

The Funny and the Scary in Children's Narratives: The Cognitive Aspect[‡]

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ABSTRACT

Background. A study of the funny and the scary in children's subculture, described in an article by A.L. Romanova and E.O. Smirnova (2013), allows us to consider these phenomena as the reverse side and an integral part of the process of assimilating culture, and to see the dialectics of child development.

Objective. To analyze cognitive mechanisms for overcoming fear through children's narratives.

Sample. The study involved 57 children, aged 6–6.5, from two Moscow educational institutions.

Methods. An empirical study was conducted using the author's technique for "A Non-Scary Story": the children were asked to make up a story about a scary character, but in such a way that the story itself was not scary. The study was conducted in preschool groups with a contrasting quality of education. The quality of education was assessed by the ECERS-3 educational environment assessment scales and scales for assessing conditions for the development of creative abilities, developed and tested in the child development laboratory of MGPU (Moscow State Pedagogical University).

Results. Among the ways to cope with something scary in children's stories are to turn a scary character into a non-scary one, and to create ambivalent characters who combine the opposites of scary and funny. Dialectical thinking is the cognitive mechanism for transforming what is scary in such cases, which makes it possible to deal with opposites and to reflect situations of contradiction and development. Ambivalent characters were found twice as often in the stories by children from the group with a higher quality of education (according to Student's t-test, the differences were significant at the level of 0.05), which may indicate a connection between the quality of the educational process and a child's development.

Conclusions. When children solve the problem of overcoming fear in composing a story, they can use dialectical thinking, notably the actions of transformation and media-

[‡] This article is a modified version of a previous paper Shiyan O.A. (2022). Smeshnoe i strashnoe v det-skikh narrativakh: kognitivnyi aspekt [The Funny and the Scary in Children's Narratives: The Cognitive Aspect]. *Natsional'nyi psikhologicheskii zhurnal* [National Psychological Journal], 3(47), 44–51. <https://doi.org/10.11621/npj.2022.0306>

tion (in ambivalent images that combine opposites). We can surmise that a symbolic activity such as storytelling functions as scaffolding for the use and development of dialectical structures at the preschool age.

Keywords: Funny, scary, scary, overcoming fear, dialectical thinking, children's narratives

Highlights:

- One way for children to cope with their fears is to transform something scary into something funny: this method can be found both in children's subculture and in individual narratives created by children.
- To solve the problem of transforming the scary into the non-scary while telling a story, children can use the dialectical mental actions of transformation and mediation, creating ambivalent characters or transforming characters from scary to non-scary (kind, small, or funny)
- We can surmise that symbolic activities such as the creation of narratives function as scaffolding for the use and development of dialectical structures at the preschool age.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Актуальность. Исследование смешного и страшного в детской субкультуре, описанное в статье Е.О. Смирновой и А.Л. Романовой (2013), позволяет рассмотреть эти феномены как оборотную сторону и неотъемлемую часть процесса освоения культуры, увидеть диалектику детского развития.

Цель. Анализ когнитивных механизмов преодоления страха на материале детских нарративов.

Выборка. В исследовании принимали участие 57 детей 6–6,5 лет из двух образовательных организаций (г. Москва).

Методы. Эмпирическое исследование проводилось с помощью авторской методики «Нестрашная история»: детям предлагалось сочинить историю про страшного персонажа, но так, чтобы сама история была нестрашной. Исследование проводилось в дошкольных группах, контрастных по параметру качества образования. Качество образования оценивалось с помощью шкал оценки образовательной среды ECERS-3 и шкал оценки условий для развития творческих способностей, разработанных и апробированных в лаборатории развития ребенка МГПУ.

Результаты исследования. Среди способов преодоления страшного в детских историях можно отметить такие, как превращение страшного персонажа в нестрашного и создание амбивалентных персонажей, сочетающих в себе противоположности страшного и смешного. Когнитивным механизмом преобразования страшного в этих случаях является диалектическое мышление, позволяющее оперировать противоположностями и отражать ситуации противоречия и развития. В историях детей из группы с более высоким качеством образования амбивалентные персонажи встречались в два раза чаще (по t-критерию Стьюдента различия значимы на уровне 0,05), что может говорить о связи качества образовательного процесса и детского развития.

Выводы. Решая задачу преодоления страха при сочинении истории, дети могут использовать диалектическое мышление — в частности, действия превращения и опосредствования (в амбивалентных, совмещающих в себе противоположности образах). Можно предположить, что такая символическая деятельность, как создание историй, выступает как скаффолдинг для применения и развития диалектических структур в дошкольном возрасте.

Ключевые слова: Смешное, страшное, преодоление страха, диалектическое мышление, детские нарративы

Ключевые положения:

- Один из способов совладения со своими страхами для ребенка — преобразование страшного в смешное: этот способ можно обнаружить как в детской субкультуре, так и в индивидуальных нарративах, создаваемых детьми.
- Решая в ходе сочинения историй задачу преобразования страшного в нестрашное, дети могут использовать диалектические умственные действия превращения и опосредствование, которые проявляются в создании амбивалентных персонажей или в превращениях персонажей из страшных в нестрашных (добрых, маленьких или смешных).
- Можно предположить, что такая символическая деятельность, как создание нарративов, выступает в качестве скаффолдинга для применения и развития диалектических структур в дошкольном возрасте.

RESUMEN

Introducción. Un estudio de lo divertido y lo aterrador en la subcultura infantil, descrito en un artículo de A.L. Romanova y E.O. Smirnova (2013), nos permite considerar estos fenómenos como parte reversa e integral del proceso de asimilación de la cultura, y ver la dialéctica del desarrollo infantil.

Objetivo. Analizar los mecanismos cognitivos de superación del miedo a través de las narrativas infantiles.

Muestra. El estudio involucró a 57 niños de 6 a 6,5 años de dos instituciones educativas de Moscú.

Diseño. Se realizó un estudio empírico utilizando la técnica del autor “Una historia sin miedo”: se pidió a los niños que inventaran una historia sobre un personaje que da miedo, pero de tal manera que la historia en sí no lo diera. El estudio se realizó en grupos preescolares con una calidad del ambiente educativo contrastante. La calidad de la educación se evaluó mediante las escalas de evaluación del entorno educativo ECERS-3 y escalas para evaluar las condiciones para el desarrollo de habilidades creativas desarrolladas y aprobadas en el laboratorio de desarrollo infantil de la Universidad Estatal Pedagógica de Moscú.

Resultados. Entre las formas de lidiar con algo aterrador en los cuentos infantiles están convertir un personaje aterrador en uno que no atemorice y crear personajes ambivalentes que combinen las calidades opuestas de aterrador y divertido. El pensamiento dialéctico es el mecanismo cognitivo de transformación de lo que da miedo en tales casos, lo que permite lidiar con los opuestos y reflejar situaciones de contradicción y desarrollo. Los personajes ambivalentes se encontraron dos veces más en los cuentos de los niños del grupo con mayor calidad del ambiente educativo (según la prueba t de Student, las diferencias fueron significativas al nivel de 0,05), lo que puede indicar una conexión entre la calidad del proceso educativo y el desarrollo del niño.

Conclusión. Cuando los niños resuelven el problema de superar el miedo al componer una historia, pueden utilizar el pensamiento dialéctico, en particular, las acciones de transformación y mediación (en imágenes ambivalentes que combinan los opuestos). Podemos suponer que una actividad simbólica como narración funciona como un andamiaje para el uso y desarrollo de estructuras dialécticas en la edad preescolar.

Palabras clave: Divertido, aterrador, superación del miedo, pensamiento dialéctico, narrativas infantiles

Destacados:

- Una forma para que los niños pueden hacer frente a sus miedos es transformar algo aterrador en algo divertido: este método se puede encontrar tanto en la subcultura infantil como en las narrativas individuales creadas por los niños.
- Para resolver el problema de transformar lo que da miedo en lo que no da miedo al contar una historia, los niños pueden usar acciones mentales dialécticas de transformación y mediación, creando personajes ambivalentes o transformando personajes de miedo en aquellos que no dan miedo (amables, pequeños o divertido)
- Podemos suponer que actividades simbólicas como la creación de narrativas funcionan como andamiaje para el uso y desarrollo de estructuras dialécticas en la edad preescolar.

