

Content renewal of school social and liberal arts disciplines as a factor of personal educational growth

Renovación del contenido de las disciplinas de las artes sociales y liberales de la escuela como factor de crecimiento educativo personal

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ABSTRACT:

The paper considers various approaches to solving the problem of ethical and moral education, which have developed both in the practice of Russian schools and in international experience. The authors pay particular attention to the analysis of the growing influence of the information environment, as well as the active virtual communication characteristic of adolescents for the formation of their moral values and ideals. The paper gives a description of the final essay on literature, which actualizes the task of combining literature and social studies courses in the school, as it requires the graduate to formulate his position on the proposed moral and ethical problem. The educational tasks aimed at transfer and creative use of the knowledge received at studying of other subject are offered.

Keywords: moral upbringing, moral values, modern information environment, humanitarian education, educational literature, intersubject communications, final essay.

RESUMEN:

En el documento se examinan diversos enfoques para resolver el problema de la educación ética y moral, que se han desarrollado tanto en la práctica de las escuelas rusas como en la experiencia internacional. Los autores prestan especial atención al análisis de la creciente influencia del entorno de la información, así como a la activa comunicación virtual característica de los adolescentes para la formación de sus valores morales e ideales. El documento da una descripción del ensayo final sobre literatura, que actualiza la tarea de combinar los cursos de literatura y estudios sociales en la escuela, ya que requiere que el egresado formule su posición sobre el problema moral y ético propuesto. Las tareas educativas dirigidas a la transferencia y al uso creativo del conocimiento recibido en estudiar del otro tema se ofrecen.

Palabras clave: crianza moral, valores morales, ambiente de información moderno, educación humanitaria, literatura educativa, comunicaciones intertemáticas, ensayo final.

1. Introduction

We will explore one of the personal goals of school education, which is stated in the Government Standard for Education – development and nurturing of moral thinking and conscience behavior. We will analyze the role of a number of school disciplines in this regard.

The goal of inculcation of moral values through education is not new for the theory of pedagogy and teaching methods and practice. According to conducted research (Skoroumova and Margun 2016) international practice distinguishes two approaches to values education and nurturing of ethical behavior. First approach equates values education to religious education. Ethical principles and moral values are taught at the classes of religious studies. This approach, however, has a number of critics (Valk 2007). Followers of the second approach stipulate historical nature of moral norms with many of them being universally humane. In this context, the norms are intertwined with generally approved societal values, whereas ethical nurturing is viewed as a methodical cultivation of certain character traits which comply with demands and expectations of a society in a given historical period (Moral potential of the society: reproduction preservation and intensification issues, 2013). The same value-cognitive approach is being followed by the majority of educators in this country. That said, however, with the introduction of the school course “Basics of religious culture and secular ethics”, the link between moral and religion is more pronounced now than several years ago.

It is well-known that one of the main obstacles for a student to accept moral values inculcated by an educator is their incompatibility with the behavior of “significant others”. If reality provides examples that a person can achieve high social status and prosperity by defying and even openly violating social norms, an adolescent will most likely turn a deaf ear to any ethical nurturing.

Now, traditional moral values are undergoing endurance testing not only through external environment but via virtual reality (New research on youth values). Recent studies of views and moral values, adopted by rising generation, show that this is virtual reality that forms new trends in internalization of role models. The majority of young people mostly follow recommendations from this information space. Alongside this, the internet and mass media are not necessarily always providing the best examples of mass culture. New information space has in abundance examples of material prosperity of an individual who violated moral prohibitions. Kindness, care about others, trust are viewed in this respect as a demonstration of personal weakness. In 1990s the release of television-series “Brigada” (Squad) gave birth to mass culture products, which romanticize violence, cruelty with the notions of “justice”, “mutual help”, “compassion” allowed to be only displayed towards the so-called “inner-circle”. School education faces even more complex situation. The already mentioned research demonstrates that adolescents rarely follow authoritative examples and do not show respect for elders, including teachers.

As the result, contemporary trends not only make the problem of ethical nurturing acute, but demand new approaches to their solution.

2. Methodology and methods of research

The task of values education is stipulated in legislation pertaining to school education. “The Education Law of the Russian Federation” states that school education is aimed, among other things, at “formation and development of ethical values” (Federal Law “On Education in the Russian Federation”. Article. 66). Federal Standard for Education (FGOS in Russian) regards moral consciousness and behavior as one of the most important goals of school education. The Concept of Ethical Nurturing outlines the following goals: “reinforcement of moral values, based upon freedom, will and national spiritual traditions, internal personal guidelines to act conscientiously; formation of set of moral values as the result of self-perceived necessity to behave in accordance with the socially accepted notions of right and wrong, of what is proper

and what is unjust; nurturing of conscience as moral personal self-actualization, ability to express personal ethical responsibilities, perform moral self-control, demand self-fulfillment of ethical norms, be able to provide moral assessment of personal behavior and acts of others” (The concept of spiritual and moral development and upbringing of the personality of a citizen of Russia).

