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Transformation of the contents of national social studies at school in the 20th century: the heritage and benefits

Streszczenie: Niniejszy artykuł jest poświęcony transformacji szkolnictwa w społeczeństwie ukraińskim w latach 1900–1990, a także podstawowym naukowo-metodologicznym oraz organizacyjnym podejściom do formowania treści współczesnych badań tego szkolnictwa. Wyjaśnia również zasadnicze naukowe oraz metodologiczne problemy tej transformacji.

Odwołując się do głównych tendencji rozwoju systemu szkolnictwa czasów radzieckich i przed nimi, artykuł przedstawia periodyzację rozwijania się społecznych studiów oświaty, jak również przykłady współczesnych progresywnych systemów z prezentacją różnych podejść do nauczania.

Słowa kluczowe: istota szkolnictwa społeczeństwa, oświata publiczna, dialektyka, ideologia materialistyczna, komponenty prawne

At the present moment Ukraine witnesses the problem of development of constantly evolving contents of social studies at school.

With the change of prospects, the emergence of new values among the youth and transition of social studies into competent and active position, pre-Soviet and Soviet organizational, scientific and methodological experiences seem very important for implementation of new contents of social studies. This arguable period in the development of social studies left much data for constructive and critical analysis. Its investigation and interpretation has some potential to specify scientific, methodological and organizational approaches towards formation of new contents of modern social studies at school.

Ukrainian scholars K. Bakhanova, O. Diatlova, L. Pyrozhenko, O. Pometun, A. Prykhodko, T. Samoplavska, I. Smagin, A. Starieva investigated some issues in their works, though the problem of emergence and development of Soviet contents of school social studies requires modern interpretation.

The aim of the article is to specify basic scientific and methodological problems concerning transformation of contents of school social studies from the modern perspective.

Within historical and methodological context, the notion of “contents of school social studies” represents the system of integrated knowledge, skills and habits, formalized means of education which was provided for public and social courses at school (including history) and enhanced the development of students’ skills, outlook, morality and behavior, prepared them for future life and work. The contents of school social studies of the 20th century is viewed as a cultural phenomenon and a model for social mandate which represents the principal part of education in didactics.

Taking into account general developmental tendencies of both school education and social studies¹, the following periodization of development of contents of school social studies in pre-Soviet and Soviet period is offered:

1. 1900–1920 – notional and emerging activity-based and cultural approaches towards formation of contents of the curricula “Logic”, “Psychology” and “Law”.
2. 1920–1930s – formation and development of contents of school social studies in terms of “work schools”.
3. 2nd half of 1930s–late 1950s – new interpretation of the contents of pre-Soviet courses “Logic” and “Psychology” in terms of “study schools”; formation of new legal course “Constitution of the Soviet Union and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic”.
4. 1960–1975 – formation and development of the contents of integrated school course “Social Studies” in terms of activity-based approach towards school education.
5. 1975–1986 – formation of contents of legal, ethic and economic school courses in terms of cultural approach.
6. 1987–1990 – immense reinterpretation of contents of school social studies in terms of cultural and educational humanization.

The analysis of the 20th century school syllabuses² and methodological recommendations states that experiments with the contents of school ed-

¹ M. Bohuslavskyi: *The evolution of theoretical foundation of high school education in Ukrainian pedagogics*. “Shliakh Osvity” 2010, No. 1, p. 4.

² P. Alekseiev: *Syllabus and regulations for all years of studies in high schools and vocational schools under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Education*. Odessa 1917, “Shkola” Publishing House, p. 223.

ucation allowed the educators to specify the basics for organization of the educational process, namely:

- the necessity to see the child's personality, treat him/her with respect, gently and attentively;
- educators' striving to provide balanced development of students' skills, foster self-activity and creativity, love of systematic work including manual work;
- a set of main stimuli for education: educational interest and practical application of knowledge;
- interrelation between teaching and life, desire to use life experiences to teach "in a natural school, not artificial course-based one";
- creation of nice and "cozy" working atmosphere;
- emergence of mutual trust and cooperation between teachers and students on the basis of similar interests and activities;
- development of cooperation between school and family, organization of teacher-parent meetings, parents' participation in school life.
- Hence, the criteria for new contents of school social studies were the following:
- provision of secondary education and knowledge about modern technological advancements;
- correspondence of knowledge and age peculiarities of students, its individualization within different skills and talents (the teaching process was divided into consecutive periods in compliance with psychological development of students);
- integration of different courses to provide more knowledge.

