

Problematic Situation at a Literature Lesson as a Means of Developing Reader's Activity of Pupils

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Abstract: In this article, theoretical aspects of problematic education are developed, definition of problematic situation is provided, main requirements to the exemplary problem are listed and main methods of elaborating problematic situations are provided: encounter of pupils with phenomena, facts that require theoretical explanation; use of educational and life situations, which arise at fulfillment of practical tasks by pupils; motivation of pupils to analysis of facts and phenomena of reality, which demonstrate to them contradictions between common understanding and scientific concepts of these facts, etc. In the work, specific features and algorithm of reader's activity are determined and main elements of reader's activity are named. The methodology of creation and usage of problematic situations at lessons in literature, which encourages development of reader's activity, is presented. A set of questions and tasks, which facilitate creation of problematic situations, was elaborated based on the materials of school program in literature. It is noted that during the process of solving a problematic situation, pupils not only receive new knowledge, but also master such activity elements as motivation, goal-setting, planning and fulfillment of actions, control, assessment and analysis of results. Particular attention is drawn to the development of pupils' ability to determine the goals of reader's activity at a lesson.

Key words: Problematic education • Problematic situation • Exemplary problem • Reader's activity
• Algorithm of reader's activity • Cycle of mental efforts

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the most highly sought type of education is the one oriented to providing pupils with a development opportunity while being engaged in their own activities. One of the means of activity activation is the problematic education, which became popular in Russian and foreign school in the beginning of XX century and is extensively used in the current educational practice.

Development of the problematic education theory is associated with the researches of American philosopher, psychologist and pedagogue J. Dewey [1]. While rejecting dogmatic education, the scientist sets independent activity of pupils, which is oriented to solution of problems, against it.

The decisive role of the problematic approach in the development of logical thinking of pupils was revealed by the American psychologist and pedagogue J. Bruner who elaborated his own concept of problematic education [2].

Further, the ideas of main concepts of problematic education were developed in researches of such foreign scientists as V. Burton, W. Alexander, P. Halverson, V. Okon and others.

In the Russian science, development of concepts and technologies of problematic education is based on the main provisions of the activity theory (L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontyev, S.L. Rubinshtein, V.V. Davydov and others) and it was reflected in the works of such scientists as A.V. Brushlinsky, D. V. Vilkeev, L.V. Zankov, M.A. Danilov, V.P. Esipov, I.Ya. Lerner, M.N. Skatkin, N.A. Menchinskaya, E.N. Kabanova-Meller, T.V. Kudryavtsev, A.M. Matyushkin, M.I. Makhmutov, A.V. Khutorskoy and others.

Much attention in current publications is paid to the development of concepts of activating the activity of pupils in the course of education and to the issues of organization of problematic education within various school subjects at a regular school and within the classes at secondary and higher professional school [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

Methodology: One of the elements of implementation of problematic education is the creation of a problematic situation. M.I. Makhmutov determined a problematic situation as the *psychical state of mental embarrassment, which occurs with a person when in a situation of the problem (task) that is currently being solved he cannot explain a new fact using his current knowledge or do any known action using older and familiar methods and has to find a new method of action* [8, pp. 109-110].

From the perspective of problematic education, according to A.M. Matyushkin, *a pupil assimilates new knowledge because he has a demand in this knowledge, rather than because the teacher tells him some verity known by the adults* [9, p.47].

A problematic situation, being a pupil's mental state, occurs in the course of activity and it cannot be suggested from outside. At developing such tasks, which can be called problematic (*a problematic question, a problematic task*), it is to be taken into account that they must cause a pupil to need obtaining new knowledge or a method of action that are planned for assimilation during the classes.

