

CURRENT ISSUES IN CULTURAL AND AESTHETIC EDUCATION OF JUNIOR SCHOOLCHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The article reveals the basic problems of cultural and aesthetic education of junior schoolchildren and their possible solutions. Particular attention is paid to the disclosure of meanings and fundamental ideas of cultural approach in the context of updating the role of art in the educational process of modern elementary school. The article deals with the essence of the concept of "cultural-aesthetic education"; based on the practice of the author described the components of aesthetic and educational environment as well as the purpose, objectives, dimensions, substantive content of cultural and aesthetic education of junior schoolchildren today.

Keywords: *Current Issues, Cultural and Aesthetic Education, Junior Schoolchildren.*

Well-known Russian aesthetician V.V. Bychkov defines the contemporary period of the world culture development as the post-culture characterised by the decline of traditional spiritual values, building of rigid social relationships on the basis of "bare" materialism, utilitarianism and pragmatism, intensification of social conflicts, and the development of electronic technology trends leading to the "information flood". Under the impact of these processes, the whole structure of human mentality is undergoing qualitative changes.

The global educational problem is related to the emergence at the beginning of the third millennium of a new generation of people who are fundamentally different – even as compared with the representatives of human civilization of the end of the XX century – in their main internal, mental characteristics (including mentality, specific features of perception, response and behaviour motivations, the scale of space-time and velocity perception, psycho-physiological reactivity, value paradigms and moral bearings of social and even physiological orientation). The negative impact of the man-made popular culture on the mankind results in a phenomenon described by Marcuse as a "one-dimensional man", and the socio-cultural environment that has been formed over recent years is fraught with the danger of destruction of the human biogenetic foundation, mentality and physicality, as well as deterioration of the gene pool. We cannot ignore the fact that the mankind is on the verge of self-destruction – either in a nuclear conflict or as a result of environmental disasters.

"In the course of the 'transformational' and superconsumer activity (which is not morally and spiritually controlled), human beings, as organic part of the biosphere and the Universe as a whole, have become a real threat not only to human existence, but to the entire biosphere." (Bychkov, 2006, p. 326).

At the same time many scholars specialising in cultural studies, aesthetics, education and psychology emphasize that the aesthetic wealth of the classical art, accumulated over centuries, is so deep and multifaceted that its effect and educative value are not weakening but rather strengthening over time. The classical (high, elite) art tackles and artistically resolves the most intimate problems of human spiritual life, and its specific form, always actual for this particular generation, more and more reveals its sensual and emotional expressiveness and appeal, almost "contagiosity". This makes it important to find present-

day psychological and educational techniques, methods and forms of introducing the best examples of art into social and, above all, educational practice.

Since the 1980-90s the methodological framework for educational studies in Russia has been based on the cultural approach, considering the formation of personal (and later professional) culture of an individual as a life-sustaining activity, a "tool" for realization of individual creative powers in various spheres and a result of self-definition in culture. We can state that a shaping personality can successfully socialise only through continuous self-definition under continuously changing conditions of the surrounding world. This continuous process of spiritual quest, achievement of the set goals and setting new ones obviously never ends.

However, currently there is a contradiction between the goals, methods and content of education, on the one part, and the need to implement cultural approach in teaching, on the other part. This contradiction can only be resolved through understanding that "the integrity of the human culture of an individual is achieved as a result of the combination and synthesis of the aesthetic qualities and artistic components of personal culture. It is controlled and dominated by the mechanism of aesthetic perception with the leading sensory and valuation function of its core – taste, interacting with the cultural potential of the objective, natural, existential and human phenomena both in the objective and subjective embodiment of beautiful (perfect in their completeness) natural objects and events. Accessibility, consistency and harmony of integral culture are possible on a large scale on the basis of the present-day aesthetic and artistic education, integral systemic conceptualization and development of aesthetic and artistic blocks of age-specific cultural development and education." (Pechko, 2008, p. 21).

On the one hand, art, due to its rich emotional, intellectual, figurative and creative potential, helps an individual deepen knowledge and intensify the process of cultural adaptation. On the other hand, it allows each individual to build the own cultural type, identifying with certain works of art based on preferences following personal tastes and evaluations and with images of characters causing "purification" of feelings (catharsis) through empathy and emotions. In this context educationalists encounter a serious problem of formation of an ethno-cultural identity of a personality (i.e. self-identification as a carrier of culture of a certain ethnicity with its traditions and values) and, at the same time, multicultural orientation based on the study, reflection and internalization of universal human values.