RESUME

Origines. Une étude du drôle et de l'effrayant dans la sous-culture des enfants, décrite dans un article de A.L. Romanova et E.O. Smirnova (2013), permet de considérer ces phénomènes comme l'envers et partie intégrante du processus d'exploration de la culture, et de retrouver la dialectique du développement de l'enfant.

Objectif. Analyse des mécanismes cognitifs pour surmonter la peur sur la base des narrations d'enfants.

Echantillon. L'étude a porté sur 57 enfants, âgés de 6 à 6,5 ans, de deux établissements d'enseignement de Moscou.

Méthodes. Une étude empirique a été réalisée en utilisant la technique de l'auteur « Histoire non terrible » : les enfants ont été invités à composer une histoire sur un personnage effrayant, mais de manière que l'histoire elle-même ne soit pas terrible. L'étude a été menée auprès de groupes préscolaires contrastés en termes de qualité de l'éducation. La qualité de l'éducation a été évaluée à l'aide des échelles d'évaluation de l'environnement éducatif l'ÉÉEP-R 3ème édition et des échelles d'évaluation des conditions de développement des capacités créatives, développées et testées dans le laboratoire de développement de l'enfant de l'Université pédagogique d'État de Moscou.

Résultats. Parmi les moyens de surmonter l'effrayant dans les histoires pour enfants, on peut citer par exemple transformer un personnage effrayant en un personnage non effrayant et créer des personnages ambivalents qui combinent les contraires de l'effrayant et du drôle. Le mécanisme cognitif de transformation du terrible dans ces cas est la pensée dialectique, qui permet d'opérer avec des contraires et de refléter des situations de contradiction et de développement. Dans les récits des enfants du groupe ayant une meilleure qualité d'éducation, on retrouve deux fois plus souvent des personnages ambivalents (selon le test de Student, les différences sont significatives au seuil de 0,05), ce qui peut indiquer un lien entre la qualité du processus éducatif et le développement de l'enfant.

Conclusion. Lors de la résolution du problème de surmonter la peur en cas de la composition d'une histoire, les enfants peuvent utiliser la pensée dialectique - en particulier les actions de transformation et de médiation (dans des images ambivalentes qui combinent les contraires en elles-mêmes). On peut supposer que des activités symboliques telles que la création d'histoires agissent comme un échafaudage (Lev Vygotski) pour l'application et le développement de structures dialectiques à l'âge préscolaire.

Mots-clés: Drôle, effrayant, surmonter la peur, pensée dialectique, narration des enfants

Points principaux:

- Une façon pour un enfant de faire face à ses peurs est de transformer l'effrayant en drôle : cette méthode peut être trouvée à la fois dans la sous-culture des enfants et dans les récits individuels créés par les enfants.
- En résolvant la tâche de transformer l'effrayant en non-effrayant pendant la narration, les enfants peuvent utiliser les actions mentales dialectiques de transformation et de médiation, qui se manifestent dans la création de personnages ambivalents ou dans la transformation de personnages effrayants en non-effrayants (gentil, petit ou drôle).
- On peut supposer qu'une activité symbolique telle que la création des narrations agit comme un échafaudage pour l'application et le développement de structures dialectiques à l'âge préscolaire.

