experimentation. Viewing, feeling through actions with objects, determining qualities and characteristics. Transfer of the state of natural phenomena and objects to human state – sensation of fabric, stone, water. Showing what a child has seen and felt in their creative art (drawing, speech, movement, tune): beauty of shapes, moods, colour diversity, sounds, tunes, etc. The art of seeing the whole diversity of the world cultivates a particular feeling – world outlook.
- **5. Our home is Earth:** Life, Earth – life on Earth. Planet Earth as the picture of the world: infinity, chaos, harmony; space, time, simplicity and complexity, recurrence, contrast, movement. Breathing is life of all living creatures. The word “breath” is related to such notions as spirit, spirituality, inspiration. Earth is our home.
- **6. Laws of life - laws of art and creativity:** seeing the binarity of the world in such oppositions as space – time, content – form, rhythms of life – rest, artistic – ordinary, reality – game, development (movement) – statics, coincidence of the beginning and the end.

Dynamics of the development of the whole educational process and its participants is the result of a correctly formed dialogue (between teacher and child, between children, between teachers and educators). This implies creation of special subject-to-subject relationships in educational institution group in each particular case, which entail individual changes for each participant of the dialogue. It is important to achieve synchronism in the work of teachers, educators and parents in each age category.

Discussion



By shaping the logic of directions of work with children, the programme tries to represent, as fully as possible, the development of all necessary qualities for creative personality according to the age.

«**Artistic and aesthetic development**» is aimed at educating and teaching children through the process of mastering various types of art, which are closely related to the process of children's creative art and are based on individual characteristics of a child. This educational area combines different kinds of artistic and creative activities, "a round dance of arts" (*music, art, artistic speech, artistic movement and dancing, theatre*), and correlates with the concept of "poly-artistic education".

The following tasks are solved:

- Development of elementary notions of different kinds of arts: music and art, art of speech, theatre, dancing, traditional art.
- Value-notional perception and understanding of different kinds of arts (music, art, art of speech, theatre).
- Creative activity in different kinds of arts (music, art, theatre, dancing).

CONCLUSION

The meaning of introduction of an innovative approach called GARDEN OF CHILDHOOD into the process of upbringing and education, emphasizing the aesthetic component and using different kinds of artistic activities, is determined by the need to activate children's thinking and creativity, their imagination, by creation of high emotional tone in the process of activities, when children fully feel the joy of learning, the strain of search, satisfaction from their first independent findings.

This poly-artistic education of children is aimed at the development of:

- ability of emotional and sensory perception of the world of nature and works of art;
- ability to transfer one's impressions of what one has seen in nature, museum, life into artistic images;
- notions of different kinds of art and its role in people's lives;
- skills of cultured behaviour and communication in accordance with age characteristics of preschoolers;
- aesthetic sensitivity to the phenomena of nature and culture;
- moral feelings: love to nature, respect to cultures of different countries and nations.

Thus organic unity of the processes of education and upbringing in preschool institution is ensured.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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