

The Knowledge of the Homeland as a Subject of Study in the Elementary Grades in the Bulgarian School

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Abstract: In the scientific publication, Regional Studies is considered as an auxiliary scientific discipline, which has as its subject the comprehensive study of the settlement, region, district or individual objects of this territory. An option for structured teaching of cultural heritage in the city of Ruse, which dates back to 2008 and continues to this day, is under consideration. The subject area deals with the study of the state of the individual end, i.e. of a part of the country and is part of foreign studies. The word "Regional knowledge" originates from "kraj", "native region" and in the literal sense means knowledge of the end - a part, as in the territory of the country. Its teaching is spread across the different subject areas, as it is itself diverse and studied by different sciences. The research has the potential to identify strengths and weaknesses of the Ruse experience and thereby become a starting point for the implementation of similar programs in other settlements.

Keywords: Knowledge of the homeland; subject; elementary grades; Bulgarian school

Introduction

Local knowledge is a scientific field that can be defined as a set of principles, rules and ways of human activity, a product of human work and creativity, which are a collective achievement of society. It is also an effective system for adapting man to the physical and social environment. The assimilation of the achievements of this science, the preservation of culture and its transmission to the future is a deep, fundamental and extremely responsible matter. Knowledge of the end regulates the behavior of the person, the style of interaction with the other individuals of the community and guides his actions in the interest of this community. The science of the given homeland, like culture, is not a static phenomenon, but a dynamically developing process that changes, moves and evolves. It is also an aesthetic education and as such has a wide range of action and influence. It affects the whole personality and develops all the faculties of man. From this arises the great task facing the school and society for aesthetic education among

adolescents. The very work of education in love for the end is a purposeful and systematic process.

Folk creativity, literature and arts, natural attractions provide rich opportunities for activities and learning. Any touch of these values must pass through the mind and heart of a child, a student, to excite him. The education in patriotism starts from the earliest years with the basic ideas about the homeland, about the way of life and customs of the people, about the way of life, about nature and work. An important part of educational work is the familiarization of children and students with native nature.

Skillful use of this kind of science in the learning process will teach children to feel the beauty of nature, of art, the beauty of man and his work. Successfully selected teaching materials can reveal to the students a lot about the native region - about its history, architecture, cultural figures. They can also show the different habits and customs that accompanied people's lifestyles.

Summarizing what has been said so far, we can conclude that the inclusion of children to folk art from a given region is the work of local knowledge.

Exploration

Knowledge about the homeland has long been part of the official curricula in Bulgarian schools. The work of state institutions such as museums, archives and libraries includes the study of local history, way of life, traditions and culture. These three levels of research work both collaboratively and from different goals and breadth of interests.

In the present work, we primarily analyze the ways in which work with local cultural heritage affects school-age children: what qualities does it develop, does it help to socialize heritage, by what methods is it done and what are the possible changes and innovations in the field. In order to arrive at an answer to these questions, it is inevitable to go through the clarification of three main concepts that will be worked with - local knowledge, school local knowledge and local pedagogy.

The knowledge of the homeland or the study of the native region in the Bulgarian context is a product of the Renaissance. Then interest in old customs, rites, traditions was born and their systematic recording, research and promulgation through scientific publications began. Many authors, including Lidiya Razpopova (Razpopova 1983: 9), consider the letters exchanged between Vasil Aprilov and Yuriy Venelin from the 1930s with a program to collect materials on Bulgarian spiritual and material culture to be the beginning of Bulgarian local lore. Many Bulgarian revivalists put a lot of effort into developing, on the one hand, methodical questionnaires for

searching and collecting folklore material, and on the other - for its publication.

The school has developed a specific attitude towards local studies over the years, as it recognizes the benefits of implementing local studies principles and achievements in direct school work, as well as for the development of multiple skills in students. Lidiya Razpopova is among the first scientists who dealt in detail with the topic of the history of the development and application of regional studies in Bulgarian schools. According to her, "school regional studies in our country is an educational and educational activity, in the process of which the student has the opportunity to comprehensively (integrally) study the environment immediately surrounding him - its past, present and future development" (Razpopova 1983: 31). Other researchers, as Doncheva, J. 2014a, 2014b; Angelova, St. 2022a, add that "Local knowledge is a way of assimilating and preserving historical memory and experience: heroic past, customs and traditions, folklore wealth, crafts, educational work, etc."

