Handiwork Evidences of Folk Pedagogics as the Mean of Upbringing

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to reveal the essence of handiwork, their significance and humane values in the development of personality that are found in folk pedagogics. In the course of years the ideas of folk pedagogics were inherited in work and in social life, in games and in honours, in upbringing and made the all-embracing, universal system of means to uphold and educate children where the special place was for handiwork as well. Compositions of folklore – folk songs, traditions, habits, beliefs, ethnographic materials, archaeological findings, written evidences – have become the sources of folk pedagogics where the essence of handiwork is revealed. The method of investigation is hermeneutics which was used to analyse literature and sources in the history of pedagogics. The article discovers the ideal of a human in the Latvian folk pedagogics, which contain moral, aesthetic and intellectual values. Work and working habit are characterized as the main values of life and at the same time these are considered as the criterion of beauty and the measure of moral development. A child’s preparation for life has been investigated in the compositions of folklore which was closely connected with various household works, handiwork and craft. The analysis of folk songs lets to track down the course of development, technical process and major differences of the most widely spread handiwork (spinning, weaving, needlework, knitting) in various regions of Latvia.

Keywords: folk pedagogics, handiwork, folk songs, values.

Introduction

The aim of the article is to discover the essence and significance of handiwork and the humane values in the development of personality which are found in folk pedagogics.

The research Handiwork evidences of folk pedagogics as the mean of upbringing is prepared in the frames of work The historical development of the subject Housekeeping and needlework manual training in Latvia up to 1940.

Methodology

Conformities proved in pedagogical science about the necessity of assessment the historical pedagogical heritage in the perception of present problems – these form the methodological basis of the investigation; about the development of an intelligent personality.

The theoretical basis of the research is formed by the investigations of the necessity of hereditary folk pedagogics and acquired cognitions of folk wisdom (Kr. Barons, J. Anspaks, J. Rudzitis).

The method of investigation is hermeneutics – used for the analysis of folklore compositions and literature in the history of pedagogics.

Hermeneutics means explanation and interpretation of the text. Nowadays explanation-guided hermeneutics is used more often. The cognition of hermeneutics used in the investigation is that the understanding of the text is the mean to come to certain conclusions. Fridrihs Sleiemahers defines hermeneutics as the art to understand the others’ speech correctly. Hermeneutics focuses on the essence, on the object of interpretation in its historical, socio-cultural context. It emphasizes the significance of the historical tradition in contemporary culture. (Fedosejeva, 2008) The method of hermeneutics is suitable where the researchers of pedagogical history have the task to understand in their investigation historical texts and their interpretation.

In the research the method of hermeneutics is used to understand and to explain the folk song cognitions, the experience of ancestors and the ability to transfer it from generation to generation. It is essential to find the correct explanation of the text as in many cases the folk life wisdom in folklore compositions is in cipher – in generalizations, in imaginative language and in other means of
expression. The language, the meaning of many words and notions has changed over the years. That is why it is very important to understand the text correctly, to interpret and to express general cognitions.

Results and discussion

Any society had sensed the need to convey the fortune of financial and mental experience from generation to generation with this meant the upbringing. Thus folk pedagogics – which is the part of mental culture – had existed before scientific pedagogics. (Pedagoģijas terminu..., 2000, 123; Rudzītis, 2006, 12)

Jānis Anspaks defines pedagogical wisdom of Latvian people as the experience of common work, communication, cognition and morality, these all formed during the long period of time where mythological and folkloristic points of view and ancient archetype patterns amalgamate with historic destiny, ideas of Christianity and the latest ideological trends. (Anspaks, 2003, 27)

The beginning of pedagogical ideas runs deep into the material and mental culture of the ancient Balts and Liivs. Due to the lack of writing the folklore compositions became the sources for folk pedagogics, they are connected with traditions, customs, beliefs, ethnographic materials. Later on archaeologists’ findings and written evidences as well. They let judge about economical and mental life of the Balts living in the territory of Latvia, and about mentality, economical and mental life of the Liivs, their mentality, their ethical, aesthetic and moral ideals and values and the connection of these tribes with the closer or farther countries and nations. (Anspaks, 2003, 23)

Up to now Latvian folklore is considered as the basis of Latvian identity formation on the top of which our contemporary pedagogical science and pedagogical reality of Latvia are being built deliberately or unawares. (Krūze, Ķestere, 2010, 75)

Of all folklore materials folk songs are the main treasurers of pedagogical values.

