

Section 4. History of Education

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Tendencies of primary education development in Ukraine during the period of emergence of democratic changes in social life (1984–1991)

Abstract: The article deals with the problem of primary education development in Ukraine during the period of emergence of democratic changes in social life in the mid-1980s and early 1990. On the basis of analysed sources the author of the article has defined the characteristic tendencies of its development such as the change for a four-year primary education; the systematic schooling starting from the age of six; the revival of national primary schools, the development of the content of primary education on the basis of the new methodological principles; optimization of educational process organization, etc.

Keywords: primary education development; structure, organization and content of primary education; junior pupils; tendencies; Ukraine.

The dynamism of modern social changes in Ukraine is attended by the reformation in education system; first of all it concerns the first level of general secondary education — primary school which is the basis for general educational and social competencies necessary for further successful training and self-realization of a person. At the present time specialists in the sphere of primary education focus their attention on complete changing of the legislative and regulatory field, on defining the optimal time for studying at the first level, on modernization of the content of primary education, etc. Similar tendencies took place in the mid-1980s and early 1990 when reformation of primary education was performed under the conditions of emergence of democratic changes in social life. Consequently, the study and analysis of them can be the basis for solving contemporary educational problems.

Historiographical analysis has shown that certain aspects of primary education development in Ukraine during the mentioned period were described in the research works of such modern scientists as L. D. Berezivska, L. S. Bondar, Y. P. Kodliuk, O. Y. Savchenko and others. But they did not define

clearly the tendencies of primary education development in Ukraine in 1984–1991, that is why the main aim of this historical and pedagogical research is to state them.

Socio-political (the proclamation of “perestroika”, democratization, “glasnost”) and socio-economic (scientific and technological advance, intensification and computerization of economics) transformations in the mid-1980s required modernization of education system, bringing it into line with the requirements of social development. In 1984 the Soviet government initiated a reform of secondary and vocational schools which was characterised by the following tendencies: improving the quality of children’s education and upbringing, development of pupils’ labor training and vocational guidance, improving educational content, providing the system of education with qualified teaching staff, improving the structure of secondary schools, development of its teaching resource base, etc. [7, 17–18]. Sharing the ideas mentioned by the modern Ukrainian scientist L. D. Berezivska that the proclaimed reform was a declarative one in nature [1, 306] we suppose that its adoption opened a new stage in the development of primary education.

First of all, this reform caused changes in the structure of primary education. According to the Decree adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Council of Ministers of the USSR under the title “On Further Improvement of General Secondary Education of Youth and Improvement of Conditions for Working at Secondary School” (1984), the four-year period of studying was introduced into primary school instead of three years, as it had been before the early 1970s [7, 35] and we consider this fact to be a positive one. It was supposed that structural transformation would enable more thorough training of the pupils in reading, writing and numeracy, teaching them basic labour skills and at the same time it would reduce their load and facilitate further mastering of the fundamentals of sciences in middle schools [7, 18].

The change for a four-year primary school was carried out by means of lowering the age limit concerning the beginning of systematic schooling to six years, and we consider it to be an innovative tendency of the researched period. It is important that the possibility and appropriateness of schooling of six-year-old children were proved during a decade of experimental studies carried out by the scientists at research institutes of pedagogics and psychology of the Ukrainian SSR [2, 93–94]. Organized change for the systematic training of six-year old children started in 1986/1987 school year. Taking into account the parents’ wishes, the level of children’s development, the appropriate training environment and trained teachers 358,3 thousand six-year-old pupils were taken to the first classes (it was only 50.2% of their total number), nearly 65% of them studied at schools, and the rest were trained on the basis of kindergarens [10, 26]. At the same time seven-year-old children were allowed to go to the first class as well, but they studied for three years at primary school. The Ministry of Education of the Ukrainian SSR should have completed the mentioned change till 1990, but this task was not carried out due to several reasons (lack of necessary training conditions, heavy material expenses, unpreparedness of teachers, etc.). Therefore, during the 1986–2000 period there were two types of primary schools functioning in Ukraine: three- and four-year primary schools.

Structural transformations in primary education system caused revision of the content of education. In 1985 a national Typical curriculum for general secondary school was adopted; and transitional curriculums for all schools in the USSR were developed on its basis [1, 309]. The Soviet schools started using it in 1986/1987 school year. Taking into consideration the different duration of studying junior pupils were studied according to different curriculums. The following characteristics were peculiar to the curriculum for the four-year of studying: weekly load was reduced, the time allotted to Labour Training, Fine Art and Music was doubled; a new integrated course “Acquaintance with Environment” was introduced into the 1st — 2nd classes [6, 8].

