Constructing Philosophy of Environmental Education in Contemporary Russia

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Abstract

The content of environmental education at any level of an educational system seems to be evident and universal because of the gravity of contemporary environmental challenges. However obvious differentiation of environmental knowledge is an unresolved issue both in educational practice and in philosophy of environmental education. The environmental education on the whole and ecology as a course at school or university are determined by technological, social, political, legal and cultural factors. Besides, environmental education and its philosophical foundation depend on actual peculiarities of a country development. The factors influencing philosophical reasoning about environmental education in contemporary Russia and revealed in the paper are the following: the reactualization of non-Marxist traditions in Russian philosophy, educational tradition of knowledge paradigm, socially inactiveness of Russians, depending on state decisions, bureaucratic organization of science branches.

Keywords: environmental education; philosophy of education; education in Russia

1. Introduction

The core of environmental education at any level of an educational system seems to be very clear: to cultivate behavior that consciously minimizes the negative influence of human activity on the environment. The formulation of the environmental education aim is rooted in problems of international society development. While being accelerated the development of the international community reveals increasingly interdependent processes within the system “nature – human – society”. Thus the present ecological situation puts forward challenges of tight

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interactions between society and nature that is a crucial factor of ecological culture genesis. Ecological challenges extend to all countries and make the international community react using all possibilities among which the education is regarded as one of the most effective and successful one. Clearly, the environment is an issue that has no national boundaries. The universal essence of the problems seems to determine a universal content of the environmental education. However, the discussions about ecological knowledge show unclearness of its learning content. The environmental education is determined by technological, socioeconomic, political, legal, and axiological factors shrinking a fundamental character of ecological culture formation. Besides, it is important to mention that any course is a learning model of an appropriate science and aims at uncovering its fundamental principles. This model is a result of cultural and political influences on the conception about content of a science and principles of material choice.

The proposed assumption makes us argue that the environmental education as well as the philosophy of environmental education differs from a country to a country.

2. Objective, methodology and research design

There are no critical reviews that have focused on national and cultural peculiarities of the environmental education and its philosophical foundation. There has been no attempt to synthesize existing qualitative research on contemporary historical context of environmental education and its philosophical foundation in Russia. This article seeks to reveal the factors determining features of philosophy of environmental education within Russia’s educational system. In order to achieve this objective the first step is the question about the historical context of contemporary Russia for educational transformation. We begin with some historical context, describing the evolution of the content of the environmental education in Russia from the early 1970s, when an ecological worldview was diffusing from scientific circles, up to nowadays. The next step is to determine what peculiarities of philosophical tradition and educational practices are influencing philosophy of the environmental education. The article defines historical, cultural, and ideological features of today’s Russia educational strategies and system. The material has been drawn from scholar results and the findings of expert workshops held on the issue. This article uses empirical data, normative sources and information collected from scientific journals, the internet, etc. Based on the analysis of data gathered during our research, we have come to several arguments, which are explained further in the main section of the paper.

3. Discussion of the research outcomes

Formally Russia always complies with the evolution of the environmental education. As all over the world the environmental education in the USSR emerged from the beginning of the 1970s. Since that time it has been radically changing. Originally teachers and learners focused on spreading information about challenges and environmental problems. From the 1980s educators tried to teach ecology not only through books and made students to put into ecological practice. The late 1980s and early 1990s are a vital period for the whole country and the environmental education. By that time the idea of man’s role and place in nature firstly regarded as a nature conqueror had been replaced by the notion of nature preserving. The grave ecological situation in the country and tragic events like the Chernobyl disaster accelerated the evolution of environmental education content. The liberalization after the dissolution of the Soviet Union gave a great opportunity to develop new educational forms and strategies. The transformation of attitude towards the environmental education was rapid from the refuse to acknowledge social importance of the environmental education into acceptance of the ecological one as a new approach in pedagogical theory. In the 1990s the ultimate goal of the environmental education was to foster responsible attitude to nature and concern with the environment degradation. From the 1990s ecology became a course introduced in schools and universities all over the country. At the same time the first educational standard of ecology was largely discussed. The educational system needed methodological and didactical books which would be prepared by Russian scientists and learners or translated from foreign languages. This is a historical context when the environmental education and its philosophy were emerged.

In order to more precisely understand the peculiarities of philosophical aspect of the environmental education it is necessary to take into account the historical context of philosophy development in nowadays Russia. For seven
decades research and philosophical thought in Russia was under a forceful suppression. Before the political changes of 1980s Marxism was the unique philosophy framing all scientific and educational strategies. The philosophical and ideological vacuum caused by the downfall of Marxism as the only possible philosophical foundation for meditations explains a strong desire for new scientific currents and revival of non-Marxist traditions of Russian philosophy. The early 1990s saw a rise marked by the return of religious philosophy that is the core of philosophical currents in before-Bolshevik Russia. Apart from a religious character, ethnocentrism is other peculiarity of Russian philosophical traditions. It is normal and even important for Russian thinkers “to gesture toward their own Russianness” (DeBlasio, 2014, p. 64). The researchers and philosophers constantly underline that any elaborations of Russian thoughts should be based on the cultural traditions and spiritual customs. Even though universality of ecological challenges is supposed to uniform ways in which the problems will be solved, there are a lot of reflections about the Russianness of these ways throughout philosophical and ecological literature. Thus there is usually cultural aspect of reflections on ecological issues leading to a division between “us” and “them”.