Introduction

In the cultural-historical approach in psychology, the idea of development refers not just to the emergence of new qualities as the child assimilates ideal cultural forms, but also to the transformation of the initial natural forms of action. As L.S. Vygotsky pointed out, “cultural development does not create anything new above and beyond what exists as a possibility in the natural development of the child’s behavior” (Vygotsky, 1991, p. 8). This is becoming all the more important, the more frequently researchers in recent decades discover unique and intrinsically valuable features in children’s activities. In research of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the child is not only viewed as incompetent, not up to the adult level in development of logic, morality, etc. (as with J. Piaget, who did a great deal to understand qualitative differences in childhood, but also emphasized the child’s incompetence compared to adults), but also as possessing characteristics in which children are not inferior to adults, but sometimes even surpass them. This refers notably to the ability to play, the amazing intensity of children’s hypotheses (Poddyakov, 2009; Shcherbakova, 2009), their ability to solve dialectical problems, an ability which they share with great scientists (Veraksa, 2021), and their spontaneous verbal creativity. Z.N. Novlianskaia writes of “the mysterious ability of the small child to spontaneously create full-fledged works of art at moments of strong emotions” (Novlianskaia, 2010, p. 11]. However, researchers’ focus on the development of ideal forms means that spontaneous manifestations of the potentials of this age are extremely rarely given due attention. A notable exception is M. Osorina, whose book *The Secret World of Children in the Space of the Adult World* deserves great interest.

***The Funny and the Scary in Children’s Subculture:
Research of E.O. Smirnova***

The work of E.O. Smirnova, written up jointly with A.L. Romanova (Romanova & Smirnova, 2013), is extremely valuable in this situation. This study of the phenomena of the funny and the scary in children’s subculture allows us to analyze these most interesting phenomena, their role in children’s growing up. The article makes a number of essential points.

First, following M.M. Bakhtin, the authors consider laughter as a way of assimilating the social norm by playing with it and debunking it (Bakhtin, 1990). We can talk about children's understanding of what makes something funny from the moment when they perform an action that differs from the norm, and understand that they are doing so. The authors note that the laughter and joy that accompany such pranks shows the child's ability to take a meta-position in relation to the action, to "turn it over," and therefore to show self-regulation, rather than automatism. And this is precisely the point in the assimilation of the norm at which its true appropriation becomes possible.

Second, children's fear is seen as something not only negative, but also important for child's development. The authors note the curious phenomenon of a positive attitude toward fear, when children do not avoid scary situations, but clearly want to experience them (recall the remark of the hero of the well-known [Soviet — translator's note] cartoon, "Let's be afraid together"). The article's interpretation of this phenomenon is extremely interesting: it is considered as evidence that for a child, what is scary "expands the boundaries of the possible, the understandable," makes it possible "to go beyond one's own limits." "The conflict between the desire to 'preserve the old self' and 'to attain a new self,' which implies fear and the overcoming of it, is in many ways the basis of self-development," the authors note (Romanova & Smirnova, 2013, p. 82).

Third, the authors point to the connection between these two outwardly opposite phenomena: laughter and fear. They note the role of laughter in overcoming fear, pointing to the well-known phenomenon of "scary stories" in children's subculture.

Fourth, they write that as children mature, their ability to understand works of art that play with the transformation of the scary into the funny, to understand humor and irony, reflects the formation of the very position of "outsideness" that marks the formation of intentionality. "Immersion in what is scary and detachment from one's fear reflect the ontogenetic dynamic of children's experiences," the authors write (Romanova & Smirnova, 2013, p. 83).

The Dialectical Method in Analyzing the Funny and the Scary

The dialectical nature of these phenomena attracts our attention: they all record transitions of opposites, assimilation of the norm through its reversal. This is no coincidence: the dialectic is the most appropriate method for understanding and describing developmental processes, making it possible not only to identify a phenomenon, but also to discover its role in the formation of the psyche. The importance of the dialectical method for understanding developmental processes is indicated by N.E. Veraksa, analyzing the method of L.S. Vygotsky (Veraksa, 2021). Indeed, key psychological concepts of the 20th century describe development as a process determined by the opposition and interaction of the conscious and the unconscious, assimilation and accommodation, the natural and the cultural, affect and intellect. The dialectical method obviously becomes necessary when we need to explain transitions from what exists to what is possible.

In Smirnova and Romanova's study, identifying the dialectic of the funny and the scary in children's subculture allows us to address the role of these phenomena

in child development and, in particular, how it would be possible, with the help of toys — a kind of cultural tool — to make “laughter a tool of self-development”.

