

Opportunities and Risks of the Development of Spiritual Abilities of Children

Zavrazhin S.A.

 Vladimir State University
Vladimir, Russia

Timerbulatova A.A.

 Industrial University of Tyumen
Tyumen, Russia

Abstract—The article endeavors to define opportunities and risks of development of children's spiritual abilities in the context of modern educational situation. The author's understanding of the essence of spiritual abilities and spiritual giftedness of children is presented. Some resources of the school and the family in the formation of spiritual giftedness of younger generation are disclosed. The positive influence of Orthodox art on spiritual needs and abilities of students with intellectual disabilities is experimentally proved.

Key words—*spiritual abilities; individuality; Orthodox art; spiritual giftedness; spiritual values; intellectual disabilities*

I. INTRODUCTION

The increased sensitivity to the problematics of spiritual development and education of the younger generation has become one of the defining characteristics of the domestic psychological and pedagogical landscape. And this is understandable: representatives of psychological and pedagogical knowledge are actively looking for an alternative to the increasing desecration of life, revitalization of values, moral disorientation, fragmentation of the individual, which create favorable conditions for penetration into the child-adolescent population of hedonism and narcissism, often resulting in transgression.

In this regard, special expectations are placed on the formation of a growing person spiritual (transcendent) orientation of the personality, which has a moral resistance to the multiplying temptations and risks of the information age. Figures of the Russian Orthodox Church, a large number of specialists-humanitarians and teachers-practitioners are engaged in the solution to this problem. Many of them are united by genuine concern about the fact that today's mass school is focused on the academic achievements of the student, and not on the process of his personal development, it is not particularly interested in individuality, it secretly welcomed the standard, competition, pragmatism.

Technocratism of the modern school is discordant with instilling in students of spiritual values. Behind the innovations, ratings, endless reports, a living child is lost, the main mission of the teacher is forgotten – to spiritualize his life, helping to germinate in the pupil the highest aspiration that give personality inner integrity, which are a reliable barrier from the influence of vague social morality, linking social success exclusively with material well-being. A natural question arises: is the modern system of education able to inspire the child in terms of egodominated society?

II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

Some researchers answer this question positively, however, in slightly different terms. So, A. Akhmatov [1] formulated four requirements for modern education, ensuring its spiritual and moral orientation. First, the reflection in the education of a creative, effective system of human interaction with nature, covering all spheres of material and spiritual life of our society, i.e. the greening of educational activities. Second, the maximum use of the spiritual component of the subjects. Third, strict adherence to the principle of emotionality of education. Fourth, the need to bring together secular and the Orthodox education without which the pedagogical potential of religion cannot be used.

A.I. Eremkin [4], relying on the spiritual and metaphysical philosophy of Russian cosmism, believes that the purpose of education should not come from the needs of society, but from the human meaning of life, which is to improve the spirit. Therefore, the purpose of education is the development of the spiritualized nature of a man. Teachers, according to Eremkin, should be spiritually developed personalities, know the method of recognition of the spiritual world of a man and consider each child as a spiritualized, gifted spirit.

It is difficult to disagree with these requirements; however, we believe that the attention should be played by aspects that remain in the shadows, by the development of the methodology of spiritual education of children. In particular, we are talking about the formation of children's spiritual abilities and the phenomenon of their spiritual giftedness.

V. D. Shadrikov was one of the first to speak about spiritual abilities in Russian psychology [13], who interprets them as a functional individuality of a person. This is the highest level of ability, a fusion of natural and moral dimensions of a man. They determine the measure of his humanity, the qualitative specificity of consciousness and behavior: love for neighbours, fatherland and altruism, meaningfulness of being, optimism and creativity.

Spiritual abilities determine the success of the resolution of spiritual and moral conflicts, moral self-determination; they are implemented in a constant correlation of themselves and their activities with moral imperatives. Spiritual abilities are regulated by individual spiritual values, which are purely individual for everyone, nevertheless allowing the person to formulate his understanding of the meaning of life and follow it strictly. Spiritual abilities enable a person to achieve true subjectivity, which is characterized by a reflexive way of

existence, moral certainty, conscious choice of life-affirming values, humanistic forms of expansion of his being, creative fullness.

Pronounced spiritual abilities relate to spiritual giftedness. It is believed that this talent is associated with the altruistic orientation of the individual, expressed in the creation of new spiritual values and service to people. In this context, spiritual values by default mean those higher meanings of human existence (Love, Good, Justice, Truth, Beauty), which are reproduced and strengthened by the spiritual activity of a person.

