



The Main Trends for Arranging Project Activities in Practice of the Modern Elementary School

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ABSTRACT

The quality of training schoolchildren is the guarantee for successful implementation of educational mission in elementary school. The quality criteria include the development of creative abilities and skills of self-cognition, self-education, and self-fulfillment. Among the means of ensuring the subjective position of a primary school aged child, which create a favorable environment for the formation of readiness for self-development, the scientists distinguish design technologies that require active involvement and learner's immersion into the process of self-education. It is necessary to identify more clearly and specifically both external and internal factors that contribute to the formation of readiness in schoolchildren of elementary grades to implement project activities, to determine optimal pedagogical conditions of implementation thereof. The priority among these project activities belongs to the use of design technologies in educational process that contribute to the development of reflective skills, independent work skills, increase of creativity, activation of cognitive interest in the partnership subject-subject interaction of junior schoolchildren and teachers. This article defines the main directions of project activities in the practice of a modern elementary school. It selects and analyzes the targets of project activities of junior schoolchildren. The authors focus on three areas of implementing project activities in secondary schools: Curricular, educational, extra-curricular activities, as well as in the process of integration of these forms. The content of the article includes characteristics of educational work on local history and civic education of schoolchildren by means of project activities. As an example arrangement of project activities for junior schoolchildren in the subjects "Mathematics" and "Russian language" is considered. The article analyzes the content of the "School of Russia" program and identifies its opportunities for arranging project activities on mathematics. The authors revealed possibilities of arranging project activities for elementary school during the extracurricular hours to produce a linguistic identity of a child.

Keywords: Project Method, Project Activities, Elementary School, Schoolchildren, Extracurricular Activities, Learning Process

JEL Classifications: I210, I280

1. INTRODUCTION

Projecting in pedagogy is considered as the process of developing real or conventional projects. The project is a kind of thought structure of any conversion. In modern elementary school, teachers actively use project activities, which have significant resources in achieving personal and interdisciplinary educational outcomes. Project method forms the basis of project activities.

The purpose of this article is to define the main directions of project activities in the practice of modern elementary school.

The history of project method is associated with the names of Dewey, Kilpatrick, Collings, and in national pedagogy - First of all with the name of Shatsky (Jones, 1986; Collins, 1976; Shatskaya and Shatsky, 1924). The teachers develop scientific ideas by Selevko, Yakimanskaya, etc., in using the project method (Selevko, 1980; Yakimanskaya, 2002).

The features and basic directions of project activities in the practice of modern elementary school are reflected in the works on pedagogical project by Zair-Bek (2011), Zimnyaya (2001), Matyash and Simonenko, 2012; Golub, 2013). The researchers conducted by Zemlyanskaya, Beloborodov, etc. indicate the necessity and possibility of including project activities in educational process even at the initial stage of school education (Zemlyanskaya, 2005; Beloborodov, 2006).

The opportunities of project activities in the educational process of a modern school were studied by Polat (2008), Polivanova (2011), Vorontsova (2010). As it is noted in “The basic educational program of an educational institution,” elementary school is a fundamentally new stage in the child’s life, expanding the scope of its interaction with the surrounding world, the need for self-expression. According to Polivanova, project activities contribute to the child’s self-expression (Polivanova, 2011). Currently, such researches as Dzhuzhuk, Matyash, Simonenko, Goryachev, et al., have convincingly shown the possibility of arranging project activities for elementary school, its versatility and compatibility with various systems of education (Dzhuzhuk, 2005; Matyash and Simonenko, 2012; Goryachev, 2014). The researchers believe that the developmental potential of project activities has a positive impact on communicative and emotional sphere of junior schoolchildren.

Project activities allow junior schoolchildren to master environment successfully, discovering, expanding their horizons, giving them ability to work with information, ability to work in groups, performing different social roles. These project activities contribute to the formation of communicative, regulatory and cognitive universal educational actions as well as to the attainment of the main objectives of elementary school: To teach a child how to learn.

