Diagnostics of Students’ Personal Development: Evaluation of the Impact of Teaching Theological Subjects in Schools on Moral Development of the Students

Diagnóstico del desarrollo personal de los estudiantes: Evaluación del impacto sobre el desarrollo moral de los estudiantes de la enseñanza de asignaturas teológicas en escuelas

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ABSTRACT:
The article is devoted to measuring of moral and ethical culture of the younger generation and opportunities for diagnostics of personal development in this field. Now more than ever, teaching practice needs well-developed methods for real-time diagnostics of students’ level of development. Effective management of individual development and socialization is impossible without measuring and monitoring of personal development. Of particular interest but also of a serious concern to teachers is diagnostics of what makes the youth act as they do and what levels of ambitions, emotional capabilities and social development (spiritual, moral and ethical) they have achieved. The authors study the impact of
1. Introduction

Diagnostics of personal moral and ethical development as one of the most important quality indicators of modern education has always been sought for in schools and is of a highest priority now. It is also obvious that this kind of diagnostics is quite a difficult, challenging task as the theory and practice of education have not yet developed a unified view on a proper balance between formal and informal aspects of schoolchildren character education and their moral and ethical development. The formal aspect is focused on the process of transfer and adoption of moral values and ideals. The informal side deals with a person’s ability to make his or her moral judgements, self-reflect and take a critical look at the offered value systems. From the formal point of view, one can say that a conformist, i.e. a student who has mastered the code of conduct of a given society and thus having optimal level of adaptation, is highly developed. High rating by the formal criterion may speak for non-conformism and willingness to change the rules (Kohlberg 1964).

It must be also borne in mind that the modern education policy is based on pluralism of beliefs as an accepted standard of social relationships; this is manifested in diversity of value (axiological) systems which, in turn, leads to development of multidimensional measures for evaluation of such an indicator as individual moral development. Experts point out that in the context of a single national ideology moral development indicator might be determined as the degree of conformity of a student’s opinions with the official mindset (such as materialistic, Marxist-Leninist, scientific, atheistic, etc.); but for a pluralist society such criteria are unacceptable. Diversity of various mindsets and systems of beliefs in the current societies including but not limited to the Russian one is caused by multinational and multi-confessional nature of the countries.

Besides, consideration must be given to the difference of education and development in terms of simulation of pedagogical situations. Educational pedagogical situations shall be lived through and experienced. In most cases, actual adoption of moral standards by students may be only determined spontaneously. In the process of formal diagnostics student may imitate the expected behaviour, and it is difficult to say if he or she is going to act in the same manner when not being watched. It means that the object of diagnostics may try and show ingenuity, acumen and resourcefulness, use an ability to guess and please (Kozyrev 2011).

2. Aims and objectives of the research

In spite of the challenges mentioned above, modern scientists acknowledge that some components of moral and ethical education and development may by subject to not only qualitative but also quantitative evaluation. The research is aimed to understand and develop procedures for evaluation of students’ moral, ethical and spiritual development as a result of studying a theological subject in nonsectarian schools as well of their impact on the trust and cohesiveness in society and on the students’ socialization. For more than 10 years, Russian schools have been teaching theological subjects which use a cultural approach to develop social skills, tolerant behavior, civic identity and commitment to trust and cohesiveness in the students. The research is aimed to study experience in teaching of theological subjects, identify teaching problems and suggest solutions by developing procedures for evaluation of their impact on students’ personal development.

3. Methods of the research

Include studying of philosophical, sociological, psychological, and pedagogical researches in teaching theological subjects in schools on development of social skills in the younger generation as the drivers of trust and cohesiveness in society. Keywords: measuring, impact evaluation, subject area, moral and ethical culture, trust, cohesiveness.
the field; examination of approaches to the subject, analysis of the current evaluation procedures, monitoring results, and findings of expert reviews; questionnaires; and interviews.

4. Fundamental concepts of the research

For development and formation of moral culture, students shall take in the value system, norms, and moral imperatives, gain experience in the process of self-determination, and develop emotional, aesthetic, value perception of the world, other people, oneself and the transmitted culture. It is not as difficult to evaluate the results of knowledge acquisition (ability to remember, understand and use) as to determine qualitative characteristic of personal development. Level of education may be evaluated by instructional methods, i.e., with the use of written reproduction, retelling and/or essays on the covered subject or on the basis of an offered text; assignments of various levels of difficulty (from memorization of new foreign words to creative use of knowledge); project works that require students to apply the newly acquired knowledge; and tests. For example, scientists offer to evaluate proficiency in the programs of moral and ethical content by working with texts, i.e., using written assignments on the Russian language and literature, history and social sciences. Criteria include: students’ ability to formulate and comment on the subject matter of the text (teachers evaluate accuracy, depth and independence of understanding), ability to recognize and analyze the author’s position, reason his or her own opinion on the subject (agreeing or not agreeing with the author), factual accuracy, conceptual integrity, coherence and consistency of retelling and/or analysis of the offered text.

