Spiritual and Moral Education of Schoolchildren as the Basis of Their Mental and Psychological Well-Being

D. M. Mallaev¹, O. A. Bazhukova¹, S. A. Magomedova², A. S. Damadaeva²

¹Dagestan State Pedagogical University, 367003, Russian Federation, the Republic of Dagestan, Makhachkala, Yaragskogo Street, 57
²Dagestan State University, 367000, Russia, the Republic of Dagestan, Makhachkala, Gadzhiyev Street, building 43-a

Abstract:
This article is concerned with the concept of spiritual and moral education, its main components, and their relation with the mental and psychological well-being of schoolchildren. The conducted study has demonstrated a close connection between the spiritual and moral education of schoolchildren and their mental and psychological well-being. Throughout experimental research, the authors of the article have considered the spiritual and moral education of younger schoolchildren since this age is a crucial period for the formation of moral consciousness and self-consciousness, and the moral foundations formed at this age determine the person’s future life.

Keywords: mental well-being, spiritual and moral education, younger schoolchildren.

INTRODUCTION

A harmonious person possesses moral, spiritual, civil, intellectual, creative, physical, emotional, and aesthetic qualities. Nowadays the spiritual and moral state (dignity) of personality and its education is a burning issue since material needs dominate over spiritual and moral ones, cutting-edge information technologies undermine interpersonal relations, the latest scientific achievements destroy the environment, respect for the older generation is lost, the desire to learn and be educated decreases, and the modern youth ignores the experience of previous generations.

Such spiritual and moral values as piety, conscience, beauty, dignity, duty, compassion, honor, respect, kindness, faith, love, veneration, tuition, and friendship are opposed to cynicism, moral degradation, rudeness, a lack of spirituality, cruelty, aggressiveness, inability to understand each other, a lack of respect and justice.

The person’s spiritual and moral education was highly valued at all times, and today it becomes even more important. The modern society is decaying in terms of morality, i.e. civil marriages are gaining popularity, the younger generation can be accused of soullessness, unbelief and aggressiveness. These traits manifest themselves in the behavior of not only adults or adolescents but also teenagers and even younger schoolchildren.

The spiritual and moral education of children is among the most acute problems that parents, state and society face. To study this problem from a scientific viewpoint, one should consider spiritual and moral education as a special educational sphere, which has its own methods, structure, goals and implementation techniques. The stated problem draws much attention to the correlation of spiritual-moral components and mental-social health in the person’s individual development, the importance of socialization based on spiritual and moral prescriptions that could lay the foundation of the mental and psychological well-being of schoolchildren.

In modern science, psychological well-being is defined as an integral characteristic that includes the schoolchild’s mental and social health and their dominant positive emotional states. A positive psycho-emotional state is an integral characteristic of the psyche’s activity for a certain period (relatively long and weak in intensity) that is marked as a positive emotion and is subjectively experienced as a good state of health and a positive attitude. A positive psycho-emotional state the presentation of the schoolchild’s positive experiences includes well-being and activity, emotional calmness, learning interest, satisfaction with educational results, a positive mood [5, 6]. Positive relationships with peers are also a socio-psychological variable associated with high satisfaction with one’s life.

Western scholars widely use the "psychological well-being" term, i.e. psychological well-being interpreted as mental comfort, the consistency of mental processes and functions, a sense of integrity, inner balance. [7]

L. Kulikov’s definition reveals a connection between mental well-being and health. He notes that mental health is not only the adequacy and purposefulness of behavior and activity, consistency in acts and actions, but also the coordination of many processes and well-being, satisfaction with one’s life; full-scale development and harmonious work of all mental functions; the state of mental well-being characterized by the absence of painful mental outbursts that regulates behavior and activity depending on the surrounding reality. [8]

The authors of the article believe that the mental and psychological well-being of schoolchildren should be regarded as a favorable psycho-emotional state characterized by activities ensuring positive interpersonal interaction with the environment, the formation of communicative skills; influences the development of cognitive processes, the students’ understanding of various emotional states, and the manifestation of empathy in accordance with communicative situations.
Therefore, the psychological characteristic of mentally and psychologically safe children is as follows: they are happy and cheerful and discover the surrounding world not only with their mind but also with their feelings; they improve intuition and their personality; acquire the ability for self-reflection and stress tolerance; use their potential in complex life situations; fully reveal their personality from the emotional and behavioral viewpoint; are capable of self-criticism and give themselves adequate self-evaluation. These children fully perceive their personalities and at the same time are tolerant towards others, acquire spiritual values and give themselves a sense of purpose.

Criteria for the manifestation of the mental and psychological well-being of schoolchildren are as follows: tend to act instead of worrying about a particular situation, the optimal functioning of all mental structures that guarantee a mental comfort in the social environment, the development of personal qualities for a positive perception of oneself and others, altruism, creativity and responsibility.