Working habit – the main value of life

The analysis of folk songs let us deduce that in the course of time the Latvians have created their own ideal of a human. The most important values are attitude towards work, respect against the older generation, humane attitude towards people, cautious attitude towards nature and morally ethical behaviour in the society. The ideal of a man in the Latvian folk pedagogics embodies moral, aesthetic and mental values. (Žukovs, Kopeloviča, 1997)

The attitude towards pedagogical values changes with the lapse of the time yet the common humane character, connection with the common human values – generosity, humanism, democracy, freedom, love, honour, etc. – are preserved. (Rudzītis, 2006)

The never-ending truth has been implanted in the child already with lullabies that only work makes a man great, noble, pretty, honours him and makes him immortal, while the unemployed life leads a man into misery. The work and working habit are considered to be the most important values of life, and at the same time the man’s own mental and moral development measure and the criterion of beauty. The folk wisdom teaches that work runs through the whole man’s life, his thoughts, feelings, his view on the world.

Work is not only the natural state of a man’s life and the condition of his existence, but first of all it is the condition for the man’s formation and development. (Anspaks, 2003, 29)

The eyes frightened of work,
The hands are not frightened of work,
The hands are not frightened of work,
They know they will do it. (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 6853)

Free, creative, life formative work has always been praised in the folk. Folk ideas are in the basis of working habit. The man’s value is estimated by the working skills and working habit, that is the source of wisdom, beauty and joy of living. Together with the working habit the wisdom received from parents and experienced people was highly evaluated.
Farmers’ simple lifestyle demanded varied practical knowledge and handicraft skills that is why various „know-how” skills were highly appreciated. The task of upbringing and learning was to prepare economical person.

Teach me, mother,
All kinds of work;
When you have taught me work,
Teach me wisdom. (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 6676)

So asks young girl who already realizes that work will be necessary for her.

The main significance was attached to work in the physical development. Work and getting over life difficulties increased a man’s physical and mental power.

Work also served for the development of taste and sense of beauty. Defining the ideal of beauty, the worker’s outer beauty – slender, strong body, the brightness of jewellery, lovely clothes – it is a complex look at working habit and honour, at the inner beauty of the person. Children from early age had to participate in the creation of beauty. Handiworks were highly evaluated in the family and society, with the help of them it was possible to beautify oneself and the surrounding. Our ancestors appreciated not only the practical meaning of a thing but its aesthetic look as well.

Artfully I dressed,
Slender was my form.
My dress I made myself,
Laima gave my form. (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 5305)

Evening works as a way to acquire art handiworks.

Particularly significant form of manual training for teenagers and young people was evening work, which became one of the strongest factors for culture development. This tradition, like for the ancient Prussians, the Lithuanians, the Slavs, the Estonians, turned into some kind of work school for Latvian farmers, where the eldest generation taught youngsters different works, trades and manners. (Pedagoģiskā doma..., 1991)

More difficult and complicated folk craftsmanship skills to the girls were taught by great landladies, experts of patterns and samples, spinners, weavers, calling together girls from neighbourhood. Landlord and fellows prepared tools for spring works during the evening works, made dishes, pastalas and other things for household. The old father with a good sense of humour told about ancient events and helped the young with his advice. The old mother plucked feathers, knitted socks and mittens, told fairy-tales, asked riddles, etc. The experience and wisdom were shared either among the people of one farm or among the people of several villages together during these evening works.