According to the curriculums new programmes were developed; they contained the detailed information about the scope of subjects, their world-view, educational and polytechnical orientations were intensified. It was the first time when a chapter under the title “Formation of Educational Abilities and Skills” prepared by O.Y. Savchenko was introduced into the programmes for primary classes. Concentricity principle concerning teaching particular aspects in Language and Mathematics was reduced and linearity principle in the arrangement of teaching material was intensified. In general it gave a certain float time and intensified the systematic and sequence principles in education [8, 60]. At the same time the content of primary education “was changed without its scientific justification, at the party’s behest” [9, 3] and it remained a unified one.

We consider the following achievement to be of a great importance: a considerable renewal of textbooks prepared by the Ukrainian methodologists for primary school; an issue of handwriting exercise-books with printed basis as a part of educational and methodical complex prepared practically for all subjects [4, 89].

We should pay attention to the fact that in order to improve the arrangement of the process of education and to increase its efficiency it was decided to reduce the number of junior pupils in a class to 30 children (instead of 40) starting from 1986 [7, 41]; and we consider it to be a positive tendency.

The plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (February,

1988) influenced greatly the further development of primary education: a new ideology concerning school education, in particular democratization, humanization, differentiation, etc. was proclaimed [1, 318]. The analysed regulatory documents and archives indicate that democratization in education influenced the appearance of new types of educational establishments (gymnasium, lyceum); the number of schools and classes with advanced study of some subjects (Foreign Language, Music, Fine Art) increased; author's schools were opened. Their functioning made differentiation and individualization of education in accordance with junior pupils' needs and abilities possible. In rural areas and a little later in cities special educational establishments such as "School — Kindergarten" were popular, they provided for sequence principle in upbringing and education of children of preschool and junior school age.

The adoption of the Law On Languages in the Ukrainian SSR (1989) and the Declaration about State Sovereignty of Ukraine (1990) caused the revival of national schools. As a result some transformations took place in the organization and content of primary education. The number of junior pupils trained in the Ukrainian language increased because a lot of schools where Ukrainian was used in the process of teaching appeared and the number of Ukrainian-speaking classes in schools with the Russian language of teaching increased significantly [11, 24]. The content of primary education was filled with the national component due to the following reasons: a great attention was paid to the study of the Ukrainian language; new subjects (Ethnology and Native Land) the main aim of which was to get junior pupils acquainted with national history, culture and traditions were introduced; the material containing political and ideological content was removed from the curriculums and textbooks and it was filled with the Ukrainian component [3, 128–129].

Under conditions of changing ideological and pedagogical orientations there was a tendency to de-unify the content of primary education. In 1989 the Ministry of National Education of the Ukrainian SSR suggested to consider some variable curriculums along with the basic one. School Board was allowed to choose the variant of the curriculum taking into account pupils' interests and needs, appro-

priate teaching resource base and teachers' education [5, 4]. At this time the first variable programmes on Music, Labour Training and Creative Work appeared [3, 129].

Democratization in education allowed teaching staffs to choose one of the suggested curriculums as well as to participate in their development directly. A new component of the curriculum — a school one — provided this process with wide opportunities. The hours left for this component were completely at the disposal of the School Board and used for the arrangement of individual and group lessons and consultations with junior pupils as well as intensification in studying certain subjects (Mathematics, Music, Labour Training) and introduction of new subjects (Eurhythmics, Ethnology, Native Land) [5, 2–3]. The identification of the school component within the curriculum was a step towards deunification of the content of primary education; it caused the variability of the educational process and allowed to take into account junior pupils' individual characteristics, interests and needs.

Abandoning a strict subjectcentrism through the introduction of some integrated training courses (Music and Motion, Creative Work, Man and Environment) was an innovative tendency of the researched period. Their introduction made weekly load in primary classes shorter, the number of subjects was reduced, and as a result the overload for junior pupils was eliminated [3, 128].

Thus, socio-political, socio-economic and pedagogical transformations taken place in Ukraine in the mid-1980s and early 1990 influenced the development of primary education. We consider it appropriate to define two stages of this process and to show the specific tendencies of each of them: *I* (1984–1988) — the change for a four-year primary education; the systematic schooling starting from the age of six; the parallel functioning of three- and four-year primary schools that caused the development of various curriculums, programmes and textbooks; structuring the content of teaching material according to the linearity principle; the creation of new textbooks for primary classes by the Ukrainian methodologists; optimization of educational process organization because of reducing the number of pupils in classes; *II* (1988–1991) — the emer-

gence of new types of educational establishments for junior pupils that influenced differentiation and individualization of training positively; the revival of national primary schools; democratization and humanization of primary education; the development of the content of primary education on the basis of the new methodological principles (depoliticiza-

tion, national orientation, deunification, variability, differentiation, integration).

The accomplished research does not reveal all the aspects of the defined problem, consequently there are a lot of problems concerning the development of primary education in the mentioned period which require further fundamental research.

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