

FORMING AN APPRECIATIVE ATTITUDE TO NATURE AS A CULTURAL VALUE IN A PRE-SCHOOL GROUP OF CHILDREN OF MIXED AGE

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Abstract

The present paper analyzes scientific research studies on the familiarization of children at pre-school age with the natural environment to the effect of forming an appreciative attitude to nature as a cultural value. The basic structural components of the concept are outlined: the cognitive, the affective, and the behavioural one. Arguments from the theory and practice of education have been advanced which prove the necessity for developing a theoretical model of pedagogical intervention for the formation of an appreciative attitude to nature as a cultural value.

Key words: *nature as a cultural value, attitude and structural components, pre-school mixed-age group*

Contemporary theoretical research and the ecological approach employed as a methodological basis for the analysis and organization of the pedagogical process in the familiarization of children with the world of nature pose important issues that have not yet found their solution in the practice of education. The main concerns of this paper are therefore the reiteration of the structure and goals of the educational content as well as the renovation of the technological process employed in the introduction of children to nature in a way that would lead to new types of interaction with it. Modern ecological education theory related to the formation of children's ecological culture at pre-school age takes into account its specific characteristics and its delineation within the ethnic and the national boundaries, as well as its capacity to instill children with the values of mankind as a whole (Янакиева 1994). A variety of research studies in ethnopsychology, culture, sociology and anthropology show that individual belonging to a specific ethnic group affects one's attitude to reality as well. In this sense, each child is bound to inherit the ethno-cultural attitude to nature that goes with her/his ethnic background through its manifestations in culture and in people's lives. In practice, however, at pre-school age children's familiarization with the environment and the formation of a system of values is delimited to the sphere of social life. The introduction to nature is oriented to the acquisition of knowledge and the familiarization with facts and phenomena described by natural sciences. Based on the culturological approach, the design and realization of a pedagogical system for the mastering of knowledge and experience that allow the child to interact with the environment create prerequisites which facilitate the formation of an appreciative attitude to nature as a value during the acquisition of scientific knowledge. The incorporation of ethnic cultural material in the introduction of the child to nature and the formation of an attitude to the latter as a cultural value are likely to aid the overcoming of the utilitarian perspective on natural objects and phenomena.

The problem of attitude formation is theoretically and practically related to the solution of all issues of personality formation. The concept *attitude* lies within the purview of a variety of sciences such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and education science. The explanatory dictionary defines the term *attitude* as "an aptitude to something or somebody, a behavioural proclivity" (Тълковен речник, 2015, last accessed 03.2015), which determines behaviour by combining the social and the psychological stand in the interpretation of the concept. The dictionary of philosophy defines the concept *attitude* as "an interrelation, interaction" between different phenomena and as "a course of behaviour and perspective, a viewpoint" of the individual or the society towards the whole of the environment (Философски речник, available at: <http://rechnik.chitanka.info/w>, last accessed 03.2015). Social psychology treats the term as synonymous to *proclivity* and *aptitude*.

At this point, however, it is vital to note that pre-school age is not characterized by proclivities such as permanent orientation or aptitude for acting in an identical way in different situations. What is typical of children at that age is that in the course of their interaction with the surrounding world they have a specific attitude and orientation manifested in an expression of amazement, awe, and exhilaration at their contact with nature. Rather than handling and tackling the environment, they tend to observe it from aside and develop an interest and curiosity to the abundance of natural phenomena that surround them. It is for this reason that attitude is the psychological clue that bespeaks of the presence of a certain orientation or proclivity. As a psychological phenomenon, attitude is an expression of the orientation, the behavioural patterns towards social phenomena, material and spiritual values, labour and nature, the self and the others. As a phenomenon of the psyche, attitude expresses orientation and social behaviour. A specific attitude occurs when interests, aspirations and individual orientation affect human behaviour and determine human activities. It is manifested in a selective perception of the environment which continuously regulates activities that meet different demands. Currently, the concept *attitude* is defined as: "an objective relation, dependency or position, individual orientation to something or somebody; a phenomenon of the psyche, an active component and attribute of individual consciousness and its subjective relation with the reflected world activated in practical behaviour (Dictionary of psychology, Desev, 2001: 329). The above definition presents a unifying conception of the term covering its philosophical, social and psychological aspects.

