

Conference Paper

V. CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Culture and Education: Value Orientations and Prospective Trends

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Abstract

The task of modern education is to ensure an acquisition of 'skills and knowledge for the XXIth century'. This article explores a highly relevant issue of finding a way out of a crisis that has engulfed the Russian education. We envision the crisis of contemporary education as a crisis of values. The author reflects on the conditions required to establish new modes of education and the challenges we need to embrace. One of the possible solutions lies in the rethinking of the role of humanities education in general and culturological education in particular.

Keywords: education, XXIst-century skills and knowledge, culture, culturology, existential crisis, development, value orientations

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1. Introduction

Today we hear more and more often that our educational systems should provide solutions for 'the tomorrow goals': Russian Ministry of Education and Science is asking the teachers giving career-orientation advice to tell students which professions would become relevant when today's school students enter the job market; employees want to hire the candidates whose skill sets would allow them to seamlessly enter the new technological processes; media describes the trends in the new 'knowledge economy'. At the same time, both parents and students make decisions about the future mainly based on the immediate needs, in career choices, as well as in other matters.

An importance of education in contemporary society is connected to the conditions of postindustrial development that require a redefinition of educational goals, forms and methods to bring them into alignment with the radically changing demands of our time. However, standardized education is failing to meet these demands.

One of the essential features of contemporary culture is its prefigurative character (Margaret Mead) [3], in which the future determines the nature of social connections

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and the variability of forms in which cultural codes are transmitted. This is the core of the problem that may be described as the 'problem of adequacy': to what extent contemporary education is capable of instilling 'XXIst-century skills and competences', and to what extent the society is ready to take responsibility for the decisions made within the educational system.

Patrick Griffin, Melbourne University Professor and leader of the largest international Assessment and Teaching of XXIst-century Skills Project, said in one of his interviews: "...the skills that defined literacy in the industrial era were described as reading, writing and arithmetic. In the XXIst century the emphasis is shifting to... critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity." (Griffin 2016)

Today we are faced with a stream of research analyzing not only the skill sets that people should possess in the XXIst century, but also the educational trends. Globalizing processes created a situation in which efficient communication between members of diverse cultures and peoples is a vital necessity, also to protect a common future of all people living on the planet. Consequently, communication and interaction skills acquire a leading role. However, the readiness to communicate is not enough – it is vitally important to have collaboration skills and to assume personal and social responsibility. Living in a constantly changing world requires plasticity and adaptability on the one hand, critical attitude to our environment – on the other [2; 6; 7; 8; 9; 12].

However, contemporary education has yet to provide solutions of these goals: a situation confirmed not only by teachers surveys and independent reviews (TALIS) proving that the teachers continue to 'teach for yesterday', but also by invectives against students who don't want to acquire 'XXIst-century skills'. This is the root cause of a discontent that may be defined as an existential crisis in education.

The goal of this paper is to highlight prospective trends in education and to elucidate the role that humanistic education should play in providing relevant solutions.

2. Materials and Methods

In analyzing contemporary trends, we have used an axiological approach that allowed us to see education system in the context of value crisis. Comparative analysis of different educational systems provided foundation for asserting the importance of culturology as a scholarly field and as an educational practice vital for the process of developing 'XXIst-century skills'. By using modelling and prognostic methods, we have come to the conclusion that *humanitas* can become a strategic trend in overcoming crisis in education and opening its future prospects.

3. Results

An existential crisis is characterised by a feeling of psychological discomfort and heightened anxiety when a person reflects on the meaning of life. Psychologists and psychoanalysts provide us with a detailed description of the symptoms of such crisis. In Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders V (DSM-V) these conditions are described as characterised by anxiety, depression, personality and/or physical disorders, with the possible causes including social relationships and dramatic events in an individual's life (loss of loved ones, divorce, physical traumas etc.). The recommended ways of treatment, alongside medication, include social practices: being focused on important goals and concentrating on positive tasks [11].

When we apply this criteria to the contemporary Russian education, its 'loss of meaning' is caused by the loss of its main value: education as a public good underpinning national, social and personal development according to the dominant cultural ideals.

Faced by the situation of radical social transformations and either the loss of value orientations or, alternatively, their conservation, education could not remain untouched by it – but it was equally powerless to solve these social contradictions. This results in a profound discontent with the state of education: parents are dissatisfied with the quality of educational services, students think that they are taught wrong things with the wrong methods, school teachers rant against the bureaucratic stranglehold, and university professors – against the lack of academic freedoms. At the same time, a search for solutions resembles a search for magic potion recipe: a solution is supposed to be simple, preferably sole and immediate. But this sole solution fails to materialize. And the sense of hopelessness prevails.

