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

Tatyana E. Chernokova
Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Severodvinsk, Russia
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6033-027X, e-mail: t.chernokova@narfu.ru

Anna L. Gulyaeva
Municipal Autonomous Educational Institution «Secondary school No. 12», Severodvinsk, Russia
e-mail: azureair@list.ru

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.

А.Л. Гуляева

МАОУ «СОШ № 12», структурное подразделение «Детский сад № 65 “Якорек”», г. Северодвинск, Российская Федерация
e-mail: azureair@list.ru

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. В исследовании приняли участие 40 детей 6—7 лет. Для изучения структуры морального сознания у детей использовались методики Т.В. Авдуловой. Результаты констатирующего этапа показали разную степень сформированности компонентов морального сознания у обследованных дошкольников: наиболее сформирован эмоциональный компонент, наименее сформированный 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, неизвестных 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, опосредующему противоположные варианты.

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


Introduction

Nowadays value orientations in our society are changing, moral standards are inconsistent, so the problem of the children’s moral development becomes relevant. The issues of developing and shaping moral consciousness in preschool age take on particular importance. The Federal State Educational Standard of preschool education indicates the need for children to learn “the norms and values accepted in the society, including ethical and moral values” [17, p. 10].

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

The moral psychology has traditionally been developed within the framework of main psychological schools: behaviorism, psychoanalysis and cognitivism, methodological contradictions of which have not yet been 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 the assumption of behavior models. It is indicated that the preschool age is sensitive for moral development of a person [1; 7; 8; 11; 20].

The issue of conditions for moral consciousness development 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 of 2 to 7 years — the stage of “moral realism” — corresponds to the pre-operational stage of the child’s intellectual development [2; 15]. In the theory of L.S. Vygotsky, the importance of intellectual development is emphasized, but at the same time it is noted 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 authors place the main emphasis on the role of education for the development of moral consciousness.
in children [1; 2; 7; 8; 14; 27; 29]. Whereas many issues associated with the methods of moral education remain debatable. The criticism of main approaches to the children’s moral education as presented by L.S. Vygotsky 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, L.S. Vygotsky criticized the practice of 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 are developed: organizing social events, creative activities [14]. At the same time, it must be noted that literary works or life situations, in which it is obvious “what is good and what is bad”, remain the medium for the children’s moral development [18].

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

Situations related to compliance with moral norms are often contradictory: ideas about moral norms and assessments of actions can not only differ, but also be opposite to each other. “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 and their resolution requires dialectical thinking [5]. Research by A.K. Belolutskaya, T.N. Le-van, O.L. Kholodova reveals that adults experience difficulties in resolving ethically contradictory situations [3]. At the same time, the 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 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 to them” [19, p. 99]. The resolution of problematic contradictory situations allows the children to identify their position and the opponent’s position, experience opposite feelings and make a free choice. This gives reason to believe that problematic contradictory situations with ethical content can be used as a means of moral consciousness development in children.

The 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 situation requires dialectical thinking as it assumes the identification of opposite circumstances and search for a qualitatively new solution, including the simultaneous existence of opposites. The use of problematic contradictory situations as a means of 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 the moral consciousness development is an ethical conversation, during which “opposite positions can be presented interactively” [23, p. 44]. Favorable conditions are also created in the game, 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 age norm.

At the ascertaining stage, the methods of T.P. Avdu-lova were used to diagnose the moral consciousness of preschoolers [1].

To diagnose the cognitive component of moral consciousness, the “Moral dilemmas” method was used. The children were offered 8 dilemmas on five moral norms: help, generosity, honesty, empathy, 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 feelings of others).

To diagnose the emotional component of moral consciousness, a test was used that involved the discussion of 10 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, desire to change the situation.

To diagnose 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 with a reminder.

Diagnostics 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 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 5 moral norms, the most mastered 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 moral consciousness development in children under the following conditions:

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

2) introduction of problematic contradictory situations in different types of activities;

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

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

To implement the first condition of the hypothesis, problematic contradictory situations were formulated in such a way that they put children in situations of moral choice while being close to the child’s experience. The unknown in such situations is the aim, conditions or way of action, in accordance with the classification of problematic situations by A.M. Matyushkin [12]. The children were presented with the following problematic contradictory situations:

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

2 — problematic situations, in which 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 significant circumstances);

3 — problematic situations, in which the unknown to be learned is a way 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 of the problem resolution).

