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THE PROBLEM OF FORMING NATURAL AND ECOLOGICAL COMPETENCE IN CHILDREN OF SENIOR PRESCHOOL AGE

The modern stage of development of society is characterized by the aggravation of environmental problems, which necessitates the formation of an environmentally responsible personality already at the early stages of ontogenesis. One of the most effective means of forming natural and ecological competence is observation in nature, which provides active, emotionally colored and holistic knowledge of the environment. It is observations that allow a child to independently discover the properties of natural objects, notice changes occurring in nature, and realize the dependence of living organisms on environmental conditions. However, in the educational process of preschool educational institutions, the potential of observations is often used incompletely, without proper systematicity and methodological justification.

An analysis of recent studies and publications shows that the issue of forming natural and ecological competence in preschool children has been studied in a diverse way. In particular, V. Ivanova, T. Atroshchenko substantiated that a positive attitude towards nature is the result of the formation of natural and ecological competence in preschoolers [1]. O. Maksymova identified the main approaches to the organization of various educational eco-spaces in preschool educational institutions, their structural elements and tasks for children within them [2]. A. Novikova, I. Karuk summarized the features of conducting observations in nature as an effective means of environmental education of preschool children [3]. O. Sorochynska O. A. with co-authors in their work revealed an innovative method of studying the natural environment through the use of natural SMART boxes in working with preschool children [4].

Natural and ecological competence is an integrative characteristic of a child's personality, which includes a system of knowledge about the laws of the functioning of the natural environment, ideas about the relationships in nature, purposeful motives and value orientations regarding environmental conservation, skills and abilities of appropriate behavior in natural situations, as well as experience of practical activities in the knowledge and conservation of nature, which are manifested in the child's conscious actions in various life situations related to interaction with the environment and living beings. Such competence is formed on the basis of a combination of knowledge, skills, value attitudes and motivation for active environmental activity, which allows the child not only to act adequately, but also to realize the significance of his actions for the environment.

The structural components of natural and ecological competence are the cognitive component (knowledge and ideas about natural objects and phenomena), emotional and value (awareness of the value of nature, interest in learning about nature) and

activity and behavioral (the ability to act responsibly in the natural environment, caring for it and the desire to preserve it).

One of the most effective methods for forming natural and ecological competence is observation in nature, which provides direct contact of the child with the environment, contributes to the development of cognitive activity and the formation of holistic ideas about natural processes. This is facilitated by the child's ability to concentrate for a long time on the object of observation, to highlight essential features, to compare phenomena, to establish the simplest cause-and-effect relationships and to make elementary generalizations [1].

Of particular importance is the systematic nature of observations, which ensures the gradual complication of the content and expansion of the circle of children's ideas about nature. In the process of systematic observations, children learn to notice changes in nature, establish the simplest cause-and-effect relationships, make elementary conclusions and realize the dependence of living organisms on environmental conditions. Also, in the process of systematic observations in nature, the sensory experience of preschoolers is enriched, which is the basis for the formation of more complex cognitive structures. Thanks to this, knowledge about nature ceases to be abstract and acquires personal content, which significantly increases their educational potential.

Repeated observations of the same objects in different conditions and at different times allow children to notice changes, analyze their causes and consequences, which contributes to the development of logical thinking and the formation of a holistic vision of natural processes. For example, during long-term observation of growing beans on a windowsill, children, together with a teacher, sow seeds in the soil and record changes daily: the appearance of a sprout, the unfolding of the first leaves, the growth of the stem, the appearance of flowers and fruits.

Also, during long-term observation, children compare the condition of plants that receive enough light and water with those that are in a shaded place or are watered less often. Such repeated observations allow children to draw elementary conclusions about the dependence of plant growth on light, moisture and heat, to realize the need to care for living organisms and the responsibility of a person for their condition [2, p. 80].

Another example could be seasonal observation of trees on the territory of a preschool educational institution. Throughout the year, children observe changes in their appearance: the appearance of buds in spring, the density of leaves in summer, the change of color and fall in autumn, the state of rest in winter. Comparing the results of observations, preschoolers establish a connection between seasonal changes in nature and the life processes of plants, which contributes to the formation of a holistic understanding of natural cycles. An important characteristic of observations in nature is their emotional richness. Direct contact with natural objects causes children to feel joy, surprise, interest, empathy for living beings. It is the emotional component that is the basis for the formation of a value attitude towards nature, because positive experiences associated with observations contribute to the consolidation of humane and caring forms of behavior. The child gradually begins to realize his own involvement in the natural world, to feel responsible for its preservation, which is an important component of environmental awareness. The emotional and value attitude of

a preschool child is manifested in interest in learning about the nature of his native land, his immediate surroundings, and Ukraine in general, as well as in curiosity about objects and phenomena of the planet Earth and cosmic bodies available for observation. It is manifested in emotional sensitivity to the natural environment, respectful attitude to various forms of life, and positive perception of interaction with natural objects [1].

The pedagogical effectiveness of observations largely depends on the level of their organization. Purposeful observations involve a clear definition of the goal, the selection of accessible and significant objects for children, a well-thought-out sequence of actions and appropriate pedagogical support. In this process, the teacher acts as a facilitator of cognitive activity, who not only directs the attention of children, but also creates conditions for independent discovery of knowledge. Through questions, problem situations, and encouragement to express their own opinions, the teacher helps children to understand the results of observations and turn them into stable ideas and beliefs. Observation of nature is an effective means of activating cognitive interest and developing children's curiosity. In the process of observations, they begin to ask questions about the laws of the surrounding world, the causes of natural phenomena and ways to explain them. Preschool children show interest in studying new objects, independently choose objects for observation, formulate questions and try to find answers using available methods of learning about the environment. Such research activities not only expand their understanding of nature, but also contribute to the development of analytical and critical thinking. Children learn to make assumptions, collect and analyze information, make generalizations and present the results of their own observations [3, p. 218].

The formation of natural and ecological competence by means of observations in nature is impossible without close interaction between the preschool educational institution and the family. The consistency of the requirements and approaches of educators and parents creates a single educational space in which the child has the opportunity to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in everyday life. Family walks, joint observations of nature, discussion of what they see contribute to the deepening of children's ecological ideas and the formation of sustainable models of environmentally appropriate behavior.

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