



The spiritual and moral growth of young children through collaborative sports with older individuals

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Abstract

Objective of the study was to examination of the influence of collaborative sports activities with older individuals on the personal growth of pre-schoolers and early school-age children.

Methods and structure of the study. The observation was conducted as part of the training sessions for athletes of various ages, including the charity table tennis tournament «Steel Tree-2024». The study involved 23 participants, including 14 retirees and 9 children from preschool and primary school. Four aspects were chosen as the focus of the observation: cooperation, encouragement, respect, and appreciation.

Results and conclusions. It was discovered that during joint training and competitions, preschoolers and younger school-children exhibited positive behavioral responses both towards their peers and towards the older participants, but these responses were more pronounced towards the elderly. There were no instances of age-based discrimination, which is often observed in society when it comes to the elderly. The criteria for respect were the athletic abilities and experience of the older competitors. The age factor was only evident in the interactions between the adults and the children, where the adults sought to provide moral support to the younger athletes. In response, there was not only respect, but also gratitude, which contributed to the spiritual and moral development of the children.

Keywords: *spiritual and moral development, table tennis, competitions, training, old age, preschool age, primary school age.*

Introduction. Modern scientific research, as a rule, confirms a direct connection between communication of older people with preschool and primary school children and their psychological well-being [4]. At the same time, the inverse relationship – the positive influence of older people on the development of the personality of preschoolers and primary school children has been practically not studied.

Spiritual and moral development of the individual is a multifaceted process that includes various aspects. One of these aspects is the education of a respectful attitude towards the older generation.

In some studies devoted to the problems of personality education in childhood, it is noted that preschoolers and primary school children do not have a positive attitude towards older people and do not

want to help them [1]. We believe that such a need can be actively formed in the process of mutual activity, and such activity can be physical education or sports. At the same time, modern research is focused mainly on the issue of studying the relationship between physical education and cognitive development of children of preschool age [3].

Objective of the study was to examination of the influence of collaborative sports activities with older individuals on the personal growth of pre-schoolers and early school-age children.

Methods and structure of the study. The experiment was conducted using included observation of the process of mixed training and competitions by age criterion, in which preschoolers, primary school students and elderly people participated.



The study was conducted in the tennis hall of the Yelets State University named after I.A. Bunin, where joint training of athletes of different ages, as well as table tennis competitions, take place. The main event, within the framework of which the study was conducted, was the table tennis tournament "Steel Tree-2024", which was held in June-July 2024. It recorded 90 participants of different ages, from 6 to 72 years old, including 14 pensioners and 9 preschoolers and primary school students. Moreover, the competitors were not divided into groups by gender and age: a preschooler could play with a pensioner, a man with a woman, etc.

The object of observation was the behavioral manifestations of the attitude of preschoolers and primary school students towards the elderly and vice versa. Four indicators were selected as observation elements: mutual assistance; mutual support; showing respect; expressing gratitude.

Results of the study and discussion. In the process of participant observation, aspects of the positive influence of joint training and competitions on preschoolers and primary school children were highlighted. The following data were obtained. Older athletes were more sympathetic to children than their coaches, more often performing the functions of psychological support and mitigating the difficulties in practicing table tennis techniques. Since the status of both children and older participants was formally equal during training - they were both the object of the coaches' guidance, then the preschoolers and older participants in training and competitions developed friendly relations. They were expressed by older athletes in an effort to increase the attractiveness of individual elements of practicing tennis techniques, since children perceived them as more monotonous and uninteresting. In response, children expressed gratitude in various forms for help and support and tried to reciprocate (see table).

As can be seen from the table, positive behavioral reactions were demonstrated by preschoolers and younger schoolchildren both in relation to their peers and to the elderly participants in training, but they were expressed to a greater extent in relation to the elderly. For example, such a reaction as searching for a ball that had rolled under the bench was carried out by children for elderly athletes significantly more often than for their peers. This was designated as a manifestation of respect for elders.

The same range of behavioral reactions, in which the positive attitude of children towards the elderly was recorded, was recorded during the competition. Moreover, the competitive activity itself, despite the fact that it involves tough competition, did not cause negative emotions in children. Older, more experienced participants in the competition behaved extremely correctly in the event of a victory over a preschooler or younger schoolchild. They showed respect during a handshake after the game and thanked for a wonderful game and positive emotions received. Children, receiving praise from an adult opponent, did not reduce the level of self-esteem.

Joint competitions revealed several points that ensure a decrease in the victimization of older people due to the nature of sports activities. Victimization as a quality that contributes to the transformation of a person into a victim is conditioned in the silver age, as noted in the scientific literature, by suffering from the loss of respect due to the emergence of the status of a pensioner and age discrimination [2]. In observation of the course of the competition, on the contrary, it was revealed that the very fact of participation in the tournament, regardless of age, became an object of respect. In addition, the child participants focused not on the advanced age of their opponents, but on their playing experience and sports

Quantitative indicators of children's personality elements revealed during 8 joint training sessions

Elements of positive personal development of children	Number of element manifestations during training in relation to elderly people	Number of manifestations of the element during training in relation to peers
Mutual assistance	6	3
Mutual support	7	5
Showing respect	10	5
Expressing gratitude	10	6



status (master of sports, candidate for master of sports, etc.). Thus, mixed age sports competitions contributed to the formation of respect for the individual regardless of age.

In some cases, the manifestation of legitimate respect for the athletic form of older athletes even contributed to the mobilization of the physical capabilities of older athletes. Thus, in one of the episodes of the competition, an elderly tennis player jumped over the judge's chair to publicly demonstrate his dynamic capabilities. At the same time, the child tennis players set a high tempo of the game and often quite tough, not focusing on the advanced age of the opponent, which in fact also became a form of showing sports and human respect.

Some of the elderly participants came to the competition with their grandchildren, who also took part in the tournament. In general, this contributed to both the transfer of sports experience and inter-age mutual support and assistance. Joint photography and filming of episodes of the game were elements of such support.

Conclusions. Thus, it has been proven that in the process of joint training and mixed age competitions, a positive effect is exerted on the development of the personalities of preschoolers and junior schoolchildren. They develop spiritual values associated with respect for the older generation, recognition of their merits and experience.

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