2. METHODS

2.1. Specific Features of Arranging Project Activities in the Practice of Modern Elementary School

The aims of project activities in elementary school can be formulated as follows: First, the final result of project activities is of great importance. This is a generated feeling of success in a junior schoolchild, its successfulness. Even if a child demonstrates low academic progress, difficulties in mastering certain subjects in educational process, working on a project it gains confidence that it will succeed.

Secondly, project activities ensure successful development of general learning organizational skills, as a child is included in the process of educational cooperation. It acquires the ability to negotiate (for example, within small groups working on the same project); distribute the work; evaluate its own contribution to common work; analyze total result (to note dignities, find errors, and correct them independently).

Thirdly, these are the project activities, during which the general study skills of searching information are developed. Working on a project, schoolchildren learn initial skills of searching,

transmitting, conversing, storing information in electronic sources and media (PC, Internet, etc.); searching (checking) necessary information in dictionaries, books, textbooks; working with library catalogs. In addition, a child learns to observe and research objects of environment; purposefully and independently find and track changes to an object in the process of observation, experimentation, work with information; orally or in writing characterize the objects of observation, correlate the results with the purpose of observation, understand whether it was possible to reach the set goal.

Fourthly, junior schoolchildren develop creative general study skills of performing projects. This is ability to solve creative problems at the level of combinations, improvisation: To create an action plan, to show originality in solving creative tasks, to make creative work (presentations, small compositions, and graphic works), to act out imaginary situations.

Fifthly, application of acquired knowledge in practice and practical project work involves constant use of knowledge gained while working on projects and knowledge gained from the lessons in class. A variety of actions when working on projects can be considered as analogous to business activities of adults, as a permanent source of real-life situations requiring the use of existing schoolchild skills for their solution.

Sixthly, project work allows expanding school cooperation with parents. Parents not only help to work on a project, but in the course of joint activity, they improve their relationships with children and teacher, thereby engaging in productive communication between family and school.

Seventhly, when a schoolchild performs a project, professional self-determination occurs: Every schoolchild wonders what it can do, where it can apply its knowledge, what it will do in future.

The value of educational research activities of junior schoolchildren and the value of the project, on which they work, are determined by the possibility of its implementation by a schoolchild, a group, a class; by genuine interest in this type of activity; by confidence of success.

The stages of the research: Analysis of information sources on a research topic; generalizing modern experience in this area; modeling and implementing projects, programs and activities within the designated project areas; developing methodical recommendations on arrangement of project activities in the practice of modern elementary school.

The essence of project method in elementary education is that the target of project activities of junior schoolchildren is to obtain the product having objective or subjective novelty, personal and public importance.

Project activities of junior schoolchildren and project method of teaching are implemented with a tutor accompanied by an elementary school teacher, in the process of cooperation, commonwealth, and co-creation of a teacher, schoolchildren, their

parents and other persons concerned. Work on projects is strictly voluntary and it assists a teacher in arranging extracurricular activities of junior schoolchildren.

While projecting, junior schoolchildren learn how to set a goal, to define the problem, to relate the goal and conditions for its achievement; to plan actions in accordance with their own capabilities; to use subject knowledge to achieve goals; to work with information; to build communication, to collaborate; to issue the results of project activities, to present the project, to assess, and to construct the perspective of project activities in future.

However, despite its undeniable merits, the analysis of pedagogical practice shows that many teachers do not pay enough attention to arranging project activities of junior schoolchildren in the learning process.

Favorable factors for arranging project activities in elementary school are the content of subjects, the degree of cognitive activity of schoolchildren.

Analysis of educational practice shows that currently there are three areas of implementing project activities in secondary schools: In the framework of curricular, extra-curricular activities, as well as in the integration of these forms.