Research in educational psychology associates personal development with the formation of an evaluative system and with the evaluative orientation, which includes the attitude and the orientation of the individual to objects and phenomena from the environment. It is this system that leads to the choice of motives, perceptual selectivity and behavioural patterns determining a person's orientation:

"What determines an individual's attitude to the phenomena that life, subjectively or objectively, abounds in is the extent to which s/he instills one or another thing with value and appreciation" (Piryov, Tsanev 1973: 330).

At pre-school age, the important feature of the attitude to nature as a value of culture is that rather than involving the development of intellectual processes, dexterity, skills and qualities, it constitutes a psychological phenomenon which reflects in a sophisticated manner the orientation of the child's personality and is represented as a stable proclivity for perception and action in terms of established evaluative standards.

Another line of research that explores the profusion of artifacts of human activity and the phenomena of nature as values or objects of evaluation is cultural studies, or, more specifically, cultural anthropology. The evaluative criteria for such objects or phenomena are intrinsic to social culture and social consciousness. They take the shape of rules and norms of behaviour and serve as points of orientation for efficient human activity. Theoretically, the rich variety of material and spiritual gains are termed *cultural values*. What lies at the basis of their cultural manifestations with different ethnic groups is the evaluative attitude people in these groups share. For centuries on end the material and the spiritual spheres have been enhanced with what matters to man and things that matter are objects of value. When considered a category of social relations, values fall into material and spiritual ones, religious, political, economic, ethic, aesthetic, and scientific. Psychologists treat them as motivating mechanisms that regulate the mental processes and serve as a prerequisite for effective psychological regulation of behavioural patterns.

The problem of the relation between value and culture is also tackled by philosophy as it concerns the very texture of culture. In his book *Culture and ethics*, A. Schweitzer (1960, part I, chapter 3, <http://www.lib.ru/CULTURE/SHWEJCER/kultura.txt>) defines culture as a combination of material achievements in the historical development of man which are instrumental in social and individual progress. This conception is akin with the modern definition of culture. According to one of the theories, the word *culture* stems from the Latin root *colere*, which was originally used to designate tilling. Using tools of labour, man influences nature, which leads to its cultivation and the creation of an artificial environment. Nature and the way man cultivates it precondition the occurrence of culture and the establishment of an evaluative attitude to nature. Evidence for this comes from the large number of traditions, norms, rites and rituals which come into being in order to pass on educative and

cognitive content as well as an aspiration to preserve the ecological balance. In other words, social production and cultural life form the foundation of an attitude to nature as a value. In time, the term *culture* undergoes a widening of meaning and is used to denote all products of man and his activity. In his book *Eros and civilization* (1991) Sigmund Freud defines culture as “the sum total of all ventures and achievements that divide man from his animal predecessors which serves two goals: to protect people from nature and to regulate human interrelations” (Wikipedia. Culture. 2015. <http://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki>, last accessed 04.2015). This definition suggests that everything man makes in the course of the evolution of his relation with nature and as a result of his activity shapes him as a social being and contributes to the development of culture. The natural, the social and the cultural aspects of man integrate to form a whole, a unity or a system of relations. This conception of culture reflects its most significant characteristics.

Other theoreticians define it as “a creative process of development” oriented towards meeting the material and the spiritual needs of the whole society (Ganev 1996: 20). Thus, the complex of spiritual and material gains created by mankind in the process of historical development in order to meet human needs constitute our cultural value system. As a component of culture, material and spiritual values are passed on from generation to generation. The philosophical understanding of culture as ‘a phenomenon of superstructure’ is what emancipates man from his natural environment; it is the world of man-made artifacts which, in its most general, incorporates the whole of the transformed world. UNESCO gives its own definition of the concept of *culture*: “*Culture is the totality of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional traits of a society or community; besides literature and arts, it encompasses the way of life, the forms of co-existence, the evaluative systems, traditions and beliefs*” (Wikipedia.Culture.2015. <http://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki>, last accessed 04.2015). This definition reveals the multiple aspects of the manifestations of human culture. The process of bringing up a child introduces her/him to culture and forms the attitude of the individual towards the environment (Shtukova 1998). Thus, this process lies upon the foundations of cultural beliefs and people’s evaluative attitude to objects and phenomena from the environment. Interwoven with the cognitive, utilitarian, aesthetic and ethic attitude to nature, the material and spiritual culture of our ethnos comes in a variety of forms and manifestations. It reflects the age-long social experience of our ethnos acquired in the process of ecologically oriented interaction with nature. If children are introduced to this experience and to this attitude to nature, they will develop a new perspective on it and will form behavioural patterns of protecting natural resources. Thus, creating an attitude to nature as a value of culture is also a matter of knowledge transfer related to nature as a source of cultural development and as an inspiration for the spiritual progress of civilization.

The cultural studies approach makes it possible to analyze and explain human behaviour on the basis of the values and rules for treating the environment intrinsic to their culture. According to E. Yanakieva (2000: 49-56), each ethnic group that occupies a specific geographic region has not only made effort to adapt to the surrounding, but has also tried to get to know the geographical features building behavioural stereotypes aimed at their preservation. These stereotypes include all norms and rules of behaviour specific to the culture of that ethnos and it is these that help instill an evaluative attitude to nature. They are also reflected in the ritual celebration system of a people. For instance, the rituals at New Year’s celebration and the establishment of a festive environment presuppose the presence of the Christmas tree as an inalienable attribute decorated with glittering toys and garlands. The origin of this tree is associated with the ritualistic tree in Indo-European culture. The fir tree came down to us from the New Year’s rites of Eastern Slavs – Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. In 1700, Peter the Great transferred it from the land of the Germanic peoples. A similar symbol in Bulgaria is the cornel ritual tree typical of the whole country. In Bulgarian spiritual culture the cornel is a symbol of health and longevity and it is part of a variety of rituals. It is the material for the decorated stick used to make New Year’s wishes for good crops, luck and wellbeing; the blooming cornel is also the tree where martenitsas are tied when the first storks arrive in spring; it is also used in the preparation of the New Year’s banitsa with lucky charms. What actually happens in kindergartens is that kids are introduced to the ritual with the decorated cornel stick only as part of their artistic-creative activities. The maple, oak, and apple trees are also highly venerated in Bulgarian culture. Bulgarian folk tales and songs tell stories of the protective forces of the maple and the walnut tree; the

pipe shepherds play while taking the herd to graze is made of maple; it was also used to make the wedding cups in which the bride and the groom were serve wine so they can live in understanding and love. On Christmas Eve oak logs glow in every fireplace. Oak was extensively used for the production of furniture. The evaluative attitude to different types of trees prevalent in our country is also reflected in our oral traditions, folk songs and in our ritual rites. The inclusion of cognitive content of these important relations is therefore a way for pre-school children to form an awareness of the traditional evaluative attitude of people to nature.

