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Socio-philosophical analysis of the transformation of the school system of the indigenous population: on the example of rural schools in Alaska

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Abstract

The paper shows that the existing socio-economic restrictions on the education of the indigenous population are significantly burdened by negative factors of poverty and lack of respect for the personality of the child. At the same time, these problems were partially overcome in the conditions of the introduction of school education in the Russian Empire, including under the influence of the missionary activity of Herman of Alaska, but became even more significant later. The more than 300-year history of the development of school education of the indigenous population in rural Alaska shows that coeducation is a more effective form of education than when some students are taught in the state language, and for another part only in the national language, which allows them to acquire socialization of personality, and at the same time preserve the level of transit of cultural values. At the same time, in order to obtain this result, the US educational system has come a long way in searching for a model of school education of indigenous peoples in remote rural settlements, however, significant problems remain at present, mainly with the search for meaningful attitudes for school teachers.

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Keywords

National identity, systemic school education, pedagogical problems.

Introduction

Alaska is the largest US state located in natural areas with extreme weather conditions, extending over 4 time zones. About 40% of the population of Alaska lives in 240 small isolated settlements with a population of 25 to 5000 people, of these rural settlements about 200 are places of compact residence of the indigenous population of Alaska [Barnhardt, 2013, www]. Modern studies have shown that Alaska natives receiving school education face significant problems in the field of academic performance and the effectiveness of knowledge application [Byun, Irvin, Meece 2015], [Guillory, Williams, 2014], [Lipka, Wong, Andrew-Ihrke, 2013]. The problems of finding a balance between preserving national identity and obtaining the competencies necessary for existence in the modern world are also very significant. There is also the problem of finding a balance between the efficiency of education costs and the need to preserve the traditional way of life of indigenous people [Surface, Theobald, 2014].

During the development of Alaska, several institutional forms of educational institutions were used, starting with schools of the Russian Orthodox Church and ending with educational initiatives adopted by the US Congress Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971 [Lipka, Wong, Andrew-Ihrke, 2013]. Over the past 45 years, there has been no global paradigm shift in the field of school education of the indigenous peoples of Alaska, improvements were primarily related to the educational process. However, quite often the innovations carried out were ineffective.

A similar problem is very relevant for the small peoples of the North and the Far East of Russia. The current model, according to a number of researchers, allows you to preserve identity, but does not allow you to get the necessary amount of competencies, and therefore, at present, to solve your own problems, you should take into account the experience of the United States in organizing school education of the indigenous population of Alaska.

Main content

The systematic school education of the indigenous peoples of Alaska began with the training of Aleut youth by Russian immigrants, and since then this system has changed many times. The first documentary mention of the opening of a school in Alaska dates back to 1784 with the aim of converting indigenous people to Christianity. Two subjects were taught – Russian and arithmetic. The mission of the Russian Orthodox Church began large-scale educational activities in 1796. In addition, adult education was also offered [Faircloth, 2015]. After Alaska joined the United States, the Government gave Alaska Commercial Company an order to manage school education in rural Alaska settlements, while only by 1916 the last Russian schools were closed, and Protestant and Catholic schools were opened [Gagnon, Mattingly, 2015].

By 1895, the Federal Bureau of Education had opened 19 schools, many of which were organized by missionaries. In 1917, it became obvious that funding for Alaska's school education was not enough, and it was also necessary to preserve the national component, since up to that point national languages had not been taught. Changes were proposed to educational programs funded by the Federal Bureau of Education, but they were not implemented due to budget shortages. In the future, since 1926, changes have been included in the educational program, and a number of vocational schools have been additionally opened [Hargreaves, Parsley, Cox, 2015].

Since 1931, the paradigm of the educational process has changed, associated with the transfer of authority to organize the school education of indigenous peoples to the Bureau of Indian Affairs

(Bureau of Indian Affairs) [Guillory, Williams, 2014]. Despite the fact that the primary task of the bureau was to preserve the national identity of the indigenous population, including through specialized education, according to a number of researchers, in practice the situation turned out to be the opposite. In fact, the purpose of this body was the complete assimilation of the indigenous population. By the end of the Second World War, all students of rural schools were enrolled in the same program, regardless of nationality. The correction of this discrepancy prompted the federal government to decide to switch to separate schooling in the region, allocating rural schools for indigenous residents in a separate type. However, as a result of the division of school education into two institutional forms, the situation of rural schoolchildren of the indigenous peoples of Alaska has worsened [Kaden, Patterson, Healy, 2014]. Thus, schoolchildren who were not indigenous had the opportunity to continue their education in local schools, while all rural indigenous schoolchildren who graduated from primary school could continue their education only in boarding schools, and only the most talented continued their education in vocational schools, and then returned to their settlements.

