JOHN HOLT’S PHILOSOPHY OF HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION

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Summary. The paper highlights John Holt’s ideas on the reasons of poor students’ achievements and the ways of improving pedagogical skills. John Holt interprets high quality education as teacher’s ability to interact with students and avoid activities that lead to students’ failures in learning.

Keywords: John Holt, quality education, pedagogical skills, teaching, learning.

The challenges of the XXI century to modern education system require new approaches to teaching and learning. Nowadays professional development of a teacher is an extremely important activity, as the full value of a nation depends on the level of pedagogical skills. Future teachers must master all the intricacies of pedagogical skills even while they are studying at a higher educational institution. This does not mean that graduation from the institution is the final point of their professional growth. While working with students, a teacher must raise his/her level of pedagogical skills, be engaged in self-development and self-improvement.

The papers of the world famous scientists highlight the problems of professional formation of teachers. Thus, John Caldwell Holt (1923-1985), the American educator-reformer, the founder of an alternative form of education, devoted his life to the research of the reasons of poor students’ achievements, the ways of improving pedagogical skills, and the techniques of transforming schools into a natural environment that would develop the best quality of students.

John Holt’s books and papers focus on the problems of education and the reasons of students’ failures: How Children fail, How Children Learn, The Underachieving
School, What Do I Do Monday?, Freedom and Beyond, Escape From Childhood, Instead of Education, Never Too Late, Teach Your Own, Learning All The Time, Homeschooling lets a child’s mind grow, Imagining the future, Schools and home schoolers, Serious teaching, Why teachers fail. John Holt’s work has been translated into more than 40 languages.

Pedagogical experience, the ability to build an interesting dialogue with the reader contributed to the growth of the extraordinary popularity of John Holt’s books. How Children Fail and How Children Learn were sold more than two million copies. They have influenced a whole generation of teachers and remain extremely popular with parents and people looking for different ways of self-education.

The interest of the European pedagogical community in the legacy of John Holt is caused primarily by the fact that the name of the educator has become a symbol of homeschooling, the full legalization of which took place in the late 80s of the XX century in the USA and early the XXI century in many countries (Great Britain, Canada, Australia, France, Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia and others).

John Holt was convinced that the reason of poor students’ achievements lies in authoritarian teaching. The educator became an outspoken critic of the system of compulsory schooling. He was sure that a democratic atmosphere (close to home) is much better for a student’s development and growth than an authoritarian school environment. John Holt treated a school as an institution that educates humble but weak citizens. He compared a day of a child at school with a full-time working day of an adult. The conclusion was the following: the humane and correct way would be to raise and educate children at home [2]. The educator emphasized that it is before they get to school that children are likely to do their best learning [4].

In the mid-1960s, John Holt started Growing Without Schooling magazine. Many parents published their homeschooling experience in this magazine, which became the basis of John Holt’s book Teach Your Own. This book is still a table book for fans of home schooling.

Thus, John Holt’s recommendations on improving pedagogical skills can be valuable for not only school teachers, but also for teachers at higher educational institutions, parents who teach their children at home.

An important John Holt’s concept is to improve the teachers’ pedagogical skills by developing the ability to observe and concentrate on the activities of students, as well as the ability to correct pedagogical actions in accordance with the results of observation. The negative results of teaching students formed the basis of John Holt’s theory of mastering pedagogical skills. He determined that negative attitude of students to learning is associated with three main factors. Firstly, students are afraid of education system; secondly, they are not interested in learning; and thirdly, students are disoriented. Analyzing the reasons of students’ failures, John Holt concluded that students’ unsatisfactory achievements depend on the teacher’s misconduct, and a low level of pedagogical skills [3].

John Holt underlined that the following teacher’s actions lead to students’ failures: focusing the teacher’s attention on the correct answer, and not on the process of thinking and problem solving; lack of observation of students’ activities in class; teacher’s negative assessment of students’ cognitive abilities; instilling an atmosphere of fear, humiliation and distrust; transformation of the learning process into a dogmatic and boring action; constant testing, control sections, evaluation; lack of opportunities for students to experiment in the classroom and solve tasks.
independently [5]. The educator mentioned what teachers and learners need to know that vivid, vital, pleasurable experiences are the easiest to remember and memory works best when unforced [4].

Thus, John Holt proved that the teacher's ability to observe, understand the reasons of students' failures can become a source of his/her pedagogical skills development and improving the quality of education.

According to John Holt's theory there are the ways of improving pedagogical skills and quality of learning. They are as follows: the basis of teaching activity is love to the student, faith in student's cognitive abilities. Besides the organization and the course of the educational process should be based on the laws of human knowledge of the world and the teacher should create situations that correspond to the individual characteristics of students.

Thus, John Holt encourages teachers to understand that students/children know themselves and the world on their own; they learn out of curiosity, not to please adults, and they have to control their own learning, decide for themselves what and how they want to learn. The educator pointed out, “When we better understand the ways, conditions, and spirit in which children do their best learning, and are able to make school into a place where they can use and improve the style of thinking and learning natural to them, we may be able to prevent much of this failure” [4].

Conclusions. Analyzing the pedagogical reality of his time, John Holt made a sound scientific prediction for the future, “To find how best to do this will take us a long time. We may find, in fifty or a hundred years, that all of what we think of as our most up-to-date notions about schools, teaching, and learning are either completely inadequate or outright mistaken. But we will make a big step forward if, by understanding children better, we can undo some of the harm we are doing now” [4].

The active work of Holt Associates Inc. proofs that John Holt's ideas are still relevant today. Patrick Farenga is now the President of Holt Associates Inc. and was the Publisher of Growing Without Schooling magazine from 1985 until it stopped publishing in November, 2001 [1].

The predictive potential of the paper is due to the possibility of using its materials and conclusions for further scientific research on the history of foreign pedagogy, developing effective ways to improve pedagogical skills, identifying reasons and preventing students' failures in learning, creating favorable conditions for obtaining quality education.

References: