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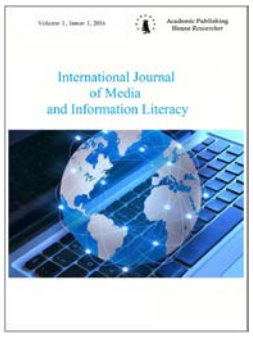

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Basic Approaches to Media Education in Russia: Sociocultural and Methodological Aspects

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Abstract

The article presents a brief review of basic approaches to media education in Russia from the genesis to present-day conditions of Russian media pedagogy. The historical analysis of media education in Russia has shown that Russian media education tradition relies on several dominant theoretical approaches such as the semiotic, culturological, aesthetic, ethical, sociocultural and critical thinking development conceptions. The study of artistic value of media production, a close link between the aesthetic approach with spiritual and moral education of the rising generation, reliance on children's creative skills have provided the basis for many media education models realized in contemporary Russia. Contemporaneous researches focus on studying media culture, various media effects and forms of media addiction, Internet safety and digital competences. Media culture as a vast layer of human culture is also in the focus of media researches. The solution to these problems depends both on teaching the younger generation basic computer skills for digital safety and on elaborating strategies for developing children's media competence, spiritual and moral values, critical thinking and analytical skills, social skills in the world of media culture. Potential research prospects of media education involve further development of scientific media education centers and schools promoting the investigation of urgent media pedagogy issues.

Keywords: media education, film education, media text, media literacy, media culture, mass media, media production, media languages, lifelong learning, media addiction.

1. Introduction

Historically, the ideological approach to media education became dominant in Russia after 1917. It combined in different periods with the protective, practical and aesthetic approaches. The present-day media education is based on the practical, aesthetic, culturological, critical and sociocultural theories.

The influence of the so-called "protectionist" approach in media education was especially strong in the first half of the 20th century. The advocates of this approach in Russia such as S. Lunacharskaya, V. Dikanskaya et al. believed that it was necessary to protect the rising generation from "adult" movies. After 1917, the list of such films included bourgeois and "ideologically opposed" movies. In the second half of the 20th century, this approach attracted further adherents such as A. Stroyeva, M. Zhabsky, et al., who insisted on protecting children against harmful and kitschy media production by means of "guided development of personality media culture, aesthetic immunity within the art education" (Zhabsky, 1998: 62).

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The main objective of the ideological ("Marxist") approach in media education was "to inspire the audience either to change the system of mass communication (if the political power was in the hands of non-Marxist leaders) or, on the contrary, to make the audience believe that the existing media system was the best (if the political power belonged to Marxist leaders). In the latter case, the media culture of other, for example, western European countries was increasingly criticized" (Fedorov, 2001: 26). The basic strategy for media education of the Soviet period was characterized by criticizing "politically opposed" media production or banning movies for purely ideological and political reasons.

The further evolution of media education in Russia was closely connected with the theories of developing viewers' critical thinking and the semiotic approach. The objective of these approaches was to teach children and youth to move easily through the flow of information and to minimize the risk of being manipulated by mass media.

The semiotic approach in Russian media education was developed due to the researches made by Y. Lotman, M. Bakhtin and V. Bibler (Lotman, 1992: 131; Bibler, 1991: 271). The key aspects of the approach concerned the study of multi-layered, image-bearing structure of media texts that were treated as a dialogue between the author and the audience, including the analysis of verbalized meanings, underlying meanings and symbolic nature of media culture, the social-communicative function of a text. Hence, the objective of media education consisted in developing the audience's abilities to perceive and analyze media texts.

Some elements of the culturological approach in Russian media education can be traced in the "thaw" period and the period of the aesthetics-based film education: G. Politchko, A. Spitchkin, N. Legotina, A. Sharikov, A. Fedorov, et al. The culturological approach in media education is still one of the leading theories both in Russian and foreign media education movements.