Modern studies of the components of personal moral development (ideals, values, attitudes, orientations, relationships) offer various methods of research based on different methodological approaches (philosophical, sociological, psychological, structural-functional, and systemic-structural) to serve as theoretical justification of their practical feasibility. Thus, in the context of philosophic approach, “the value of social groups may only be measured in so far as they protect the rights and interests of individuals and help individual subjects to achieve their goals” (Jakovlev 2015, p.27). According to sociological approach (Tomas and Znanieckij 1994), methods of learning, for example a value system, shall be chosen on the basis of attitudes, value orientations or behavior of a particular person, while psychologists believe that changes in personal values may be perceived with the most efficiency in the process of observation.

Russian scientists (F.N. Kozyrev, B.P. Bitinis, L.I. Kataena, S.V. Yakovlev, N.V. Bordovskaja et al.) suggest using both traditional and innovative methods of diagnostics to evaluate the level of social and moral development of the students (Konrad 2004; Bitinis and Kataeva 1993; Jakovlev 2015; Bordovskaya and Rean 2004). Traditional methods of diagnostics include observation, ethical discussions, tests, experiments, school record analysis and surveys (Bitinis and Kataeva 1993; Jakovlev 2007; Kohlberg 1964; Dermanova 2002).

Modern methods of diagnostics are usually built in accordance with the classic Rokeach Value Survey when a student is offered to arrange 18 terminal and 18 instrumental values into the order of importance. Then every value is scored in accordance with its position in the final arrangement: The most important value gets 1 point and the least important value gets 18 points. On the basis of such arrangements one can make a conclusion on value preferences and motivations of the survey participant. Testing results may be processed statistically by calculating the average score for each value (sum of all the scores given to the value by the test group divided by the number of people in the test group), variation indicators as well as regression, factorial and other forms of analysis. According to the modern test theory, value shall be tested from minimum to maximum, i.e., the higher the score the more important is the value if it has positive staining, and vice versa.

This method makes it possible to compare preferences of students from different categories, their value orientations, and attitude to certain values with due consideration to the impact of such factors as age, sex, social background, ability to learn, etc., and trace the dynamics of the results depending on pedagogical influence and age. Humanistic theories of personality have a special focus on connections between the value orientations and
motivation of a person. Spiritual and moral development of personality means increasing quality of the needs (Maslow 2003). Then, in the terms of V. A. Petrovsky, education is aimed to accumulation of some pool of “wishes” through understanding of what a person “wants from life” — his or her interests, motives and desires (Petrovsjik 2007; p. 124). In this regard, it would be interesting to recall Smekal and Kucher’s and Sh. Schwartz’s methodology (Shvarc et al. 2012) for diagnostics of three types of personality orientations — personal, professional and collective. It is a 30-question questionnaire which answers the questions of what “I would like”, “I like”, and “I love”. The questions have choice of answers the analysis of which makes it possible to get an idea on the respondents’ attitudes with more regard not to the beliefs and norms they have already established but to their wishes and needs.

International practice often shows the use of Sh. Schwartz’s methodology based on Rokeach’s method. It offers a respondent to prioritize 57 value as the “guiding principles of his or her life” using a 9-poing scale. Based on the test results, the respondent may be assigned to one of several value types according to his or her motivational orientation (commitment) to the chosen value priorities. Thus, in the process of implementation of European Social Survey project, Schwartz’s methodology was used to test about 60,000 respondents from 20 countries, and the results of the tests helped to develop a culturological classification consisting of seven value types (Karandeshev 2004).