Everybody had got his own work with him, flax plait for spinning, wool tow, knitting, stich craft, etc. Young girls were the most hard working during these evening works, while singing they prepared rich and gorgeous dowry. There was no lack of fellows during the evening works who wound strings, horse-locks, bridle reins, whips, splintered and dried kindlings on the top of the stove, watched over the fire not to be gone out and as a payment for that they got patterned socks and mittens. (Eše, 1929)

Cut splinters, brothers,
Your sisters are coming to do their evening work;
One will get mittens, the other socks
For cutting splinters. (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 6958)

Girls gradually acquired the difficult art of handicraft. The smallest ones had to collect worsted endings thrown away by the eldest sisters and had to try to plait in, stitch some simple patterns. Later the small girls started to practise on easier works – knitting, sewing, which were possible to do with simple tools while standing or pasturing. Knittings, bast shoes, hand-woven ribbons were the first works of girls that were sung about in the pasture folk songs.

It was not easy to acquire the difficult art of ornaments – years passed asking and exercising as the ornaments of woollen shawls, waist-belts and bands demanded not only attention, diligence and stamina but consummated taste and sense of composition as well. Younger sisters asked help from
mothers and elder sisters in acquisition of complicated ornaments so the mother-in-law did not teach them and sinister talks were not heard in the village about the daughter-in-law and her mother.

Great experts- needlewomen are mentioned in the folk songs as the pride of the family, of brothers, their reputation spread far and lured proud people. The praised experts/needlewomen became the unachievable ideal especially for the poor maids and orphans. The girls had to do easier works – they wound bobbins and clews, teased, hackled, spinned flax waste and then woollen yarn. As any work done diligently and sincerely, the simplest handicraft little by little brought up Latvian girls. These works demanded stamina, concentration of physical and mental strength to transfer the game with worsted endings into serious work. It was a big trial for the girls to leave off the game and to focus on serious work and in the folk songs it pretty often was connected with salt tears and suffering. (Eše, 1929)

### Rich dowry – the pride of every girl

The life demanded much and the ideals were high. The girl who wanted to enter a good society had to prove the decent working habit. The ideal of the maiden was a rich dowry that was much and far spoken about. Folk songs mention that it had been expensive and heavy even for several horses to be dragged.

Do not let, brothers,
Two carry my dowry;
Let my bridegroom carry it alone,
As I alone made it. (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 16666)

The girl’s dowry is richly described in folk songs: expensive woollen shawls – forged with silver and even gold, with silk tucks, crested and fringed, the dowry cannot do without patterned socks and mittens. (Eše, 1929)

Many folk songs let us trace the development of spinning and weaving in the course of time. We see how spindles are gradually substituted by spinning-wheels. The weaving technology had been well developed, folk songs give evidence of this, mentioning steep weaving-mills and looms known nowadays.

Latvians were able to weave various ornaments. Folk songs give vast insight into available textile fibres, which were used for weaving and making clothes. Most often mentioned textile fibre from flora are flax, for making clothes also nettle and hemp are mentioned. Though nettle are mentioned ironically, alongside with „thistle gloves“, „thorn wrap“ and „cane bone gloves“.

Both wool and silk are mentioned as textile fibres from fauna. In many folk songs silk is mentioned as not real but imaginary as it was difficult to access. As natural textile fibres were not absolutely clean and white it was necessary to dolly and whiten them. (Auškāps, 1929) Many folk songs urge to do accurate washing and dollying.

Mother pounds the washing, daughter pounds the washing,
My bride pounds the washing;
The crow has gone blind
With all this whiteness. (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 7545)

If washing, dollying and whitening manifested as a demand for cleanness then colouring served for satisfaction of aesthetic demands. The tendency to decorate clothes in different colours was so big that art of colouring developed little by little and craft of various colours appeared.

Folk songs give insight how well girls knew various colouring methods and features of plants, they also knew different means of etching. One of the main mean for colouring is wood and these did not grow in the free nature, girls had to grow them in the garden in order to get gorgeous worsteds.

The second way of colouring that was mentioned in folk songs was with bedstraws, it gave yarn and linen different shades of red.
The time which was the most suitable for colouring with bedstraws is contradictory as they were gathered both in spring and during the harvest. May be the stability of colour depended on it as folk songs say that colouring with bedstraws not always had been light resistant.