The aesthetic approach in media education (alongside with the practical and ideological approaches) dominated for a long time in Russian media pedagogy. Various aspects of aesthetic education based on arts have been described in works written by A. Burov, G. Petrova, B. Likhachev, B. Nemensky, et al. For instance, Y. Fokht-Babushkin considered that "students' familiarization with art must become a well-organized complex system of curricular, extracurricular and out-of-school activities" (Fokht-Babushkin, 1982: 32).Such system of upbringing children based on studying literature, theatre, music, art, cinematograph and other forms of art enabled to treat film/media education as a real component of students' aesthetic perception of the world.

Studies of cinematograph artistic diversity, development of students' creative potential by means of screen culture served as a basis for Russian film education researches made by O. Baranov, I. Weissfeld, Y. Rabinovitch, S. Penzin, Y. Usov, et al. The aesthetic education based on film art took place in film clubs, children's cinemas, film societies, etc. Frequently, film studies were integrated with literature.

In the tradition of Russian media education the aesthetic development of the oncoming generation has always been closely connected to the moral and ethical education. The core objective of the aesthetic approach to media education is using media to teach moral values to audiences by asking them to analyze the artistic and ethical aspects of media production. This approach was developed by G. Politchko, N. Legotina, Y. Usov, A. Fedorov et al.

Gradually the Russian media education turned to the sociocultural approach based on the synthesis of the culturological and sociological theories. This approach has been developed by L. Bazhenova, E. Bondarenko, A. Fedorov, A. Sharikov, et al. The main objective of this approach is to reflect on the social role of mass media and to teach different audiences to understand media languages. This is especially important in the modern world.

2. Materials and methods

The main sources for writing this article were books, journal publications, articles of Russian media experts and researchers. We essentially used methods of theoretical research such as classification, comparison, analogy, abstraction and concretization, theoretical analysis and synthesis. The study used the basic methods of cognition: systemic and the comparative method. The use of these methods allows the authors to reproduce assessment approach to the problem under study.

3. Discussion

The present-day media education in Russia is based on the synthesis of the aesthetic, culturological, critical, practical and sociocultural approaches but the dominant theories are the critical, culturological and sociocultural conceptions.

The first attempt to present a complete characteristic of basic media education models in Russia was made by A. Fedorov and I. Chelysheva (Fedorov, Chelysheva, 2002). Besides A. Fedorov made a comparative analysis of Russian and foreign theories and models of media education (Fedorov, 2007, 2009; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2016; 2017; Fedorov, Levitskaya, Camarero, 2016). His researches present a classification of different media education models: educational-informational models, educational-ethical models, practical-utilitarian and sociocultural models. In addition, it has been stated in his works that Russian and foreign media education models are based on several theoretical platforms. For instance, the model developed by A. Spitchkin, Y. Usov, and A. Fedorov is based on the culturological approach to media education, whereas the model created by A. Sharikov is based on the sociocultural approach to media education. It can be explained by the aims of different media education models.

The rapid expansion of information in the modern world, the advent of the global information society significantly broadened the scope of the sociocultural and educational discourse. It led to interactive communication of audiences with media and penetration of media into all spheres of human life. Nowadays the educational and informational impact of modern media on audiences can rival with the influence of traditional pedagogy. In this regard, we agree with V. Vozchikov who wrote: “media culture is a dominant culture of the information society existing due to the traditional and electronic means of mass communication that reconstruct the sociocultural world view with the help of verbal, symbolic and visual images; a universal culture that absorbed the functional diversity of mass, folk, elite cultures and their modifications, a metamessage culture ontologically enrooted in human life” (Vozchikov, 2007: 62). That is why an integrated use of social and educational functions of media culture is of particular importance these days.

For example, one should mention the vital importance of the educational function of media culture that consists in imparting information and knowledge to the younger generation. That enables them to evaluate data and take bearings in the complex flow of information. The role of media as transmitters of life modes, exemplary behaviors, moral values, cultures and social norms persists.

Currently, the potential of media culture is extensively used in education and communication: distant forms of learning are rapidly developing and guarantee the learners getting any level of education; the network of virtual picture galleries, exhibitions, museums, libraries is also increasing; internet communication has become quite common. In the meantime, today’s readers, viewers, users of media production turn into media consumers and the media environment has become a unique sphere of consumption and commercialization.

Modern mass media increasingly practice “confusion” of genres thus erasing the borderline between real events and invented facts. Such media texts become more frequent both in this country and abroad.