Here we meet with a secular understanding of spirituality. From the point of view of Christian anthropology spirituality is primarily associated with the belief in the full influence of the Divine on our lives. Religious faith can be interpreted as a search for the spiritual among the community of co-religionists. Theological and secular perception of spirituality is not so far from each other: "Russian spirituality," the well-known Orthodox teacher, A. Likhachev, notes, has its own characteristics that are characteristic of people regardless of their conscious position in relation to religion or Church: aesthetic attitude to the world, striving for beauty and harmony in everything; reasonableness of all life manifestations, unity of word and deed, good disposition of heart and deeds; vital attitude to self-sacrifice, ideal of life as service to God, Fatherland, neighbours» [10, c. 35].

We share the position of I. A. Kolesnikova, which treats spirituality as an ontologically conditioned state, inherent in man, experienced holistically, manifested at a certain stage of individual and personal development. This state is conditioned by the need and ability, through internal efforts, to establish and maintain a connection with the superindividual, as well as with the superhuman space, in which the existence of humanity as a reasonable part of living nature is "inscribed" and in which all human (all-human) meanings are concentrated [8, c. 27-28.].

In this article, spirituality is considered as a deeply intimate relationship of a person with providential, as a conviction that everything in this world is sacred and endowed with the energy of the spirit. Spirituality does not depend on the maturity of cognitive processes or adaptive skills. Moreover, the connection with the higher Self (spirit) becomes thinner as a person's spontaneity, naturalness, immediacy, openness, originality diminish, which is characteristic of children, but not very highly valued in the adult world.

In the humanistic pedagogical paradigm it is believed that every child is endowed by nature with spiritual abilities, but among children there are those who have especially expressed them, forming the core of individuality. They can be called spiritually gifted. The experts include a diverse enough group of children in their psychologist characteristics: children Indigo, mystics, pious, with a talent for telekinese, telepathy, knowledge of the future, etc.

Traditionally, children with a deep religious attitude are considered to be spiritually gifted. They, as a rule, became spiritual ascetics, priests, prayers later. Hagographie emphasizes that they are from a young age were distinguished for piety, compassion, humility, moral purity, reverent attitude

to the world. The first biographer of Sergius of Radonezh, Epiphanius the Wise, reported that even before the age of 12 the future Saint observed fasts strictly. On Wednesday and Friday he ate nothing, and on other days he ate only water and bread. At night, often not sleeping, devoting time to prayer [2]. The boy Prokhor-the future St. Seraphim of Sarov-was notable for pungency of wit, quick memory and at the same time meekness and humility [3]. N. With. Leskov in his story "The engineers' unmercenary" describes Ignatius Bryanchaninov in his childhood years: "piety was, I think, the inherent Bryanchaninov's feature. At least according to the book written about it, it is known that he was pious from childhood, and according to the phrenological system of Galya and Lavater, Bryanchaninov's skull showed signs of "exalted divine worship". He was a boy with an extremely pretty and appearance, which made a good impression on others with the persistence of his character and the nobility" [9, p. 136].

American psychologist, researcher of the spiritual world of children, Tobin Hart believes that they have a special openness to everything mystical, amazing and wonderful. They are natural mystics [12, p. 60].

Today, the concept of "mysticism" is used in several completely different meanings: 1) to denote experiences of unity or merger with the ontological fundamental principle of the world and all existence in General (God, absolute, etc.); 2) to denote various kinds of esoteric rituals (mysteries); 3) to denote various forms of the occult, sometimes having a pronounced parascientific character - magic, astrology, mantic, etc. In view of the heterogeneity of these phenomena, as the well-known religious scholar E. Torchinov, it is advisable to abandon the definition of "mystical" and replace it with the word "transpersonal", that is, beyond the limits of individuality and trivial experience [11, p. 347-348].

In transpersonal experiences, expressed in a special kind of psychic experience, the subject-object relationship fades, the duality of perception of the world overcomes, the same knowledge, the knower and the known align [11, p. 353]. In our opinion, transpersonal experience can be verified as an experience of direct contemplation of the transcendent presence by a person.

An acute sense of unity with the universe, repetitive heuristic States of consciousness, spiritual enlightenment are characteristic of a spiritually gifted child.

A child with clearly expressed spiritual abilities is a being in need of wise guidance. These children, it seems [6, p. 133], are subject to the three most serious dangers: 1) to become misunderstood, rejected by parents; 2) the subject of harassment (bullying) by peers; 3) to turn into spiritual narcissists - claiming the spiritual exclusivity of egoistic despots.

III. DISCUSSION

Let's take a closer look at these risks.