2.1. Capacity of school disciplines

School humanitarian and social disciplines include elements pertaining to values education. Quest for moral answers is typical for many characters of domestic classical works, studied at literature classes. Instrumental kit of literature textbooks contains tasks, presupposing analysis of how characters act, what moral assessment the author gives to these acts, for example: *Read a novel by M.A. Sholokhov “The Fate of a Man” and perform the following tasks. What demonstrates Sokolov’s true heroism? How many times did Andrey Sokolov have to make moral choices? How did these situations help display his personality? Why didn’t Andrey Sokolov get hardened, while battling with adversity?* (Erohina 2016). These tasks let students assess moral dilemma, displayed in the work “from outside”, judge characters’ acts from the point of view of abstract moral ideal, which in many cases doesn’t form the basis of moral consciousness of students themselves. Social science textbook displays complexity of moral dilemma with the help of an episode from the Soviet movie “Roadside Check” describing one of the events during the period of the World War II, when Soviet partisans mined railway bridge, awaiting a Nazi train, loaded with weapons. At the same moment when the enemy train enters the bridge, a barge with the Soviet war prisoners floats under (Bogoljubov and Lazebnikova 2014).

Courses of history give examples of people who lived in different ages, but whose acts can serve as examples of moral service to others. Ethical categories, principles, ideals are studied as a separate subject in the social science course (Lazebnikova and Koval 2016). Introduction of the course “Basics of religious cultures and secular ethics” which is centered upon moral subjects adds new emphasis to the problematic of emergence of moral norms and their role in the life of a man and a society.

At the same time, as some of the pedagogical observations and analysis of educational and methodological literature demonstrate, moral and ethics textbook coverage has some omissions and deficiencies. Moreover, instruments used during class work in many cases do not fully take into account this range of problems.

In some cases, textbooks follow declarative and didactic approach to the exposition of this range of problems. Whereas in elementary school it is possible to limit the scope of presentation to declaration of moral norms, supported by examples, the approach becomes inefficient for adolescents. One of the respondents to the above-mentioned survey stated: “We were taught that “must not” has a literal meaning. But they (rising generation) ask: “why must we not?” They are not afraid to argue, ask questions.” Schoolchildren, especially high-schoolers, need clarifications of moral values and arguments in “favour of what is right”.

There is also little use in extensive citations of thinkers and philosophers without deeper analysis of what they meant. Now schoolchildren are less prone to take moral norms for granted, even when expressed by credible sources.

Textbooks, in particular on social science, on many occasions lack tasks, suggesting to make a choice under difficult moral conditions, when there is not just a choice between what is right or wrong, but when a student needs to choose between positive values (justice – kindness) or applying “lesser evil” selection. The problem of motivation in respect to conscience behavior deserves additional special attention.

It is important to extend the structure of a lesson to include educational tasks (problem solving, real cases, etc), which give a student an opportunity to live through different situations, to show emotional feedback to them, to express sympathy to other participants, to frame their

own ethical assessment of their actions. For the lessons of social science it is important that the situations, requiring moral choice correlate to realities of life, be contextual for high-schoolers. However, we think that the main deficiency is that there is very little interrelation among school disciplines with regards to moral and ethical problem range. We will explore potential solution to this problem by way of an example of such interrelation between the courses of literature and social science.

2.2. Literature and social science: interdisciplinary relation

An object of study in school literature course is a work of fiction viewed in the context of its author's creative, spiritual and philosophical quest as well as in the broad historical and cultural context. Traditionally, curriculum includes literary works of Russian and international origin, with more than a half Russian classical works, which offer colossal ethical and spiritual potential.

3. Results

In accordance with the main methodological principles of domestic teaching of literature, it is assumed that the skills of reading, analysis and interpretation of literary works are based on references towards emotional, intellectual, ethical and spiritual life of a student. This, in turn, forms his/her aesthetic and ethical experiences, immersion into moral and spiritual ideals propelled in domestic and foreign literature (Erokhina 2015). However, practically nowadays school faces a problem: the expected mission of fiction works, studied at literature classes, is almost not realized. As the result ethical self-actualization of a student-reader is not being properly formed.

It is very important to give a more precise definition to the goals of literary education in school. Development of Preliminary Basic School Program (in compliance with the State Standard) is aimed to this task. The document states that it is important to shift the focus from a literary work, studied in isolation from a student, towards her personality as a reader. The task of "formation of reading perception habits and related intellectual independence..." is proclaimed to be the main goal of literary education in school. Study result alienated from personality is not considered an educational result." It is stated as an objective to "shape students' attitude towards literary works of fiction as possessing personal and social value and as a tool for self-actualization and self-development" (Approximate basic educational program of secondary general education).

2014/2015 academic year showed an introduction of final essay – prerequisite for an admission to state final evaluation and a form of personal achievement for university applicants.