A common question that concerns researchers of school regional studies is the scope of the concept of "native region". Dimitar Kanchev examines the problem in the most comprehensive way, whose final conclusion is that "the content of the concept of "homeland" and its territorial scope should be approached differently, according to the specifics of the course, section or topic being studied" (Kanchev 1976: 14). Since the work on studying the native area begins already at preschool age, it is clear that it is initially defined as the closest and familiar environment to children, while with the advancement of their identification capabilities it can also reach broader perspectives - region, country, continent...

Another important topic related to school local lore is where it belongs - as illustrative material within lessons in history, geography, literature, etc. or as a separate educational form (circle, club, etc., extracurricular activities). Both work options are explored and the benefits of both options are indicated. And here the general conclusion is necessary that the best results are obtained from the study of local history material through the integral approach - when a problem is examined through the prism of different disciplines, so that its multi-layered nature can be covered.

The peculiarities of the organization of the educational process at school create a prerequisite for sharing knowledge about the homeland between different disciplines. In an initial course of study, this is more easily overcome due to the fact that, on the one hand, students have one teacher who covers most of the subjects, and this allows him to make connections, summaries, combine activities to start in one hour, and to continue in another, etc. On the other hand, in the very structuring of the study subjects, there are integral ones that combine multiple scientific fields. Such a subject

is today's "Man and Society", which is the successor of the long-standing study subject "Family Studies" (Doncheva, 2016).

Much of the research devoted to school local knowledge focuses on the benefits it has for the student's personality. They can be summarized in several categories:

1. *Benefits related to the integration of students into the community. Integration has different dimensions:*

1.1. in relation to ancestors/people of different generations (their way of life, aesthetic views and culture);

1.2. related to problems of the area in which they live, with cultural institutions and public organizations.

1. Local knowledge helps students to better understand older people, to explain their customs, their way of dressing, the things that are valuable to them. On the other hand, it is a valuable tool through which students can create connections with various local institutions, organizations, associations. This stimulates the development of their civic position.

2. *Benefits associated with a more accessible explanation of the learning material:*

Among the most frequently highlighted benefits related to ensuring the accessibility of the educational material is the fact that through the teaching of local history or the inclusion of local history material in the lessons, students are brought closer to what is being studied - new, complex and abstract concepts are explained in accessible and close, examples are given of things they know. (Angelova, Sv., 2022b) This concreteness is introduced into the lessons, which makes them more convincing for the students. Last but not least, through examples from local history, the students manage to discover the general regularities in the development of society.

3. *Benefits related to developing different skills*

By working in local studies classes, students develop their various skills - e.g. ability to take notes on what has been read, ability to observe, discover and appreciate natural beauty, research skills.

4. *Benefits related to the formation of attitudes in students.*

Attitudes are something that is extremely slow to form and difficult to change. The work of many pedagogues in the field of regional studies proves that it is possible to work in the direction of forming valuable attitudes and moral virtues. It directly affects the education of patriotic feelings among students. A consequence of this feeling is their desire to preserve the local cultural heritage. The knowledge that students acquire in the process of studying local history affects their self-perception and self-esteem. On the other hand, it also leads to a desire for development and self-improvement.

5. *Benefits related to the quality of knowledge.*

It is accepted that local knowledge work can influence the general level of the quality of students' knowledge. Among the most frequently cited benefits are: more permanent and full mastery of the learning material and overcoming its formality. As local knowledge works with objects familiar to students or objects from their cultural heritage, it stimulates them to understand things in their depth.

One of the most important features of the mentioned science as a methodological fact is that it can and should be considered as a subsystem of patriotic education. That is why the many benefits described in the scientific literature from the use of a local studies approach in the Bulgarian school speak for themselves.

Main thematic sections - The seven main thematic sections are presented ("Geographic landmarks", "Land of our ancestors", "Guide through time", "Unforgettable places", "My native school", "Genealogical roots", "Folk holiday calendar"), highlighted by the author. For each section there are introductory words, thematic scope of the educational content and expected results in pre-school, primary and junior high school stages.

Sample Annual Distribution of Educational Content in Local Studies - Included is a list of topics that should be studied between third grade in kindergarten and seventh grade. They are different in number - in the preschool stage there are 25, in the primary stage - 20, and in the junior high school stage - 27. The number of topics from one thematic division in different years is different. *There is a preponderance of topics from the "Unforgettable Names" and "Guide through Time" sections.*

„Forms, methods and means of teaching local knowledge" - the chapter examines the preliminary preparation that the teacher must carry out in order to teach the subject - preparation of an annual, thematic and weekly plan. The features of the local studies lesson and the methods of interaction are presented. An important conclusion is that "visualization in the learning process through appropriate means of educational work has a special role in increasing the attention, concentration and curiosity of students, the development of their cognitive abilities." (Dechev 2012: 93)

