Development of students' spirituality and morality through allegoric tales when teaching English as a foreign language

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Abstract

This paper considers the use of allegoric tales as an effective means of students' ethic education while learning a foreign language. The social and psychological factors of the popularity of allegoric tales among adults in recent times are analysed. The place and role of allegoric tales in the youth's spiritual and moral development are determined. They help pedagogical correction of the young people's social behaviour, offer role models, promote positive interpersonal relationships, social skills, relieve stress and teach to resolve conflicts. The criteria for selecting allegoric tales are determined, the technology of students' moral development through the use of allegoric tales when learning a foreign language is described, and some specific methods are suggested: the method of educational metamorphoses, philosophical dialogue, solving ethical dilemmas, theatre forum, etc. The efficiency of the proposed technology is proved by the results of the experiment carried out at a non-linguistic university.

Keywords: Moral development, higher school students, allegoric tales, ethic education, non-linguistic university.

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1. Introduction

Such realities of the present day as terrorism, local wars, refugees, religious, racial and national intolerance, the threat of the third world war, trafficking people and drugs, violence, hatred, the dominance of poor examples of popular culture have one common root—the lack of spirituality and morality.

Nowadays, the level of education and socialisation of a young man is often determined by the formation of a set of specific competencies, such as professional, economic, environmental, legal, computer, communication and sociocultural (Chen, Gorbunova, Masalimova & Birova, 2017; Golubkova, Masalimova & Birova, 2017; Kazakov, Zakirova & Birova 2017; Vasbieva, 2015). But, the person with all these competencies is not a human yet unless his or her main qualities, such as spirituality and morality, are formed. Besides, today many employers pay particular attention to applicants' personal qualities, their ethics and responsibility. That is why spirituality and morality seem to be the core values of the present century as opposed to hyper technolisation of the society, and the search for new effective tools of developing ethics and spirituality in the youth is still the task of strategic importance.

Above all, spiritual development is associated with moral education, which results in performing the standards of moral conduct, internalising the categorical imperative, according to which you should treat others as you want them to treat you, and the question that confronted Socrates many centuries ago: 'Can virtue be taught'? remains topical in philosophy of the education. Teaching morality has always been one of the most complicated problems in pedagogy, because one can know what is good and right, but does not live by their laws, and it is education that can provide the moral growth of a young man because people are not born moral, they become moral.

One of the ways to develop morality is the use of allegoric tales—parables, fairy tales, myths, legends, fantasy stories and moral dilemmas when teaching a foreign language.

The objectives of our study were solved on the material in the English language, because the number of those who learn English around the world is growing steadily. Spreading English is both a cause and a consequence of globalisation. International organisations in their reports predict that within a few years there may be about 2 billion people all over the world who are learning English—almost a third of the world's population.

Allegory is a literary device, a statement with the hidden meaning. The interest of various people to allegory and allegoric tales in the recent years has increased amazingly. This is not about a constant demand for classic children's fairy tale books: parents have read them to their kids and continue reading. The matter is different. We are witnesses of completely new and unusual phenomena: the madness around the Harry Potter books that are published by millions of copies worldwide; the popularity of fantasy novels and parables by Paulo Coelho, the incredible success of Lord of the Rings trilogy that all are nothing more but fairy tales for adults. How can it be explained? Why do tales capture the hearts and minds of not only children (it is not surprising) but also a huge majority of adults around the earth?

The first factor is social. On the one hand, safe and carefree life of one part of the population directs their attention to consuming fairy tales products for entertainment. On the other hand, the fantastic world gives the opportunity to the other (bigger) part of the population to get distracted from everyday problems and plunge into a completely different—amazing and wonderful reality. The second factor is the tradition of arts: art products have always featured metaphoric nature. The third factor is the mythological nature of human thinking. That means that even the modern civilised person is sometimes guided in his real life not by rational thinking but by attitudes that do not obey the laws of formal logic. This can explain the unconscious desire for fairy tales. The fourth factor is the specific properties of metaphor, which makes fresh accents, helps people rethink their experience. The fifth factor is the scientific one. The current level of science is characterised as a transition to post

non-classical paradigm that implies the rejection of traditional deterministic ideas about the world order and emphasises its dialogic character, recognises the multiplicity of truths. Within this paradigm, philosophical ideas of antiquity, eastern teachings, views of writers, artists and religious leaders are regarded as philosophical foundations of science (Vachkov, 2011).

Although mankind has accumulated a great number of tales during its history, there is a lack of well-tailored materials based on allegoric tales to be used during foreign language classes.

