Strategy of Media Education: Philosophical and Pedagogical Aspects

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Abstract

Modern requirements for educational activities have a binary nature. Thus, on the one hand, educational practice established in the form of a social institution is one of the most conservative areas of social space. On the other hand, comfortable adaptation of a person to the processes occurring in the modern world is impossible without taking into account the phenomena of digital nature. The article provides a philosophical and pedagogical strategy aimed at the development of critical and creative thinking skills and competent reasoning, which can act as a basis for media education. The paper shows that the community of researchers is an interactive form of lesson organization, which makes it possible to develop rationality and ethical-and-democratic behaviour and, thus, to promote information and media literacy among students. The article also presents theoretical justification of the strategy, as well as techniques and materials for its empirical assessment. These can help arrange a lesson according to the principle of research community, which will contribute to the development of both cognitive and ethical-and-social skills in students.

Keywords: Community of researchers, Philosophizing, Socratic dialogue, Problem-solving activity approach, Media education.

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Introduction

Theoretical background of education and upbringing in the modern society is being constantly updated and corrected. A number of important factors contribute to this process: ever-increasing scope of knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for students and, finally, the processes of diversification of educational system. Substantial novelty stops playing a leading role in cognition. The user agrees with information repeats: "Die Welt ist flach, klein, leer und bodenlos" ("The World is flat, small, empty and has no basis") (Bolz, 2007).

Today the digital information environment surrounding a man, along with the increase in communication activity, has not only transformed our everyday life, but has also given rise to a whole complex of social reactions and generated a number of changes, which proved to be able to level the reasons for cultural hierarchy.

New electronic media are special phenomena characterized by interactivity and freedom of dialogue. They have made a user an active participant of information exchange, who, unlike their predecessor – the recipient of such communication channels as print media, radio and television, can not only absorb and retransmit the received information, but also to independently produce a full-fledged information product. This situation can be described as a symptom of returning subjectivity to the subject. The crisis of subjectivity was written about by many 20th-century theorists.

Methodological Framework

In the conditions of the new media-reality, when social interactions have the "person – media – person" structural type, new strategies of media-educational process are required. However, the traditional (modernist) model of education, which has developed within the European culture over the past few centuries, has not basically undergone any major changes. The list of fundamental principles of the model, though incomplete, includes the dominance of just one universal didactic discourse, static and monological nature, orientation to disciplinary division of knowledge into relatively autonomous storage systems of information, which should be "placed" into the students' heads. This model is becoming more and more inadequate to the realities of modern society, the main characteristic of which is uncertainty. Is it necessary to essentially change modern education and completely abandon the conservatism in favor of educational foresighting?

To answer this question let us consider the program of American professor M. Lipman. In the 1970s the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (Montclair, USA) developed the Philosophy Training Program for schools, and it has been used in many countries since 1980s. The chief theorist of the program is Professor M. Lipman. He proceeds from the premise that critical thinking is qualified (experienced, skilful) and responsible thinking, which passes correct judgments because it relies upon certain criteria, is self-correcting (self-improving) and sensitive to context (Lipman, 1988).

Lipman's program aims at systematic training of skills of argumentative and self-dependent reasoning in order to make our mind flexible in acquisition of new knowledge and to bring up an analysing, morally and socially responsible person. This idea is especially urgent in the conditions of rapid development of new (electronic) media, which are notable for their interactivity and freedom of dialogue; they make the user an active participant of information exchange.

The developers of the program proceed from the fact that the questioning nature of Philosophy and the existence of cognitive, ethical and aesthetic aspects in philosophical questions make it possible to discuss a wide range of philosophical issues that interest children and make this discipline unique for teaching literate reasoning.

We believe that the main component of media literacy is similar to the type of mental activity described by Professor M. Lipman. It can be developed in the process of education, when the student is given the opportunity to grasp different obvious and latent potentialities of the new media. In the most general form, teaching interaction with the new media is based on the following elements: educational (acquisition of knowledge about the structure of the media language and development of skills of analytical decoding of the content), edifying (formation of the ability to understand moral and ethical issues in media texts), antiglamorous (elimination of consumerist threat for the student) (Mikhailovna & Dmitrievich, 2014), and practical (development of practical skills for working with the media, which allow students to produce their own media texts).

The "Philosophy for Children" program was developed for schools, but its potential turned out to be much broader. The methodology of the program is effective for adult audience too, and is particularly effective as a way of introducing philosophy to beginners. Its theoretical and methodological understanding now touches upon certain broader issues related to higher education such as "Philosophy as an instrument for development of thinking skills", and "Methods of transmission of philosophical knowledge". The program even analyses the principles of education in general. M. Lipman's (2003) theoretical work "Thinking in Education" deals with these issues.