The exploration of nature as a value of culture in the framework of the cultural-and-historical approach is grounded in the works of A. Disteverg (1886), N. Ignatovskya (1987) O. Adygbay (2000), E. Yanakieva (2000). This perception of nature can be an object of scientific analysis in two aspects (Yanakieva 2000: 49-56). The first one is related to the fact that “through his activity man has created a number of horticultural plants and a variety of domesticated animals” (Yanakieva 2008: 216-230). These are part of the cognitive content of a number of educational concepts employed in the formation of a cognitive attitude to nature (Veternikova 1973; Makedonska 1979; Bonevai & Yulzai 1991; Galcheva & Galchev 1998; Gyurov 1999, 2002; Ilieva 2000) that help develop labour habits and an ethical attitude to nature through work (Makedonska 1979; Arnt et al. 1981; Koleva 1996; Yanakieva 2000, 2008). The second relates to the process of adaptation to the physico-geographical conditions and the prevalent terrain inhabited by an ethnos, which is accompanied by the establishment of ‘ecologically relevant’ stereotypes of behaviour reflected in its natural calendar, rites, traditions, lifestyle and mindset. These stereotypes encode the evaluative attitude towards representatives of the animal and plant worlds which have a symbolic meaning to the spiritual culture as well. As a result, the educational content needs to feature specific ethno-cultural, geographic, historical, language, and literary components based on ‘emotions and values’ (Yanakieva 2000: 46-56). Current applied models for children’s familiarization with the local countryside are directed to the acquisition of knowledge and are aimed at providing better orienteering in the physical and geographical characteristics of the region. The association of this knowledge with the origin and meaning of geographical names, the local legends of certain geographical areas or features can instill the pedagogical process with appreciation and emotions. Experience shows that the absence of an emotional aspect in children’s communication with nature leads to spiritual poverty. Conversely, when cognitive content is presented in an emotional manner, it guarantees the continuity of the perceptions, provokes cognitive interest, develops keenness of observation, maintains curiosity and motivates an active behaviour. The analysis of the current applied and didactic models for the familiarization of children with nature leads to the conclusion that the cognitive content is preeminently directed to their orienteering in the surrounding, to learning of facts concerning processes and phenomena and the formation of safe behaviour rather than to creating an attitude to nature as a value of culture.

Despite the detailed theoretical framework for the formation of knowledge of the cultural and historical legacy of the homeland and that of other nations, the process is viewed preeminently in relation with artistic perception and the development of artistic abilities (Ignatyev 1961; Sakulina 1965; Sheitanova 1978; Yodanova 1982). There is extensive research on the acquisition of knowledge of nature and the aspiration to its preservation though the Bulgarian folk tradition (Sheitanova 1966; Angelov 1970). Other research explores the role of didactic discussion and the introduction to literary works dedicated to nature (Klochko 1953), nature as a source of enriching children’s vocabulary (Abadzheva 1994), language development and the perception of fiction (Daskalova 1995; Ковачева 1986), fairy tales as a pedagogical means for the formation of concepts about lifestyle and social functioning (Zhechev 2010). The achievements of this theoretical framework are related to the way in which poetic genres can reveal knowledge of life, models of behaviour and habitat of certain plants or animals. For instance Ivan Vazov’s *Song of the cornflower* gives information on the flower’s habitat, its morphological features, its aesthetic characteristics. Still, what would help the child learn about the cultural value of nature in an emotional and spontaneous way is the employment of the folk genres, the proverbs and saying the nursery rhymes and puzzles, as well as the folk tales and the legends, which convey the accumulated life experience and philosophical view of nature. Prerequisites are established for the child to feel the emotional states of the folk tradition which, for centuries on end, has stimulated the acts of creativity and the evaluative attitude to nature.

As a psychological phenomenon, attitude incorporates three components:

Cognitive (including knowledge, perceptions, concepts)

Affective (reflecting the emotional and evaluative aspect)

Behavioural (expressing the potential readiness of the individual to act in a specific manner).

The formation of each one of these components requires that certain objectives be set and delineated. They orient the teacher in the employment of the relevant theories and teaching methods necessary to build an attitude to nature as a value of culture.

The cognitive component reflects children's cognitive orientation, aspirations and interests, as well as their need of information about nature. It forms the foundation of the attitude and has a direct bearing on the affective and the behavioural components. The content aspect of the cognitive component includes the knowledge structures, their systemic relations, hierarchy, depth and congruence. Voluminous pedagogical and psychological work has been dedicated to the cognitive component of attitude as a mental phenomenon instrumental in: 1) the formation of knowledge and perceptions of objects from the environment; 2) the orientation in the basic regularities and interrelations among these objects (Nikolaeva 1978; Arnie et al. 1980; Boneva & Yulzari 1991; Deryabo 1993, Vinogradova 1997, Galchev & Galcheva 1999; Yanakieva 1994, 2008).