Unlike European and American educational practice that is supposed to be based upon experience Russian educational process as well as educational program begins with philosophical meditations. It is regular to base learning strategy on a scholarly foundation and to claim unanimity of content and approach. The researchers are confused by the variability of approaches in different educational institutions and look forward to conceptual elaboration of notions and terms within the ecological discourse. The conceptual elaboration is other deeply rooted tradition of Russian education. Now scientists and experts are concerned with working out such a homogeneous philosophical foundation.

The monopoly of the materialist interpretation of historical development for a long time sheds light on linear understanding of historical process up to nowadays. In this context the history seems to be developed in a vector manner from one point to others determined by the irrevocable historical and social laws. Philosophical literature is still full of expressions such as “correct or right way of society development” that has a huge influence on ecological discourse. It is supposed that a person would be provided with concrete, one and the only patterns and would know still full of expressions such as “correct or right way of society development” that has a huge influence on ecological discourse. It is supposed that a person would be provided with concrete, one and the only patterns and would know how to correctly behavior himself or herself to environment.

The expectation of being equipped with social skills characterizes the national educational strategies. In 1993 an American observer described peculiarities of the environmental education in the context of Russian learning system: “Russian students traditionally are not active learners. Instruction in Russian schools is typically authoritarian, repetitious, and based strongly on the writings of experts. A prevalent view exists among Russians that ‘nothing will change’ so effort is futile. This attitude is fostered by the utter hopelessness of a world that lacks opportunity for personal advancement and the chance of self-actualization” (Silcox, 1999, p. 708). Since that time the educational system has undergone radical changes. For example, the European model of two-level system of higher education has been introduced and embedded throughout the country since September, 1, 2010. The adaptation of two-cycle system affords real opportunities for students for choosing individual learning and development route. However there is a persistable lack of meaningful and personal experience that means to realize a project direct and measurable for one’s own community and to have a significant impact on the learning situation. The sense of hopelessness that has become a cultural trait of the Russians under communism is still peculiar for their consciousness. The tradition of the educational system in Russia obliges to formulate learning program as a complex of knowledge whereas the goal of the environmental education is to develop concerns and awareness about nature (Bogner, 1998), to change behavior and to foster values. Despite the new federal state academic standards (constantly being modernized since 2009) totally based on a competence approach it is a stable tendency to generate knowledge as the most habitual educational strategy at secondary schools and universities. Moreover, the fundamental knowledge is praised as the best learning foundation which means a lot of subjects in curricula of a general character and absence of applied projects bound up with current ecological initiatives.

Generally in spite of significant changes and active modernization in the 1990s and the beginning of XXI century some features of the soviet educational system stay relevant for a contemporary education in Russia: centralized and uniform schooling, invarableness of basic educational patterns all over the country, outdated economic, social, scientific or technical concepts, absence of competitiveness and many others.

Insufficiency of mastering in self-development and self-education explains worship of state policy as an effective element of the environmental education. Overall the depending on policymakers’ good will is still a crucial factor of
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implementation of a new mode of sustainable development (Hautecoeur, 2002). Ecological behavior is regarded as

may consequently be incorporated into ecological scientific field. That is the reason why contemporary scientific

sociology, law, economy and some other humanitarian studies. Any interaction of an object and its environment

knowledge has recently become ecologized, or has been put in the context of ecological issues.

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oriented approaches within ecological interactions that coincides two various avenues in the environmental education (Kobylyansky, 2003).

4. Conclusion

Ecology is mainly thought of as an interdisciplinary sphere of modern scientific knowledge. However historical, cultural and social factors shape the content of the environmental education in a different country, namely in Russia where the philosophical foundation of the environmental education is the object of the analysis in this paper. On the whole the Russian environmental education is an integral part of international initiatives aiming at fostering ecological awareness and concerns about environmental challenges. The environmental educational system evolved through the same stages as other national ones. Nevertheless, the philosophical reasoning about environmental or most likely ecological education is determined by historical, political, social and cultural factors. The most influential circumstances and facts analyzed in this paper are the following: the reactualization of non-Marxist, religious traditions in Russian philosophy, uniformity of conceptions and philosophical language, educational tradition of knowledge paradigm, social inactiveness of Russians, depending on state decisions, bureaucratic organization of science branches. These revealed factors explain the peculiarities of philosophy of the environmental education in today’s Russia.

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References