"Organization of local knowledge training" - basic terms from pedagogical theory such as "learning approach", "learning technology" etc. are clarified. The principles in the organization of education in local history have been examined - local history principle, ethnic principle, anthropological principle. Special attention is paid to the educational process in local studies - *„The learning process [...] cannot be limited only to the formation of knowledge, skills, ways of knowing, without noting that the same forms views, moral qualities, convictions, piety of communication and behavior, which are in a close organic relationship with education, as its sides and elements."* (Dechev 2012:106)

"Teaching design in local history" - different elements such as attracting

learners, motivation for participation, creating a favorable learning environment, stimulating the activity of learners, continuity and providing feedback, visit and excursion, organizing a local history expedition are considered, organization of local history promotion work. At the end of the book, a detailed (75 titles) methodical literature for the local history teacher is presented.

The knowledge of the homeland history pedagogy

The latest step in the development of the topic of the relationship between local studies and the school is the formulation of an independent pedagogical field "local studies pedagogy". The credit for this goes to Zahariy Dechev and Yana Merdjanova, who in several publications after 2010 tried to formulate the peculiarities of the genesis and characteristics of the share of pedagogical knowledge defined by them.

The goal of local history pedagogy is to "develop the theoretical scientific foundations and applied directions for integration into a local sociocultural context" (Rasheva-Merdjanova, Dechev 2010: 123). The important thing that the authors emphasize is that each local community has its own characteristics - historical, demographic, economic, etc. and only a subject that can adapt to these conditions can play the socially integrating role that adolescents need. They emphasize that this is a subject with an extremely applied function. In their articles, the authors make a connection with European practices related to the so-called *pedagogie regionale* or *pedagogie du patrimoine*. In both versions, these are special forms of education that connect young people not only with the historical heritage of the community in which they live, but also with contemporary local problems. In this way, they can be more effectively useful to their home region. The main thing worth "taking" from this foreign experience is precisely the idea of teaching knowledge about the birthplace not only in a historical but also in a contemporary context.

The beginning of the "Ruseznanie" initiative was in 2008. The most indicative of the first stage of its development is the description of Prof. Nenov, director of RIM-Ruse: „ *The training in Russian studies began as a patriotic initiative of VMRO-BND-Ruse and the museum, which aimed to give a higher level of knowledge about the local history, about the personalities who are the basis of the development of the city and the region, about the collections, the expositions and the stories in the museum, which present the most important moments of Ruse's history. Initiated by the then chairman of the Municipal Council Iskren Veselinov (and leader of the VMRO in the city), developed by the museum and coordinated with the regional inspectorate, the initiative became a reality in the form of training in the SIP from the second term of the academic year 2008/2009. In 2009, sixteen schools in the city held classes in this discipline, the curriculum of*

which contains fifteen sample topics. The authors of the curriculum are the writer of these lines, Dean Stanchev, history teacher and Yulian Gyurchev, history inspector" (Nenov 2010: 94).

After the initial work on "implementation" of the initiative in the work of the schools and the museum, some trends in its development crystallized.

First of all, it is important to distinguish between the activities of this initiative that find a place in the museum and those that are part of school programs. They have developed differently over the years and are subject to different factors, not least because school education and museum education are two very different fields. In her article, the Ruse museum pedagogue, Magdalena Trifonova, points out the following characteristic features of museum education:

1. there are no mandatory curricula and plans;
2. each museum can choose its own theme;
3. implements an educational process in extracurricular settings;
4. it does not repeat the school methodology, but complements and expands it, affecting not only the students' knowledge, but also the aesthetic feelings and creative abilities of the students;
5. takes place in a non-traditional setting;
6. there are no strictly established rules and a sharp distinction between trainers and trainees. (according to Trifonova)

The work at school and the work at the museum are two sides of the "Russian studies" coin - the theoretical and the practical, standardized by educational standards and free for creative interpretation. In this publication, it is more important for us to trace how the subject finds its place in the Bulgarian school environment - what are the obstacles, what are the successes and the good examples, so that we can evaluate in conclusion to what extent school "Russian Studies" is a factor for socialization of local cultural heritage. The school and the museum have a different function and structure and therefore the initiative has a different development in the two contexts. The point of intersection between the two is the organized "Russian Studies" competition in April/May 2016. It takes place in RIM-Ruse and is organized and financed by VMRO-Ruse. It is essentially a final assessment of the work of the school groups studying the subject and is a platform for students to see external validation of the efforts they have made throughout the year. Important to trace the history of the initiative is the study of its reception among society. In this regard, we offer a unique analysis of the coverage of the topic in electronic media and forums.

