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ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 166 (2015) 351 – 355

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

International Conference on Research Paradigms Transformation in Social Sciences 2014

Cultural and historical correlations of ideal education and human paradigm

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Abstract

The article describes main educational paradigms developed in different historical periods: antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the Modern Age. It is shown that anthropocentrism is in the forefront of all philosophical works. In the present article we review different points of view on the ideal men described by famous philosophers, since the final objective of education is getting an ideal man, make him better. It is proved that intellectual experience of the past is quite useful nowadays for settling issues of modern education, since it allows for deeper understanding of the essence of what is happening now and what has happened in the field of education throughout history.

It was concluded that the present model of education includes all educational practices that once existed in history. It is found that at present one of the reasons of systemic crisis in education is confrontation and competition of different educational models. Thus, it is necessary to determine a harmonic combination and interaction of different educational paradigms.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Tomsk Polytechnic University.

Keywords: paradigm, education, knowledge, management.

1. Introduction

“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learnt in school”. This has been assumed by A. Einstein, the same has been assumed by philosophers over the course of history and currently this idea has not lost its significance.

A man is almost always given in the process of learning: upbringing in the family, education at school, University and continuous getting knowledge from others and acquiring life experience, thus, from this perspective it is difficult to overestimate the contribution of education and process of cognition in the quality of human life, in the destiny as a whole.

Whereas the content of education is changing, its forms are being changed as well; the necessity of education is preserved in different historical epochs. Most likely, a single educational model was applicable throughout the history

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but depending on human objectives and challenges it varied and developed differently in certain time periods. Currently in pedagogic practice the situation is such that all educational models, which once existed in history, are available at the same time. At that these educational models confront and compete with each other rather frequently, being, in such a way, the reason for systemic crisis. In view of the above it is relevant to review the history of origin, development and functioning of different educational models and identify the ways of their possible combination in the current context.

2. Historical Background

In science philosophy the concept of a “paradigm” has been introduced by G. Bergman, German philosopher-positivist, to describe normative methodology of education and science (Shakabara, 2006). This concept has been further popularized due to work of T. Kuhn, American philosopher and historian of science. Working out the model of education and science development T. Kuhn has drawn a conclusion that the activity of community of practitioners is ruled by established traditions or paradigms, which can be reconstructed and one can determine the mechanism of their reconstruction. A paradigm by T. Kuhn is “universally recognized scientific achievements that, for a time, provide model problems and solutions for a community of practitioners” (Kuhn, 1975).

Among Russian scientists the concept of a paradigm has been studied by philosophers and representatives of methodology of scientific knowledge: M.A. Mostepanenko, V.V. Nalimov, A.I. Rakitin, M.A. Rozov, V.S. Stepin, V.S. Shvyryov, Yu.V. Yakovetz and others. The paradigm is used by them mostly under development of scientific rationality. Paradigm, reflecting some established and repeated in different situations cognitive signs of theoretical structures, first and foremost, represents this knowledge and is used by V.I. Kuznetsov for the “analysis of not knowledge systems themselves, but their functioning in a community of practitioners” (Kuznetsov, 1997).

Main items of educational paradigm are: 1) nature and objective of education; 2) attitude of a teacher to a disciple and his position in educational process; 3) concept of human-forming functions of education (humanitarian, culture-forming, socializing function); 4) content of education (axiological, cognitive, activity-creative, personal components); 5) pedagogic technologies of education (Bondarevskaya, 1997).

3. Educational models from antiquity to the Modern Age

The basis of all currently existing pedagogical trends and ways is some philosophical idea on the ideal man, on how it is necessary to influence on a man to make him better via upbringing and education. The final objective of education is to get an ideal man. Philosophical understanding of a man made great impact on the development of education.

At all times the objective of education was such an impact on a child, which will help to get independence for completing a mission by a man on earth. Missions and objectives of men on earth are different, and then educational purposes are different as well. In other words, “each historical cycle forms own problems of upbringing and education of a personality, finds corresponding methods and solutions, determines ways and directions of engaging into knowledge, adoption available skills, ability to translate and apply them in practice” (Romanenko, 2002). Philosophers of antiquity, the Middle Ages, Modern Age, and Enlightenment speculated on what nature of a human is, who the human shall be, whether he is capable of changing under the influence of education, inevitably turning their attention towards education. Their philosophical ideas on upbringing, enlightenment and image of a human became the basis for the whole set of educational systems.

