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Organizational and content-related aspects of the problem of students’ knowledge assessment in national pedagogues’ interpretations

(1919-1944)

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In the article pedagogical ideas over the problems of secondary school students’ knowledge assessmentin Ukraine in the period from 1919 to 1944 are highlighted; contribution of national pedagogues and academic scholars of theinvestigated period is defined in forms, kinds, criteria, ways and methods of knowledge assessment.

**Key words:** students’ knowledge assessment, national pedagogues, forms, functions, criteria, ways of assessments, mark, exam, knowledge assessment system, tests.

Nowadays, in the course of Ukrainian integration into global educational environment, reforming of secondary school education and also creation of favorable conditions for intellectual, moral, esthetic and physical development of a personality it is currently important to study the problem of students’ knowledge assessment.Innovation in any matter is only possible on a basis of critical use of historically pedagogical experience of the past. Within the framework of stated above it is important to refer to the problem of students’ knowledge assessment innational pedagogues’ interpretations (1919 – 1944), which can enrich educational process in modern schools.

Analysis of historically pedagogical literature in the framework of the outlined issue proves that it was touched in a certain way by modern Ukrainian scholars in the scope of problems studied by them: main approaches to education of students in the national pedagogical thought (L. Berezivska, L. Bondar, L. Holubnicha, O. Hurianova, H. Dichek, I. Zaichenko, I. Skoropad, S. Strilets and others); tests as one of the forms of students’ knowledge assessment(L. Berezivska, I. Petukhova, O. Savchenko and others)[2; 27; 4; 5; 6; 9; 22; 24; 26; 20].

The objective of our research is to reveal organizational and content-related aspects of the problem of students’ knowledge assessment in the national pedagogues’ interpretations (1919-1944).

Years 1919 - 20-s of XX century are characterized by installment of soviet power in Ukraine. Many renowned pedagogues and scholars in the course of social and political changes emigrated abroad and worked there to develop Ukraine as a country. A lot of educational spherepersonalities continued to work in Ukraine, reforming educational field. In their pedagogical works they covered various aspects of students’ knowledge assessment (main idea, kinds, forms, criteria, ways and methods) in the scope of secondary education and pedagogical science development.

The issue of students’ knowledge assessmentwas researched by pedagogic scholar, political and social persoanlity Y. Riappo in the article “New stage in work of People’s Commissariat for Education of Ukrainian Soviet Social Republic” (1925). He insisted that such form of assessment as exams must be cancelled. Students’ knowledge assessment must be carried out constantly in the course of educational process. The pedagogue criticized activity of a teacher that has no idea about students and does not check their acquired knowledge [19, p. 6].

On ways of assessment, among others, a verbal one (in evaluative judgment), Y. Chepiga gave his reasoning in the article “Rationalization of records. Academic success of students and teachers” (1926). He wrote: “Some schools introduce instead of assessment characteristics of student’s behavior as well as his knowledge but it does not provide the exact differentiation by stages of academic success in every subject or cycle of knowledge, in order to compare success in certain subjects in some schools with mathematical accuracy”[29, p. 2].

Since December 1921 renowned pedagogue and social figure S. Rusova was in emigration. In 1923 she moved to Prague, which was a citadelof Ukrainian emigration of those days, and became her permanent place of living. During years of emigration in publishing companies and bulletins of Leipzig, Prague, Paris, Lviv, Mukachevo, Chernivtsi and others many of her printed works were published. Among them there is a manual “Didactics” where S. Rusova revealed the main idea of meaning of academic marks. The pedagogue wrote: “Students should study not to get marks but rather to satisfy their curiosity, to solve the problem which a teacher managed to encourage them to solve, marks can exist for teacher, when he is not yet familiar enough with his students, they can be necessary for school as a way of defining intellectual strengths of a class and certain students” [18, p. 120].

S. Rusova, in the mentioned work, has distinguished such kinds of control of students’ knowledge: preliminary (it is carried out before studying new material), current (in the course of studying new material), thematic (is carried out after studying certain topics or chapters), conclusive, which takes place at the end of an academic quarter, final, which is carried out at the end of the academic year in order to monitor academic success for a year period. The pedagogue distinguished such functions of control and assessment of students’ knowledge as stimulating, diagnostic, educational, developing, pedagogic, correcting etc [9, p. 110].

Thus in 20-s of XX century in USSR pedagogues, social figures, leaders of educational sphere tried to develop knowledge assessment system based on humanistic and national principals.

Since the end of 20-s of XX century in USSR development of education changes its vectors – unification of Ukrainian educational system to general soviet one, gradual shutdown of “Ukrainization”. Consequently views of pedagogues and scholars started to change as to students’knowledge assessment system.

From psychological point of view the main idea of assessment was revealed by national psychologist B. Ananiev in his leaflet “Psychology of pedagogical assessment” (1935). In his opinion, assessment has two roles – “orienting” one which impacts intellectual activity of a student and helps to understand the very process of this activity and to realize own knowledge, and stimulating, which impacts will and effect-related sphere of a student due to passing through success and failure [1, p. 9].

Concept of “knowledge assessment system” and a “mark” was revealed by a scholar of Ukrainian scientific researching institute of pedagogic Y. Reznik in his article “Criteria of assessment of academic success rate of students” (1935). Thus “knowledge assessment system”is a tool of improvement of quality of education, mobilization of children around a struggle for knowledge, cultivation of love for knowledge in them; “assessment” is not a punishment for own of somebody else’s mistakes but rather characteristics of actual academic success rate[17, p. 53].

A scholar of Ukrainian scientific researching institute of pedagogic A. Feoktistov in the article “Norms of assessment of acquired knowledge” (1935) interpreted assessment as assertionof level of acquired knowledge and skills [28, p. 67].

Remained important the problem of students’ knowledge assessment. People’s Commissariat of Education of Ukrainian SSR M. Skrypnyk in the article “To provide differentiated assessment of knowledge” (1932) covered such way of students’ knowledge assessment as evaluative judgment (“totally satisfactory”, “very good”). He classified quality features of academic success rate – profound digestion of material, ability to orientate and master acquired knowledge. The public figure distinguished two positive marks – “satisfactory” and “good” – and assumed, that in some cases the mark “very good” can be admitted but it is optional and not compulsory”[21, p. 2, p. 3].

Politician and statepersonality, scholar B. Zatonsky in the article “On assessment of academic success rate of students” (1935) developed guidelines to assessment of students’ knowledge; in particular, he paid attention to verbal form and criteria of grades. The scholar suggested shortened labels for levels of assessment: “very bad” – “VB”, “bad” – “B”, “satisfactory” – “S”, “good” – “G”, “excellent” – “E” [16, p. 24, p. 26].

In one of the councils of directors of academic departments of schools of Kiev (On May 28, 1936) People’s commissar of education B. Zatonsky in his report “Away scholasticism!” revealed ways of approach of teachers toward assessment of written works of students. He paid attention to marks “with advance”, insisted on following unique demands regarding norms of assessment, stated in People’s commissariat of education (January 1936), and also rejected recurring exams, and also quittance of students (if it is indeed due to illness, so to allow, but not by parents’ will) from exams [10, p. 68, p. 69].

Let us state that in 30-s of XX century scholars focused particular attention on the issue of criteria and a scale of academic success rate assessment. Scholar Y. Reznik suggested a short analysis of control and students’ knowledge assessment in secondary school in his article “Criteria of students’ academic success rate assessment” (1935). He paid attention to criteriastudents’ knowledge assessment: one should not give very simple of complicated tasks and questions (Idea of students’ knowledge level was wrong). Y. Reznik affirmed that absence of unified public criteria of students’ knowledge assessment resulted in creation and application by teachers their own criteria in schooling practice. Hence, marks were given in a nonobjective way [17, p. 45, p. 46].

In the mentioned article the scholar covered ways of students’ knowledge assessment (in evaluative judgment) and forms of control of results of academic activity (individual). He emphasized that a mark for student’s knowledge must be given on the basis of actual achievements, despite the fact of how a student came to it.

Y. Reznik analyzed 4- and 5-point scale of assessment, which was introduced in certain secondary schools. He defined negative side of 4-point system and gave positive characteristics of 5 points system of students’ knowledge assessment in soviet school of the investigated period. Incompleteness of 4-point system was proved by practice: it did not give opportunity to differentiate clear enough students by their knowledge. 5-point system was convenient to apply and had clear differentiation according to ordinary levels of comparing (medium, better, the best, bad and the worst). The scholar also covered approaches to students’ knowledge assessment. He affirmed that “assessment of students’ knowledge must be defined on the basis of registering of all the sides of diagnosed knowledge by them”, quantity and quality of actual academic material remembering, profoundness of its understanding, ability to apply it on practice and etc.; when assessing students’ knowledge it is advisable to analyze it from the most important qualities point of view – amount and solidity of digestion of actual material; profoundness of its understanding; easiness of applying and quality of its external expression (its oral and written forms)” [17, p. 54].

Analysis of historically pedagogical sources proves that in 30-s of XX century there were no unique public criteria of students’ knowledge assessment defined that is why teachers used their own ones, shaped during years. Criteria of students’ knowledge in Ukrainian language discipline were presented by the scholar A. Feoktistov in the article “Norms of assessment of language digestion” (1935). He suggested criteria of assessment of various kinds of work with language: reading, calligraphy, spelling and grammar, oral and written language. The author revealed ways of students’ knowledge assessment – characteristics and “assessing portrait” of a student. He recommended “when providing assessment of academic success rate for a quarter, a teacher has to take into consideration all the previous work of a student… Current and semester grades are the material for final characteristics of a student which covers him comprehensively and deeply, with his inclinations and hobbies, with his imperfections and difficulties. Teacher must give an a “assessing portrait” of a student which is a written artistic portrait, which gives his personal features”[28, p. 67].

Pedagogue L. Magazinnik emphasized the importance of commenting grades by teacher at school in his article “Pedagogical “theories” of reasons of low academic rate of students and practice of school in struggle with low academic rate” (1937). It is necessary for a student to know his weak points in knowledge. In Magazinnik’s opinion assessment should be “revived”: firstly, to tell a child what exactly he does not know, secondly, give him a guideline of how to reach what is lost and define form and place of extra work; thirdly, teacher has to take notice into his diary of what exactly a student does not know in order to while preparing to the next lesson revise, explain material which causes difficulties [13, p. 88].

As we already know, in secondary school of the outlined period thematic questioning, tests and exams are the form of knowledge assessment. The problem of control, grades, quality of students’ answers in the course of education was raised by A. Makogon in the article “School in the period of exams” (1936). In particular, he paid attention to thematic questioning of students and giving grades. In his opinion “questioning of students in the process of thematic revision shows to what extent a student will understand what was studied, what weak points are there in his knowledge, what was badly digested by the majority of students and what should be consolidated and explained to all the students” [14, p. 77].

Scholar I. Story in the article “Exams in the fourth form” (1937) revealed his view over one of the forms of students’ knowledge assessment or exams; in particular, he paid attention to transferring exams in the fourth form of secondary education schools. He emphasized that “every teacher should deliberately plan the whole course before hand, define and write down tasks for oral and written exams. Beside an examiner, as well as assistant, should also give marks for written and oral answers of students”.[25, p. 39].

The problem of assessment as means of control and stimulus of improvement of students’ knowledge was raised by a teacher V. Shurova in the article “On some questions of working with language” (1937). In her opinion, “when a student knows that all he writes or says to respond a question will be assessed, then it will make him be particularly attentive and strict to himself”.

Making exams on a basis of tickets and students’ knowledge assessment in the exams are covered in the article of O. Zhuk “Exams in secondary and junior secondary school” (1937). The Author approved card-based (with tickets) form of making exams: a student has an opportunity to think over his answer, impossibility of individual questions, teacher’s impartiality. He stopped on exam grades in the 10-th form. They must be given considering the way a student studied a subject during a year period, and also on the basis of how grammatically correct his composition in literature was. One mark was given for it, where content as well as stylistics, spelling and punctuation were counted [8, p.32, p. 35].

The question of using of assessment as one of the ways of individual approach to students from psychological point of view was covered by Ukrainian psychologist G. Kostiuk in the article “On individual approach to students in educational work” (1937). He believed that “assessment in individual approach to a student as well as in the overall educational and teaching work is a very important and indispensable moment. It has to not only qualify already performed student’s work, but also help him to realize his achievements and mistakes, form sense of responsibility for doing tasks, generate desire to keep on studying and mobilize a student to make those desires come true”[11, p. 61].