Psychological well-being forms positive interpersonal relationships and produce positive emotions. Psychological well-being is subjectively manifested as a sense of completeness and value of life and is obligatory to realize the child’s abilities and talents.

Thus, psychological well-being embraces mental and psychological health. It is also a necessary condition for the full development and functioning of schoolchildren in the society and the realization of their personal potential at various stages of growing-up.

The research objective is to determine how younger schoolchildren usually understand the meaning of moral actions. The authors of the article also aim to reveal the connection of spiritual and moral education with the psychological well-being of schoolchildren.

The research hypothesis is that the spiritual and moral education of schoolchildren lays the foundation for their mental and psychological well-being.

Table 1. Characterizing the concepts of “spirituality” and “morality”

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RESULTS

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

A significant stage in the formation of the child’s spirituality supported at the state level was the introduction of a course covering "Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics" into school curriculum. This religious course is currently taught in the fourth grade. The discipline is concerned with religious-philosophical, cultural and educational-educational aspects. Parents together with children choose one of five modules, including the fundamentals of the Orthodox culture, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism or secular ethics. This year, 15,500 out of 42,400 Dagestanian schoolchildren of the fourth grade decided to study the Islamic culture [http://tass.ru/obschestvo/4698556].

The course aims to develop Islamic ethics of schoolchildren and familiarize them with basic Islamic values like truth, piety, goodness, dignity, duty, conscience or honor, which provides proper moral and ethical conditions for self-cognition and self-realization of a growing personality. In particular, it is the formation of empathy, compassion and joy; intellectual and cognitive abilities (the development of various types of attention, memory and mindset). Education should improve such positive character traits as benevolence, diligence, love for one's neighbor, compassion and optimism.

To attain this objective, the authors of the article used the following research methods: an individual ethical interview, anxiety test (R. Temml, M. Dorky, V. Amen), quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods, statistical methods.

50 pupils from schools of Makhachkala took part in the study, including 25 schoolchildren of the 4th grade whose parents chose the module "Secular Ethics" and 25 schoolchildren of the 4th grade whose parents chose the module "Fundamentals of Islam".

During the interview schoolchildren were asked certain questions to define such basic values as truth, piety, kindness, love, beauty, dignity, duty, conscience, and honor that provide proper moral and ethical conditions for the self-cognition and self-realization of a growing personality. The interview also included questions related to an emotional sphere as a component of mental and psychological well-being (empathy, compassion, joy, etc.).

The results of the research are as follows:

1. The analysis revealed that the level of moral values and emotional well-being was much higher for children studying "Fundamentals of Islam" than for those pupils who were studying "Secular Ethics."

2. It should also be noted that the "charity" indicator is very low among schoolchildren studying "Secular Ethics" (20%) compared to the group studying "Fundamentals of Islam" (80%).

3. There were insignificant differences for such concepts as "freedom" (76% and 88%), "courage" (52% and 64%), "duty" (68% and 76%) and "fairness" (60% and 64%).

4. The concepts forming the basis of the schoolchild’s mental and psychological well-being have roughly the same indicators: "friendship" (96% and 96%), "justice" (60% and 64%) and "good" (92% and 96%). Despite almost identical indicators, schoolchildren understood these concepts in different ways:

   "Good" – schoolchildren studying "Secular Ethics" understood it as material goods, politeness, reasonableness; pupils who study "Fundamentals of Islam" associated it with peace of mind, peace in their country, love and help to one's neighbor;

   "Justice" – the first group thought it was when parents do not punish them for no fault; the second group believed it was the balance of life;

   "Friendship" – the first group used this notion to describe situations when they visited different institutions and did lessons together with their fellow pupils; the second group used this word for a close person who would share both joy and sorrow, and never betray.

The anxiety test conducted in these two groups have demonstrated that 13 children (26%) have a high level of anxiety (8 pupils studying "Secular Ethics" and 5 pupils studying "Fundamentals of Islam"), 21 children (42%) have an average level of anxiety (12 pupils studying "Secular Ethics" and 9 pupils...
interpersonal relationships, additional courses, games, etc. where the child feels more relaxed, is not success-oriented and is not afraid of getting a bad evaluation, also play a crucial role in the spiritual and moral education of the younger generation.

It should be noted that a close connection between the spiritual-moral education and the mental-psychological well-being of schoolchildren is conditioned by the fact that spirituality and morality are most efficiently implemented in the process of communication and interpersonal, i.e. in the process of social interactions. Interpersonal relationships are a specific channel for obtaining information. Due to this type of relationships, schoolchildren are included into a specific group interaction that contributes to the development of appropriate social skills and abilities to obey collective discipline and learning how to defend their rights and interests. The competitiveness of mutual relations typical of this particular age and social level (a factor absent in other spheres of communication) helps schoolchildren evaluate their own actions and actions of others and forms more adequate self-assessment, which among the factors of psychological well-being. A group affiliation, the pursuit of solidarity and mutual assistance, the desire to receive the same attitude in return ensure the emotional well-being of schoolchildren.