After the initial development of the thematic plan of the optional subject "Russian Studies" in 2008, teaching practice is subject to individual interpretation, i.e. in each school the initiative develops in a different way.

In some, the original idea is followed and the subject has a sustainable form of implementation (e.g. in "Lyuben Karavelov" OU, it is always an IEP), in others - it changes its form - it can be an optional subject or a club under the "SUCCESS" program. Teachers say that the change is necessary because of the funding of these additional activities. This fall, they try to apply different methods for conducting lessons and testing students:

- individual homework assignments for preliminary familiarization with a given object;
- presentation;
- topics for reports delivered in the form of a whiteboard or presentation.

Within the teaching of the subject, the focus is obviously on learning, which is largely based on preliminary preparation of the students and sharing what they have learned in a group. In this way, greater commitment is achieved. Due to its nature as an additional activity, a subject whose subject matter is linked to the personal experience and heritage of the students, "Russian Studies" has the potential to help develop many skills in students - search and selection of information, presentation skills, generalization skills.

When thinking about improving the teaching of the subject, teachers bring up the following needs of the following nature:

- expansion of financing by the municipality;
- additional financing of excursions for students in the region;
- more visual materials for use in classes;
- methodological developments.

Such a good example of dissemination and effectiveness is the visit of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria - Rumen Radev to an open lesson on "Russian Studies" at the "Yordan Yovkov" School in Ruse. The guest of honor was impressed by the knowledge and skills of the students, as well as the competences of the teachers and the director of the school, Mrs. Kremena Krasteva.



Conclusion

This scientific publication traces the emergence and practice of application of the subject "Local Studies" in the city of Ruse. The following conclusions are drawn from the analysis so far:

1. After the initial idea of creating this subject, its initiators did not take enough care to develop it. In recent years, there has been an outflow of groups in the PES "Local Knowledge", and the schools participating in the competition are the same. Education is a very dynamic field and requires flexibility and quick response to registered problems.

2. Each teacher has over time established his practice of conducting his work - they have different lesson plans, different number of visits to RIM-Ruse, some use developed methodical materials from the museum, others - not, different form of conduct - SIP or club. This has both its positives and negatives. The form of conducting the subject also predetermines the greater freedom that teachers have in planning the topics they advocate and the ways in which teaching is carried out. But the lack of common basic methodological support is the reason for a big difference in the education of students in different places, and this makes them non-competitive with each other.

3. The teachers working on the subject are aware that the subject must be presented in a different way from regular history/geography classes in order to achieve its goals. This makes them innovative and is a prerequisite for increased interest among students. The nature of the subject predetermines the possibility of developing many skills in the students, which they can successfully transfer to their work in the main subjects.

4. The public attitude towards education in a subject related to the city's cultural heritage is positive. Unfortunately, a large number of Ruthenians do not know about the existence of the subject "Local Studies".

Analele Universității Dunărea de Jos din Galați, Fasc. XX, Sociologie, nr. 18, 2023, pp. 133-143.

This is due to the fact that training in the subject takes place in fewer and fewer schools. The children's parents are not involved in learning activities and this makes them isolated from what is happening at school.

5. The students would prefer to deal more with natural and architectural objects, while the teacher's practice is focused above all on the strongest period in the history of the city - the Renaissance.

6. Diversification of topics from purely historical to more culturally oriented ones would satisfy the needs and interests of the students.

7. There is a lack of a uniform teaching methodology and adequate teaching aids developed in accordance with the goals that teachers must cover. In order for the subject to be integrated into the general school life, the intervention of methodologists is needed to develop methodical materials and conduct trainings among teachers on ways of "translating" the subject into the language of the specific school group of children of junior high school level.

8. To a very small extent, the teaching of "Local Lore" corresponds to the modern development of local knowledge in local studies pedagogy, i.e. shifting the focus from the past to the present of a place. Such an integrating subject has the potential to implement successful pedagogical practices in this direction.

From what has been said so far, it can be added that in order to successfully implement an idea, the institutions that especially in the city of Ruse - the Regional Department of Education, in the person of Dr. Rositsa Georgieva, the Mayor of the city, must also be involved Ruse, Municipal Council, Regional Library, Regional History Museum, Ruse University "Angel Kanchev" and many others, always respond, cooperate and help to turn ideas into reality, because without Local Knowledge - the knowledge of the homeland, without history, without the past, there are no "lessons" to remember and not repeat, or ones to brag about to the whole world!

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