

# Revisiting the problem of teaching students decorative and applied arts

## Revisando el problema de enseñar artes decorativas y aplicadas

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#### ABSTRACT:

The paper considers the problem of improving the quality of teaching artists of decorative and applied arts in the context of modernization and higher professional education system's reformation. It determines the place and role of bachelor's degree in the system of modern multi-level education. It describes the specifics of teaching artists of decorative and applied arts at the bachelor's level. It analyzes the specificity of educational process organizing to implement the state higher education standards' requirements. It reveals untapped reserves of the students' creative activity stirring up. It substantiates a set of special tasks, taking into account the specifics of professional activity of decorative and applied arts' future artists. One of the most important factors in the formation of the artist's creative personality is integrity of formal and content components of creativity, harmoniously included in the process of education and training. It determines the possibilities of integrating the academic and independent work of students to improve the quality of education.

**Keywords:** higher art education, federal state educational standards, folk, decorative and applied arts

#### RESUMEN:

El documento considera el problema de mejorar la calidad de la enseñanza de artistas de artes decorativas y aplicadas en el contexto de la modernización y la reforma del sistema de educación profesional superior. Determina el lugar y el papel de la licenciatura en el sistema de educación moderna de múltiples niveles. Describe los detalles de la enseñanza de artistas de artes decorativas y aplicadas a nivel de licenciatura. Analiza la especificidad de la organización del proceso educativo para implementar los requisitos de las normas estatales de educación superior. Revela reservas sin explotar de la actividad creativa de los estudiantes que despiertan. Justifica un conjunto de tareas especiales, teniendo en cuenta las características específicas de la actividad profesional de los artistas futuros de las artes decorativas y aplicadas. Uno de los factores más importantes en la formación de la personalidad creativa del artista es la integridad de los componentes formales y de contenido de la creatividad, incluidos armónicamente en el proceso de educación y capacitación. Determina las posibilidades de integrar el trabajo académico e independiente de los estudiantes para mejorar la calidad de la educación.

**Palabras clave:** educación artística superior, estándares educativos estatales federales, artes populares, decorativas y aplicadas

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Modernization and reformation of higher professional education system

The globalization and modernization processes of all public life spheres, which started at the turn of the century, have brought both significant quantitative and qualitative changes to higher professional education. In 1992, the Federal "Education law" formalized in legislation the diversity of educational systems as well as the rights of institutions construct the educational process independently, creating the threat of destruction for the country's unified educational space. Hence, there was a need to develop and carry state educational standards aimed at preserving the invariant core of education which are fundamental nature and width of training. The educational standard was necessary as "a tool and a form of organizing the activity and development of the education system, assigning the requirements for its structure, the level of detail, ways of assessing its predictive validity." (Polivanova, Kasprzhak and Loginova 2004, p. 29)

In the same 1992 year, the Decree of the Ministry of Science's Higher Education and Technical Policy Committee approved a temporary statute "On the Multilevel Structure of Higher Education in the Russian Federation" and the statute "On the Implementation Procedure of Educational and Professional Programs by Higher Education Institutions" in order to form a common pan-European educational space. Thus, a three-level system of higher education has been officially introduced, and it has formed two educational subsystems with structural units "specialty" and "training program", operating at the same educational space with unified personnel, material, technical and information resources.

In 1996, the Russian Federation Federal Law "On Higher and Post-Graduate Professional Education" established a multi-level educational structure of higher professional education, which included three main educational programs of varying duration and focus:

1. Traditional educational program for qualification "graduate" with at least five-years mastering period.
2. Bachelor's program for obtaining Bachelor's degree (qualification) with at least four-year mastering period.
3. Master's program for obtaining Master's degree (qualification) with at least six-years mastering period.