2.2. Arrangement of Project Activities in the Process of Teaching Junior Schoolchildren

Project activities of junior schoolchildren have their methodological features. The important feature of project activities on the disciplines of elementary education is its integrated nature. No less important feature should be considered as forming and developing projective skills. We believe that a teacher should conduct propaedeutic work on developing projective abilities of schoolchildren from the first grade. The problematic, partially exploring, creative tasks are the basis of this work. Tasks aimed at the acquisition of general education skills (analysis, synthesis, classification, comparison, summary presentations) and at the arrangement of projects contribute to forming projective skills of the first graders in the learning process. We believe that the projects performed by the first graders should be the group projects divided by the number of participants and integrated according to their content.

In the second grade, the work on forming projective skills of schoolchildren has to continue. Its emphasis can be made on more specific familiarity with theoretical concepts of project activities and on forming skills to work with them. We believe that in class, teachers should use problem and searching methods, offer tasks focused on different properties of objects, on establishing causal relationships, on making the sequence of actions, on training methods of observing and describing, on comparing items and sets of items, on offering logical tasks. A project can be performed under the guidance of a teacher by involving parents and senior schoolchildren.

In the third grade, project activities of schoolchildren have some peculiarities. Third grade schoolchildren activities are

more intensive, they have more unconventional approaches and proposals for implementing project activities. In this regard, we recommend the implementation of long-term projects under the guidance of a teacher. During implementation of such projects, schoolchildren learn to form hypothesis, conduct an independent search for information and highlight the main points, carry out the simplest proof, observe, work with questionnaires, formulate conclusions, make reports, and present the results (the products).

In the fourth grade, most schoolchildren should choose a project topic with sufficient degree of autonomy, plan their work, formulate goals and objectives, hypothesis (for a research project), find and summarize collected material, draw conclusions, show the results using multimedia presentations. As a rule, the junior schoolchildren of this period have the activities of maximum intensity.

2.3. Methodologically Specific Features of Project Activities While Learning Mathematics in Elementary Grades

Currently, the project curricula activities of junior schoolchildren are understudied. All disciplines taught in elementary grades have a huge potential in terms of arranging project activities of schoolchildren. The analysis of pedagogical experience shows that most elementary school teachers focus on the implementation of projects on such subjects as "Environment," "Literary reading," "Technology," and "Art."

The "Russian language" and "Mathematics" subjects are certainly most difficult to learn for junior schoolchildren. Performing projects according to disciplines not only helps to enhance cognitive activities of junior schoolchildren, but to consolidate and expand basic knowledge received at the lessons.

In the framework of the "School of Russia" program, the developers recommend project activities to be arranged on one common theme on the subject "Mathematics" every 6 months (Pleshakov, 2011. p. 238). Thus, in the first term of the first grade they propose projects on the theme "Mathematics is around us. Numbers in riddles, proverbs and sayings." In the second term of the first grade, junior schoolchildren run projects on the general theme "Mathematics is around us. Patterns and ornaments." In the first term of the second grade, such theme as "Mathematics is around us. Patterns on plates and dishes" is introduced. In the second term of the second grade, junior schoolchildren perform projects on the theme "Origami" (children make various items from blanks in the shape of a square). In the first term of the third and fourth grades, the following themes of the project: "Mathematical tales," "Mathematics is around us" are denoted. The creation of mathematical handbook "Our town (village)" is carried out. In the second term of the third and fourth grades, such projects as "Sums-calculations" and "Mathematics is around us" are defined. The collection of mathematical sums and assignments "Flowers-clocks" (Chislova, 2015. p. 127) is produced.

Topics presented in textbooks "Mathematics" on the program "The School of Russia" aim junior schoolchildren on implementing integrated projects. This integration, in our opinion, may

be exercised within such subjects as “Literary reading,” “Environment,” “Russian language,” “Technology,” and “Art.”

Thus, implementing the project on the general theme of “Mathematics is around us. Patterns on the dishes” means the integration on subjects “Mathematics,” “Environment” and “Art.” To perform group projects under this general theme, the following topics: “Golden Khokhloma,” “Gzhel Paint,” “Ornaments in Russian dress,” “Patterns of Yelets lace,” and others can be selected.

The main important feature of project activities is ability of teachers to involve their schoolchildren in participating in a project. Involving junior schoolchildren in project activities is quite complicated. In our opinion, there are two ways to perform project activities for junior schoolchildren more accessible and attractive. The first method consists of presenting project tasks in a playful way. Project tasks in the form of a game (in studying mathematics) contribute to the development of such qualities of computational skills as awareness, rationality, and correctness. Among these tasks, we include:

- Tricks with solving intended figures, with high-speed addition of three or five multi-digit figures, with high-speed multiplication and division of some figures.
- Tasks with entertaining frames and magical squares.
- Sophisms, etc.

Project decision of these activities includes tasks of solving the method of trick performance or developing a winning strategy of the game.

The second method involves the use of ancient tasks and historical information. Both methods can be used simultaneously.

Therefore, we showed a number of methodological features associated with project activities of junior schoolchildren in the process of curricular activities. We are sure that the features of project activities examined by us contribute to the solution of problems of developing junior schoolchild’s personality in all subject areas.

2.4. Using Project Methods in Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities according to the new standards of the FSES EGE include work in several areas, one of which acts as project activities. The main purpose of extracurricular project activities can be considered as the implementation of individual potential and development of schoolchild abilities, partner communication, development of skills to work with information, arranging and using time, ability to assess own capabilities and realize their interests, therefore, all the objectives of project activities will be implemented.

Moreover, project extracurricular activities can be implemented based on school or any educational arrangement.

Using project methods in extracurricular activities is considered as a productive direction of arranging educational process in the practice of modern elementary school.

The choice of a project theme (it is better if it will be implemented during a “brainstorming”) is considered to the main stage of project activities. It is well, when the choice of the theme of the project is preceded by a “burst of interest;” motivating event; strong desire to know, to understand. A child must be interested in working on the project.

A teacher formulates didactic and methodological goals, the fundamental question of the project. Problematic issues are put before learners (Why does it happen? Why this name? What do the words, terms, concepts mean? etc.).

At the second stage of “brainstorming;” the problem is discussed, hypotheses are put forward.

Creative (initiative, working) groups are formed, areas of information collection are selected (working in the library, with Internet resources, conversations, interviews, observations, etc.). For example, the theme “Yelets is the city of military glory” had the following areas of data collection: Where and in what does the military glory of Yelets “live” (city streets that bear the names of heroes; memorable places connected with the military events of different years; monuments to the heroes and defenders of Yelets and Russia; living legends - Military glory holders; glorification of the heroes in poems and paintings).

We believe that collection of information should be done after school during 1-2 weeks when parents can be involved. The collected data are processed with the help of a teacher; presentation materials (multimedia presentations, booklets, leaflets, promotional announcements, etc.) are prepared.

The results of project work shall be presented with the active participation of parents and invited guests during the extracurricular hours. “Communicative hours” and activities are carried out; research projects are protected (submitted). Therefore, on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the great victory, a “communicative hour” on the already mentioned topic was carried out in the third grade.

2.5. Using Project Methods while Teaching Reading and Writing in Extracurricular Activities

A special course “ABVGDeyka,” which is designed for 33 h per year, where the classes are conducted once a week. Duration of each class is 35 min. Such course is the most relevant now as it ensures development of independence, learning activities, literacy, takes into account individual abilities of each schoolchild.

The course program is generated according to the requirements of the FSES of the second generation and corresponds to the age peculiarities of junior schoolchildren. For this purpose, the program provides increasing of active forms of work aimed at involving first graders in dynamic activities.

The course is a series of project tasks, i.e. it is of practical nature. It examines the specific examples of developing and implementing project tasks at different stages of elementary education. The content of the course “ABVGDeyka” meets the requirements of

arranging extracurricular activities, corresponds to the curriculum of the subject “Russian language” (Pleshakov, 2011. p. 238).

During the development of projects in each section, the level of acquired skills is significantly higher than baseline. The topics of assignments reflect real cognitive interests of schoolchildren; contain useful information, interesting linguistic facts, which can give the scope for imagination. Schoolchildren learn about sounds, learn to read and write.