Children who receive information from "the subtle world" tend to share their experiences primarily with their parents. If such experiences are ignored or, worse, ridiculed, children are "closed" and their spiritual abilities begin to wither. To remain loved, to meet parental expectations, they have to give up"

unapproved knowledge", "unapproved feelings", i.e. to suppress themselves, to distrust themselves, which objectively leads to the rapid growth of the shadow side of the person, the accumulation of destructive energy.

Many parents have a false belief that children are their property. As a result, irreparable damage is done to the spiritual forces of the child, which are deformed, degenerating into a variety of destructive forms: addictive behavior, infantilism, aggression, neurosis and other manifestations of progressive self-destruction. This attitude is rooted in the narcissistic inability to recognize that the child is a separate, independent entity, and therefore is not obliged to think and feel exactly as the parent would like.

Children do not belong to their parents, they have a special purpose. This thought was brilliantly expressed by Khalil Gibran:

- Your children are not your children.
- They are sons and daughters of a life that does not depend on you.
- They went through you, but they're not of you.
- And even though they're with you, they don't belong to you.

Therefore, it is advisable for parents to accept the fact that children have their own mission; they are given, entrusted under certain conditions. "What is this mission, these conditions?", "Why did your child choose you as a guide in this world?", "How can you help him fulfill his destiny?" the range of issues which will need to reflect future parent prior to the date of birth into the light.

A parent makes a covenant with his or her child: both help each other in spiritual awakening. To awaken means to be present as much as possible in the present, to be meaningful and focused, to see and feel the child, himself and his relationship with him. Education is impossible without spiritual awakening, without awareness of the higher (sacred) dimensions of the universe, without openness, unconditional acceptance and understanding of the child.

To understand a child-in a primitive sense means to know his needs, interests, mental state and take them into account in the process of education. True understanding, however, requires the support and knowledge of children through contemplation.

Contemplation is a vision without judgment, "pure awareness", i.e. devoid of assessments. The ancient Greek philosopher Plotinus observed that the highest truths are revealed only in the contemplative state of consciousness. The art of contemplation helps parents to see the world through the eyes of their children, to penetrate into the depth of their inner universe, with quiet joy watching their thoughts, feelings, aspirations, sorrows, victories.

The ability to contemplate indicates a developed ability to intuitive knowledge of the world. The outstanding Indian thinker Sri Aurobindo pointed out that the greatest mission of the parent is to listen to the inner teacher of the child with the ear of his own inner teacher, i.e. intuition.

The developed intuitive abilities help the parent to "decode" correctly the signals coming from the spiritual world of the child, to remember his own early experiences and to correlate them with the actual States of his son or daughter. A parent who is able to hear the voice of his heart is clearly aware that the child is the same materialized spirit as he is. Parents, according to A. I. Eremkina [5], accustomed to think that children are small and so poorly versed in life, not even knowing that the souls of the children and grandchildren, sometimes older than souls of the parents. And if they are older, then they are more developed, with a large accumulation of energy reserves, which make up the spiritual forces. Therefore, parents (as well as teachers) should admire the Forces that have prepared the child's soul for the fulfillment of the divine mission.

Spiritual abilities, we believe [6, p. 133-134] may become for the child a source of confusion, anxiety, guilt, shame, alexithymia that excite parents, giving the child a way to understand, it would be better if he was like everyone else, would not deliver by its phenomenal a lot of additional inconvenience. At school, such children cause fear and aggression among peers, irritation of teachers, often taking spiritual giftedness for mental pathology.

Today, in the era of narcissism (Zh. Lipovetsky), spiritual abilities are interpreted by individual children as an undoubted advantage over their peers, which should be used for self-promotion, feeding inflationary enormity, as a special right to exploit others. ("I am more spiritual than you!") They begin to consider themselves chosen, believing that the support of metaphysical forces guarantees them permanent admiration, invincibility and permissiveness. Spiritual narcissists believe that others will always mirror their unfathomable talent. The orientation to the manipulative uses of spiritual energy destructive her. Spiritual narcissism contains a real danger of transgression - the effect of narrowing consciousness, which consists in a compulsive desire to violate cultural norms on the basis of an illusory idea of omnipotence.

Healthy spiritual abilities (light spirituality) are associated with a respectful (reverent) attitude to any manifestation of life, concern for others, modesty, empathy.

It is important for parents and professional teachers to develop children's ability to listen and hear the inner voice, separating the chatter of the ego from the voice of a compassionate, empathetic, open heart; encourage naturalness and openness; help a growing person to trust his experiences; synchronize information coming from the visible and invisible realities; realize the difference between the knowledge of something and the responsibility for this knowledge; simultaneously stimulate logical and extra-logical forms of thinking.