In 2003, September, Russia has signed the Bologna Declaration at the Berlin meeting of European countries' Ministers of Education. It has led to another higher school modernization in order to create a unified educational space. In 2007, the Federal "Education Law" introduced certain legislative acts that initiated higher education's final transition to a two-level system. (Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" dated 29/12/2012, No. 273-FZ.) A bachelor's program was considered as the first level while masters' and specialists' educational programs were the second. The result of those innovations was the mandatory higher professional education's unified structure introduction in all educational fields, including the artists' and educators' training of decorative and applied arts. In 2016, a new Federal-State educational standard of higher education has been introduced in training program "Decorative and applied arts and crafts" (bachelor's level). There was practically no detailed content, as it was so-called open standard, which has been oriented to the needs of industry and labor market, personal and professional students' development. (Federal state educational standard in the training program "Decorative and applied arts and crafts")

## 1.2. Bachelor's program in contemporary multilevel art education system

Bachelor's degree in the multilevel education system is considered as the first (basic) level, intending a broad-based fundamental training of students without any focused specialization

for the purpose of their further self-development in professional or research activities (continuation of education in a master's program). "Bachelor's programme is created to satisfy the high demand of school graduates and their parents in higher education. But when it becomes wide-scale, the new level of higher education inevitably changed its functions, and the main thing is rather the socialization of young people, their social inclusion, inoculation of the modern society's norms and values than the professional training." (Chastukhina 2016, p. 76)

The understanding of education's final result has to determine the curriculum which would be sated with certain disciplines oriented towards the solution of specific practical problems or aimed at preparing for a certain master's program. If we consider a four-year bachelor's programme as a part of a six-year educational program for master's training with a broad fundamental interdisciplinary education, then the curriculum should contain disciplines orienting students to research in the field of their master's programme right from the first year of education. Therefore, there is the question: where are the students able to gain professional knowledge and skills, if not from the university education? Educational process orientation to the artist's high professionalism in the master's programme requires sacrificing the scientific component, which is basic for higher education. M.S. Sokolova noticed that "the problem of choosing professional activity type is related to the fact that the developing labor market does not ensure, when and where the graduate would be in demand, and which activity type proposed by the educational standard would be of interest to him" (Sokolova 2016, p. 63).

According to V.S. Senashenko, "It becomes practically impossible to build unified bachelor's level educational program, which is focused on the training of a graduate specialist on the one hand, and the master's degree training on the other. In fact, forfeits in education quality are inevitable: the fundamentality level would be reduced in one case, or the practical orientation of education would be practically lost in another case." (Senashenko 2008, p. 37)

Trying to preserve the professionalism, universality and scientific character of education, most universities orient to the training of artist-educator. However, it is well known that the decorative and applied arts educator, first of all, must have high professional and artistic background, which makes it possible to successfully carry out pedagogical activity. At the same time, new state standard significantly reduces academic hours for all professional disciplines. As a result, future artists of decorative and applied arts have the opportunity just to get acquainted with the basics of professional activity in the learning process, and it inevitably leads to a devaluation of art education and loss of motivation for students to learn.

### **1.3. Educational process management in the context of modern educational standards implementation**

The development of the general educational program by the university is based on the requirements of state educational standards as a system of basic parameters and a set of requirements for the higher education quality. All modern higher education standards have a unified format with a specific form and studies duration with a specific number of credit points for the mastery of basic educational program. These standards do not take into account the specifics of subject area and type of future professional activity, as well as demands for material and technical resources, training and methodological support. Only properties and types of professional activity differ in bachelor standards, professional competencies are partially modified. In accordance with the standards' requirements, the curricula contains three blocks: disciplines (modules), practices and final state examination. The university independently determines the types, number, volume and order of disciplines' implementation. The core part traditionally contains disciplines providing humanitarian, legal and socio-economic training for students. There is history, philosophy, the Russian language and speech culture, a foreign language, economics, cultural studies, art history, jurisprudence, physical culture, health, and safety, etc. In other words, those are disciplines aimed at the formation of general cultural competencies. The basic part of the curriculum also includes fundamental disciplines forming artists' background and aiming at mastering

general professional competencies, developing general artistic and special skills. There are an academic drawing and painting, material science, chromatics and coloristics, sculpture and plastic modeling, composition, font culture, computer technologies, etc. The variable part (module) of the curriculum includes disciplines determining the direction (profile) of the bachelor's program, that the university chooses independently. Variable disciplines are aimed at studying the methods and technologies of material processing, gaining skills in the design of single and industrial products and their implementation in various materials. In order to preserve high level of education quality, it is necessary to provide all the academic disciplines with the educational and methodological materials, which have been developed quite thoroughly for a long art education history. At the same time, all textbooks and study guides were developed in the context of completely different requirements of state standards. They provide a specialist for a six-year training period with appropriate academic hours, as well as sufficient time for conducting job training and carrying out graduation works.

Therefore, in modern conditions of significant decrement of the academic hours for artistic disciplines, the standards for students' independent work are increased. Consequently, it is required to develop an entirely new scientific and methodological support in all special subjects, which would emphasize the methodological task of independent students' knowledge and skills gaining. In this context, it is necessary to scientifically justify new forms of practical exercises, topics and tasks providing active educational and creative activities of the students, which are aimed at constant self-improvement. For the development of various forms of self-education, students need serious and purposeful activity in the process of job training in all education periods. It is no accident that the leading role in the training of the artists of decorative and applied arts has a practice based on theoretical knowledge. It helps to understand the regularities and principles of professional activity comprehensively at the time of mastering the necessary practical skills. The Federal State educational standards of higher education provide for carrying out different types of practice during the whole period of training, replacing and complementing each other. They are the integral parts of comprehensive educational process aimed at developing students' practical skills. At the same time, the duration of practices laid down in state educational standards is clearly not sufficient to comprehend all the specific features of contemporary decorative and applied arts.

Training in the university (at the bachelor's level) is completed by the state final examination, carrying-out and defending the final qualification work, which consists of two parts: theoretical and practical. The theoretical part must have the form of a report with appropriate illustrative material and reference list. The practical part must have the form of a visual series (tablets) and completed artistic decorative product. The qualification works includes professional level modern standards, high level of creativity, author's individuality and independence in solving creative tasks. However, the standard allocates only 9-12 credit points for final state examination, i.e. just 6 weeks, whereof preparation and passing the state examination take 2 weeks, and 4 weeks remain to complete the final qualification work. For comparison, the state standard for a specialist with a six-year term study allocated the whole academic year for the qualification work implementation, moreover, 144 hours was scheduled for the project management. It is clear that the development and practical implementation of a hand-held artistic decorative and applied arts' product with an aesthetic content, requires much more time than the state standard has given.

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## **2. Methods**

### **2.1. A complex of special tasks set including professional activities of future artists of decorative and applied arts**

Decorative and applied arts education requires the skills' development in working with decorative materials, knowledge of drawing, painting, composition, coloristics and other artistic disciplines that effectively develop visual perception, visualization, imagination, form the aesthetic principles of the artist and his harmony essence comprehension. These factors

of professional development of future specialists in decorative and applied arts must be integrated into a single didactic process of the artist's creative personality formation, taking into account the individual psychological and intellectual characteristics of personality and its aesthetic preferences.

Obviously, educational and creative tasks in the process of teaching decorative and applied art are very conventional. They include the unity of formal and content components of creativity organically presented as the distinctive features in nature of decorative and applied arts.

Thus, the modern method of teaching decorative and applied arts is based on the understanding that arts and crafts imply sufficiently long in time creative manual artistic work. They also require perseverance, attention, observation and professionalism. Therefore, the formation of strong-willed qualities, professional motivation, aimed at encouraging students to further self-improvement is the most important methodological problem for comprehensive research in all professional disciplines.

## **2.2. Methods and ways of organizing classroom and independent students' work in the university**

"The main practical goal of the future artist-teacher's training is understanding of the visual process essence, mastering theoretical knowledge, professional terminology, practical and fine art skills" (Kravchenko and Shalyapin 2017, p. 107). It is possible to solve indicated problems at the level of bachelor's programme only through the introduction of modern methods and innovative educational technologies based on the principles of advancing independent work and developing education. Advancing independent work implies a preliminary independent study of theoretical material on the particular module disciplines, which passes through the use of MOODLE e-learning environment most productively. The undeniable advantage of electronic courses is a wide range of elements, including a glossary, resource, task, gallery, allowing one to present a broad visual material. It is not always possible in the conditions of a workshop.

In classroom practical exercises, it makes sense to begin with defining clear educational and creative tasks aimed at activating the problem-search activity of students. It should be done through performing preparatory, short-term training exercises that accumulate various interdisciplinary knowledge activating the purposeful independent students' work. In the process of classroom sessions, it is necessary to consider possible ways to make a compositional solution of the task in hand, to discuss the sketches of the decorative product, to specify certain elements and details, ways of fixing them, the options for decorating, etc. This would allow students to improve independently their technical skills, requiring a lot of purposeful efforts and time. All kinds of students' independent work should be integrated with other disciplines, consistently complicating their interaction from the initial courses to the qualification work implementation.

Integration of academic hours and independent students' work contributes the profound digestion of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, activates the students' aspiration for self-education and readiness to implement mastered basic and professional competencies in independent creative activity. "The general function of educational process in the university is to ensure the development of subjectivity and professionalization of the future specialist. The function of the nurturing process is to form personal skills, and the function of integral educational process is to form individuality of scrupulous unique integrity" (Shirokikh and Nikolskaya 2015, p. 37).

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## **3. Results**

In modern conditions of economic, political and cultural integration of Russia into the global educational space, the training of creatively thinking specialists with high mobility and competitiveness in the labor market, able to quickly switch to related areas of professional activity in the field of culture and art, is of paramount importance. In the context of these requirements, the tasks of educational process aimed at determining the content of

pedagogical activity, and the choice of adequate methods and means of education and development, are modified. A clear planning of general direction of the students' educational and creative work is the pivot in the university's educational process in conditions of the cut system that the bachelor's programme is. The concept of future specialists' training in the field of decorative and applied arts in accordance with modern objective conditions, logic and expediency, must be based on the students' academic and independent work balance, which makes it possible to firmly assimilate the arsenal of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Introduction of modern effective methods and innovative learning technologies that activate independent problem-search activity into the educational process, contributes to an increase of scientific attainment level, and to the formation of artist's creative personality.

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## 4. Discussion

One of the most discussed topics in the pedagogical environment is the problem of the professional standard correlation with the educational standards of higher education, caused by the desire to bridge the gap between the quality of education and the employers' demands on specialists' competencies. In order to understand the specifics of modern competencies that specialists must have more clearly, professional standards contain requirements for knowledge and skills for a specific type of professional activity. Currently, more than 300 professional standards are represented in the Ministry of Labor of Russia. In 2014, the Decree of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Russian Federation approved the professional standard "The specialist in the technical processes of artistic activity", which determines the group of activities by types of professional activity, aimed at creating products in accordance with the traditions of folk art centers. (Professional standard "Specialist in the technical processes of artistic activity")

The blue-collar occupations, indicated in the standard, include potters, molders, art restorers and manufacturers of products from different materials (metal, wood, stone, leather, etc.), i.e., those narrow profile specialties that must be obtained as a result of education in the intermediate vocational institute. "Methodological recommendations on the development of basic professional educational programs and additional professional programs, taking into account the relevant professional standards" indicate that educational programs of higher education should actualize the skills and labor functions of specific specialties.

(Methodological recommendations for the development of basic professional educational programs and additional professional programs, taking into account the relevant professional standards from 01/22/2015)

However, the pedagogical environment takes such innovations very ambiguously, because they initially contradict the idea of the multi-level structure of higher education, which basis is universality, fundamental and scientific knowledge. Narrow profile specialization may be a limitation of professional mobility of higher educational institutions' graduates in the context of the need of educating students for the following professional activity in related professions, as well as it may cause a threat of substitution of higher education with artisanal training. Therefore, the professional standard can be interesting only as an idea of the requirements for the various qualification levels that are necessary for the successful professional activity of a particular kind.

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## 5. Conclusion

The transition to the Bachelor's program of art has brought huge changes in the education of the artists of decorative and applied arts'. It has radically gone against the methodological system of teaching decorative and applied arts which had been developing for many years. Reduction of normative education term from six-year to four-year caused the reduction of academic hours for special professional disciplines, as well as conducting practices and creating final qualification work. It made the education quality problems very challenging. In fact, there is education level reduction from a specialist to a competence-oriented bachelor.

It is necessary to ensure unity in the scientific and educational activities of students by integrating the content of all academic disciplines, developing new forms and methods of independent work in order to preserve the fundamental character and thoroughness of

professional training in the educational process. Integration of academic hours and independent students' work would form the skills for self-education and readiness to carry out basic and professional competencies in independent creative activity.

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