Ever since ancient times, philosophers have developed the idea of an immediate link between, on the one hand, methods of teaching and methods of knowledge acquisition and, on the other hand, understanding of the received information. Socrates proceeded from the fact that only the process of solving a problem can lead to true knowledge, wisdom and virtue. The main methodological ideas of the mentioned program became the basis for the model of organisation of practical classes on different philosophical disciplines. The main pedagogical innovation that we tried to integrate into our teaching process was the transformation of ordinary student audience during seminars into the "community of researchers" (community of inquiry), collectively seeking the truth by means of Socratic dialogue. The stages of the research are as follows: analysis of the situational context (primary source text), formulation of the related philosophical problems and issues, formation of hypotheses, discussion of the criteria of proof, and generation of a good judgment. Such a community of researchers is the best ground for the development of both cognitive and ethical-and-social skills.

The community of researchers is the central concept of the program. The term itself is known to have been first introduced by Charles S. Peirce, but has become widely accepted in recent decades thanks to Th. Kuhn. The historians of science, including Kuhn, note that a scientist that belongs to a group sharing similar goals, methodology, and, to some extent, value system produces much more than the one who works alone. Certainly, ideas always appear in the minds of individuals, but they are crystallized, formalized, and acquire protective layers in talks and discussions. Ideas are often generated only as the result of criticism or refutation of someone's views. In other words, intellectual efficiency depends largely on the immersion into socially stimulating facilitative environment – the community of researchers. The concept *facilitator* was introduced by Carl Rogers, an American psychologist and the founder of the person-centered approach. A facilitator creates a favorable intellectual and emotional atmosphere. The atmosphere of mutual understanding stimulates and at the same time facilitates the learning process (Rogers, 1986).

The student community of researchers does not certainly intend to solve scientific problems, and, all the more, to produce theoretical innovations. It has a developing and training nature, and, therefore, a different aim – stimulation of collective search and acquisition of the related skills, as well as formation of ways to use knowledge.

The art of conducting a dialogue requires the skill of intellectual flexibility, self-correction and self-perfection (Buber, 1971). In other words, we propose the following intention: to avoid passive memorizing and reproduction of information, based on the work of memory, but to focus on active immersion into the essence of philosophical issues, which requires independent creative intellectual efforts, ingenuity, and imagination.

To fully implement his competencies, a teacher-facilitator should be able to:

1)   Listen carefully to what students say (reports, messages, remarks, etc.), watch, remember, and fixate both what is uttered by the participants and their behavior during the discussion;

2)   Establish transparent communication between the members of the group and eliminate information and communication barriers arising in the process;

3)   Ddetect and fixate similarities and differences in students' opinions, analyze and synthesize their statements related to any given problem;

4)   Diagnose and encourage effective behavior and correct ineffective one patiently, compare the observed types of behavior with those that can improve students' individual or group efficiency;

5)   Encourage feedback from the participants of educational process, avoiding authoritarian and defensive forms of communication;

6)   Gain students' confidence, encourage their efforts, inspirit, be tolerant of manifestation of individuality and freedom of judgment.

Results

Students generate their own questions and examples, make judgments and possible logical explanations. They do not have to follow the primary source; they can just proceed from it. They agree or disagree with the author or each other and start a conversation, a dispute, and a collective search for truth. This dispute reveals logical flaws in reasoning of the participants, draws out criteria of a plausible judgment, corrects positions, and determines the strongest arguments. It is likely that by the end of the lesson there will be no clear and distinct "answer" or "solution", and it will not be that important if the teacher does not reach a final verdict. It is crucial that students will gradually acquire skills of reasonable, logical, evidence-based thinking. They will get an idea of the basic philosophical categories not from the teacher's explanation but from their own intellectual operations, and get used to reflecting independently using these categories.

Some strict restrictive rules, related to both cognitive and socio-ethical aspects of the dialogue, should be used not to let the conversation turn into an idle chatter. Freedom of expression is associated with the requirement of substantiation, the right to criticize others – with tolerance of adequate counter-arguments, whereas the right for an identity – with the ability to contribute to the cooperative search for truth.

Let us consider in detail the sequence of steps in a practical research lesson according to the presented methodological scheme (seminar on the Theory of Knowledge for the 3rd-year students getting Bachelor's degree in Philosophy at Kazan Federal University):

1) The topic of the lesson is the study of one of the media phenomena. Students watch a presentation, which shows the historical background of this media object and the selection of the most relevant topics. For example, there is a phenomenon such as the Internet trolling. So the presentation should clarify the definition, and then the aspects of its visual representation and their impact on social relations should be considered in detail.

2) Based on the visual material students ask questions, formulate their opinions, and write them on the board (there may be from 5 to 7 of them or more). They classify the judgments and choose the most interesting questions for discussion. Now we would like to give some sample questions, which were formulated by the students for the recourse boards.4chan.org:

Is it somehow possible to confirm the identity of offline users on this website? Isn't this network practice a way of compensation for a person's inability to realize oneself in the real world, where it is impossible to stay anonymous? What is the essence of joy in disturbing someone's emotional balance? Will the rise of intolerance in the network transfer to aggression in reality? What should a user do not to become the victim of trolling?

3) Consideration of a better way to express and formulate problems extracted from the context.