At this stage, the following communicative skills are formed:

- The ability to listen, obtain information (not to interrupt, carefully and respectfully listen to any speaker at the lesson: A teacher, a classmate, correlating the contents of their statements with one’s own opinion).
- The ability to take initiative in communication, to exchange information (to find out the perspective of other schoolchildren, to put questions to a teacher).
- The ability to manage voice (to speak clearly, adjusting the volume, the power of voice depending on the situation: To be heard speaking in front of the class and not to disturb others during group work).
- The ability to address personal statement (to address to someone, trying to look at this person and using in the speech the pronouns “you,” but not “he,” “she,” and “they”).
- The ability to express personal point of view (to formulate personal opinion clearly, to explain and prove it giving reasons).
- The ability to negotiate and find compromise (to choose the most loyal, rational, original decision, reasoning in friendly atmosphere).

These skills should be formed in junior schoolchildren from the first days of their training, when schoolchildren together with the teacher “open” and properly formulate “The Rules of academic communication” in simulated learning situations.

2.6. Using Project Methods while Teaching Russian Language in Extracurricular Activities

For schoolchildren in the second, third and fourth classes we have developed the program “Gramoteyka.” It is intended for extracurricular activities with schoolchildren of elementary school and involves the use of project method. The program is aimed at informal communication between teachers and schoolchildren, provides an opportunity to implement features of schoolchildren, development of their individuality. The program on extracurricular project activities on Russian language “Gramoteyka” is developed in accordance with the requirements of Federal state educational standard of elementary general education on the basis of the author’s program by Oleinik and Kabanuck (2014. p. 32).

Project activities are a set of interrelated activities. Appropriate resources are available and certain deadlines are established for them. Joint activities of teachers and junior schoolchildren are aimed at finding solutions to encountered problems and resolving problematic situation.

The program includes studying the following sections of Russian language in an entertaining way: Phonetics, spelling,

word formation, vocabulary, morphology. Schoolchildren learn synonyms, antonyms, paronyms, archaisms in an entertaining way in details. Much attention is paid to study idioms, proverbs. Children learn where the names of the familiar words they meet in everyday life and in class came from.

From the teacher’s point of view, a project in extracurricular activities on a subject (for example, on the “Russian language” subject) is a didactic tool to teach projecting a targeted activity on finding solutions of problems. From the learner’s point of view, a learning project is the opportunity to do something interesting independently or in-group. This is a searching activity that allows a learner to express itself; to try its hand in some activity; and to show publicly the result. These activities are aimed at solving interesting problems, formulated by schoolchildren themselves in the form of goals and objectives.

Project activities are traditionally based on three forms: Individual, group and collective work. The group work is the leading form of arranging extracurricular activities. During this process, an individual and differentiated approach to learner is performed.

As noted above, the process of working on the project includes several successive stages. In the framework of the program “Gramoteyka,” we established the goals and objectives, formulated the basic idea and approximate themes, and developed product forms of a future project. Then we presented poster information on the project was presented. Future authors of projects received recommendations (themes, requirements, timing of projects). We consulted on the choice of subjects of educational projects, formulating ideas and plans. Afterwards, we formed the groups on interests, approved themes of projects, and defined deadlines for work them over. After a search stage, schoolchildren presented their interim reports. Tutors consulted on the content and design of projects. At the synthesis stage, the results were shaped and the projects with consideration to comments and suggestions were finished. Schoolchildren were preparing to the public defense of the project. A public defense of the project, summing up the results, analyzing the quality of project work were held at the final stage.

3. RESULTS

The Department of Elementary Education of the Bunin Yelets State University has been implementing a number of projects since 2010. The most significant ones are Regional intellectual-cognitive competition “Young scholars of the native land,” Regional competition “A young philologist.”