The development of domestic and foreign psychological and pedagogical knowledge convinces that the problems of socialization, education and training are the most difficult for teachers groups of children: prone to deviant behavior, with disabilities are successfully solved through the formation of healthy spiritual abilities.

Our studies [7] prove that children with disabilities experience realized deep but rarely spiritual needs, which,

unfortunately, do not always receive adequate psychological and pedagogical instrumentation. Among the means which contribute to the activation of spiritual States of this category of children educational resource of Christian art is rarely used.

Christian art is an art that has a powerful force of emotional impact on a person. In the process of perception of works of Christian art emotions are improved, so that children become more understandable those feelings that the people around them-adults and peers express.

The perception of Christian art is a type of activity of schoolchildren with intellectual disabilities, organized by a teacher, involving contemplation and active activity, where first impressions are accumulated, then their differentiation and only after that – the formation of an estimated attitude. Children with intellectual disabilities are a category in which Christian art is one of the most effective ways to prevent and correct developmental disorders.

The empirical study was conducted on the basis of a Special (correctional) boarding school in Gus-Khrustalny, Vladimir region. The experiment covered 16 schoolchildren of 9-10 years with intellectual impairment, who made up the experimental (8 people) and control (8 people) groups. At the ascertaining stage, the author's methods revealed the level of students' knowledge in the field of Orthodox culture, the level of emotional evaluation of Orthodox ideals, values and norms.

IV. RESULTS

The results indicated a low (92%) and average (8%) level of spiritual and aesthetic development of the subjects in both groups, which initiated the development of a special program of spiritual and aesthetic education of students by means of Christian (Orthodox) art. The program provided familiarity with the biblical history of the origin of the world, the Christian understanding of the meaning of human life, the basic norms of Christian ethics; development of moral feelings (empathy of responsibility for another person, thanksgiving, respect for elders, tolerance, goodwill, charity) on the material of positive examples of the life of heroes of Russian history and culture and Christian saints; development of aesthetic perception, artistic representations and concepts, aesthetic judgments and tastes, skills of artistic activity and aesthetic needs on the basis of samples of Orthodox art.

The solution of the tasks involved the formation of students with intellectual disabilities sustainable interest in Orthodox culture. The classes developed skills and needs of communication with objects of Orthodox culture: with the Bible, literature about the life of saints, Orthodox norms, traditions and values reflected in works of art and in the surrounding life (Orthodox holidays, monuments of architecture, iconography, etc.). Classes were held in an accessible form for children.

Pupils made excursions to churches and monasteries of Vladimir and Moscow regions; visited Museum expositions devoted to icon painting, religious relics, decoration of churches and priests. Students received initial ideas about spiritual music, poetry, painting, life and customs of Orthodox people.

Particular attention was paid to the organic interweaving of Orthodox ethical and aesthetic norms and values in the Foundation of Russian culture. The history of the Old Russian art is inseparable from the history of The Russian Orthodox Church. The meaning of this art cannot be understood by someone who has no idea of Christian culture. Entering the joyful world of Orthodox culture, the light of love and beauty, which Orthodoxy carries, penetrates into children.

The content of the developed program included four topics:

1. We and the beautiful world of God around us. (Creator and creation).
2. Joyful world of Orthodox culture.
3. Orthodox culture around us. The Fatherland of the earth and the heavens.
4. Virtues in the life of Christians.

The main methods of implementation of the program were system, creative and method of interdisciplinary interactions.

A form of consolidation and the current test assimilation of the received information were the problematic task rubric "discussing – thinking", creative work of children. The form of final control was a collective creative project.

Indicators of the development of the program material is the ability to assess the spiritual and aesthetic phenomena and categories of Orthodox culture, as well as the ability to build their relationships with others in accordance with the norms of Orthodox life.

The program is designed for 26 hours. Classes were held for six weeks 1-2 times a week for 30 to 40 minutes.

After implementation of the program, the author carried out a final control experiment.

The level of spiritual and aesthetic development of students in the experimental group increased significantly: 7 (out of 8) students reached the average level, positive dynamics in the subjects of the control group was not revealed.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed program of spiritual and aesthetic education of pupils of primary school age by means of Christian (Orthodox) art has proved its effectiveness at the initial stage of implementation. However, to talk about its effectiveness, repeated measurements are required.

VI. CONCLUSION

This article analyzes only some of the opportunities and risks of development of children's spiritual abilities. Understanding all the complexity of the transfer of the national education system, especially mass and inclusive schools, on the tracks of the development of the spiritualized nature of the child, we express cautious optimism about the fact that this goal will at least be the subject of reflection of the pedagogical community.

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