The above-mentioned tendencies to a large extent cause various media risks and harm inflicted upon the younger generation. These include media manipulation (lobby the interests of the public opinion, biased or distorted information, etc.), media violence and cruelty, media addiction and the like.

Media experts express concern that many media consumers have mosaic perception, creative exploration of the world is replaced by imitation, the borderline between reality and screen virtual space is blurred. These entail a shift of spiritual and moral conceptions of the world of culture.

The consumption values – both commercial and informational – are becoming more essential for people. Under these conditions, preservation of the cultural identity of the rising generation, preservation of their subjectivity are coming to the forefront of national concerns. Besides, genuine understanding of culture is intrinsically linked to cross-cultural communication, a cultural dialogue that enables a person to define sociocultural and value priorities in the world of media.

While the information environment can be both a means of information and disinformation, today’s younger generation needs critical skills to perceive and analyze media production (movies, TV programs, internet sites, computer games, etc.). One may agree with E. Bondarenko who states that “inaccuracy, emotional vividness of information received by students from the media, image-

bearing nature of mass media languages, underlying meaning, a low level of professionalism and common culture of most media texts are the factors that cause the danger of the so-called "parallel school" and its impact on their worldview" (Bondarenko, 2013).

Teachers and psychologists are greatly concerned about the urgent problem of media violence and aggression on the TV screen and on the Internet in relation to the oncoming generation. The researchers of this problem (Soldatova, 2013; Mikhaleva, 2014, 2016; et al.) note that during the recent years the younger internet users have increasingly found themselves confronted by such digital risks as cyber-trolling and cyber-bullying. Trolling is a violation of the implicit rules of Internet social spaces and is often done to inflame or provoke conflict. It is widely circulated in social networking. Another negative phenomenon of present-day online communication is cyberbullying – a sort of virtual terror – use of communication technologies for the intention of harming (intimidating, controlling, manipulating, putting down, falsely discrediting, or humiliating) another person, widespread among teenagers.

Another major challenge facing children and youth in the digital world is media addiction that does not only mean video games addiction or Internet addiction but also selfie addiction and social networking addiction.

These and other negative aspects of modern mass media alongside with the positive sides of the information space such as free access to information sources, educational opportunities, communication, cultural exchange attract the attention of Russian researchers interested in the issues of children's media safety. Some Russian secondary schools hold lessons devoted to media safety and teach students how to safely behave on the Internet, in social media, how to use online programs, etc.

The problem of safe and risky behavior of Russian children on the Internet was deeply investigated by G. Soldatova, M. Geer and V. Shlyapnikov within the research project "Russian Kids Online: Younger, Faster, Riskier" (Soldatova et al., 2013). The key findings of the survey proved that the Russian Federation can be compared with the countries that formed the "high online activity and high risk" group, together with Northern and Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden). The authors also highlighted the importance of digital literacy improvements for Russian schoolchildren since competent and responsible internet use will allow children to avoid many online threats and protect them against potential harm of any kind.

However, in our opinion, a complex solution to the problem depends mostly not only on timely informing and instructing children, teenagers and their parents of potential media risks but also on formulating effective strategies for developing children's media competence, spiritual and moral determinants of people involved in media environment. It is no coincidence that in recent years one notices a growing interest in the educational and developing opportunities of media pedagogy.

We believe that one should agree with the opinion of S. Korkonosenko that nowadays "modern approach to media education is taking the shape of a long-term public awareness raising campaign aimed at continuous development of the culture of public perception and critical evaluation of mass media – the information culture based on democratic and humanist ideals, respect for diversity"(Korkonosenko, 2004). This predetermines a constantly growing interest of Russian and foreign researchers in media education which is increasingly treated not only as a pedagogical movement but also as a sociocultural phenomenon.