4) Construction of hypotheses related to probable solutions.

5) Making assumptions and Judgment 1 in relation to the problem under study. For example: "Anonymity and actual impunity of the users of resources of this type helps actualize a person's creative potential."

6) Judgment 1 may be accepted by the audience as optimal or can meet objections. The discussion about convincingness of the proposed solutions leads to the discussion of its criteria. The agreement on the criteria implies rejection of invalid hypotheses, which do not meet these criteria.

7) Judgment 2 is adopted during this stage. Unlike Judgment 1, it is the result of the discussion and criteria-based reasoning. For example: "Positive evaluation of creative, but being of an offensive nature (on the basis of race, gender and other features) trolling products will lead to the growth of real physical harassment of women, colored people, etc.

8) Post-reflection situation. Students evaluate the deeper content of Judgment 2 in comparison with Judgment 1 and simultaneously detect its problematic nature. This allows them to open new perspectives for discussion.

Discussion

One of the leading experts in the new media, American theorist Lev Manovich believes that the study of products produced by the category of media producers (people who are actively present in the new media environment) will make it possible to fix social changes. Particularly, in his article "How to Follow Global Digital Cultures, or Cultural Analytics for Beginners" (Manovich, 2009). L. Manovich focuses on the fact that the current situation is unique in terms of the study of cultural processes, because media files must be studied by new methods. The author points out that the main task of the modern cultural analytics will be to get away from the paradigm of authority in art and accept the concept of art history without great names.

Let us consider to what extent these tasks of media theory are relevant for consideration of modern education.

Whet trying to determine the content of modern education, we often rely on imperatives put forward by the classic strategy of teaching, and, therefore, encounter its excessive standardization and regulation, which give rise to the illusion that it is possible to bring up a person in a strict logical order using this or that technology. We often underestimate the need to encourage, by means of education of upbringing, production of individual knowledge, inquisitiveness, and the desire to experiment. These particular abilities can help a person who lives in the state of ever increasing internal and external uncertainty to deal with a global problem – the need for permanent expansion of the scale of personal change.

Study of media refers to many areas of scientific knowledge, such as journalism, sociology, IT, philosophy, etc. <u>nominally</u>, we can divide the existing approaches to the phenomenon into two types: static and unstable. The approach that recognizes instability of the media means a set of ideas about the media, suggesting that they can undergo essential changes. M. McLuhan, L. Manovich, C. Marvin, and others can be considered as the representatives of this approach. Any kind of discussion about the media should begin with the acceptance or denial of the thesis that a *medium is the message*, whose authorship belongs to the pioneer of media theory, Canadian philosopher M. McLuhan. Despite the fact that M. McLuhan himself was not a network society contemporary, in his works he highlighted the necessity to study not only the media as a tool for information transmission, but the intermediary nature of the media. Selecting this approach is determined by the existence of the concept of the new media, whose dominant idea is their dynamics.

Among the researchers who share the view of the static nature of the media are E. Huhtamo, J. Klapper and others. These representatives of media theory work with certain media technology or media effect.

In our opinion, the existence of various directions in media theory is one of the key causes of problems arising in modern media education. American researcher Kathleen Tyner notes: "Media educators in the United States are a fractious bunch. One teacher's definition of media education is another's heresy. Like the blind men and the elephant, teachers often practice one small aspect of media education and conclude that they have the whole picture" (Tyner, 1991). C. Marvin, the Professor of the University of Pennsylvania, formulates the precondition of working with the media: "Media are not fixed natural objects; they have no natural edges. They are constructed complexes of habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate cultural codes of communication. The history of media is never more or less than the history of their uses, which always lead us away from them to the social practices and conflicts they illuminate. New media, broadly understood to include the use of new communications technology for old or new purposes, new ways of using old technologies, and, in principle, all other possibilities for the exchange of social meaning, are always introduced into a pattern of tension created by the coexistence of old and new, which is far richer than any single medium that becomes a focus of interest because it is novel" (Marvin, 1988, p.8). We believe that it is necessary to follow the strategy of dissimilation in relation to such a global matter as the media, which has a decisive influence on all aspects of our daily life.

M. McLuhan's (1964) concept "global village" has turned out to be prophetic in terms of the attitude towards information, when the deceptive nature of information channels is not comprehended.

Conclusion

If philosophy is understood as philosophizing as an activity rather than just study of theories, names and dates, then the proposed model of organizing a seminar makes it possible to give students not only refined final results of the research, but also to pay attention to their search. In this case, the content of media education is a constantly updated, nascent, appearing and varying phenomenon. It focuses on the inner experience of the student, rather than on external purposes of education. In addition, this research model is based on the principles of partnership and cooperation, due to which the student finds himself a full member of the pedagogical process; the student and the teacher establish trust-based and easy relationships, and their joint activities are carried out in a favorable creative atmosphere. This ultimately forms the culture of dealing with the new media, develops analytical skills of interpretation and decoding of media texts, the ability to perceive information as a single unit, as well as creative abilities, allowing students to create their own media products.

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