There were efforts to create integrated courses too.

It's worth mentioning that in the early 20th century the development of the theory of contents of education was difficult and fruitful, though some issues were not solved. Hence, progressive pedagogics of the 20th century stated that secondary education had to precede the specialized (vocational) one. Connections were discussed between secondary and vocational education, with emphasis on the superiority of the former – though the character of such connections during the process of teaching was not specified. Elements of secondary education that were used in vocational one were not specified either.

At the beginning of the 20th century they developed the transition of contents of school social studies from the knowledge-based to activity-based

paradigm. In addition to knowledge of philosophical propaedeutics and law, students had to develop skills and habits necessary for their further social life.

At that time, a regulatory system was formed for teaching religious education – the basic religious ethics course – at school. It defined the aim, the structure of the course, specified all its aspects, the officials' rights and duties, and it provided the courseware. Progressive teachers wanted to implement an integrated course and were against teaching formalism and dogmatism.

After the establishment of the Soviet Union, the content of social studies as a school subject was changed. Such courses as religious education, philosophical propaedeutics were excluded from the school curriculum.

In 1923–1924 Ukraine turned to teaching integrated course of social studies on the basis of a universal complex method. In some Ukrainian educational establishments there were such courses as economic geography of Ukraine and Ukrainian culture studies. After the analysis of syllabuses, differentiation was found of the teaching content according to the type of the locality (city, town or village), school (school for village youth, factory apprenticeship school, sugar industry apprenticeship school, agrarian school, agricultural school, etc.), territory of Ukraine (city outskirts school, village outskirts school, etc.) as well as discrepancies in the content of Ukrainian and the RSFSR schools.

Considering the problems of school education in the 1920s³, interesting analogies can be mentioned between the existing progressive education and the present learner-centered teaching approach. According to this approach, the content of education is not the one defined in the standard regulations, but it is hidden in personal traits, abilities and talents of each student.

The pragmatic teaching approach promoted a century ago corresponds to the competence and pragmatic approaches manifested in the state standard for basic and general secondary education today.

Integration of the content of social studies as a school subject in the 1920s is represented in the current educational standard by its integration according to the following motto: a person in a particular social, political, legal, economic and cultural environment⁴.

³ L. F. Ivanova: *Social studies in 1920s*. "Social Studies in School" 1997, No. 2, pp. 22–29.

⁴ State standard for basic and high school education in Ukraine: <http://www.mon.gov.ua/> (21.03.2015).

In the late 1920s the content of school social studies was not limited only by history, economics, law and economic geography. Social and political, social and practical education was an important part of the subject's content. Through the Pioneer and Comsomol organisations, students' activities were socially beneficial due to the knowledge received at social studies lessons, which were an integral part of the social studies curriculum. That is why, the project method and research method were the main methods of teaching social studies.

The problem of interrelation between the general and subject curricula was constantly discussed at teachers' meetings, conferences, in pedagogical periodicals and newspapers in the second half of the 1920s. General curricula promoted: public education boards as the basic means of formation of dialectal and materialistic ideology; interrelation between school and everyday life; preparation of students for labor activity; participation in the socialist society formation. Indeed, a number of general curricula were aimed at these purposes, but their implementation was not right and often caused a lot of trouble at school, as they complicated and often even made it impossible to understand the subject properly.

What is believed is that complex teaching, integration of social studies subjects into one subject, emphasis on students' activity, and implementation of active teaching methods which were used in the teaching process in the 1920s can be implemented nowadays forming the content of social studies. That is why the disadvantages of the reforms in the 1920s should be taken into account while changing the social studies course at school.