The Relationship between Affect and Intellect in Study of the Phenomenon of the “Funny”

Analysis of the cognitive mechanisms of the funny and the scary may be a productive way of exploring these phenomena. The problem of the relationship between affect and intellect is a central one in contemporary psychology. There are two approaches to the study of this relationship. The first approach was originally proclaimed by Jean Piaget, who considered the intellect to be a universal mechanism of adaptation, the development of which determines the development of other domains, including the symbolic and moral. The second approach is analysis of the role of affective processes in cognitive development: notably the research of V.K. Zaretskii on the role of a feeling of self-efficacy in cognitive development (Zaretskii, 2016).

In our study, we asked what the cognitive mechanisms are for overcoming fear and generating humor in preschoolers. We note two studies of interest in this context. O.V. Shcherbakova and M.V. Osorina (2009) studied the humorous component in intelligence tests, notably the Wexler test. The authors believe that it is the whimsical, “carnavalesque,” inversion of a situation and the violation of expectations that creates intellectual complexity and makes funny stories a convenient tool for assessing intelligence. T.V. Artemeva (2021) raised the question of what kind of cognitive mechanisms underlie the understanding and production of something funny, and she succeeded in showing that these mechanisms are not those of formal intelligence, but of dialectical thinking.

Continuing the study of the funny and the scary in children’s subculture, we analyzed the cognitive mechanisms of overcoming fear in children’s narratives. Children’s stories are both the content through which children’s subculture is refreshed, and also the result of the child’s “appropriation” of the subculture, its transformation into a means of spontaneous individual action.

We know that at preschool age, play, drawing, and storytelling exist syncretically: in play that is orchestrated by a child, the child, while drawing a picture, simultaneously plays a game with a narrative plot. However, by the middle of preschool age, storytelling begins to stand out as an independent activity. Z.N. Novlianskaia considers one marker of the separation of artistic creativity from play to be such story endings, acceptable in children’s subculture, as in the goofy rhyme “*Konets. A kto slushal ogurets*” [literally: “The end. And who listened to me is a cucumber”] She notes that “the assumption that there is an ending” shows an already developed feeling, first, of one’s own creative will, and, second, of the creation of a form, formalizing a fluid and infinite content, introducing it into certain boundaries, frames” (Novlianskaia, 2010, p. 23).

Children’s narratives, along with play and drawing, may be classified as symbolic activities, the primary purpose of which Piaget sees in the assimilation of reality: by composing a story, children comprehend the events taking place, express their attitude toward them. That said, as Vygotsky noted, play is not a reproduction of somebody’s experience, but it’s creative processing — in play the child creates a self-

regulated design (Vygotsky, 1966). That is why it is justified to consider narratives not just as a reflection of children's experiences, but also as a way to transform them. Elly Singer writes that stories provide a window into children's inner worlds (Singer & de Haan, 2019). Traditionally, in studies of narratives, the focus is on the content of children's stories, reflecting their experiences, whereas our task was to analyze not the content of the stories, but the cognitive structures that children use when creating their narratives.

N.E. Veraksa and O.M. Dyachenko identify three types of tasks that can be addressed in a given situation: tasks for understanding normative relations, tasks for transforming the situation, and tasks of meaning (expressing one's attitudes toward the situation by symbolization of reality) (Veraksa & Dyachenko, 1996). We surmised that transformations can be achieved especially when solving symbolic problems, where children discover a situation of uncertainty and the need to express their attitude toward it; therefore, it was important for us to construct a "meaning task," which also allows for the transformation of its content.

Methods

The study used the "Non-Scary Story" diagnostic technique (Shiyan & Baranova, 2022), which is a tool for assessing creative thinking and imagination based on children's narratives. A problematic situation was given as a prompt to create a narrative ("fairy tale").

Participants

The study involved 57 children aged 6-6.5, from two educational institutions. These kindergartens differed significantly in the quality of their educational environment (as previously assessed using the ECERS-3 scales and scales for assessing conditions for the development of creative abilities, developed and tested in the child development laboratory of Moscow City Pedagogical University) (Belolutskaia, Vorob'eva, Shiyan, Zadadev & Shiyan, 2021). We also note that in the kindergarten with better environment, there is a practice of writing down the children's narratives.