Recently, there has been conducted a research in Russia on information and media literacy issues "Conceptual Relationship of Information Literacy and Media Literacy in Knowledge Societies" supported by UNESCO's Communication and Information Sector. The findings of the research included some recommendations for tackling these crucial issues: 1) promoting m-learning and maximizing mobile technologies; 2) cultivating 21st century competencies with objectives such as responding to the specific needs of the new socio-technological environment, narrowing the "digital use divide", fostering media pluralism and contesting restrictions on freedom of speech; 3) establishing collaborative networks and strategic partnerships; 4) education reform and teacher training; 5) contextualizing initiatives for specific cultural settings; and 6) considering the power of individuals (particularly the Net Generation) in the civil society when suggesting that more research should be conducted in this respect (Gendina, 2013: 6). In this regard, Russian scholars and researchers are interested in further analysis of accumulated experience of both Russian and foreign media experts.

Moreover, current media education issues do not include only the theoretical and methodological aspects of media studies in schools and universities. Media education should also comprise developing older people's Internet use and digital competences that is especially important in terms of lifelong learning. In this respect, we cannot but mention the project for adults within the program "Management in social environment" completed by E. Lazutkina. We share the author's opinion that "media education promotes citizens to recognize the potential of media for presentation or misrepresentation of their culture and traditions. Media education should be introduced into national curricula wherever possible as well as into post-secondary, informal and lifelong self-education" (Lazutkina, 2014: 14). The research also emphasizes the critical significance of teaching adults to use ICT with confidence and apply them effectively in daily life since media education is part of basic right of every citizen of ant country for freedom of expression and information accessing.

4. Results

Russian media education tradition is based on several dominant theoretical approaches such as the semiotic, culturological, aesthetic, ethical, sociocultural and critical thinking development approaches to media education. Unlike the foreign media education models, the aesthetic approach developed by O. Baranov, I. Weissfeld, Y. Rabinovitch, S. Penzin, Y. Usov is still used in present-day Russian media education. The study of artistic value of media production, a close link between the aesthetic approach with spiritual and moral education of the rising generation, reliance on children's creative skills have provided the basis for many media education models realized in contemporary Russia.

Modern approaches to media education to a large extent depend on the processes taking place in the global information space caused by the revolutionary development of telecommunication systems and information communication technologies, wider opportunities for interactive communication, radical mass media penetration in all spheres of social life. Human interaction with the media including perception and creative self-expression using communication technologies has become normal practice.

Media culture as a vast layer of common culture is also in the focus of media experts' researches as it represents sociocultural events occurring in the world through mass media. Modern major sociocultural tendencies in media space comprise increasingly broadening sphere of consumption and commercialization, multigenre media texts, blurring of boundaries between real-life and virtual events.

Moreover, in contemporary conditions media culture has become an essential means of developing students' creative potential and a means of their exploring the sociocultural environment. In this context, it is important to remember about the nature of media culture that is part of common culture and is inseparable from mass media. It also contains social and cultural phenomena of media sphere, various channels transmitting sociocultural information (television, press, radio, cinematograph, and internet) and at the same time determines the human interaction with the media including human perception and creative self-expression through communication media.

The crucial issues concerning potential risks and threats awaiting children and youth in the digital world usually include such most frequently mentioned dangers as media manipulation, scenes of violence and aggression on the screen, cyber-trolling and cyber-bulling, different forms of media addiction (online gaming, selfie, online gambling, social networks, etc.). The solution to these challenging problems depends both on teaching the younger generation basic computer skills for digital safety and on elaborating strategies for developing children's media competence, spiritual and moral values, critical thinking and analytical skills, social skills in the world of media culture.

5. Conclusions

Media education has become one of the ways of teaching children to properly reflect on media information. Its long-run objective is to develop children's media and information competence that will enable them to critically access and analyze modern mass media and evaluate their content. That is why there is an urgent need to review not only the positive and negative media effects on children's personal development and socialization but also the effective strategies for media education that would enhance children's media competence, critical thinking, cognitive interests, and creative skills.

Further research prospects of media education in Russia are connected with the development of scientific media education centers and schools that continue the investigation of urgent theoretical and practical media pedagogy issues. Their activities promote media education and media studies in Russian schools and universities. The core objectives of these centers focus on creating and implementing media literacy programs for teachers, students, adults including joint collaborative partnerships with various organizations and social groups (educational and research institutions, libraries, funds, etc.) interested in promoting media and information literacy in the society.

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