In the early 1930s, specialists of the Institute of Pedagogics, according to the school curricula for 1932/1933, issued the requirements for polytechnical school textbooks. The analysis of these requirements states that the following didactic and methodological features were typical of the social studies curriculum for schools in 1930s:

- social studies at polytechnical labour school is the main factor of the communist education;
- distinct class orientation should be observed in the process of teaching social studies;
- a textbook on social studies should contribute, by its methodological and methodic structure, to formation of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, students' preparation for active participation in forming the socialist society;

- a textbook on social studies should be a means of antireligious and international education;
- a textbook on social studies should be a means of polytechnical education and struggle against the multisubject school system;
- the content of the school course of social studies should be class – and communist-oriented and should highlight the provisions of the Communist party as well as the prospects for forming the socialist community;
- the teaching material should conform to particular tasks of constructing socialism⁵.

A lot of attention concerning the content of the school course of the social studies in Ukraine in the early 1930s was paid by the education authorities to the “up-to-date educational material”⁶.

However, since the middle of the 1930s the main task of the Soviet school was the development of students’ knowledge and skills. Verbal education was brought back, labor education was gradually eradicated and the educational process came back to the official pedagogics of the 19th century. In the second half of the 1930s, the type of secondary education used earlier was restored. Soon it was called “Stalin’s gymnasium”⁷.

After the adoption of Stalin’s Constitution, all schools in Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic introduced the course “The Constitution of the Soviet Union and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic” – a legal element was added to the school curriculum of social studies. From the second half of the 1930s to the end of the 1950s, this legal content – except the constitutional and administrative elements – was improved and completed with the knowledge of other spheres of law. However, functioning of the subject law within the “school of knowledge” required from learners only remembering legal information and implementing ideological provisions concerning organization, regime and functioning of the Soviet state, its authorities and government. The content of legal orientation was at first distinguished from the integrated content of social studies, and in the early 1960s it became a part of a new course – basics of political science (since 1962 – social studies).

⁵ Central state archive of higher bodies of authority and government of Ukraine (CDAVO of Ukraine), fond 166, inventory 10, file 495, pp. 202–203.

⁶ Ibid., p. 204.

⁷ L. N. Boholiubov: *School education of 1930–80-s*. “Social Studies in School” 1997, No. 3, pp. 24–32.

In the middle 1940s the courses of logic and psychology were again included into the school curricula. Broad discussion in scientific and pedagogic circles, publications in the journal “Soviet Pedagogics”, the analysis of the experience of logic and psychology teaching at pre-revolution school preceded the inclusion of the introduction to philosophy to the curriculum of the secondary school and the formation of its new Soviet content. It is clear that these processes were under the strict ideological control of the Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party.

The return of logic and psychology into the content of school education outlined the inevitable need of formation of students’ skills and abilities of logical thinking and understanding human relationships. Yet, teaching these subjects within the paradigm of “teaching school” aimed at receiving knowledge and formation of understanding skills contradicted the requirements of the modernized “labor school” which became a new stage in the development of the Soviet comprehensive school in the early 1960s on the basis of “poly-technic school education” ideology.

In the late 50’s – early 60’s the content of the new integrated educational subject “social studies” was formed in the modernized Soviet “school of labour”. This subject substituted philosophical propaedeutics (logics, psychology) and the course of constitution of the USSR and the Ukrainian SSR. It covered the general history of the communist party, the basics of philosophy, political economy and scientific communism (especially for final classes). The formation of content held on to the inquiry of the ruling party in accordance with the directions of the educational reform and the provisions of the new program of the CPSU.

In 1959–1963 all the necessary elements of “social studies” were formed, namely:

- normative acts of educational discipline;
- requirements for training syllabuses and the curriculum;
- textbooks for students and methodological materials for teachers;
- system of teachers’ training and retraining;
- methodological subject support system;
- scientific support for the content and didactic components of the subject ⁸.

⁸ I. I. Smahin: *Social studies course book in Ukrainian schools in 1920–1990s: compilation and application problems*. Zhytomyr 2010, “Polissia” Publishing House, p. 192.

At that time, the RSFSR Institute of Teaching Methods of Pedagogical Sciences, cooperating with practicing teachers, was improving the educational content by discussing issues at seminars, meetings and conferences.