The essence of ancient educational model is the combination of two cognitive methods – intuition and discourse. “The initial method of perception of the beginning of the world in pre-Socratic philosophy was intuition as a focused contemplation of essence of existence, in the act of which the contemplator equals to contemplation. To transfer the result of intuitive perception of the truth to another human being it was necessary to create special conditions. It was necessary to develop perception and reveal the possibility to see the world via symbolic structures for a disciple to have the sought for intuition. Traditionally a myth served for these purposes; thus initial attachment to philosophical knowledge started from studying myths” (Romanenko, 2001). It is known that all areas of knowledge take their origin from myths: medicine, philosophy, art, and upbringing.

The list of sages includes only those, who knew how to literally formulate their thoughts and skillfully use their knowledge. Code of “Sentences of the Seven Sages” was, in fact, the first educational program.

The second issue of ancient education was a discourse, which originated in sophistic period and was the way of verbal and logical expression of initial intuition. The standpoint of the author, expressed in rationalized speech or text is discourse. To enhance the skill for discourse other techniques and conditions were required.

Conversations of Socrates with his disciples were a classical form of realization of ancient education. These conversations encouraged combining and developing skills of a person to intuition and discourse. Socrates revealed a new method, which could extract hidden knowledge and skills from a person by asking skillful inducing questions – maieutics. By Socrates the teacher shall facilitate in a disciple the birth of truth. Socrates also did not accept any absolute truth: “No opinion can be false” (Plato, 1993).

Today the Socratic method of teaching is read as method of relativity of knowledge. This method gives the right to express a point of view, which can be different from a viewpoint of a teacher providing knowledge, relevant to the development of science at the present moment. Obvious examples of using such a method are the following: non-Euclidian geometry of Lobachevski, Einstein’s relativity theory and others.

Finally ancient educational paradigm was formed, when intuition and discourse were united in dialectics of Plato. Plato (disciple of Socrates) in his pedagogical works, formed on the basis of a philosophical view of a man and the world, assumed that from the moment of birth the nature of a man is somehow damaged. Thus, the main objective of upbringing is “correction” of a man. By Plato this evil was caused by the lack of knowledge.

Aristotle, the nearest disciple of Plato, was his known critic. He assumed that knowledge depends mainly on human willpower than impact morality. In his opinion despite knowledge impacts morality, nevertheless it depends on human willpower. A man shall choose himself how to act in conformity with his moral ideal.

Epicurus was one more outstanding figure in ancient philosophy. The school of Epicurus on the outskirts of Athens was called “The Garden”. Over the entrance there hung a statement: “Dear Guest, here you will do well to tarry; here our highest good is pleasure”. Epicurus assumed that the main objective of education is to enjoy harmony of life. Education should promote achievement of certain targets. The ability to adopt fast in a situation and apply knowledge timely is one of the main criterion of fruitful education and perception by Epicurus.

It is seen that educational models of philosophers of antiquity are the result of their ethic views. Thus, the way of life in the Hellenistic era directly depended on the choice of the philosophical school. But on the whole for thinkers of antiquity, the sage, who knows how to speak well, think well and act, is the ideal of a human being despite their different moral principles.

Conscientious creation of new educational system begins in the Middle ages. It is related to emergence and distribution of Christianity. “The main objective for philosophical and pedagogical thought of the Middle Ages was the salvation. The Divine was accepted the basis for upbringing and education. Monkhood exemplified by disciples of church was the benchmark of education” (Novichkova, 2001). Harmonization of relations between mind and faith was considered a primary task in the Middle Ages.

Such education was based on two theological-philosophical methods – apologetics and exegetics. Apologetics is the same logic but applied for discourse, arguments and conviction of others in truth and rightness of the practiced religion”. Exegetics is “interpretation of a noteworthy sacred text”. In the Middle Ages the ideal man was an obedient, virtuous and pious Christian.

In the Renaissance, which followed the Middle Ages, scholastic educational model of the Middle Ages was abruptly criticized for excessive seriousness and refusal from secular world with its new knowledge. Education of the Renaissance was a combination of three “main components: ideas of antiquity, which proved their viability, ideas of the Middle Ages, ideas of prognosticators of new society” (Dzhurinsky, 2004). Famous teachers-humanists of the Renaissance period were T. More, F. Rabelais, N. Cusanus, M. Montaigne, T. Campanella and E. Roterodamus. A personality developed both physically and spiritually became their ideal of education.