Unfortunately, we have to state that the results of various psychological and educational studies on the state of socio-cultural development of an individual at all ageing stages "revealed the general trend – an emerging gap between education and culture manifesting itself in curtailing of true culture, its consistent isolation from school, reduction of hours dedicated to the classical artistic legacy in school curricula, closeness and elitism of art initiation processes, outdated traditional content and techniques of aesthetic training and public education." (Shkolyar, 2007, p. 9).

The current stage of development of pedagogical sciences is associated with overcoming the negative trends, search for new methodological frameworks, approaches and innovative technologies of training and education, as well as didactic foundations of the educational process.

However, it is still obvious that today the development of education has nothing to do with strengthening of its cultural and creative role, the necessity of which is declared in all legislative documents. Underestimating the role of art in the development of a shaping personality and the formation of its inner culture can lead to irreversible consequences – a person can stop understanding that the art is his/her mode of existence as a HUMAN BEING.

These findings confirm the relevance of enhancing the aesthetic education of the young generation and the need to review this process from cultural and creative positions.

We believe that the cultural approach is very promising for the aesthetic education because it proclaims the personality as a cultural value and focuses the educational system on a dialogue between the culture and the person as both its creator and subject, who is capable of cultural self-development.

In view of the cultural approach, the aesthetic education is considered in a wider context of culture as its integral part performing all the basic functions of culture: organization of human activity, establishment of relationships between generations, creation of favourable conditions for creative self-realization and self-development of a person, preservation, enhancement and modification of value paradigms and designing of new patterns of cultural life. (Gani, 01/02/2016).

In terms of the cultural approach, the aesthetic education is impossible without an active position of the personality, and it is aimed at the development and formation of an integrated system of aesthetic qualities when acquiring knowledge, skills, values and modes of professional and creative self-realization. In terms of the cultural approach, the aesthetic education is formative in nature, as it allows an individual to be creative, develops aesthetic taste and rejection of vulgarity, fosters cultural behaviour and makes the environment more aesthetic. (Gani, 01/02/2016).

Cultural and aesthetic education of junior schoolchildren is actually the process of fostering aesthetic sensitivity, creative thinking, artistic abilities and shaping aesthetic sense as the most important elements of personal culture manifesting themselves in cultural and creative activities.

We can regard familiarisation of children with cultural values, shaping of aesthetic sense and involvement in active cultural activities as the main goals and objectives of the cultural and aesthetic education of junior schoolchildren. To achieve the set goals, such activities and components of learning environment can be used in primary school:

- development of the humanitarian sphere: libraries, training rooms, exhibitions, etc.;
- visits to museums, exhibitions and theatres;
- organisation of art and cultural festivals;
- establishment of artistic associations for schoolchildren interested in poetry, arts, singing and various musical genres;
- involvement of schoolchildren into participation in festivals, competitions and other artistic events and associations;
- organization of exhibitions of works of junior schoolchildren, photo and book exhibitions;
- involvement of pupils in decoration of classrooms and creation of aesthetic external appearance of the school building through drawing competitions and group and class design projects.

We can define the following main aspects of the cultural and aesthetic education of junior schoolchildren in the context of the culture approach:

- social and normative aspect (revealing the social significance of education as a tool of society continuation in every individual through adoption of social norms, traditions and rituals – exposure to all these external impacts is a powerful source of beneficial influence on the shaping personality because culture, including art as its basic component, determines not only activity, but also the pupils' perception of certain facts and events, predetermining their evaluation and choice of behaviour patterns);

- individual substantive aspect (revealing the role of the culturally congruent environment in the search for the meaning of human life, which is essential for fulfilling the main task of the education – to ensure individualized self-realization of each individual);
- axiological activity aspect (revealing the mechanism of training and education understood as a dialogic interaction with a "significant other").

The review of the current situation with cultural and aesthetic activities in primary school made by the author of this article revealed the need to rethink and restructure them to change their substantive, methodological and technological components. The main issues inhibiting the practical application of promising ideas of personal cultural and aesthetic education in the educational process have been formulated and updated. (Aryabkina, 2010a, 2010b)

However, we should note that this process can be complicated by a recent trend to keep some distance between cultural studies and art and aesthetics, when, on the one part, the culture is declared to be of high priority for the achievement of social goals both by a person and society as a whole, and, on the other part, art and aesthetic activities are not used as powerful educational tools in this process. Such differentiation between the spheres of culture and education in the society, in combination with the general crisis in the world of culture and art, makes it vital to find new forms of integration between these spheres, especially with regards to the moral and aesthetic training, education and development of personality.