Procedure

The task was: "Think up a story about someone scary, but so that the story itself turns out not to be scary." The tasks were presented individually. The experimenter created a trusting situation in which the child, after a motivating conversation, willingly agreed to draw and dictate a story to the adult.

Results

We analyzed 57 stories, looking for productive solutions, including dialectical constructions. In 36.6% of the stories, the problem was not solved: the story turned out to be either just scary, or just "cute" or funny. But in some stories, the children made several "moves" at once (for example, both transformation and ambivalence), so we

calculated the share of solutions based on the total number of such “moves,” not from the total number of stories. In 16.6% of cases, the children made up heroic stories, where the scary character was defeated. In 39.9% of cases, there were ambivalent characters in the stories, while in 18.3% of cases the ambivalence was shown by a combination of scary and funny (in other cases, the ambivalence was between scary and kind or scary and small). In 6.6% of the stories, the characters went from being scary to non-scary. In the stories by children from the group with a higher quality of education (including the practice of writing down the children’s stories), ambivalent characters were twice as likely to occur (51% of all solutions in the group with superior education versus 27% in the group with inferior education).

Discussion

First of all, we note that not all the children were able to cope with the task of writing a non-scary story about a scary character. As one boy said, “If it’s scary, there’s nothing I can do about it.” In such cases, the story either remained scary or turned out to be funny or playful — 36.6% were of that type, about a third. This indicates that a transformation of this sort is indeed difficult for children.

In those cases in which the problem was solved, we identified the following methods of action: first is a victory that the hero wins over a scary character; second is a transformation of the scariest character into a kind or safe one during the course of the story; and third, the appearance of ambivalent characters who combine the opposite characteristics. We interpret the second and third variants — transformation of characters from scary to non-scary and the appearance of ambivalent heroes — as manifestations of dialectical thinking, a special form of thinking that makes it possible to operate with opposites and resolve contradictory situations (Besseches, 2018; Veraksa, 2021).

Let us consider in greater detail how dialectical solutions of the problem manifest themselves. The category of “scary” itself is syncretic for children, and therefore transformations into “non-scary” can proceed along different lines: ambivalent characters may be both scary and funny, or scary and weak, or scary and beautiful, or scary and kind. In all cases, we can speak of polarities, but for different reasons. To turn a scary character into a weak one, children use diminutive suffixes that identify weakness (“a mini-monster who liked ice cream” or “a toothless vampire”). A character may be scary, yet do good deeds. Funny situations occur where something happens to a scary hero: he falls down, falls through the earth, hiccups, a bucket of garbage is dumped on him, etc.

One example is the story of a cactus whose prickly appearance is at odds with its kind actions. “*There was a cactus. It was a bit scary. And it had a little flower. And that made it beautiful. But one day a cat pricked itself on its thorns. But the cactus used its flower to pull out the thorns. And one day it was transplanted into the forest. And it was just better for it there. The end!*” Creating a character whose appearance contradicts its actions is a typical way of constructing an artistic image.

Here is an example of a story that involves the second and third ways of creating a “non-scary” story about a “scary” character: both the transformation of a scary one

into a non-scary one, and the creation of an ambivalent character. “*The Kind Tower. This is a kind tower. And it turned all the monsters into kind and beautiful people. And once a bad girl monster came up to this tower. She didn't know it was a kind tower. And the tower turned her into a good girl. And she began to help the kind tower, to protect it. And one day a bad mini-monster came up to the tower. It was all black and purple. But then the kind tower turned him into a donkey-cat. And so they began to protect the kind tower. The end!*” Thus, the author creates a contradictory creature by using a diminutive suffix: “bad mini-monster” is an “oxymoronic” character, which, moreover, turns into an absurd creature, a “donkey-cat.” The author’s solution in this story is characteristic: enemies are not defeated, but are transformed into kind creatures. In some stories, the transformation leads to the appearance of an ambivalent character: for example, “the vampire turns into a kind vampire who protects people, and bites those who are evil.”