The goals and objectives of this project are the nurturing love for one’s Motherland; developing cognitive interest in the field of local history; developing creative abilities of junior schoolchildren; forming their civil and patriotic consciousness; and valid attitude to cultural and historical heritage of Yelets. The competition is traditionally attended by schoolchildren of the second, third, fourth classes, teachers, and parents. Schoolchildren work on different topics, according to the basic categories of the competition: “The history of the city of Yelets,” “Yelets is the city of military glory,”

“The streets of my native town,” “Residents of Yelets are my countrymen,” “I am proud of my countrymen!” “The nature and surroundings of the Lipetsk region.”

Children’s work differs in the variety of genres: Essays, drawings, entertaining-informative crosswords, own poems, training and research projects in individual and group performance, photographs.

According to the results of the implemented project, the Department of Elementary Education of the Bunin Yelets State University accompanying the project traditionally publishes a collection of creative research works of junior schoolchildren.

Junior schoolchildren knowing the history of their native land and reflecting it in their papers, elementary school teachers relating sensitively and carefully to the creativity of their schoolchildren, parents participate in the project with great pleasure, demonstrating pride for their small Motherland and unique sense of belonging to one big and important matter. The collection “From where the Motherland begins...” is really the first step of young authors on the path of knowledge, research, citizenship and active life position. In the works of schoolchildren, a meaningful acknowledgement of traditions, values, and particular forms of cultural-historical, social and spiritual life of ancient and modern provincial, amazing and unique native city of Yelets is traced. Such main things as sincerity and purity of purpose, love to the native land can be seen in words and images, stiff camera shots, and poetic lines.

The purpose of the competition “A young philologist” is to form linguistic personality of junior schoolchildren. The competition takes places in two stages: Subject Olympiad, protection of individual and group projects, which are of research nature. All this contributes to successful formation in junior schoolchildren of the cognitive, communicative, universal, educational actions.

The implementation of such projects allows schoolchildren, teachers and parents not in words but in reality to feel themselves important, desired, and successful through a real “situation of success,” to be able to overcome various problem situations, to make discoveries in the glory of their native land.

4. DISCUSSION

The discussion of the results of studying the problem of arrangement and implementation of project activities in educational environment of elementary school was held at the scientific-practical conferences of different levels. The regional scientific-practical conference “Scientific research activity of participations in educational process of elementary school using information and communication technologies” (October 19, 2013); the All-Russian scientific-practical conference Traditions and innovations in the implementation of Federal state educational standards (April 25-26, 2014); the Regional scientific conference “Civic education of junior schoolchildren under conditions of cultural and educational environment of the region” (October 9-10, 2014); the International scientific-practical conference Epistemological foundation of education (April 17-18, 2015); and

the Interuniversity WEB-conference “The child in language and educational space” (April 28, 2015).

In addition, the possible future research on this theme was determined in the statements of all interested authors and scientific-pedagogical teachers and elementary school teachers at the regional methodical seminar “Creating competence - Oriented educational model of school under conditions of introduction by FSES of a new generation” and at the All-Russian roundtable meeting “Arrangement of extracurricular activities in elementary school under conditions of EGE implementation by FSES” (March 26, 2015).

5. CONCLUSION

Thus, project activities have several advantages compared to traditional extracurricular activities: They teach children to communicate with each other and with adults; to be creative and initiative; require non-standard solutions; develop a sense of responsibility for themselves, for others, for the outcome of personal affair; and, finally, it is just interesting to children.

In the process of project activities, the status of schoolchildren who are apt to creativity, imagination - “romantic persons” and dreamers noticeable increases in class. This leads to the unity of the class, the development of communicative skills of schoolchildren, creates the atmosphere of shared passion and creativity. Each schoolchild contributes to the common matter and acts as both an organizer and a project manager; an expert of activities and, therefore, it becomes more independent and responsible.

We are convinced that project activities contribute to ensuring the integrity of the educational process in elementary school, implementing in the unity of many-sided development, training and education of schoolchildren; developing creative abilities and activities of junior schoolchildren; forming project worldview and thinking, developing unity of knowledge; adapting to modern social and economic conditions of life; forming cognitive learning motives, as schoolchildren see the end result of their activities, which gives them the sense of success and desire to learn and improve their knowledge, skills, personal qualities.

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