The next transformation of the educational paradigm of rural schools in Alaska began in 1959, after the region was granted state status. At this time, there was a change in the approach to preserving the cultural identity of rural schoolchildren [Faircloth, 2015]. Thus, several institutions of higher education were created to train the most talented students of indigenous peoples in order to transfer competencies, both the cultures of the local population and the common values of the nation. This approach was improved in 1975, after the case of Molly Hutch (Molly Hootch) against the Alaska State-Operated School System Regulatory Authority (Alaska State-Operated School System) was won. During the judicial review, it was proved that Alaska natives are discriminated against when receiving school education. As a result, since 1975, subsequent stages of school education have been organized in all rural settlements of the indigenous population where there was a primary school.

Further transformations of the institutional form of the educational process did not bring significant improvements. So, in 1994, the Alaska Indigenous Affairs Commission, based on a study conducted, showed that the path full of trial and error in the organization of school education of indigenous peoples led to the understanding that all previous systems were imposed by the authorities, bypassing the opinion of local residents, which led to a negative attitude to the system school education, and often to its neglect. As a result, a strategy was proposed that includes a review of all relations at the regional level in relation to the school system. According to this approach, it is assumed that indigenous people, when choosing a school system, should rely on their own path in building a supportive and adaptive system of co-education for all rural residents, regardless of their nationality.

Modern research in the field of the school educational process in rural settlements of Alaska touches on various socio-pedagogical aspects. In particular, a number of studies address the issue of teacher training, the shortage of which is traditionally large in this region. Thus, according to the data of the early 2000s, rural settlements in Alaska annually create 1,100 jobs for school teachers, while the Alaska education system does not create enough graduates ready to carry out the educational process - local universities prepare only about 250 graduates prepared to work in rural schools according to programs adapted for indigenous residents. Thus, approximately 12% of 8,100 teachers are replaced annually [Adams, Woods, 2015]. Such a high turnover of teachers is only one-fourth replaced by graduates of Alaska universities. The main obstacle for teachers is the inaccessible nature of a significant number of rural settlements. Thus, most settlements are not connected by road, the only means of transport to them is air or water, operating only in the summer months. All this negatively affects the attractiveness of working conditions, while the average salary of a rural teacher in Alaska is

comparable in terms of wages in other states.

According to statistics, schoolchildren of rural settlements of Alaska belonging to indigenous peoples have low academic performance. The main limitations of academic performance are [Avery, 2013]:

- language and cultural differences at school and at home;
- ignoring the cultural characteristics of indigenous schoolchildren;
- poverty, low self-esteem, indifference to education and boredom.

In addition, modern research indicates a significant gap between what rural schoolchildren need and the educational programs that are provided to them. According to surveys, a significant part of schoolchildren are sure that even now residents who are not indigenous are in a privileged position and do not believe in equal educational opportunities for all. As a reason, it is pointed out that the elements of the culture of local peoples are not used in the educational materials provided, only standardized tests are used when assessing academic performance, which do not take into account cultural and linguistic characteristics, as well as the presence of differentiation in the teaching of schoolchildren of different national groups [Burton, Brown, Johnson, 2013]. The models of school-family interaction in relation to the indigenous population are extremely poorly developed. Also, pedagogical problems are burdened by a high level of social problems – alcoholism, neglect and abuse.

Conclusion

The US educational system has come a long way in finding an acceptable institutional model of indigenous school education in remote rural settlements. The modern form of the educational process has significantly improved the educational opportunities of rural schoolchildren, however, in general, problems have been identified and criteria have been developed during this time, the solution of which would allow forming an effective model of the educational process, but in reality such a system has not been formed. The reasons for the failure include: firstly, the different attitude of teachers towards students belonging to and not belonging to the indigenous population, and secondly, to the difficult working conditions in rural areas, where more than 12% of all personnel are renewed annually.

Difficulties in school education of the indigenous population in rural Alaska are aggravated by negative social factors – a high level of poverty among the local population, alcoholism and child abuse. Practice shows that coeducation is a more effective form of education than in the case when some students are taught in the state language, and for the other part only in the national language.

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Социально-философский анализ трансформации системы школьного образования коренного населения: на примере сельских школ Аляски

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Аннотация

В работе показано, что существующие социально-экономические ограничения получения образования коренного населения существенно отягощаются негативными факторами бедности и отсутствием уважительного отношения к личности ребенка. При этом, данные проблемы частично были преодолены в условиях введения школьного образования Российской империи, в том числе под воздействием миссионерской деятельности Германа Аляскинского, но стали еще более значимыми в последствии. Более чем 300 летняя история развития школьного образования коренного населения в сельской местности Аляски

показывает, что совместное образование является более эффективной формой обучения, чем в случае, когда для части школьников преподавание осуществляется на государственном языке, а для другой части только на национальном языке, что позволяет приобрести социализацию личности, и в том же время сохранить уровень транзита культурных ценностей. При этом, для получения данного результата образовательная система США прошла большой путь в поиске модели школьного образования коренных народов в труднодоступных сельских поселениях, однако в настоящее время остаются значимые проблемы, преимущественно с поиском смысло-жизненных установок для школьных учителей.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Национальная идентичность, системное школьное образование, педагогические проблемы, труднодоступные сельские поселения, институциональная модель школьного образования.

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