Social and moral development may be evaluated in conjunction with evaluation of mental development, i.e. memory, comprehension, speech, etc. and the structural theory of personality development of. Evaluation of these criteria may be efficiently used together with other methods and tools of pedagogical diagnostics (Karandashev and Dmitruk 2002). Modern Russian scientists (Kozyrev 2011; Kozyrev 2011) bring innovative components to the traditional methods of diagnostics of moral development mentioned above:

— **Observation** helps a teacher to successfully solve some research problems in the process of teaching. It offers specialists to focus on incidents — unusual situations or events that have drawn researching teachers’ attention and help to see the moral qualities of an individual student or of the whole class in a new perspective. A good way to record incidents is audio- or video-recording of lessons because analysis of the incidents happening at the lessons may help to reveal communication difficulties and specifics of perception of the subjects of interaction. As a rule, such incidents are perceived differently if the teacher gets involved. Ongoing observation and incident analysis help teachers to make involved observation less subjective and get a clearer picture of a student’s moral development on comfortable vs. non-comfortable, conflict vs. non-conflict situations.

— **Conversation** is a usual method of student survey. At the same time, this method lets teachers perform both research diagnostic and educational functions. If diagnostics is performed by a third party, it would be better to use interviewing. It is a good practice to combine open-type research and observation as this makes the results much more informative. Subject of interview may be developed either fully or partially. Group interview has not yet been used in pedagogical researches very often while it helps to examine individual orientations of the students and at the same time observe specifics of their interpersonal relationships. By comparing findings from individual and group interviews teachers may get valuable information on dominance-submission relationships in school communities and use an appropriate pedagogical situation.

— **Questionnaire surveys** allow for anonymous diagnostics. Questionnaires give students an opportunity to express their views and opinions which are not always easy to speak out. For this reason, findings of questionnaire surveys are thought as reliable and appropriate. However, it shall be noted that achievement of these results requires proper conditions for the survey: It is necessary to invite an expert in the field and respondents shall be given a guarantee of confidentiality. This type of research has a limitation — it may only by applied to determine moral condition of the group but not of an individual. Respondents are offered to choose an answer from a multiple choice of variants but it is also possible to score the degree of agreement with a certain answer.

— **Testing** method is actively used in teaching and scientific practices as the most...
processable type of diagnostics. Testing is first of all characterised by its focus on compliance of the objects of study with predefined requirements and expectations. Testing is different from questionnaire survey in that for students it feels like an examination as usually they have no idea of the goal and subject of the test. For researchers testing is a process that is not only controlled but also requiring strict adherence to predefined procedures for conducting, processing and interpretation of results. In most cases testing is encoded and its diagnostic tools include a decryption key and criteria for quantitative analysis of results. Testing methodologies are hard to develop and result from a long-term adaptation of this method.

— **Review of school records and class assignments** is a natural part of pedagogical process. Of principal interest are students’ essays, projects on moral subjects, products of out-of-school and extracurricular work — these shall be subject to content analysis.

— **Pedagogical experiment** is another important method of diagnostics. Diagnostics is usually focussed on a new pedagogical system, method or model. Experiment may be also aimed to ongoing examination or analysis of the current system (ascertaining experiment) in which case it will be focused on the current subjects of pedagogical interactions. The process of experiment includes observation of pedagogical events in simulated situations. Experimental method of diagnostics of students' social and moral development may be used in the course of usual school activities. Experiment may be based on the principle of **contextual moral choice** in a new situation. A good way of situation modelling is a role play. A typical example of role plays is school takeover days — usual practice in many regions of the country. They let a teacher to enrich their understanding of the students’ morality by observing them in unusual, simulated conditions (Kozyrev 2011; Kozyrev, Kuchurin and Firsova 2011).

Experts believe that due to “delay” of pedagogical effect of experiment, the source of the most unbiased results is a **longitudinal observation**. Innovative educational systems of 1920-1930s remain classics of pedagogical experiments up to the present days. For example, one of the current large-scale pedagogical experiments is the subject of “Introduction to Spiritual and Moral Culture of the Russians. Introduction to Religious Culture and Secular Ethics” included into the national school system in 2012.

It is also possible to use experiments as a method of diagnostics of students’ spiritual and moral development and education in the course of usual school activities based on the principle of **contextual moral choice** in a new situation. A situation may be, for example, created by offering the subjects of educational interaction to exchange the roles. An example of such an exchange is Takeover Day when teachers get a real opportunity to observe behavior of the students and see demonstration of their characteristics in various situations. The process of experiments shall never interfere with the general goals and objectives of the educational process otherwise it will turn into primitive “student experimentation” which is completely unacceptable.