The school community is one of the priority groups to which children want to belong. However, this officially organized collective is an ambiguous phenomenon. On the one hand, it grants schoolchildren the opportunity to expand and deepen the corresponding theoretical knowledge, and, on the other hand, it helps to test this knowledge on practice and check whether it is correct and appropriate.

To ensure the effectiveness of this training, it is necessary to build it on real life situations, play out various patterns in various situations, the enrichment of moral experience.

The efficiency of a role-playing game is explained by the fact that, on the one hand, it grants schoolchildren the opportunity to expand and deepen the corresponding theoretical knowledge, and, on the other hand, it helps to test this knowledge on practice and check whether it is correct and appropriate.

It is possible to attain this end if there is a certain sequence of stages in conducting classes, namely:

The first stage: the creation of a favorable psychological environment in the group.

The second stage: setting tasks by creating life-like images and situations that should be identified and played out.

The third stage: the organization and self-organization of schoolchildren's activities through a combination of the proposed images and situations with regard to their practice.

The fourth stage: the improvement of the identified shortcomings by redirecting schoolchildren's activities to themselves and their lives.

The fifth stage: the reflection and assessment of this "game", the realization of acceptable and unacceptable behavioral patterns in various situations, the enrichment of moral experience.

To ensure the effectiveness of this training, it is necessary to build it on real life situations, play out various conflicts, situations of acquaintance, argument and cooperation. These situations should be simple to understand, contain several aspects of morality, offer several options for a possible solution, i.e. they should be problem-based.
The last provision is especially important since the formation of interaction skills involves not only the performance of certain behavioral actions, but also the training of mental activities and constant intellectual tension. S. Rubinstein noted that the initial moment of thinking and an impetus to intellectual activity is a problem-based situation with a conflict between what is given and what needs to be clarified [9, p. 191].

While choosing situations to play out, teachers should make sure that the chosen situations reflect the real life of schoolchildren and contain problems significant for them. Otherwise, children can take a position outside the situation since it does not arouse their vital interest, and its solution is not based on their own views and beliefs but is presented by the teacher, which contradicts such a condition of the child's moral formation as freedom in the context of their mental and psychological well-being.

Freedom provides the child's desire for independence and presupposes the ability to independently determine their actions in conformity with the formed worldview and act on their own decisions. Acting in a certain way, children make a moral choice between good and evil, moral and immoral. The subjective parameter of freedom is the development of personal consciousness, through which children acquire the ability to perform moral acts independently, without external pressure. The state of complete moral freedom is achieved only when a conscious necessity grows into a personal moral orientation, becomes an internal need of an individual.

Personal freedom is regulated by spiritual, moral and social norms that are worked out by the society and ensure its effective life’s activity.

Alongside communicative training, different group activities should be introduced into the pedagogical tuition for the spiritual and moral development of schoolchildren used as the basis for their mental and psychological well-being. The pedagogical value of group activities is determined by the fact that they enable to interpret the actions of a particular schoolchild into the act of each group member. Various group activities focus on individuality as a universal value and contribute to spiritual and moral self-realization through a creative activity in which the group is involved.

Group creative activities help develop schoolchildren’s knowledge and skills of ethical communication, and the consolidation of spiritual and moral norms that determine their readiness for moral behavior in real life situations. In addition, group creative activities improve logical and critical thinking, the ability to reflect, learn to objectively evaluate their own actions and deeds of others, focus on a moral choice, overcome stereotypes, conscious barriers towards others, which greatly contributes to mental and psychological well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

Spiritual and moral education is an important component of socialization that grants schoolchildren the opportunity to purposefully learn and represent moral norms and values. To attain this end, spiritual and moral education should be based on the child’s active role, conditions for their fullest self-realization and the correction of the existing shortcomings. This type of education serves as a foundation for mastering the spiritual values recognized by some particular society, facilitates constructive interpersonal contacts, attracts classmates to communicate in a group as a model of real interactions leading to mental and psychological well-being.

The study conducted by the authors has demonstrated that a significant positive effect on spiritual education of schoolchildren as the basis of their mental and psychological well-being is provided by the lessons on "Fundamentals of Islam" which teach children to sympathize and empathize, develop a proper way of thinking and communication among fellow pupils, form such character traits such as benevolence, diligence and love for one’s neighbor.

In this regard, an effective method of spiritual and moral education is communicative training that gives schoolchildren the opportunity to master rules of social interaction based on spiritual and moral values, check their rightfulness in various communicative situations, exercise their freedom, make independent decisions and take part in group activities based on the possibility of children to manifest their moral and social activity.

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