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*Features of Social and Educational Work  
at the Sunday School of a Religious Community*

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Charakterystyka pracy socjalnej i edukacyjnej  
w szkółce niedzielnej wspólnoty religijnej

ABSTRACT

For the organization of social-pedagogical work with children in the religious community is used a variety of forms and methods that contribute to the implementation of this activity content. The author of the article conducted an analysis of the content of education used in Sunday schools and methods of didactic and educational work.

**Key words:** Sunday school; religious education; working methods; forms of work; the epistolary form of self-education; therapy; social work

THE IDEA OF SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

Social and educational work at the Sunday school (SS) has a specific characteristics and is associated with the whole educational process of the institution aimed at fostering a spirituality of each child through the study of the Word of God, pray, faith in God and education of children in the light of Christian moral virtues. Having turned to scientific ideas of past times, one can realize that most of them (J. Komensky, J. Pestalozzi, A. Dysterveh, M. Pyrohov, K. Ushynskyy) considered a desire to see God and the ideal – the God-man – Jesus Christ as the basis of spiritual education.

Spiritual education has been seen as a process of development and self-identity through engagement and internalization of the Christian values, the high moral ideals and implementation of moral behaviour samples in the experience of the person.

Adults who take care for the child's education should not forget about the most important aspects of life – the spiritual life, which requires some education. Human spiritual life is new, distinct and not separated from the body and soul. The spirit of man is the most important, the rest is related to the “spiritual”.

The idea of spiritual education comes from understanding the concept of “spirit”, “spiritual life”. O. Suhomlynska, A. Horohovych, K. Zhurba, K. Desyatnyk, I. Solovtsova, D. Levchuk, O. Potapovska, M. Bilova define spiritual education as the education incultural aspects by means of science, art, language, traditions, customs and ethics. Other scientists like I. Klymishyn, V. Schuchenko, T. Petrakova, O. Vyshnevskyy, L. Povaliy, M. Yevtuh, L. Shuhayeva, R. Anisimova, B. Nechyporov scrutinize spiritual education in the religious aspect as a perception through religious values (Horohovych 1992, p. 34).

Anisimova understands the opportunity to link education with religion in the light of spiritual education. The author evaluates a religious factor of the education as the most relevant in our time, because the society in general and school in particular are in a deep crisis. Anisimova determines the purpose of spiritual education to human and humanizing interpersonal relationships. It is essential that by the term *spiritual education* the author considers the ideal of the God-man – Jesus Christ, religious knowledge, religious culture and pastoral skills of priests. A. Pimenova identifies education of patriotism, selflessness, compassion with a high degree of a citizen's awareness of spiritual education.

Different forms and methods are being used for the organization of the social and educational work with children in the confessional communities. The methods are the way to achieve goals and solve problems, plus forms that are the way of content organizing, having illustrated certain ways of the activity.

#### THE BIBLE AS THE SOURCE OF THE MODELS OF TEACHING

The Bible is the main book in Christian education, which contains not only the guidelines for the faith, but also the tips for teachers, the main content and models of the education, the teaching methods and evidence for necessary education.

The Bible is the lens through which there is the look at the education in general, and which lays down the principles of Christian education. It is the Bible that tells about the Great Teacher – Jesus Christ, who appears as the role model for teachers.

The basis of Jesus' model of teaching was the love of His pupils. He knew them (psychological characteristics, human needs), He knew what to teach (the subject) and how to teach (methods), and, most importantly, He lived as he taught.

He gave knowledge easily but in an accessible and understandable way, using constantly a variety of methods constantly: individual interviews (conversation with Nicodemus), an explanation based on life example (donation of poor widow), parables, the speech before a large audience (sermon speech on the river) and others. He used various methods when teaching transformation of the world and comprehension of the meaning of human existence (Ohirko 2008, p. 129).

General scientific methods of the scientific abstraction, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, the unity of a common and special, historical method, movement from simple to complex, qualitative and quantitative unity analysis, specifically sociological, formalization, analogy, system structural method are widely used in the educational process at the Sunday school (Bekh 2006, p. 152).

#### TYPES OF METHODS PRACTICED AT SUNDAY SCHOOLS

The methods of explanation are often practiced in educational work at SS. The teacher explains the requirements for the good behaviour in the community and the society according to the Christian norms. The impact on the minds of pupils, instilling of moral norms/rules of conduct for encouraging the practical application of the Christian moral virtues are done.

While preparing and conducting interviews on any topic by the teachers, the age characteristics of pupils are taken into account. It demands from the teachers forming meaningful beliefs, interests and psychological characteristics of a child's personality.

The children are taught to assess the given conversations as worthy and unworthy (sinful) acts of the biblical characters and life stories. It is useful to conduct the discussions on moral topics: "The world was created by God", "Who is your neighbour?", "Be honest and truthful", "Honor your father and mother", among the youngest pupils, and full of moral and legal content, "Be responsible for own choices", "The golden rule of Christianity", "Freedom or permissiveness?" with the older pupils.