According to competent experts, evaluation combines component of idiographic and nomothetic disciplines. Evaluation (nomothetic) diagnostic procedure requires elaboration of some criteria for researchers to make conclusions by measuring, comparing and correlating the criteria. Educational theory distinguishes hard and soft, quantitative (statistical) and qualitative criteria of evaluation. Hard criteria are used in pedagogical researches rather rarely, they serve to determine the level of morality in a certain age group in the process of large sociological researches. They may include, for example, statistics on delinquencies by children of deviant behavior, using drugs, etc., or on the number of students who won in contests, academic competition, etc. (Kozyrev, Kuchurin and Firsova 2011).

According to the scientist, diagnostics of personal spiritual and moral development may be successfully performed with the method of moral dilemmas by L. Kohlberg (Kohlberg 1964). The method distinguishes six stages and three levels of moral development showing consistent moral growth of personality (obedience, understanding of moral standards as mutual benefit, urge to comply with the others’ expectations, conformism, recognition of human rights, discovery and acceptance of universal human values). According to Kohlberg,
knowing the stage of moral development of a person one can determine what arguments this person is going to use to reason his or her moral action. When this method is used, respondents are presented with stories that contain moral dilemmas. The dilemmas are created in such a way as to make judgement on morality of the characters’ actions as hard as possible. The central idea of Kohlsberg’s method is to analyse arguments of the respondents (Dermanova 2002). G. Lind’s method of dilemmas in the form of written test has shown high performance in surveys of more than 300,000 respondents from various countries and continents. At the present time, metodic is the most reliable and efficient tool for measuring students’ abilities to make moral judgement and is widely used by the Russian scientists.

Comprehensive diagnostic technologies used abroad also include methodology that consists in sorting of given statements (Q-methodology). In Russia, it is now used only to measure self-assessment parameters but in the Western world it is more and more used in sociological, political and pedagogical researches. The methodology is based on constructivism concepts and helps to determine active internal structures of consciousness (constructs) that make students able to not only get the knowledge from educational materials but also accept the values.

Respondents shall sort the given statements in accordance with his or her agreement/disagreement with the statements; in the process of sorting, respondents may choose what cell of grid he or she is going to put a statement to but cannot choose the number or location of the cells. For example, from 30 given statements 2 shall be place into category “completely disagree” and 2 to “quite agree”, 4 to “don’t agree” and 4 to “agree”, 6 to “tend to disagree” and 6 to “tend to agree”, 10 to “neither agree not disagree.” Respondent is offered to place the numbered cards with statements in accordance with the offered scheme. The resulting allocation of statements reveals the respondent’s personal view on the subject and may be further compared by methods of correlation (quantitative) analysis (Kozyrev 2011).

Diagnostic tools that are currently being tested include one of special interest — it is a methodology for evaluation of moral selectiveness and coherence of judgements (“ONYX”), modification of Kohlberg and Lind’s method with added elements of Q-methodology. The method helps to measure students’ moral judgements by two criteria: Level of Motivation (LM) revealing the level of personal moral development by Kohlberg, and Coherence of Judgements (CJ) revealing ability to make moral judgements by Lind.

According to the scientists’ opinion, the methodology is easy to use and has a simple mathematical apparatus to make statistically significant diagnostic conclusions in the process of researching the general level of the students’ development and its dynamics in study groups. It is believed that in terms of performance evaluation of teaching and educational programs the method will help to determine efficiency of the tested programs in formation of value systems and in development of independent moral judgements.

An opportunity to make an unambiguous quantitative evaluation of how close a system of personal opinions is to a certain standard or reference makes Q-technique especially attractive for pedagogical purposes as pedagogical actions are focused on achievement of a personally or socially established standards (ideals) and let teachers monitor students’ failures and successes on the way to this goal. Proper use of correlation between the real and projected pattern of thoughts makes it possible to see students’ progress on the way to the specified goal. In this case, pedagogical ideal is a standard established on the basis of experts’ consensus.

The data acquired with the help of Q-technique may be processed by traditional statistical methods. Q-technique is quite a tool for subtle analysis of students’ opinions on a subject researcher is interested in. Q-technique is not a methodology that is programmed and established for a certain purpose but rather an innovative form that may be adjusted to various content. By changing the difficulty of the statements to be ranked, one can set Q-technique for either psycho-diagnostics of the general level of a student’s development, for evaluation of the student’s ability for apprehension of new material or for his or her knowledge of the material learnt including but not limited to tracking of changes in value
orientations due to the impact of pedagogical process. Together with the methods described above, Q-technique may help to significantly deepen the insight into a student’s inner world and become an indispensable tool for solution of wide range of diagnostic and prognostic tools (Kozyrev 2011).