The issue of the formation of perceptions and knowledge mediating the cognitive development by way of learning about of the physical phenomena, the inanimate objects and the climatic changes has also been extensively explored in the works of Arnt et al. (1980, Freidkin (1980), Bruner (1995), Gyurov (2002). Research into the content aspect of the pedagogical process, however, still awaits new solutions in relation to the incorporation of knowledge of the lifestyle and behaviour of different nations with regards to the climate and the local flora and fauna. For example, people around the world have different construction practices in the modeling of the space they inhabit, which leads to divergent architectural culture.

Prior research on cognitive development relates it to the observation of nature (Zalkind 1968). Much of human knowledge of plant and animal life comes from age-long experience of empirical observation. As a result plant names, for instance, are semantically motivated by the phases of blossoming, the seasons, the morphology, the scent, taste or geographical distribution. Based on the above features, the folk tradition gives them suitable names such as aspen 'трепетлика' (*Populus tremula* L.), cleavers 'лепка' (*Galium aparine* L.), St John's wort 'звъника' (*Hypericum perforatum* L.), Cross gentian 'горчивка' (*Gentiana cruciata* L.), Forking larkspur 'червенка' (*Delphinium consolida* L.), Buttercup 'жълтурче' (*Ranunculus ficaria* L.), etc. The Bulgarian language is rich in folk names of plants and animals. This results from the fact that, for a long time, Bulgarian people dealt preeminently with agriculture and cattle-breeding, interacted with nature on a daily basis and observed the flora and fauna. Thus for example for our predecessors the number of the flowers and weeds growing on the field used to be indicative for the crops during the year. A variety of plants were used as cures for different ailments, as spices. Others were related to the rites, traditions and beliefs of the past. Children's introduction to these aspects of our culture and lifestyle can facilitate the formation of their exploration skills and interests. Vinogradova (1978) inquiries into the employment of natural materials in the cognitive development of children. Very often they are offered to children in kindergartens as a ready-made product excluding them from the process of the material's collection and selection. This deprives them of the opportunity to receive direct impressions from the natural environment. An ecological field trip, however, for the collection of such materials is very likely to enrich their perception of the habitat of the different species of vegetation, their characteristics and it would also give them a chance to experience positive emotions from the activity. Psychological studies demonstrate that at pre-school age children form their perceptions on the basis of sensory cognition. Neglecting the forms of organization of education in the process of immediate interaction with nature takes away the feeling of joy, empathy and delight.

The affective component of the attitude to nature as a value of culture reflects the emotional evaluation of objects and phenomena from the environment. It shows the extent to which the child is ready to

empathize with the condition of plant and animal life, to respond emotionally to its state, to appreciate its pragmatic value and aesthetic import and to feel delight and necessity to interact with it. The child's interaction with nature serves as a catalyst to a rich variety of emotional states, it kindles inquisitiveness, observation and an awareness of people's commitments and their agricultural work. A significant part of this work is devoted to the preservation of the environment. Volumes of theoretical studies explore the role of nature in the formation of an aesthetic attitude to its manifestations, objects and phenomena (Flerina 1961), children's drawings of natural objects (Sakulina 1966), introducing children to arts as a basis of their aesthetic education (Atanasov 1975; Sheitanova, Aleksieva, Nikolova 1987: 150-156). This research tackles the issues of aesthetic education and is applied in the pedagogical interaction with children. The aesthetic qualities of natural objects have inspired artisans as well. Their deliberation in presenting each detail of the appearance of these objects in the works of applied art (embroidery, weaving, carving, etc.) reflects the rich palette of natural hues and shapes. Even a cursory look at folk costumes shows the exquisitely depicted tulips, carnations, poppies and cornflowers as well as the simplified animal images – birds perched on trees, butterflies, beetles, etc. In these products of applied art the specific features of nature acquire symbolic meanings as objects of creative imagination fostered by culture.