Contemporaries were interested in this stage in the development of school social studies because of its approaches to the formation of an integrated educational course, methods of feedback between curricula and textbooks designers and practicing teachers, public participation in the discussion of the training contents and all its components. This was widely covered on the pages of educational journals.

Later, during the second half of the 60's – late 70's of the 20th century, social studies went through a time of experiment with the content, forms and methods of teaching the subject (though researchers have characterized this time as stagnation in the structure and content of school history courses)⁹.

Just at that time the requirements for the content and functions of educational programs were finally formulated in Soviet didactics. One of the objectives of social studies at school was defined as “developing students’ skills to expose bourgeois ideology and disclose the nature of the enemy”¹⁰.

In 1963–1986 the content of school social studies varied only slightly, being influenced by “external” political and ideological factors and “internal” ones such as approval of the content by training, development of didactics and teaching methods. A positive experience of this period was the organizational and methodological work to improve the content of social science: discussion at conferences, seminars and meetings, experimental approval of innovations, feedback to curriculum developers and practicing teachers, the use of scientific and technical periodicals to share the best pedagogical experience of teaching social studies, etc.

During the period 1975–1986, the content of social studies was divided into several separate subjects such as ‘social studies’, ‘basics of Soviet state and law’ (from 1975), ‘ethics and psychology of family life’ (1985) and numerous additional courses. At this time, the dominant influence on the transformation of educational content was exerted by political, ideological, social and economic factors.

⁹ Ye. I. Pometun: *Developing history education in Ukraine in the 20th century: thesis for doctor degree in education studies*. Kiev 1996, p. 285.

¹⁰ I. I. Smahin: *Social studies course book in Ukrainian schools in 1920–1990s: compilation and application problems*. Zhytomyr 2010, “Polissia” Publishing House, p. 255.

In the next stage in the development of school social studies (1986–1990) the content again began to be integrated within the subject “the individual and society” under the influence of social, economic and ideological factors. There was a shift of emphasis to the humanization of education in the content of social studies. During this period, various curricula of social science were developed¹¹.

It is necessary to emphasize that the reform of secondary education on the basis of party orientation towards reconstruction, democratization, transparency and pluralism led to increased activity among the pedagogical community (education of cooperation) and contributed to self-organizational processes. Since the mid 80's the political, ideological, social and economic factors that influenced the content of school social studies were improved by initiative and creativity of teachers, researchers and public representatives. It resulted in the emergence of new generation programs and new textbooks written from new conceptual and ideological perspectives.

Therefore, the transformation of the contents of school social studies in the 20th century allows for highlighting certain aspects that need attention of modern educational reformers:

- search for the optimal combination of integration and disintegration of the social contents within subjects and optional courses. The extreme measures (covering the contents within single one or several subjects) do not give the necessary training effect, defined as a requirement in the state standards of education;
- the social studies should include certain structural components which are proven by practice and based on the principles of scientific philosophy, logics, psychology, political science, economics, sociology, cultural studies, religious studies, ethics, and law. Nowadays, law and ethics are gradually disappearing from the curriculum in order to save training time by limiting the philosophical, theological, political knowledge. The courses of logics and psychology are not included;
- wide discussion with the use of modern communication means should precede the approval and implementation of new educational contents. As the Soviet experience shows, the constant “feedback” between the authors of curricula and textbooks and practicing teachers, students and parents improves the contents and brings about a positive result;

¹¹ I. I. Smahin: *Social studies course book in Ukrainian schools in 1920–1990s: compilation and application problems*. Zhytomyr 2010, “Polissia” Publishing House, p. 364.

- an important component of social studies is social and political education. That is why today project method and research method become widely used.

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Summary

The article analyzes transformations of the contents of school social studies in 1900–1990 in Ukraine since it can be helpful to specify scientific, methodological and organizational approaches towards the formation of contents of modern social studies at school. The study highlights principal scientific and methodological problems of these transformations.

Based on general development tendencies of both school education and social studies, the article provides periodization of development of the contents of

school social studies in pre-Soviet and Soviet times. Analogies of the existing progressive education to the present teaching approaches are indicated.

The author draws conclusions from transformational practices of the 20th century and determines their importance nowadays.

Key words: contents of school social studies, public education, dialectal and materialistic ideology, legal content

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