Conclusion

Our data allows us to draw the following conclusions. First, the transformation of something scary when telling a story is a difficult task that children by no means always manage to achieve. Second, when solving a problem in a symbolic field like storytelling, children can use dialectical thinking, notably the actions of transformation and mediation (in ambivalent images that combine opposites). The question arises of how the task of symbolization (that is, expressing one’s attitude and conceptualizing reality) is related to dialectical cognitive structures — and more broadly, the connection between symbolic and sign mediation. G.A. Tsukerman, analyzing the importance of narrative play for the learning activity of first-graders, notes that “educational-conceptual games are the support, the ‘scaffolding’ which the adult constructs around the future edifice of the conceptual system” (Tsukerman, 2016). In that way, play introduces meanings and relationships that establish a context for solving problems. In our case, dialectical solutions appeared in the decision to create symbolic images, overcoming the emotion of fear. We can assume that such symbolic activity as storytelling acts as scaffolding (J. Bruner) for the use and development of dialectical structures at preschool age. This thesis needs further study, although there is data that favors it. A number of studies have shown that reflection of a situation through a symbol allows children not only to express their attitude and to conceptualize reality, but also to better understand it (Loizou, 2005; Veraksa, 2012).

Third, one way to overcome something is scary is to create ambivalent characters that combine the scary and the funny. The relatively small proportion of such characters (18.3%) indicates the significant cognitive complexity of such a solution. Using laughter as a weapon against fear is a very important cultural strategy, as shown by E.O. Smirnova’s and A.L. Romanova’s study of children’s subculture. Let us recall a remarkable episode from the book by J. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, in which the children were tasked with pacifying a scary creature by ridicule, which it was not so easy for them to do. We can assume that this is exactly the type of case where affect needs cognitive resources for its development and transformation.

The fact that in the group with a higher quality of education — where, in particular, there is a tradition of writing down the children’s stories — ambivalent characters are significantly more common in the children’s narratives, suggests that the ability to transform scary images into non-scary ones depends on the educational situation.

We note that a culture of humor is rarely encouraged in preschool education. Modern educational practice largely ignores children’s laughter: we even venture to say that it is deliberately and artificially serious. This is partly because laughter itself is a complex, ambiguous phenomenon. S.S. Averintsev pointed to two modes of laughter, the “liberating” and the “mocking” (Averintsev, 1992). The avoidance of laughter in school may be associated with its “carnavalesque” character, which conveys a kind of protest, which, precisely for this reason, may seem inappropriately contagious in a children’s group. Yet “liberating” laughter, which allows one to “set aside” reality and test the boundaries of the social norm, can become an important developmental tool (Lucas, Bridgers, Griffiths, & Gopnik, 2014); however, as we see, the children must also have the cognitive resources for this. It may be that if “the culture of laughter” becomes part of the educational process, it will be important both for the emotional development of children and for the development of their dialectical thinking.

The idea developed in the article by Smirnova and Romanova, of considering the phenomena of the funny and scary in children’s subculture not as marginal behavioral, but as the reverse side and an integral part of the process of assimilating culture, allows us to see their role in children’s development. The question of dialectical structures as a cognitive mechanism for overcoming something scary and creating something funny leads to a search for new ways to amplify the development of preschoolers.

Limitations

The data was obtained from a small, unrepresentative sample. One of the reasons for this was the difficulty in conducting research in kindergartens in 2020–2021, in connection with the pandemic.

Ethics Statement

The study was performed in accordance with the EECERA code of ethics.

Informed Consent from the Participants’ Legal Guardians

Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants’ legal guardian/next of kin.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Original manuscript received August 21, 2022
Revised manuscript accepted October 12, 2022
First published online December 15, 2022

To cite this article: Shiyan, O.A. (2022). The Funny and the Scary in Children's Narratives: The Cognitive Aspect. *New Ideas in Child and Educational Psychology*, 2(3–4), 38–50. DOI: 10.11621/nicep.2022.0303