To implement 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 9 children.

To implement the third condition of the hypothesis, lessons were held in a certain sequence. The diagnostic results showed that out of 5 moral norms the norms of help and generosity were the most mastered 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 problematic contradictory situations that we developed:

— The norm of generosity: the children need to distribute a limited set of toys among themselves — it is a contradiction between the norm and 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 — it is a contradiction between the norm and attitude.

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

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

— The norm of obedience: the adults ask the children to perform an act that contradicts the learned rules — it is a contradiction between norms.

To implement the fourth condition, we used the algorithm for the resolution of problematic contradictory situations proposed by O.A. Shiyan for 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 the situation and helps to identify mutually exclusive relationships, for example: “Guys, 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 to lead him across to another path”;

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 sit down as follows: those who are in favor of helping this man sit on one side, and on the other — those who are in favor of not helping the man and leaving.” When the children have settled, each group provides their arguments;

4) return 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 a grey square”;

111
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 the 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 and you can 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, saying goodbye.

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

**Results of the Study and their 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.

In the EG at the control stage, the number of children with a low level of moral consciousness cognitive component 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 doesn’t”, “The person is in pain, so you need to help first”, gave arguments related to the empathy and respect for 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 confined to a general assessment (“Good mood”), did not name the reasons, but to the question “What do you feel when looking at the picture?” they expressed empathy: “It’s a pity”, “I am glad”. The children tried to change the negative situation, but did not offer specific actions, confined to defining the aim: “To reconcile”, “To give treatment”. At the control stage, 17% of children in the EG had a high level: 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”, “Pull apart the kids in different directions so that they stop fighting” etc.

The number of children with a low level of moral consciousness behavioral component 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 and control stages are significant: \( U = 35; R = 0.67; P = 0.00005 \). This proves the effectiveness of the conducted work.

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 conditions of the situation, in interests and relationships of its participants. The introduction of problematic contradictory situations in different types of activities contributed to the 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 actual to potential abilities of the 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 in the introduction in the game ensured the complete experience of the situation. It is especially important that the children have gained experience in producing modes of action that allow them to overcome contradictions, find behaviors that mediate the extreme positions and, therefore, satisfy all participants.

The short duration of the 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 of modern education. The preschool age is the first stage of a person’s moral development, which determines prosocial development at later ages. Therefore, the issue of means of moral consciousness development in children becomes 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, causes ambivalent ethical feelings and, therefore, is reflected in the child’s behavior. Artificial modeling of situations with moral contradictions makes it possible to form in children a dialectical mechanism for their resolution: the ability to single out contradictions in an ethical situation and find ways to mediate them.

The results of the formative experiment showed that the 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.

References

development of preschool children: analysis of research from the perspective of a structural-dialectical approach. // Sibirskii psikhologicheskii zhurnal [Siberian Psychological Journal], 2020, no. 75, pp. 115—143. DOI:10.17223/17267080/75/7. (In Russ.).


Information about the authors
Tatyana E. Chernokova, Ph.D. in Psychology, Associate Professor of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Severodvinsk branch, Humanitarian Institute, Severodvinsk, Russia, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6033-027X, e-mail: t.chernokova@narfu.ru
Anna L. Gulyaeva, teacher-psychologist, Municipal Autonomous Educational Institution «Secondary school No. 12», Kindergarten No. 65 «Yakorek», Severodvinsk, Russia, e-mail: azureair@list.ru

Информация об авторах
Чернокова Татьяна Евгеньевна, кандидат психологических наук, доцент, доцент кафедры педагогики и психологии, Северный (Арктический) федеральный университет имени М.В. Ломоносова (ФГАОУ ВО «САФУ»), филиал в г. Северодвинске, гуманитарный институт, Северодвинск, Россия, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6033-027X, e-mail: t.chernokova@narfu.ru
Гуляева Анна Леонидовна, педагог-психолог, МАОУ «СОШ № 12», структурное подразделение «Детский сад № 65 “Якорек”», г. Северодвинск, Российская Федерация, e-mail: azureair@list.ru

Получена 18.05.2021
Принята в печать 27.04.2022

Received 18.05.2021
Accepted 27.04.2022