The distinctive features of the approach to cultural and aesthetic education in Russia include, on the one part, references to its enduring value and the wealth of the accumulated theoretical and practical experience, and, on the other part, the treatment of aesthetic and artistic classes as secondary, not always and not fully obligatory, which is widespread in the practice of secondary educational institutions. Such classes in junior forms of secondary school are held mainly by teachers who have received art education, which is undoubtedly a positive development. However, participation of primary school teachers in the classes of music, fine arts and world art is often reduced exclusively to the organizational role, which demonstrates some kind of professional isolation of teachers of art subjects from primary school teachers who are not only form masters but also authorities in various fields for junior schoolchildren.

The described realities of primary education result in the fact that not all schools (especially it refers to those located far from regional centres) fully provide the cultural and aesthetic educational process with the necessary methodological, material and human resources, aesthetic classes are often replaced with classes in some other subjects or are carried out without taking into account present-day requirements to their organization, and there is hardly any planned monitoring of the results of forming aesthetic culture in schoolchildren, which is essentially the main criterion of effectiveness of cultural and aesthetic educational process at school.

The analysis above led to the conclusion that it is necessary to improve the performance of the cultural and aesthetic education of junior schoolchildren.

In order to help schools to solve such complicated task, I.N. Ulyanov State Pedagogical University established the Centre of Formation of Aesthetic Culture in Junior Schoolchildren. It was the combined effort of the leading university professors (including those invited from other regions), cultural figures, artists, teachers working in the city and the region and students (future teachers) within the frames of the Centre activities that allowed to improve the substantive content of secondary and higher education syllabi for artistic and aesthetic subjects; to develop advanced training programs for primary school teachers and teachers of music, fine arts and world art; to establish the bank of teaching materials

(including results of socially significant creative projects implemented by students and practising teachers).

Based on the assumption that a creative personality can be only shaped by another creative personality, each member of the Centre, which operates on a pro-bono basis, can participate in a wide range of activities that allow them to realize their own cultural and aesthetic competencies in educational engagement and interaction with junior schoolchildren with the use of individualized approaches defined by the teachers themselves. During the methodological workshops, hearings, meetings, open sessions and master classes organized by the Centre in cooperation with the Education Administration personnel, they consider the results of the latest studies by leading experts regarding problems of developing in junior schoolchildren the individual aesthetic abilities related to emotional, cognitive, motivational, evaluation and activity-related spheres of their mentality with the use of various practical methods, forms and techniques of art activities. The Centre operation is mainly focused on comprehensive monitoring of such important indicator of schoolchildren's socialization as the level of their cultural and aesthetic education, based on studying and applying the most advanced diagnostic techniques in the field of artistic and aesthetic education. With all that, it is very important that the results of cultural and aesthetic education of junior schoolchildren in primary school are studied directly in the process of children's creative activities in the sphere of art supported by adults.

In the course of psycho-pedagogical experiment held by the author of this article for many years, a careful and painstaking work of primary school teachers included the following stages of studying the level of aesthetic education of junior schoolchildren:

- acquaintance and talk with the pupil;
- acquaintance and talk with his/her parents, questionnaire surveys;
- analysis of the first creative assignment performed by the pupil;
- regular discussions with pupils, questionnaire surveys (more often used among pupils in the third or fourth form) and testing (with elements of games);
- regular discussions with parents, questionnaire surveys;
- control measurements of the level of development of the child's creative abilities through the quality assessment of works performed;
- observing children engaged in the creative process;
- comparison of works created by a particular pupil with those of other pupils in the same form;
- teacher observation of the child's attitude to works performed by other pupils;
- observing pupils engaged in the learning process (their opinions and attitudes to the performance process);
- studying the child's attitude to various pieces of art in the aesthetic perception process and intensity and completeness of aesthetic sensibility expression;
- monitoring behaviour of junior schoolchildren during their visits to exhibitions, concert halls and museums;

- accounting for opinions of other teachers about the child's aesthetic development during aesthetic education activities;
- organisation of open lessons and extracurricular activities in presence of other teachers and parents;
- compiling a plan for the aesthetic development of each child, with participation of other teachers and parents, and its implementation in practice.

As a conclusion, we can state that the development of curricula and educationally expedient interdisciplinary communications based on poly-art and expressive approaches to aesthetic education, reliance on the pursuit of creative self-realization, inherent in all children, target-oriented development of their aesthetic abilities, interests, needs, tastes and the system of aesthetic perception of the reality and the study and use of modern personality-oriented educational technologies for this purpose, introduction of aesthetic components in teaching of humanitarian and natural-science subjects at school, combination of learning and extracurricular activities, and active cooperation with parents and colleagues will allow primary school teachers, on the one hand, to demonstrate the achieved level of their cultural and aesthetic competencies and better understand the necessity to develop them on a regular basis, and, on the other hand, to achieve positive dynamics in the individual development of each junior pupil virtually in all cases.

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