Final (December) literature essay, on the one hand, revives old-time tradition of essay completion by graduates. There were always the-so-called "free topics" among essay tasks. Often they were based on a quote or an aphoristic assertion about a philosophical or ethical subject. A student had to express his/her attitude towards this assertion with the help of self-selected literary works. Some examples of such topics could be: "It is not difficult to hold the judgement of others in contempt; it is impossible to hold one's own judgement in contempt" (Pushkin) or "True love cleanses and exalts every man, completely transforming him" (Chernyshevsky). On the other hand, current approach to graduation essay makes new changes to the traditional treatment: this is no longer a literature essay, but an over-disciplinary literature-centric work. It means that a student has to demonstrate his/her understanding of an ethical and philosophical problem stated in the topic of the essay, articulate her attitude, convince the reader in its validity with the help of any necessary arguments, but with at least one reference to a literary work (domestic or international works of fiction, journalistic, epistolary or memoir texts, works of folklore). We need to emphasize: literature-centric nature of an essay is a tribute to Russian cultural tradition. As was rightly stated by Lev Annensky, we are "the people of books", "... someone desires to be the people of money, the

people of gestures, the people of TV screens or something else. But as we used to be the people of books for some time in the past, this directs us internally to the type of culture that we used to be in, are now, could have been now" (The most reading country in the world is trying to learn how to read again).

When preparing for the final essay, students have an opportunity to reflect on conceptual ideas they will expand on, matching these with their personal life experience and their experience as readers. Once in a year the Council on final literature essay in graduation classes under the chairpersonship of N.D.Solzhenitsina, provides thematic guidelines which are used as the framework for design of actual essay topics which are often formulated as problem-solving tasks. The actual topics become available for students right at the beginning of the exam.

4. Discussion

It is worth exploring how the design principles for final essay topics have been changing over the past three years.

For 2014/2015 academic year the following guidelines were selected for the final essay: "With cause all Russia fashion lays ... " (M. Lermontov's 200-year Anniversary); "Questions a war poses to men"; "A man and nature in domestic and international literature"; "Generation gap: together and apart"; "What men live by?". These topical references, on the one hand, were mostly focused on literature essays – they actualized problems, traditional for literature school studies ("generation gap", "a man and nature in literature, war range of problems). On the other hand they encouraged student to reflect on more abstract topics, which may be considered philosophical ("what men live by").

Among the concepts of topical guidelines for 2015/2016 academic year such as "Time", "Home", "Love", "Route", "Year of Literature", there were themes which are traditional for school literature essays ("Home", "Love", "Route") as well as those rarely encountered before ("Time"). There was still a tendency to encourage students to dissert upon general laws of living, nature and human relationships; ethical content of the above guidelines remained opaque.

For 2016/2017 academic year the following topical guidelines have been put forward: "Mind and emotions", "Honour and disgrace", "Victory and defeat", "Experience and mistakes", "Friendship and animosity". In the process of preliminary reflection students are encouraged to forego stereotypical characteristics of specific literary works. Topical guidelines now mostly appeal to ethical and values experience of a graduate. Binary format of guidelines provides opportunities for their problematization, discussion and debate.

New format of the final (December) essay actualizes personal perspective of mastering literary works. Binary rating system which is now in place allows students to concentrate not only on maximizing their result at any cost, but on their need for self-expression and comprehension of moral and ethical problems based on their hands-on and reading experience.

5. Conclusion

While bringing up moral and ethical layers of literary works, teachers of literature can use information, obtained by students at social science classes. Secondary schoolers get acquainted with a wide range of ethical concepts such as "conscience", "honour", "duty", "moral and social responsibility". Social science lessons give relative overview of moral values, principles and norms. These abstract categories and ethical generalizations are hardly perceived by adolescents without reliance on specific examples. Works of literature provide wonderful illustrations of moral conflicts combined with emotional experience, ethical evaluation and self-judgement.

At the social science classes when studying such topic as "Moral", an instructor may refer to the plot of the novel by M.Bulgakov "The Murderer". The action takes place during the times of civil war. Doctor Yashvin killed his own patient – Leshenko, a ruthless and immoral person. For

seven years now the doctor has been unable to get rid of painful reflections. "But in any case I remember this night every year. You see, seven years ago to the very night, and even, indeed ..." Yashvin pulled out his black watch and glanced at it, "... yes, almost to the very hour, on the night of the 1st and 2nd of February, I killed him" (M. Bulgakov "A country doctor's notebook", translated by Michael Glenny, Melville House Publishing 2013). The following question can be offered to students for discussions: 1. What is the moral dilemma the main character is facing? 2. Could Yashvin's action be justified by the severity of historical moment or immorality of Leshenko? 3. What was Yashvin's self-assessment of what he did? 4. Why is the inner voice of conscience often referred to as pang?

Therefore, to sum up, we can formulate the following statements:

1. There are a number of modern-life factors, with increased information flow and greater impact of online environment among them, which amplify the importance of ethical nurturing and values education among school children.
 2. School social and liberal arts disciplines have a large potential to solve this task. At the same time, analysis of educational and methodological literature reveals certain gaps in coverage of this range of problems. Instrumental techniques which are being chosen are also far from meeting complete specific requirements.
 3. Inter-disciplinary coordination between literature and social science disciplines creates strong prerequisites for deeper comprehension of moral and ethical range of problems by adolescents.
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