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Self-determination of Youth and Traditional Moral Values: the Role of Russian Literature

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Abstract

The article aims to prove the assumption that along with the known approaches to encouraging cultural diversity in education (critical, pluralistic, acculturation), a new methodological approach should be defined – that of forming the culturally-oriented world-view on the basis of personal self-determination in the traditional moral values, as represented in the national culture. The authors present their own definition of traditional moral values and analyse the way they are reflected in the classical Russian literature. The authors present the results of a field study designed to determine whether this reflective tradition is followed or interrupted in the modern Russian prose in the end of XXth – beginning of XXIst centuries.

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1. Introduction

Rapidly developing globalization processes result in the emergence of the issues of individual multicultural development that bring about the realisation of conceptual equality of various cultures, as well as the necessity to rescue different cultures with their unique representations, the value of the life experience interpreted through the lens of cultures around the world.

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On the basis of the studies of non-Russian experts, we can distinguish between at least three major approaches to the upbringing of the youth on the basis of the cultural diversity: the critical approach, the pluralistic approach and the cultural assimilation approach (Kalantzis et al., 1991; Megill, 2005; Hutton, 2003; Schmitt, 2008, etc.)

We argue that along with the aforementioned approaches, there is an approach which presupposes the formation of the multicultural world-view based on personal self-determination within the framework of the traditional moral values represented in the national culture (Kostyukova, 2002; Kostyukova, Petrova, 2001; Sklyarova, 2006, etc.). The authors of these studies concur with the assumption that the only person capable of respecting and appreciating other cultures is the one who knows and loves his native culture.

2. Literature as a clue to the values behind the society

2.1. Traditional moral values and classical Russian literature

Traditional moral values are, first of all, the initial values that were chosen by a certain people in the course of its history and formed its culture and traditions. Secondly, these are the values that form the basis of the people's lifestyle. They are represented in the language and customs of the people and they create the basic archetypes of the national world-view. Thirdly, these are values that make a certain national culture unique (different from the other cultures) (Kostyukova, 2002). In the Russian tradition, the moral values are, first of all, related to the thousand-year-old Russian culture. Perception, emotional experience and knowledge of this culture make an individual a true representative, defender, successor and member of his or her national culture. In this respect, the classical Russian literature crucially affects the formation of a cultured person of the Russian nationality.

The classical Russian literature is based on high moral standards and aspires to the eternal harmony between the person, the world and God. It raises global issues of the philosophical understanding of the world. The mission of the classical Russian literature was to nourish the spiritual aspirations of the human soul. The writer Valentin Rasputin brilliantly interpreted this mission of the classical Russian literature in his speech on the 4th of May 2000 during the final ceremony of the Literature Award named after A. I. Solzhenitsyn: «There were bells ringing and handbells singing from the pages of the books, the epic movement of life was always vivid in them... and the sunsets above our motherland were so beautiful that any human soul was full of tears of joy and delight. The literature was not blind and noticed every success of the evil, but to renounce the good was as inconceivable for that literature as for the prayer to renounce God» (Rasputin, 1990).

In the classical Russian literature there is no hero who values only himself. Onegin, Pechorin, Bazarov, prince Bolkonsky were painfully finding their destinies, the right places for them in the world. The mission of the classical Russian literature is brilliantly expressed by A. Pushkin in his poem «Prophet»: «Fire with the word the hearts of men...» (Pushkin, 1979). This was the mission of L. Tolstoy, F. Dostoyevsky, A. Ostrovsky and other Russian writers. It was adopted by the best representatives of the Soviet literature. M. Sholokhov defended the Soviet writers, accused of writing at the command of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, by arguing that these accusations are lies, asserting that Soviet writers were creating only at the command of their hearts. Russian literature expresses in its delicate fiction the vast cognitive, emotional, esthetic and spiritual experience – the eternal values that should be cherished by the humankind for the ages to come. These values, the moral standards, the aspiration to the good, justice, honour, dignity, charity, humanism are important both for the world society and for every person. The classical Russian literature always depicted life as it was, but its aim was also to present life as it should be, to portray the «positively beautiful individual» (Dostoyevsky, 1866). The process of active literary creation was supported by the rich and expressive Russian language. The Word was the most important and significant tool for Russian writers, the beginning of creation, as it is in the Holy Bible: «In the beginning was the Word...».

A. Chekhov noticed in one of his works that for Russian writers an individual was neither «little», nor «superfluous», nor a «clerk», nor a «petty officer» nor «Ionitch», but a Human (Chekhov, 1976). The literature indirectly provides the priceless life experience that is necessary for a young person. This literature helps to find and realise the sense of one's personal existence in the world, while assimilating the experience of the other person. The classical Russian literature has always provided the opportunity to bring up a person with regard to his/her soul, guiding the reader to moral self-determination. Russian writers, including Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Leskov and Chekhov, pondered over the human soul. They noticed that the soul is not always

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