EDUCATIONAL MODEL OF SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT IN MUSEUM PEDAGOGY

Elena Polyudova¹, Elena Olesina²

¹Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (UNITED STATES)
²Institute of Art Education and Cultural Studies (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

The article considers an experimental model of socio-cultural environment that connects schools and museums in one educational space. The model developed in Russian education when many Russian schools developed experimental educational programs in association with cultural institutions such as museums of different types. The model implies interconnections between schools and museums on the constant basis. The experiment as a new educational strategy appeared as a reaction to transformation that is happening in various socio-cultural institutions, including museums and schools.

Although museums offer the plethora of educational programs of different formats, from traditional to innovative, these programs do not satisfy the need for new educational approaches. Schools, from their side, provide studying visual arts, music, and the World Artistic History. However, the school system does not take into account a special intangible process, the process of acquiring socio-cultural environment of a region as the whole environment of constant education and students’ cultural advancement. This environment is inherited and could be understood through a special educational program that embraces all possible agents of cultural diversity of a certain place. The program must not be restrained only by activities inside a school place, but needs to be expanded into the entire living cultural space of a city. In such paradigm, a museum plays an important role of a liaison between the structured and rigid school system and endless possibilities of exploring the world outside of school. Taking into account educational and psychological traits of modern generation, their mobility and social media involvement, this program could be adjusted to modern life requirements.

The article considers programs that were created in 2015-2019 based on the experimental interconnection between museums and schools. Based on the research experience and findings, the most current form of such advancement in education was defined as the “special socio-cultural school environment”. Authors define main issues appearing in the process of working on the environment connected to the school education. Examples of the socio-cultural environment developed in several Russian schools are provided.

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Keywords: modern museum program, socio-cultural environment, school education, museum pedagogy, school and museum collaboration.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, schools use museums as an efficient resource for educational activities. Recently, museums started playing a new additional role as places for social gatherings and events. The new perspective museums open for their work brings new perspectives to schools too for latter can combine educational goals with social adaptation of school students [1], [7]. Modern museums offer the plethora of educational programs of different formats, from traditional to innovative [7], [8]. Unfortunately, these programs do not satisfy the need for new educational and social perspectives students have to develop. Schools, from their side, provide studying visual arts, music, and the World Artistic History. However, the school system does not take into account a special intangible process, the process of acquiring socio-cultural environment of a region as the whole environment of constant education and students’ cultural advancement. This environment is inherited and could be understood through a special
educational program that embraces all possible agents of cultural diversity of a certain place. The program must not be restrained only by activities inside a school place, but needs to be expanded into the entire living cultural space of a city. In such paradigm, a museum plays an important role of a liaison between the structured and rigid school system and endless possibilities of exploring the world outside of school. Taking into account educational and psychological traits of modern generation, their mobility and social media involvement, this program could be adjusted to modern life requirements.

Creating a model for an educational institution is not a new thing because traditionally educators have a system of developing students’ skills to perceive and process information. The traditional system includes such categories as methods, strategies, different types of material and time management. Museum educators keep these traditional system in mind when plan a visit to a museum for a certain group of school students. Modern Museum Pedagogy works on the issue of defining different aspects of schoolers who come to a museum with different educational, experiential, and exploration goals. Thus, G. Black in his book “Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century” elaborates a system of societal aspects regarding museum pedagogy, from social class in audience segmentation and social inclusion, social interaction in creating museum environment to social marketing [Black, 2012]. Other studies concentrate attention on the dialogue during museum visits (Mirghadr etc., 2018; Poli, 2013; Polyudova, 2018) to achieve the clear results in research and define the types of museum dialogues. “The most important factors in improving education and learning in museums can be classified into three groups: policy making, executive functions within the museum and executive functions in relation to the visitor” [9]. It is the time to reexamine existing models to adjust them for modern educational needs [8].

The article considers an experimental model of socio-cultural environment that connects schools and museums in one educational space. The model developed in Russian education when many Russian schools developed experimental educational programs in association with cultural institutions, such as museums of different types. The model applies interconnections between schools and museums on the constant basis. The experiment as a new educational strategy appeared as a reaction to transformation that is happening in various socio-cultural institutions, including museums and schools.