The content of a problematic situation is the exemplary problem, for which main requirements were formulated by M.I. Makhmutov:

- An exemplary problem must be associated with the material under study and follow from it in a natural and cohesive way as well as from the pupil's activity with regard to the analysis of facts and phenomena that caused the problematic situation.
- An exemplary problem must mirror the inconsistency of information (right in the formulation of the question, the task or in an exemplary situation).
- With its main content, the problem must set the direction for cognitive search and point at the ways of its solution. The unknown through some transitions must be associated with the knowledge familiar to the pupil.
- Problems must be adequate, i.e. it must not be too hard to solve them or they will cause no interest and pupils will try to pass over them. They also must not be too easy: easy problems can be solved quickly and do not activate mental activity of pupils or even are not treated as problems at all.
- The verbal formulation of a problem must contain words that describe concepts familiar to the pupil, which include elements that have a connection with the unknown in the very problem.

- Problematic questions, tasks and training assignments as well as examples provided by the teacher at setting problems must influence the emotional state of the pupil, interest him in the educative material and cause him to extensive activity [8, pp: 131-132].

Based on the analysis of pedagogical experience, M.I. Makhmutov determined main methods of elaborating problematic situations: encounter of pupils with phenomena and facts that require theoretical explanation; use of educational and life situations, which arise at fulfillment of practical tasks by pupils; motivation of pupils to analysis of facts and phenomena of reality, which demonstrate to them contradictions between common understanding and scientific concepts of these facts, etc.

The result of problematic education is not only a pupil's system of new knowledge, but also development of himself, assimilation of main elements of activity as a whole.

The result of reader's activity is expressed through mental, emotional and moral development of a pupil as a reader; his activity comprises mastering deciphering of messages, which the author included in the text.

As we noticed in our earlier published article, the structure of reader's activity is *similar to the structure of any activity: in its beginning, there are motives; then, the goal appears, which is achieved through the system of actions and, finally, – control, assessment and analysis of results* [10, p.26]. Problematic education assists in the development of the mentioned elements of reader's activity.

Body of the work. Let us represent a set of questions and tasks, which facilitate creation of problematic situations based on the materials of school program in literature.

Following V.G. Marantsman who noticed that *a problematic situation is built as a determination of a complicated task, comparison of various points of view, search for a correct solution and proof of its reasonableness* [11, p. 3], we will provide examples of such a method of activating reader's activity of schoolchildren.

At a lesson in literature in 7th grade, during the study of the story *Biruk* by I.S. Turgenev, a problematic situation is created by comparing two different opinions expressed by past-time pupils in their theses.

Victoria: When describing the life of the forester, the author showed with great skill the peasants' life in XIX century and revealed how poor the life of the people was and how cruel and greedy the landlords were. This is the main idea of the story.

Alexander: When describing the unfree, lack-all and suppressed people, Turgenev highlighted the fact that even in such conditions, they managed to keep their hearts and souls unaffected and the ability to sympathize others when they were in trouble. Even the hard life did not manage to kill people's humanism and this is the main idea of the story.

After representing two different opinions, pupils are asked the following questions: Who of the two kids do you think is right more? Can it be that you have not understood other ideas of the story?

The opinions of the class also divided. Presence of different points of view evidences the complexity of the question and finding the answer for it will determine the direction of activity during the lesson.

At a lesson where they studied the fairytale *Wild Landlord* by M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, the problematic situation was developing in the following manner: Pupils were asked to study the opinion of a contemporary reader about the fairytale *Wild Landlord*, which was published in Internet and which ended with the following conclusion: ... *they started to call the landlord the wild. The word is not offensive... Wild means natural, real and even - useful.* Then the following question was asked: What idea do you think has the definition *wild* in the fairytale by Saltykov-Shchedrin? While searching for the answer, the pupils will come to the understanding of the nature of the fairytale's lead character.

The problematic situation at a lesson in literature in 10th grade where they studied the novel *Oblomov* by I.A. Goncharov was created with the following problematic question: What is the role of the bathrobe in the understanding of the nature of the lead character?

It is to be noted that problematic situation at a lesson in literature becomes one of the most efficient means of creating special conditions for development of such element of reader's activity of the pupils as goal-setting. The highest level of development of pupils is reached when they are provided with an opportunity to participate in formulation of the goal of their activity at a lesson rather than when they have to accept the goal suggested by the teacher.