An existential crisis is a crisis of values. Nikolai Berdyaev was write when he wrote in 1931 that, "The world has become liquid, it has no solid bodies anymore, it exists in a revolutionary state both externally and internally, in an age of spiritual anarchy. Man, more than ever, lives in fear (*Angst*), under the constant threat, hanging over an abyss" [1, p. 486].

The state of being 'over an abyss' could not last forever – therefore, educational reforms and modernisation were all but inevitable. The first stage of these reforms (1990s-early 2000s) was dominated by the solutions based on humanities; however, at the second stage the focus shifted towards technologies. The goals of the first stage were related to meanings; the goals of the second stage became instrumental.

Let us turn to sociology. According to the survey conducted in November 2017 by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) on the topic of required subjects in school curriculum, more than half of Russians would support an inclusion of traffic code into the school curriculum (73% said that it should be made obligatory). Almost two thirds (63%) of respondents would like to see basic military training included in the core subjects; almost half (44%) said that it was necessary to teach financial literacy. S.L'vov, head of the VCIOM's Research Department, noted in his commentary on the survey results that "the expectations from the basic education system are very pragmatic. Both students' parents and other adults believe that children should be taught practical subjects that they are likely to need in their adult lives: they should learn how to behave on the road, be prepared for the military conscription, learn how to manage personal finances and even learn how to communicate in a bilingual environment...

Subjects aimed at the development of the mind became outsiders. Today researchers are facing a challenge to discover the reasons behind this scepticism the Russians express towards the humanities. Maybe it is rooted in a lack of trust in school system; or is based on the belief that other institutions should cultivate cultural, spiritual and citizen values; or maybe this attitude is simply based on a pragmatism bordering on cynicism that is widespread in society." [10] The cause of this 'scepticism' lies in the attitude towards education which is perceived not as valuable-in-itself, but as a tool that should guarantee future social success. It is exactly how education is understood in traditional society (which is typical for a prefigurative culture). Therefore, we may declare time and again our need to develop 'XXIst-century skills and knowledge', while in reality remaining in diametrically opposite situation.

Let me now turn to my professional sphere of expertise: culturology as a reflection on culture. As is well known, culturology became a part of college-level and, in some measure, school-level education happened as part of the first stage of modernizing reforms [for more detail see my article: 4]. Is the elimination of culturology today a fait accompli and the basis of pessimism? I don't think so.

In my opinion, the future of culturology as a scholarly field lies exactly in finding solutions to the challenge of mastering XXIst-century skills and knowledge.

Contemporary education is not ready to reject subject-based approach and the requirements of federal state educational standards. At the same time, educational goals on each stage (from pre-school to college level) presuppose personal development (that is, personal results) and acquisition of competences that do not form a part of concrete classes or subjects (the so called non-subject based results) but, on the

contrary, bringing them all together. Culturological courses may prove invaluable in solving this contradiction between a narrowly-defined subject-based approach and a holistic approach. First, because they don't have formal examination requirements (no Unified State Examination); second, they present a multifaceted approach to reality based on pluralistic value and normative systems; third, they provide a dialogue between cultures, historical eras and individuals; fourth, they offer ways of exploring a constantly changing reality by facilitating critical thinking and developing skills required to form an expert opinion on sociocultural processes. Of course, at every educational level these goals become more complex, but their essence remains. A solution to an existential crisis exists.

If we agree that the importance of education is based on its capability to transmit cultural codes and existential meanings from generation to generation. we would be forced to take a different stance regarding culturological education: an education that we define not so much as a number of subjects focused on culture, but a fostering and teaching process that is grounded in transmission and reproduction of humanistic values – values aligned with the individual self-determination and with the goals of postindustrial society.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Culturological approach in education is not, of course, a panacea – it is only one of the possible solutions to the current crisis. Rethinking the role of the humanities education in general may provide educational practices with a much needed three-dimensionality and versatility, as well as human focus and an understanding that humans are the main goal and value of education.

Latin word *humanitas* means both humanity, humaneness, kindness, education and cultivation of the mind. *Humanitas* in contemporary education provides a unified conception of the meaning of education, and the way towards this meaning. This is probably the main trend in education: finding meaning through reflexivity. The degree to which we move along this way consciously determines educational strategies, teaching methods in working with students, communication tools or network interactions in a multicultural world. And it may just turn out that mastering XXIst-century skills and knowledge would not seem such an unsurmountable task.

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