2 METHODOLOGY

The article considers programs that were created in 2015-2019 based on the experimental interconnection between museums and schools. The research experience and findings took place in different schools in Moscow where scholars, educators, and museum curators worked collaboratively on the curricula. Middle and high school students studied different topics of the world artistic history on the basis of the school subject “World Artistic History”. This subject has started as a part of the humanitarian approach in Russian schools since 1990s. Since then, it continues being a part of the school curriculum. The subject involves studying different epochs of the world artistic history from perspectives of Art History and the personal perception. This subject is mandatory for middle and high school students and is included in the state standards of the school education. It is taught one hour per week and supported by developed programs, lesson plans, and textbooks. Being taught mainly at schools, the subject could be taught outside of school as well. The places for extended teaching could be not only museums, but also historic parks, architectural sights and spaces. The question of such extension is always a question of discussion about the best approaches of using external objects and space for better educational results. Institute of Art Education and Cultural Studies of Russian Academy of Education, Moscow, Russia, conducts and supervises all educational activities for the subjects. Therefore, the experiment of creating a model was a part of the Institute academic research and was included in the state program of fundamental researches. The experimental work was based on programs conducted in 23 Moscow schools and 17 Moscow museums in 2015-2019.

It is hard to define the prior subject of modern Museum Pedagogy. Schools and museums can create specific educational environment not separately but only during unified activities. This environment, being the common space of museums and schools, can efficiently develop and socialized schoolers [4]. Hence, there are following goals of modern Museum Pedagogy:

- motivating children to converse with cultural heritage through museums;
- developing new forms of museum activities through creative activities;
- creating different levels of museum education (kindergarten - school - museum - club - college - university).
In the process of analyzing modern Museum Pedagogy, it was important to visualize types of interconnections between schools and museums. Based on responses of 10 scholars, 18 museum educators, and 56 teachers, the classic model of “school-museum” interconnections was created. It was named as the “academic” model. Amongst variations of other options how the model could be named were “traditional” and “classic”. The research team has chosen “academic” as one that reflects the current character of “school-museum” interconnections. “Academic” in this context refers to formal, rigid, and strictly curriculum-oriented museum programs and activities. In the case of the academic model, a schoolteacher chooses excursions and museum programs based on a curriculum. In aforementioned program, they were programs at Moscow Museum of the Fine Arts, such as “Ancient Egypt”, “Ancient Greece”, “European Medieval Ages”, etc. The main characteristic of such tours is their simple, non-problematic titles that repeat parts of school textbooks. No surprise, these titles have no interest among students.

The Fig.1 that represents the academic model intentionally depicts it in a simple and straightforward way. It visually defines the simplicity of such interconnections. Interestingly to note, scholars, educators, and curators did not want to eliminate this type of model from “school-museum” interconnections. Among reasons they expressed was the necessity to explain simple ideas and topics. Following the goal of informative excursions, this model is the epitome of an educational tour.

Although the academic model is well-developed, modern educators and curators see the lack of efficiency when it is traditionally applied. When visiting museums, students remain uninterested to the content of materials and collections. “Forming a new conceptual museum model based on the philosophical understanding the museum as a unique cultural object is the most important goal in modern museum studies” [4]. Nowadays school and museums are working and experimenting on different forms of interconnections. The most current form of such advancement in education was defined as the special “socio-cultural educational environment” [2], [3]. In this model, which is represented in the Fig. 2, a museum plays a role of a liaison between structured and strict school system and the world outside the school. To demonstrate changes in school programs, the shape of school programs was changed to a less rigid figure. The museum’s core is a museum’s collection altogether with its academic and research activities. It will be more clear to name it a “traditional” museum concept because it refers to goals museums were created and how they existed during last two centuries. The beams that go from the core of a museum collection to different directions symbolize endless possibilities to explore the world and school environment. They also symbolize the ample amount of educational programs that could be created based on a museum’s collection if not restricted by a rigid program.