In this article the author highlighted such drawbacks in using assessment by teachers as: pedagogues do not fill their assessment with a necessary concreteness; do not state what exactly they do not like about students’ answers or other their works; do not analyze concrete mistakes of students; after inquiring a student do not put a mark, leaving him in doubts; hiding marks, turning it into a secret for some time, which a student can find out only by peeping into a register; they do not use students diaries. Such ways of assessment of students’ work, in scholar’s opinion, are anti-pedagogical[11, p. 62].So, G. Kostiuk covered such problems: drawbacks of assessment, registering of results of control, which was held by teacher in class registers; criteria of assessment; functions of control and assessment of students’ knowledge (teaching, developing, stimulating, correcting and educational).

Practicing pedagogues expressed their ideas as to assessment of students’ knowledge in certain subjects. Teacher I. Yermolenko in the article “How to get high academic success rate in history” (1938) gave advice about improvement of students’ knowledge in this subject. Assessment is a means of control and stimulus for students to gain new knowledge. In author’s opinion, high academic success rate depends on the appropriate check of students’ knowledge. It is necessary to put marks into a register, diary and notebook where marks for each topic are written in [7, p. 63]. Such forms of registering of results of control of students’ knowledge motivate students’ to study systematically new material and gain qualitative knowledge.

General criteria of marks in history as a subject were defined by H. Medvedenko in the article “On norms of marks in history” (1940). The author on the basis of practical experience defined such number of criteria of knowledge assessment in history: check of knowledge must be systematic, complex, differentiated, objectiveand only individual. H. Medvedenko among general criteria of assessment of students’ knowledge in history pointed out the main ones: amount of knowledge or number of historical events and facts known to students; form of expressing or showing knowledge. As far as quality of knowledge in history is concerned it is an important requirement for a mark [15, p. 62, p. 63, p. 64, p. 67‑68].

Exam used to be a widespread form of students’ knowledge assessment at schools of the investigated period. Y. Lipman in his book “Exams at school” focused attention on students’ knowledge assessment, defined forms and approaches to assessment in exams at schools of 30-s of XX century. As far as this is concerned he wrote: to assess a student correctly, it is necessary to be “completely good in your subject by yourself, but not to be a judge, to be able to suggest questions, to be sure of intellectual development and profoundness of knowledge; to know what to ask, not to ask questions which come to mind” [12, p. 104].

In the scope of creating a unique unified scale of assessing students People’s commissariat of education of USSR made heads of educational departments develop general criteria of marks.In 1940 people’s commissar S. Buhalo in the speech “Results of 1939/40” and main tasks of the next 1940/41 academic year”  
performed at republican council of People’s commissariat of education of USSR (August, 13) informed over criteria of assessment from subjects, elaborated by our scientifically researching institute of pedagogic which after approbation and discussion were supposed to be adopted. All the projects were made by qualified specialists and thoroughly discussed at the republican, educational and methodical conference and at the full range of special councils [3, p. 16].

Scientist of Ukrainian scientifically researching institute of pedagogic I. Slutskin in the work “On norms of assessment academic success rate in geography” (1940) suggested developed by scientific establishment general criteria of knowledge assessment in geography at secondary school. There were taken such main criteria as: amount of knowledge of geographically educational material; understanding of this material; eternal forms of demonstrating knowledge in geography [23, p. 64-68].

As we can see in the scope of ideological changes new terminology of the issue being investigated appears, among others such notions as “registering of academicsuccess rate”, “knowledge assessment system”.

In the course of research we found that native pedagogues, teachers, scientists of the framed period in the scope of ideological changes covered in their works the issue of assessment of students’ knowledge in such aspects as: main idea and meaning of school grades (S. Rusova, Y. Riappo); functions of students’ knowledge assessment (B. Ananiev, H. Kostiuk, V. Shurova and others); forms of assessment (O. Zhuk, B. Zatonskyi, L. Magazinnyk, M. Skrypnyk, I. Story and others); students’ knowledge assessment system in the soviet school (Y. Rieznik); main idea of a concept “registering of academic success rate” (Y. Chepiha); criteria of marks in subjects (S. Buhalo, B. Zatonskyi, H. Medvedenko, Y. Reznik, A. Feoktistov and others); ways of assessment of students’ knowledge (M. Skrypnyk, Y. Reznik, A. Feoktistov and others); methods of students’ knowledge assessment (A. Feoktistov, V. Shurova and others). New concepts are revealed – “registering of academic success rate”, “knowledge assessment system”.

Since in our article we have revealed not all the aspects of the investigated problem, and it is important nowadays, in the course of reforming secondary school education, foreign experience of students’ knowledge assessment requires investigation, and that is exactly what we shall cover in next publications.

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