There are some examples of anthologies that include ample samplings of classic fairy tales (e.g., The Book of Virtues, The Moral Compass and A Children's Book of Virtues by William J. Bennett etc.), but the access to them via the internet is protected by copyright. Some allegoric tales can be found on the internet, but they are not adapted for learning English and are not supplied with tasks developing both language skills and ethics. In addition, the analysis of popular English language courses which are learned by the students in many countries shows that they do not practically contain materials of this sort that, certainly, lessens their educational value.

Therefore, there is a need to create such a resource of allegoric tales with tasks to them that could be used by any teacher of English.

The objectives of the paper are:

- to reveal the importance of using allegoric tales in foreign language learning
- to specify their types
- to describe what tools can be used to solve the tasks of moral education
- to present the results of experimental work with allegoric tales.

2. Literature review

The role of allegoric tales in education was studied by Andreev (2002), Bunyatova (2010), Fridrichova (2013), Vachkov (2011), Vozniuk and Dubaseniuk (2009), and others. However, the didactic opportunities of allegoric tales for foreign language teaching should still be found and explored.

Allegoric tales contain standards of normative behaviour, wisdom of the peoples of the world, they can be understood as a specific form of subconscious ('born') ideas, archetypes, 'matrices of thinking' of humanity (Vozniuk & Dubaseniuk, 2009, p. 532), they contain situations of the moral choice without unnecessary moral teaching, as if they formed the emotional program of a young person's responsibility.

The feature of the most allegoric tales is a happy end. This gives the reader a sense of psychological security and proves that 'all the trials that befell the heroes were needed in order to make them stronger and wiser. On the other hand, the person who made an ill act will surely obtain his deserts; and, a hero who goes through all the tests, showing the best qualities will necessarily be rewarded. This is the law of life: the way you treat the world, you are treated by the world' (Bunyatova, 2010). Finally, allegoric tales can be used as a rich source of material for language training. During the foreign language classes, in addition to developing the ability to make moral choices, allegoric tales can enrich vocabulary, perfect speaking skills.

The methods and tools of developing students' spirituality by means of a foreign language were analysed by different researchers: Birova, Ocovay and Vasbieva (2016); Fridrichova (2013); Melnichuk and Osipova (2017); Vasbieva (2015).

Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan (1980) wonder what kind of ethical education the men who later tortured their fellow human beings had been offered and why this education didn't work. The authors hypothesise that they had probably received an indoctrinating ethical education based on unquestioned traditional or religious beliefs that they later abandoned. This means that mere instruction in morality is not sufficient to nurture virtues. One should remember that excessive

verbalism in education, inept repetition of even noble ideas can generate only nihilistic attitude towards them.

The great philosopher Buber (1978) tells the story of how he fell into 'the fatal mistake of *giving instruction* in ethics' by presenting ethics as formal rules and principles. Buber discovered that very little of this kind of education gets 'transformed into character-building substance'. He recalls: 'I try to explain to my pupils that envy is despicable, and at once I feel the secret resistance of those who are poorer than their comrades. I try to explain that it is wicked to bully the weak, and at once I see a suppressed smile on the lips of the strong. I try to explain that lying destroys life, and something frightful happens: the worst habitual liar of the class produces a brilliant essay on the destructive power of lying'.

Andreev (2002) also notes that just knowing moral principles is not enough for the process of moral education. Teachers must develop in students a deep desire and need for their indispensable performance in many situations, especially in situations of moral choice.

3. Results and discussions

The American writer O'Connor (1990) said that a story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way. You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate.

Allegoric tales—fairy-tales, myths, legends, parables, are described as narrative, often folk poetic works about fictional people and events, mostly involving magic power to explain the origin and nature of the world, the destiny of man, a short, instructive story, including truth and fiction.

Allegoric tales raise such issues as good and evil, their characters that express some noble ideas are living figures taken from real life. They are described clearly and definitely. The heroes of an allegoric tale, as a rule, are distinguished by some pronounced features of character—kindness, cowardice, courage—and they reveal these features to full measure.

Positive images, ideals acquired in young years, will in many respects shape a person as a personality.

The allegoric tale does not give direct instructions, but in its content, there is always a lesson that the youngsters constantly perceive. It has been noticed that direct methods of influence on the youth are not always effective. For example, a ban on negative behaviour often causes a desire to violate it, while punishment causes offense and fear of another punishment.

The tale allows performing the process of education more holistically, i.e., it helps to expand the boundaries of moral, spiritual, patriotic, ecological, aesthetic and intellectual development (Zimina, 2005).

At the first stage of our research, we selected allegoric tales in English, mostly finding resources via the internet. Our collection included parables, dilemmas, myths and legends, as the most appropriate material for adult learners.

There is usually nothing mystical in parables, and miracles, so typical for fairy tales happen rarely. They describe situations that could actually happen but avoiding too much specificity. Therefore in parables, the action takes place in some abstract space; the main thing is the thought, idea and wisdom. Parables are often timeless; you never understand when and where the action happens, so they are eternal. Parables have a rich social, moral and educational potential. They teach, educate, warn and encourage the activity and even cure that can be considered as their most important functions. The dilemma is a combination of judgments, conclusions with two opposing provisions that exclude the possibility of the third one, a condition in which the choice of any of the two contradictory decisions is difficult. Main characters in myths are usually gods or supernatural humans, while legends generally feature humans as their main characters.

At the next stage, we had to solve the most difficult task—to ground theoretically and realise practically the process of moral education through the use of allegoric tales in the English language class.

In the process of moral development, the most important task was to transfer social values to personal ones, the values that determine the individual's behaviour. The moral person is characterised by a deep awareness of ethical principles and norms as principles and norms of their own behaviour when the person acts not due to immediate external effects but due to their own attitudes.

Researchers point out the unity of moral knowledge, positive attitudes and practical behaviour in morality formation. For example, Maslov (2008) claims that emotional reaction precedes the cognitive one. Emotions can be taught and resulted in the person's active social position, assuming that it is not enough to feel pity, pain, compassion, injustice, resentment, it is much more important to be capable of defending their moral position, not just compassionate, but also try to help those in need.

Thus, based on the intellectual and emotional structure of the individual, we considered the following key components of the process of teaching morality which was taken into account when developing methods of work with allegoric tales: (1) knowledge about the content of moral principles, accepted emotionally; (2) moral appraisal; (3) moral patterns of behaviour and (4) realising moral behaviour in practice.

To make spiritual and moral values the individual's inner gain, we used special educational tools aimed at transforming knowledge and experience into inner strength. That is why the next stage of the research dealt with developing new and perfecting existing methods of moral education by means of foreign language.

Tales were used as supplementary material to the existing course books of English, they were selected in compliance with thematic blocks recommended by a curriculum; they were small in size, and the tasks to each story varied according to the level of students' knowledge and skills.

Using allegoric tales refers to the so-called method of educational metamorphoses, which proves that even in the mind of the already adult person fundamental changes may happen. This method was realised through philosophical dialogue, i.e., inviting students to question and to find for themselves the reasons for choosing the particular decision or making the opposite one. Value reflection was realised through clearly defined questions that made students reflect on the importance of values. Training implied classroom practice for acceptance of modified models of behaviour in various situational contexts.

Besides, the following tasks were used for working with allegoric tales during the foreign language lessons: reading tales with further discussion; telling tales; characteristics of heroes with expressing attitude to them; continuation of the famous tale ('What happened next?'); changing the end of the tale; comparison of the same characters from different tales; writing the mini-essay 'Letter to the hero'; inventing questions addressed to the characters of the tale; dramatisation; inventing tales; the character's 'trial'; associating with heroes of the tale 'Who could you play in the tale'?; inventing a tale according to the available model; guessing the situation ('What would happen if ...') and dialogic tale-telling. It is advisable to use project work resulted in such 'material' outcomes as collage, the album of illustrations, creating comics for the story with emphasising key points.

Dilemmas as a type of educational metamorphoses demand students' active reflective activities. Ethical dilemmas were effectively solved by compromise, smoothing contradictions and achieving a reasonable balance of interests, persuasion, appealing to conscience, reason, common sense. Here is an example of moral dilemmas with questions to discuss:

The value of a promise
A friend confides to you that he has committed a particular crime and you promise never to tell anyone about it. Discovering that an innocent person has been accused of the crime, you plead with your friend to give himself up. He refuses and reminds you of your promise.

What should you do?

In general, under what conditions should promise be broken?

One more method which can be recommended to achieve goals of ethical education is the Forum theatre as a means of teaching people how to change their world. The Forum theatre was used while dramatising tales and during this process, the audience members could stop a performance, often a short scene in which a character was being oppressed in some way. The audience could suggest different actions for the actors to carry out on-stage in an attempt to change the outcome of what they see. It enabled participants to try out actions which could be applicable to their everyday lives. The subject of the game might be drugs, aggression, bullying, infidelity and the like (Fridrichova, 2013).

These tools were supplemented by the use of information technologies. As blended learning, i.e., learning augmented with digital technologies, rather than working in physical classrooms, is becoming more and more popular (Kong, Kayumova & Zakirova, 2017; Masalimova et al., 2017), the research covered areas for which there is a lack of time during formal education.

We used Web 2.0 tools that have proliferated in recent years and are considered ideal for language learning. We mostly used the blog and wiki to publish some important information and discuss some issues.