New time under the influence of empiric methods of F. Bacon, rationalism of R. Descartes and sensationalism of J. Locke formed a new educational paradigm. Now the ideal of education became not only an educated aristocrat, but a gentleman, many-sided, business-like with fine taste and sophisticated manners. For this model the most important was to draw attention to getting to know outstanding masterpieces of art and learning methods of right thinking.

Bacon assumed that the objective of gaining knowledge is to increase the power of a man over nature. He acknowledges nature-like principle of perception and education, since a man is part of nature. Science shall be cleaned from religious dogma and scholastics. Perception of the final unity and general reason for all the reasons is the highest scientific objective. The ability to use methods of knowledge acquiring but not accumulating some volume of knowledge is the purpose of education.

Englishman John Locke stated that human knowledge is the consequence of, above all, external sensitive experience. Locke's viewpoint that all children from birth are equal, since their mind is "unfilled blank sheet" is inevitably distorted. Now focus is on inequality of individual skills, different external circumstances and different degree of diligence.

Development of character, way of thinking, and manners of a true gentleman is an ideal and objective of English education. Completeness and systematic nature of knowledge take second billing and scientific erudition is considered just one of professions of a man, which he can do, if he has nothing else to do.

Ideas of upbringing and education of a man have been developed by J.J. Rousseau. His principles are more democratic. Educational practices are oriented towards freedom of a personality as the highest value. The main objective of upbringing as per his pedagogical theory is perseverance and development of natural talents of a child. A man, who is not spoiled by society and upbringing, is kept in his natural state is the ideal of education.

The Age of Enlightenment has become a turning point for Russian education. Reforms, which have been made in education, were revolutionary and contradictive – this was destruction of traditional basis of Russian culture, in which not everything should have been destructed. Adjustment to European culture had its disadvantages, such as superficial "Westernization", separation from traditional national mentality. For Western Europe and Russia the Age of Enlightenment has become the time of drastic changes in the field of education. This period is related to the transition from non-systematic education to philosophically justified pedagogical systems. It can best be seen from the example of classical German philosophy. Immanuel Kant is an outstanding representative of German philosophy. Kant differentiated the concept of "education", which forms reasonable morality from "training" aimed at development of natural skills. I. Kant saw the essence of education in teaching a man to understand his moral duty and follow it but not in settling down-to-earth pragmatic issues. Development of physical strength and spiritual abilities shall be part of physical training. Practical or moral training shall teach a man to live as independently acting human. By Kant pedagogy as a science shall demand creation of a self-perceiving and self-developing personality. A teacher by Plato in full sense is the God, by Rousseau – nature, and by Kant – the human is responsible himself for forming his own moral character, he shall be responsible for his own future and build his own life.

Ideas of educational philosophy of I. Kant have been further developed by Fichte. In his opinion the state shall take responsibility for implementation of objectives for education and upbringing. A uniform educational system shall be created for the whole society, but education alone shall become not only uniform and available for all the estates, but also mandatory. Thus, Fichte promoted the idea, which became revolutionary for European education – idea of creation a national-state educational system. Financial funding of educational system is, in his view, the responsibility of the state as well. Educational revolution in Russia accepted forms, which are close to German. In Europe two educational systems have been created, which differ quite a lot by their philosophical basis: Anglo-American and German-Russian, which exist till date.

4. Conclusion

Intellectual experience of the past is quite useful nowadays under settling of contemporary educational issues. It is more valuable since it allows you to understand the essence of what has happened and is happening in the field of education throughout history. Philosophical studies are above all studies of values: vital, moral, ethic, cultural, social. Anthropocentrism is at the forefront of all the studies. A man is standing in the center of all the intellectual findings and thus, everywhere even in abstractive problems moral domain prevails. And upbringing and education originate from spiritual and moral traditions of cultures. Thus, any changes in the field of education depend a lot on moral values of the modern society, thus their philosophical interpretation is required.

Having examined different educational paradigms in different epochs it can be concluded that contemporary educational model contains in fact all educational practices that once existed in history.

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