The teacher should embrace the conversations, being based on current students' moral and legal knowledge acquired during the study of subjects, with the teenagers: "Living credo", "What is love?", "Know, respect and obey the laws – duty of every young boy and girl", "Norms and values in society". Such conversations encourage the students to exchange views in practical application of moral virtues of biblical truths in their own lives and to contribute to the formation of the student's attitude.

Lecture with a relaxed conversation is often practiced at the Sunday school while working with parents (“Children are the gift of God”, “The parental duties on pages of Holy Scripture”, “Decalogue and education of the child”), as well as with youth and teens (“Forgiveness is a weakness or strength”, “How do I know God’s will?” “Good and Evil”, “Gifts and talents”, “Friendship between boys and girls”) etc.

Dispute is an interesting method which provides free, lively exchange of ideas, brainstorming issues involving the students. Assessing the facts of the given class life and the school life, a literary paper, a newspaper or a magazine article, are being discussed by the pupils from the perspective of the Bible. The success of the dispute depends on preceding preparation in order to avoid the talk becoming meaningless (Sukhomlynska 2006, p. 43).

The method of following the role model or an exemplary behaviour plays the leading role in socio-educational work of the Sunday school. It is an independent method of education as well as the way of using the other methods for active influencing the children’s consciousness and behaviour. Teachers, parents, relatives and close friends, classmates, biblical characters, literary characters, figures of science and culture, church priests could be role models for the education. But the major role model for pupils and members of the religious community is Jesus Christ. He is the ideal, whom every Christian tends to follow.

The clarity and specificity of the action is a feature of example’s educational influence. This should be spiritually mature, the believers’ personality, along with the persistent moral views and Christian worldview, who are practicing such Christian principles and values in their own lives in order to live as it is being taught. The closer and clearer the given sample is for the student, the greater will be its educational power.

In addition to the traditional methods of activities – practice, teaching, pedagogical requirement, the method of public opinion is widely practiced in the confessional communities. It operates not only within the given school community, but in the whole community in general. The method of social judgment is a communal obligation or compulsion, that affects the formation of a child’s certain moral norms of behaviour.

The confessional community can assess the behaviour of its members (children), according to the church’s position, based on the Bible and other regulations, having pointed out their positive or negative ways for the person, community and society (Ohirko 2008, p. 133).

The game method is a way of social interaction and creative personality development, which promotes spiritual and physical liberation along with stress relief in the company of increased sense of enjoyment for overcoming specific obstacles. Today, the practice of the social and educational work is applied actively by role games, case game programs and outdoor game festivals.

Psychological methods (testing, psychodrama, sociodrama, socio-psychological training, psychotherapy (family, gaming, art therapy) are used in the socio-educational work for giving a characteristic diagnose of a personality or an organization on the basis of the results of psychotherapy and psycho-corrective work.

Socio-pedagogical work at the Sunday school includes various methods of training and education. Among them studying of Christian educational values and principles acts as a basis: the detailed knowledge of biblical truths has its educational spiritual and moral dimension, which forms a system of particular regulations and promotes the specific skills of the children.

One of the undeveloped issues in the theory of social work is the classification of social work forms. Thus, according to many Ukrainian authors' beliefs, the most common classifications include the following: the quantitative composition of the participants (individual, group, mass); the means of a dominant influence on the client (verbal, practical, visual); the complexity of construction (simple, compound, complex); the time (long-term, short-term); the place (cabinet, outdoor).

The characteristics of the social and educational work with the children at the Sunday school in a religious community is the process of involving the school staff. We can observe it in the various forms of such activity – Christmas and Easter celebrations, temple festivals, family celebrations, Mother's Day, the Day of the Bible, the national holidays and so on. The program of the action makes the participation available for all of the members of the community – children, youth, parents, priests and parishioners of the church.

There are various forms of activities involving parents that encourage active collaboration of the teachers with the parents from the community such as visiting families, parents' meetings, discussions and consultations, conferences; visual propaganda, questioning, "round tables"; training and seminars, organizing clubs ("Mother in prayer"), brotherhoods ("Maccabees Martyrs"), nursing ("St. Ann") which are used in the course of this.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Social and educational activities at Sunday schools are realized by applying the presented methods of training and education. Biblical truths, that affect the formation of spirituality which, in turn, positively influences the spiritual, physical, intellectual and social development of personalities, are taught in the process of the educational activity. The main task of a social pedagogue is to promote proper growth and development of each student, creating conditions for development of personal self-identity.

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## STRESZCZENIE

W organizacji społeczno-pedagogicznej pracy z dziećmi we wspólnotach religijnych używa się różnorodnych form i metod, które wspierają realizację tego typu działań. Autorka artykułu przeprowadziła analizę wykorzystywanych w szkołkach niedzielnych treści kształcenia oraz metod pracy dydaktyczno-wychowawczej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** szkołka niedzielna; nauka religii; metody pracy; formy pracy; epistolarne formy autoedukacji; terapia, praca socjalna