The research was both qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative methods implied the theoretical study of the problem, collecting and developing materials, organising group discussions, carrying out individual interviews, observation and participation in the educational process. Quantitative methods were used to collect statistic data on results of students' tests, generalise results, conduct and describe various surveys.

To prove the effectiveness of the technology of working with allegoric tales, a pedagogical experiment was conducted with students of a non-linguistic university. The sample was formed from first-second year students of different faculties (totalling 144 people). The results of the experimental work were evaluated according to the following criteria and indicators: value criterion (indicators: formed or unformed moral needs, values, moral ideals); behavioural criterion (indicators: formed, insufficiently formed, unformed abilities to make a moral choice, to be responsible for the result, etc.) and personal criterion (stable or situational character of such qualities as kindness, ability to empathy, responsibility, nobility, etc.).

According to the results of the comprehensive diagnosis, three experimental groups (101 students) and three control groups (43 students) were formed.

The experimental group E_1 (16 students) and the control group K_1 (nine students) were formed from the students who revealed stable moral needs, values, ideals and their inherent desire for moral behaviour. At the same time, these students did not always show deep moral knowledge, felt some difficulties in defending their moral position, and making an independent moral choice in difficult situations.

Students of groups E_2 (55 students) and K_2 (25 students) showed an understanding of the significance of moral values, the ability to defend their point of view, but solved situations of moral choice mainly with the help of a teacher, had a tendency to change their own views under the influence of other people.

Experimental group E_3 (30 students) and control group K_3 (nine students) were formed from students who were characterised by superficial ideas about the content of moral categories, following negative examples of behaviour (vulgarity, self-esteem, aggressiveness, etc.) and, as a result, often revealed tendency to deviations in behaviour, had clear pragmatic orientations.

The students of the experimental groups worked systematically with allegoric tales, while in control groups, students worked with traditional courses, not supplemented with allegoric tales.

Depending on the group, educational situations of various types were created. In group E_1 and E_2, the situations encouraged students to reveal their moral position (the situation of moral choice, taking responsible decisions, conflict-creating situations with moral collision, etc.). In group E_3, special attention was paid to the creation of situations aimed at stimulating emotional states that excited the students' aspirations to reveal moral qualities, to acquire moral knowledge.

The generalised results of the experimental work are presented in Table 1; they allow confirming the positive impact of the proposed approach on the students in the aspect of raising their level of moral education.

Table 1. Results of experimental work (difference of diagnostic and control data, %)

Criteria, indicators	Groups					
	E_1	E_2	E_3	C_1	C_2	C_3
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Value criterion						
Formation of moral needs, values, ideals						
• formed	+39	+57	+56	+14	+23	+21
• unformed	−39	−57	−56	−14	−23	−21
Behavioural criterion						
Formation of abilities to be guided by moral values in one's own behaviour	+61	+58	+42	+14	+16	0
• formed	−52	−40	+14	−7	−10	+35
• formed insufficiently	−9	−18	−57	−7	−6	−35
• almost absent						
Personal criterion						
Character of positive moral qualities						
• stable	+34	+41	+42	+21	+24	+15
• situational	−34	−41	−42	−21	−24	−15

So, we regard allegoric tales as metamorphosis that, as transformation, is inherent in the world in the sense that everything in it is moving, changing, and therefore reveals metamorphoses. The task of the educational metamorphosis is to teach a person to develop, to transform, that is realised at the level of students' taking decisions in the educational process, solving educational tasks, participation in various educational and psychological training, games, events, etc. (Vozniuk & Dubaseniuk, 2009).

4. Conclusion

At all times allegoric tales have proposed a role model and patterns of behaviour, contributed to the development of positive interpersonal relationships, social skills, moral and human qualities, relieved tension, established rapport, trust, taught to solve conflicts. All this can be achieved with the use of interesting materials touching everlasting problems.

The potential of allegoric tales in ethical education was positively realised while teaching a foreign language at the non-linguistic university.

The significance of this study stems from the idea that students' reflective activities based on allegoric tales when learning a foreign language can effectively help formation of moral personality.

The findings revealed that working with allegoric tales captivated learners' interest, generated their enthusiasm, contributed to humanisation of higher professional education, increased the level of students' moral values and stimulated their ethical behaviour.

It should be noted that 84% of the students identified the proposed approach as an effective educational tool that motivated them into reflection, facilitated language acquisition and promoted collaborative learning.

The created collection of tales and the use of special methods ensured pedagogical correction of students' ethics and social behaviour.

The results of the experiment showed, along with the improved language and communicative skills, deeper ethic knowledge, stronger values, higher ideals, critical thinking and cross-cultural tolerance.

Our research into this area is still on-going, the work is supposed to be enhanced by the use of information technologies for organising group discussions and carrying out joint projects.

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