For colouring girls also used marjoram, club-moss, camomile, heather, alder peel, moss and other plants.

As it was mentioned before the dowry could not go without a woollen shawl. Archaeological excavations in the ancient graveyards of Latvia show that Latvians had known the woollen shawls already in very old times. (Zariņš, 1929)

Depending on the kind of day, I choose my woollen shawl: Depending on the kind of day, I choose my woollen shawl:
Roses bloom, poppies bloom
On a sunny day I wear a white one, On a sunny day I wear a white one,
On a rainy day a grey one. (Barons, On a rainy day a grey one. (Barons,
Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 5648) Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 16636)

The analysis of folk songs give evidence that each area had got its own characteristics for making woollen shawls.

It was not easy to decorate a woollen shawl, it was the job for experts to do and quite often it was a sign of prosperity. Most lovely the white woollen shawls were described in folk songs.

Differences could be seen in various areas in ornaments, in colours, in techniques for making shawls, hand woven ribbons and waist-belts. Basically two kinds of techniques were used – the simple with comb or roller and with a weaving board. (Dzērvičs, 1929)

In the vast collection of folk songs there is a row of songs dedicated to gloves and socks, that were the concurrent elements of the dowry, the knitter was praised as well. It means that not only weaving but also knitting had the significant place in fancyworks. Gloves and socks had not only practical meaning but symbolic as well. Gloves and socks had the significant role in folk traditions and habits, especially in weddings and funerals.

I am knitting patchy mittens, I am knitting patchy mittens,
Who will get them, who won’t get them? Who will get them, who won’t get them?
Will it be the cross bearer, Will it be the cross bearer,
Or the grave digger? (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 7210) Or the grave digger? (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 7210)

It was not easy to deal with this work without good skills and consummated taste. Girls exercised in knitting from early age and it may be said with certainty that knitting were the girls’ first handiwork. (Grunvalde, 1929) We can track down the variety of patterns for gloves and socks in folk songs. In the beginning socks were knitted very simply, using woollen yarn or flax yarn. Nettle socks, also silk socks are named in folk songs though these were the same woollen socks knitted from specially soft and fine thread as the silk was known as foreign made product which was difficult to get. White socks for girls were the most beloved, the abundant amount of folk songs gives proof of it. In its turn, masters’ sons were wearing long and fine thread socks, but plowmen – short woollen socks.

Mittens were for work in folk songs. As gloves demanded more work and skills they were considered as luxury article and they were worn by wealthy people.

White colour was the most popular for gloves. Yellow, red, green and blue worsteds are mentioned much. Multi-coloured and patterned gloves were wide spread.

I knitted gay mittens I knitted gay mittens
For my darling; For my darling;
Round the edge a fine ornament, Round the edge a fine ornament,
In the middle I put my heart. (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 7248) In the middle I put my heart. (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 7248)

It was great honour to know patterns. In patterns every knitter could express her fantasy, rhythm and understanding of beauty and show her art and diligence. The ways patterns were arranged in gloves and in other pieces of clothes were closely connected with peculiarities of Latvian people. Latvians
were tended to live apart – in farmsteads, the same with girls’ handiwork – each element in pattern is
locked and completed.

The pattern has got not only ornamental function but narrative and informative function as well. We
can compare Latvian ornaments with the language of signs that contain different symbols. In ancient
times many graphical signs had symbolic sense, even magic power was attributed to some signs. A
Latvian frequently relied on a pattern sign like on witchcraft words. For example, a cross which was
used both in positive magic and in black magic, repeatedly was used as a protective sign. The power of
magic circle was believed in, this helped to concentrate, not to give away or to stop. (Kraukle, 2006)
Pretty often girls are mentioned in folk songs who tried to bewitch the sweetheart fellow with the help
of inwrought or knitted-in sign of pattern.

I do not knit mittens
Without yellow yarn:
I know my ploughman
Has yellow hair. (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894–1915, 7259).

What had been and still is the mission of Latvian folk pedagogics?

Folk pedagogics became the effective mental and moral power during the long medieval period of
time. There were found means in the struggle against foreign enslavers and their ideology.