Attention shall be also paid to test methods of diagnostic of personal moral development. Some of them are very popular, especially among the Russian teachers, and include the method of N. Shurkova, E Stehanov, etc. (Shhurkova 2013; Stepanova2001).

We think, the most comprehensive of these methods is Personal Growth questionnaire (P. V. Stepanov): According to the authors, the fact that our community considers education as socially valuable intellectual and practical activity makes it necessary to evaluate goals and objectives of this activity which in turn demands for pedagogical science to be introduced with a notion for positive direction of personal development. “Personal growth” may be such a notion meaning progressive, positive development which is significant for both the person and community as a whole.

Personality displays itself in the attitudes to three focal areas — to the world, to the other people and to oneself. These may be value attitudes (positive), non-value attitudes (indifferent), and anti-value attitudes (negative).

Authors of the questionnaire introduce the following scale for rating of value attitudes:

- Consistently positive
- Situationally positive
- Situationally negative
- Consistently negative

Personal growth involves development of an individual’s value attitude to the values recognized by the civilization the person identifies oneself with. If someone regards these object as anti-values it means regressive development of that person (Stepanova2001).

5. Discussion

We believe that diagnostics of personal moral development is connected with the discourse focused on a wider subject of discussion that involves scientists from all over the world: They wonder what a human being inherits at birth — ultimate capacities or just dispositions and inclinations? It is common practice to differentiate capacities from inclinations being potential opportunities for development of certain capacities as individual psychological characteristics of a certain individual. Findings of psychological-pedagogical researches reveal that human beings inherit not capacities but inclinations. Inherited inclinations may be realized or not depending on the living circumstances of a given individual.

Especially heated are debates on inheritance of intellectual abilities, mental development and moral qualities. Understanding of the nature and principles of the process of inheritance of intellectual abilities helps to presume capabilities and teaching methods while education process shall ensure equal opportunities for development of every inclination an individual may have. Most of foreign pedagogical theories proceed from the premise that education is a driver of human development and favourable conditions for development of individual capacities and inclinations. Proper conditions (methods of teaching) may help individuals to develop their intellectual abilities with a great efficiency.

Researches of Western scientists presume that individual moral qualities have biological reasons, that people are born good or bad, honest or mendacious and pugnacity, aggressiveness, cruelty, greediness are given by nature (Lorenz. 2004; Fromm 1998). These conclusions are based on results of researches on and comparison of human and animal behaviour. If human behaviour is mostly as based on instincts and reflexes as animal behaviour then the theory that genes of “deception” “aggression” (“theory of inherited evil”) or “goodness” are inherited may have a reason to exist. Some of the Russian scientists (P. K. Anokhin, M. S. Yakovlev, etc.) start advocating the theory of genetic reasons for moral qualities and behaviour of individual human being but still with a caution (Anohin 1978; Chetverikova, Lugovskih and Bykasova 2018; Jakovlev 2007)
It should be remembered that the most important criteria of the quality of education include not only mental (intellectual) but also personality development of students including spiritual and moral culture development. Indicators of moral development may be determined by target results specified in the Standards: Readiness for moral self-improvement and spiritual self-development, orientation on acting according to one’s own conscience, understanding of values of human life, etc. They are also defined by the knowledge of principal norms of secular and religious morals and understanding of secular ethics, traditional religions and their role in the culture, history and the present of Russia, etc. Moral behavior manifests itself in the students’ ability to believe, analyze moral situations and events and judge them with a critical mind (Mehli 2007).

6. Findings

Diagnostics of educational process is a new branch of the Russian pedagogical science that has already built a significant toolbox of various diagnostic methodologies, and teachers may successfully implement them in their exploratory and practical activities. Choice of methods shall be based on the established criteria and indicators and the goals of your research. Establishment of criteria and indicators is the most important part of any research that will be used for making reasonable conclusion on efficiency of student education and socialization.

7. Conclusion

The issues tackled and the methods of diagnostics presented in this article may help teachers to determine students’ attitudes to the value systems, situations and events in their surroundings and thus form a judgement on the level of their morality as well as on their spiritual and moral development. At the same time, one shall listen to the scientists who believe and alert that it is hardly possible to solve the problem of objective evaluation of individual motivational and value priorities in school with these methods only as respondents are prone to inadequate self-evaluation of their motives and value priorities. The younger the students are, the higher the probability of inadequateness* (*The research is funded by the Russian Humanitarian Scientific Fund (Project # 16-06-00282-a))

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