The oval shape named “socio-cultural environment” represents the wholesome environment of “adults”, to which school students usually do not have any access. The socio-cultural environment is defined as a unified functional space that includes activities of local social and cultural institutions. An educational institution (as well as a museum) is a part of the socio-cultural environment. Children and schoolers could be sporadically exposed to this environment though educational and family activities. The goal of socialization is to expand the role of socio-cultural environment in teenagers’ life and make this environment familiar and useful for them. When unifying all elements, i.e. school programs, museum collections, and socio-cultural environment, into one picture of children life, a new type of educational space emerges. It was named as “socio-cultural educational environment” (the term was created by Dr. Elena Olesina). It was defined as “special type of educational activity that coalesces studying and cognitive activities based on the foundation of integration of all local educational, cultural, and social sources. Using these sources helps to expand educational space and activities of schools and create interconnection between educational process and socio-cultural resources of a region (the definition was created by Dr. Elena Polyudova).
The purpose of the article is to describe the “beams”, i.e. those extra-traditional activities and methods developed in recent decades as a response to the modern world requests. To finalize the visualization, these beams were called “vectors” of interconnections (the term is created by Dr. Elena Polyudova). A vector, a directed arrow that goes to a certain direction from a specific point. In the model, vectors go from the collection core of a museum and direct to a certain point, a topic of a museum tour. The nature of vectors is uncertain as uncertain the variation of excursions a museum can provide based on its collection. Vectors create a field of meaning-making when any students’ question, inquiry, or interest turns into a topic for a museum visit. Being open and non-rigid, vectors are unstoppable in their possibilities to go outside of a museum, connecting the museum environment with the entire society and other fields of culture. It is impossible to describe all varieties of vectors inside of the model, but the following ones are some of them that were discovered and described by the experimental team (the names of the vectors were created by Dr. Elena Olesina):

- “harp” vector that represents a special choice of programs and excursions based on one topic from a curriculum. For example, when studying a topic of Russian folklore, students visit different folklore-related museums, such as House-museum of V. M. Vasnetsov, Tretyakov Gallery, Museum of Fairytales, Interactive museum of Bazhov, museum “Russian everyday life”, etc.

- “integrative” vector when different areas of knowledge are connected into one educational module based on common ground. For example, a teacher uses paintings to ponder to a topic of Physics. Studying optics, 8th grade students analyze impressionist, expressionist, and abstract paintings to follow up with the characteristics of the light and optical illusions. First, students started in the class, working with prints. Then they went to a museum when they could see originals to prove their findings on the real art works.

- “immersion” vector when a teacher conducts a lesson in a museum based on its collection. Having a lesson in a topic-related museum helps students to immerse into a special space of museum objects. Moreover, learning outside of a typical classroom enhances students’ impression and interest to a subject.

3 RESULTS
In the end of the experimental application of the model, a comparative research was conducted by the scholars of the Institute of Art Education. The research was studying the response of two groups of schoolers on their visits to museums: the 8th grade school students, age of 14-15, from Moscow school #46 and #354. The first group participated at typical museum tours according to the “academic” model. The second experimental group went to museums according to the “socio-cultural educational” model.
Students who experienced and acquire museum’s programs from the perspective of the socio-cultural educational model, were more interested in the museum itself. They expressed eager intentions to visit museums more and more.

Hence, modern school students need a special educational approach that expands their narrow and enclosed school physical space and mental experience. The research proved the socio-cultural educational model can create engaging educational environment outside of a school, in museums, on streets, or in any cultural space.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The model described in the article is one of the examples of transformative process modern museums are experiencing at this time. Throughout the world, museums are struggling in their attempts to combine their research background with the demands of modern society. The society demands a special role for modern museums, obliging them to be “a clone of malls, something like recreational centers with museum funds, exhibitions, libraries, video-, photo-, phono collections, discussion groups, hobby activities, performance studios, classes for art lovers, cafes, shops, concert halls, discotheques, etc. interaction between these two ideologies defines the dynamics of modern fine arts museum development. The museum type existing today, the type of poly-functional museum, is full of polemics and transforms constantly, permanently assimilating new dimensions, that are oriented to the future of culture” [1].

The article considers an experimental model of the socio-cultural educational environment that connects schools, museums, and socio-cultural institutions in one educational space. The model developed in Russian education when many Russian schools developed experimental educational programs in association with cultural institutions such as museums of different types. The model implies interconnections between schools and museums on the constant basis. The experiment as a new educational strategy appeared as a reaction to transformation that is happening in various socio-cultural institutions, including museums and schools. The research team being exposed to a new type of museum activities is hopeful to see changes in museums’ approach to greet more and more visitors.

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