The familiarization of children with samples of the folk tradition in applied arts will facilitate the formation of their attitude to nature as a value of culture. A variety of studies inquire into the artistic and creative activities performed by children (Atanasova, Sheitanova 1978), the formation of an aesthetic attitude to the surrounding (Veltugina 1980: 200-208), the role of fiction in the development of an aesthetic attitude to nature (Kovacheva 1996). The relation between children's intellectual and the aesthetic upbringing in the context of creative activities has also been explored extensively (Komarova 1996). Another line of research is dedicated to the formation of an aesthetic attitude through applied art (Sheitanova 1966), the perceptions of natural objects and their depiction in real or fictional images (Legkostup, Angelova, Angelov, Stoychev 2005). All these authors investigate the formation of an appreciative attitude to nature as a value of culture but the issue has not been handled in its completeness because it requires that an association be made with the knowledge of its vital significance for the development of spiritual culture. The ethical attitude to nature is manifested in the sacral feelings to objects and phenomena reflected in the oral tradition and in applied and fine arts. For instance wishes and blessing are an important genre demonstrating the deeply ethical attitude to nature as well as people's craving for health, fertility and wellbeing. Thus children's ethical feelings and evaluative attitude to nature can be cultivated by drawing their attention to the way nature is handled in artistic folk traditions. Guseynov (1975) and on this basis Zotov (1998) defines the attitude to nature as an issue of ethics and explains the necessity to teach children how to preserve and take care of the environment and to form emotional and evaluative attitude to natural resources. Kozlova (1998; 2001) explores the familiarization with the environment as a foundation for ethical behaviour. These studies play a significant role in the design of the educational content in pre-school pedagogical interaction. Most of them, however, are predominantly oriented to the presentation of the number and types of species found in nature. The very process of children's interaction with nature is viewed as a process of contact rather than one of communication manifesting an appreciative attitude. Therefore the transformation of the concept of nature into an idea relevant and valuable to the child's personality demands the establishment of pedagogical conditions conducive to emotional experience.

The behavioural component includes the caring attitude to nature, the desire to conduct labour-like activities, to preserve the environment and keep it clean, to comply with the rules of hygiene, to develop an awareness of the usefulness of one's own efforts to care about nature as well as a perception of the negative effects of one's peers' maltreatment of the natural surroundings. There is a large pool of research on the observation and cultivation of nature (Mazurina 1967); on nature conservation activities (Gretskova 1968; Markova 1990); on the role of the latter in children's sensory and cognitive development (Boneva 1974) and the importance of the plant and animal life to the individual in the context of its observation (1979). Other studies handle the problem of the formation of perceptions of the anatomic and physiological characteristics of the human body (Vitanova 1994). The didactic models based on these explorations feature the interrelation between health and food. Yet, they lack specific goal setting practices for the acquisition of knowledge of the cultural and moral

norms for distributing the food in the family and the attitude to food as a value. These norms are depicted in the stories, legends, rhymes and other works of art as well as in holidays, rituals and rites. The ritualistic holiday system of the Bulgarian people is characterized by special requirements concerning the preparation and the laying of the table. These requirements are related to the ethical attitude to food, to the hope for good crops and thus they express the gratitude to the gifts of nature.

A line of research starting out in the 60s of the previous century deals with the employment of natural materials in children's modelling activities and its relation to their cognitive development (Nechaeva 1961; Delcheva 1985; Gaydova 2006). Some of the authors in this tradition explore construction toys and their role in the child's personal and cognitive experience (Baeva 2001), as well as the role of the interaction with nature in the acquisition of skills and abilities (Baeva 2004: 5). These studies bring to the fore the formation of a positive attitude to work activities conducted in the countryside, the development of value-oriented qualities of the personality, such as a positive attitude to work and labour, and promote diligence and caretaking. Cultural traditions, rites and rituals reflect the evaluative attitude to nature as well. The system of ritual celebrations of the Bulgarian people is largely oriented towards that attitude. In the process of their work, farmers have to select and grow plants that provide material benefits. This is the cultural flora reproduced and cultivated for centuries in our lands. Some of these plants have been introduced to our conditions from other countries, evidence for which can be found in the names signifying them, such as buckwheat 'тарарка' (*Fagopyrum esculentum* Moench.), dahlia 'стамболче' (*Dahlia variabilis* (Willd) Desf.), marigold 'турско цвете' (*Calendula arvensis* L.), mallow-leaves 'индийски коноп' (*Corchorus casularis* L.). The familiarization with this aspect of human activity will facilitate the formation of a perception of nature as a value of culture.

An infallible attribute of each Bulgarian celebration is the ritual bread. Christmas bread for instance is decorated with symbolic images of the sun, the wheat, the sheep-pen, the cattle, all of which encode people's desire for a rich crops, health, wellbeing and fertility. Learning the meaning of these symbols, children will stimulate the emotional perception and the spontaneous awareness of the importance of the relation between the natural surrounding and peoples' lives.

The existence of kindergarten groups of children of mixed age is a typical phenomenon of the current pedagogical reality. Up to now pre-school educational establishments were oriented to enrolling children of the same age into homogeneous groups. However, the conditions in mixed groups are more favourable in terms of socialization rates and pedagogical efficiency. This is mediated by the interaction among children at different levels of cognitive development characterized by different habits and abilities. The process of pedagogical interaction in heterogeneous groups buttresses the establishment of an appreciative attitude to nature: *"The existence of mixed age groups should not be treated as a negative phenomenon resulting from the necessity to ensure to required number of children, but as an important principle for effective an pedagogical process"* (Dragolova 2001: 34). One of the most important pedagogical decisions that have to be made in this situation is to organize the process of education into small subgroups of kids that interact with one another. This stimulates different forms of collaboration, communication and assistance. Working in mixed groups requires the application of differentiation and individualization in the formation of subgroups of children sharing a common goal to be achieved through the activity. Classical pedagogy has tackled the problem in detail (Montessori 1932; Decroly 1936; Froebel 1937; Chakarov 1940) and so has modern education science (Lisisna 1986; Repina & Stekina 1990). Subeva (1991) analyses mixed groups as a social phenomenon characteristic of the present day. A special line of research deals with the methodological aspect of working with children in a mixed group. (Radeva, Nikolova, Stefanova, Todorova, Dimitrova, Dancheva, Zankov, Pavlova 1989). The theoretical work on the issue, however, is related to the organization of the pedagogical process in mixed groups rather than with the favourable conditions and the opportunities for forming an appreciative attitude to nature as a value of culture. Based on the above discussion, the following section presents the conclusions about the relation *child – nature* that summarize it.

Most of the historical and ethnographic research fails to analyze the formation of an attitude to nature as a value of culture with children at pre-school age. Despite the extensive inquiries into the familiarization of the child with the natural environment, no unity of knowledge, empathy and

experience is achieved that can educate the child to treat nature adequately. The psychological and pedagogical literature, on the other hand, is mainly oriented to building children's knowledge of the variety of biological species, but not to the development of an awareness of nature and an appreciative attitude to it. There is no systematic pedagogical model for the formation of attitude as a subjective behavioural control mechanism, as a component of consciousness and a proclivity to perceiving nature as a value of culture in pre-school groups of mixed age. The cognitive content in the course books accentuates the accrual of information concerning the quantitative and the qualitative features of objects from the natural environment. The pedagogical process is dominated by reproductive methodologies and approaches, whereas children's communication with nature is limited. In practice, no adequate use is made of the opportunities offered by the mixed age of the children to form their attitude to nature. This creates an immediate necessity for favourable pedagogical conditions to be established in working with pre-school mixed age groups. Providing these conditions requires that forms of organization, based on the emotional appeal of ethnocultural, geographic, historical, linguistic, and literary components should be introduced that efficiently reflect the lifestyle and the spiritual culture of the Bulgarian ethnos. This suggests an enriched process of education and up-bringing and the inclusion of activities related to the agricultural calendar. The ubiquity, congruence and systematic character of the educational process, on the other hand, can be assured by relying on the calendar chronology of celebrations, rites and ritual reflecting the sacral dimension and the appreciative attitude to nature fostered in Bulgarian culture.

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