Having faced a difficulty while solving a problematic situation, which difficulty is impossible to overcome only using current knowledge and skills, the pupils realize what they have to master at the lesson. By formulating goals of their activity at a lesson, pupils determine what they need to do to overcome the arisen difficulty. As the result of the solution of a problematic situation, pupils voluntarily and judiciously join the activity.

For example, at a lesson in literature at 10th grade dedicated to criticism by Russian literators of the novel *Fathers and Sons* by I.S. Turgenev, the pupils were told to read an extract from a summary *Criticism of Fathers and Sons by Russian Literators* published in Internet on the Referat-Collection website. It begins with the following statement: *Fathers and Sons caused a storm of world criticism. After the novel had been published, there appeared a lot of reviews and articles rather contradictory in their essence...*

Having read the text, the pupils were to unassistedly voice the questions that appeared with them after this summary had been read. The main questions include the following ones: Who of the literators made analysis of the novel? What is the difference in the attitudes of the literators? Is there any similarity in their views? Whose opinion is the most persuasive?

The main of the arisen questions allowed to determine the goal of the reader's activity at the lesson, which was formulated by the pupils independently: to realize the content of various literators' articles, to determine the similarity of their attitudes and the difference between them with respect to the novel *Fathers and Sons* and to form own attitude in solution of arguable issues.

A problematic situation, which causes mental difficulty with pupils and thus determines the needs in new knowledge, encourages understanding the goals of the forthcoming work by pupils.

After having set the goal of the forthcoming activity at the lesson, the pupils are suggested to develop a plan of its implementation. As a rule, the essential actions include reading the text of the studied literary work, using dictionaries and searching for required information in various sources.

The main form of work that allows forming the understanding of a literary composition by pupils is the dialog, in the course of which the problematic situation is being solved and the answer for the stated problematic question, which has determined the chain of thought at the lesson, is being found.

The work ends with understanding of the received results of reader's activity and realization of the process of their achievement. Self-control and self-assessment are the most important elements of the structure of the reader's activity.

And the task to finish the following statement is one of the efficient methods of developing the skills of self-control and self-assessment:

- Today at the lesson, I have found out ... have learned ...
- I faced a difficulty with ...
- I have managed to overcome the difficulty with ...

The pupils can also be suggested to do another task and answer the following questions:

- Compare your initial understanding with the one that has formed in the course of interpreting.
- Have you managed to achieve the set goals?
- What difficulties did you face in the course of your activity? How did you overcome them?

For senior pupils the conditions are created when they need to pay attention to themselves, control, realize and assess the peculiarities of their reader's activity, its course and results. Understanding of the role of self-control and self-assessment of activity, as well as the experience that lets them do the mentioned actions confidently, are formed with the pupils.

Summary. Such specially arranged conditions of educational activity predetermine the development of incentives of reader's activity, as well. The interrelation between the incentives and the activity is in the fact that, on the one hand, incentives encourage for activity and are its internal determination and on the other hand, they develop themselves in the course of active teaching. If incentives are formed by a pupil with a goal on mind and systematically, his reader's activity becomes reasonable and efficient.

Comparison of the algorithm of reader's activity (formulation of the goal of forthcoming activity at a lesson, activity planning and performance, control, assessment and analysis of the results) with the cycle of mental acts, which are required to be performed within the framework of problematic education in order to solve a problematic situation (realization of the substance of the difficulty and problem definition, search for a way of solving the problem and elaboration of an action plan,

suggestion of hypotheses, verification of the correctness of the problems' solution), allows to come to a conclusion on the similarity of the structure and the consequence of actions performed in both cases.

Thus, creation and usage of a problematic situation at lessons in literature conduce assimilation by pupils of all elements of reader's activity, which are interrelated and allow to enhance the activity of the teaching in general.

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