In the further centuries when the pedagogical thought got the theoretical shape, ideas and conclusions
of folk wisdom became the significant initiative source for the beginning of Latvian national
pedagogics. Johans Godfrīds Herders and Garlībs Merķelis found new ideas in the folk experience
highlighting the nation’s particularity and value in the process of cultural development. J.H. Herders
got to know the life of Latvian folk, its traditions and he was the first to understand the cultural
historical significance of folk songs in people’s life, in personality development, in understanding the
humanity over the years. His collection of folk songs Stimmen der Volker in Liedern led Latvian folk
art in the turnover of European mental life. He saw the unceasing value in Latvian folk songs.
(Anspaks, 2003, 58) This was accepted by Neo-Latvians who formulated the goals for implementation
of Latvian school and upbringing. Juris Alunāns appraised approvingly the meaning of folk songs in
the upbringing.

Krišjānis Barons called folk songs and singing as „pricy intellectual fortune” and wrote „when we got
at the bottom of the healthy core of our folk songs, in them we discovered the best ideal ambitions of
the human’s spirit, the deepest and most virtuous feelings of the human’s heart and spirit, that never
got old though any ostensible possession of its time changed.” (Barons, Visendorfs, 1894, 1.sēj., 18)

Kr.Barons called to look into folklore closely and pointed out that folk songs still suited as a mirror for
our family life.

Aleksandrs Dauge once emphasized the importance of folk songs and indicated that even in modern
period it was possible to make out significant ideas and conditions for improvement of upbringing
practice and development of pedagogical ideas. (Dauge, 1924)

In general we can say that the basis and sources of Latvian identity are found in folk songs.
Investigating oral folk art, one can find out about his I, one’s own essence. „If we deny and lose our
history, our culture and language we will disappear as a nation,” underlined Jānis Rudzītis. (Rudzītis,
2006, 29) Imants Ziedonis has expressed the significance of folk songs: ‘This day has to come out as it
is a wrong opinion that folk art is only the art of souvenirs, of art galleries or the folk song is to be
sung only in song and dance festivals or it is for small children to be recited at the Christmas tree this
is the way of thinking of our nation, quite present-time, quite natural, only polished more accurately in
the course of centuries.’ (Ziedonis, 1981, 8) In its turn Vaira Viķe-Freiberga points out that our only
care is how to draw these values closer to the folk life. (Viķe-Freiberga, 1993)
Conclusions

Folk pedagogics is an inexhaustible object of investigation where it is possible to discover more and more new aspects. We can make the following conclusions during investigation of handiwork value in folk pedagogics:

- in the course of time the ideas of folk pedagogics inherited in work, in honour and in upbringing have become a universal, all-embracing system of means in children’s education and upbringing where handiworks have a significant place;

- compositions of folklore – folk songs, traditions, habits, beliefs, ethnographic materials, archaeological findings, written evidences – have become the sources of folk pedagogics where the essence of handiworks is revealed;

- the ideal of a human in Latvian folk pedagogics comprises moral, aesthetic and intellectual values; work and working habit are considered the main values of life and at the same time the criterion of beauty and the measure of human’s moral and intellectual development;

- the goal of studying and upbringing – to prepare an economical person that is why „know-how” skills were highly appreciated;

- our ancestors highly evaluated not only the practical meaning of each thing but also its aesthetical look so the handiwork was so much respected;

- evening works – this was one of the most powerful factors in encouragement of culture development and at the same time became as the working school for the Latvian farmers;

- folk songs let us trace the course of development, technical progress and main differences of the most widely spread handiwork (spinning, weaving, needlework, knitting) in various areas of Latvia;

- folk songs give the wide insight about the available textile fibres used for weaving and making clothes and to understand how well the girls knew different methods of colouring, features of plants and means of etching;

- folk songs reflect the symbolic meaning of pattern signs, even attributing magic power to some patterns; quite often the most spread trades and their characteristics are mentioned in folk songs – blackssmiths of gold and silver, weavers, carpenters, shoemakers.

Bibliography:


