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## **POTENTIAL CAPACITY OF THE LAW PRACTICAL COURSE IN THE SCHOOLCHILDREN'S LEGAL EDUCATION**

**Problem definition.** Law as a product of the spiritual area of human activity plays a significant part in the social relations regulating as well as influencing all sectors of people's lives. While learning legal studies at school, pupils get involved in the vital law issues. Nevertheless, school educational program is not aimed at training law specialists. Nowadays the teacher's main task is to teach pupils the proper law behavior, important skills and abilities as well as finding solutions for everyday problems in accordance with the basic law regulations by means of an appropriate methodic. Therefore, it is necessary to say about the formation of his/her law subject competence in the set of the abilities-competencies.

**The topicality of the article** is predetermined by the fact that currently the formation of the powerful public society becomes not just the issue of improving the state but, actually, the issue of its survival. As the recent events have demonstrated, the state of Ukraine will remain to be under a constant threat without conscious, responsible, initiative citizens who are deeply motivated and are able to join different institutions to exercise their rights of developing a new country, to defend the democratic freedoms and to control the state bodies.

Modern challenges and democratic tendencies of the country development demand not only political, social and economic activities but also realizing its importance in the life of the society which calls for taking initiatives and active actions for the personal purposes as well as for the social ones.

In a dynamically changing world, the effectiveness of the youth activity depends on its social mobility, the ability of exercising the rights and legal interests and defending them, applying to the necessary legal knowledge in everyday life, as well.

Such aims can be achieved by secondary education, particularly, by teaching law to the secondary and high school students.

**The objective of the research is** to characterize the development of the law practical course as well as to determine its potential capacity in the school youth's law education.

**The main part.** As it has already been distinguished in a number of academic works that cover this subject as well as the similar ones, the school subject "Law Fundamentals" which had been taught in the secondary educational establishments of Ukraine by 2009/2010 academic year had a number of drawbacks despite its positive features. Particularly, among them there are such items as containing redundant theoretical information in the course, lack of practical guidance, limited opportunities for building up the cognition interest to the law and the system of values of the students as well as for their social integrity and a probable loss of law career orientation of the senior pupils. Due to such disadvantages, some researchers emphasized the weak subject mastery, as well.

Consequently, in the late 90s, the educators-practitioners came up with the idea of the propaedeutic course of the school law. Working out its fundamentals fell in the same time interval with numerous international law and public educational programs for the young people in Ukraine. Among them, the leading role was played by the international democratic law education program for teens named "Street law". It was being introduced in our country in 1997–2004 as well as in other partner countries by the international education organization Street law (Washington, D.C.).

It should be mentioned that the first steps to create such programs were taken in the late 90s of the previous century. Since 1998, the program "Practical Law" has started expanding in the country [1]. It has become the Ukrainian version of "The Street law" program and has been introduced in the following areas: 1) training classes for the teenagers in their leisure time (pupils from boarding schools, orphanages etc.); 2) preparative training classes supported by the State Committee of Youth, Sport and Tourism (the staff of the civil service organizations, government institutions, public organizations etc. involved in the work with teenagers and for teenagers); 3) tutorial

programs and courses for the secondary schools in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (secondary schools pupils).

Similar to the other educational projects, “Practical law” was introduced and developed not as a special law educational program but as the one that was practically used by the young in their everyday life.

We intend to consider the objectives of the Ukrainian “Practical Law” program. They are the following: 1) assurance of the deep knowledge. “Practical Law” raises the level of the pupils’ knowledge about the state power sphere, judicial system as well as the rights and the obligations of the citizens in a democratic country; provides an opportunity to apply to the acquired law knowledge in the practical situations which are faced by them in their everyday life [4, 6-7]; 2) development of critical thinking and communicative skills. The interaction between the educational process participants (pupil-pupil), (teacher-pupil) makes it possible to study the law problems, to express one’s ideas, to discuss, to be tolerant, and to respect the others. Pupils learn to make reasonable decisions taking into consideration the possible consequences for themselves, their social group, society, to realize their own civil and moral responsibility [4, 7]; 3) the development of the positive attitude to the rule of law and their trust in justice and power of the judicial system. «By means of the interactive methods usage, the “Practical law” program offers some practical experience in developing the democratic processes (work in small groups, simulating trials, modeling, debates, discussions etc. which demonstrate their appropriateness and effectiveness» [3, 33]; 4) encouraging young people’s desire and ability to participate in the public life. By means of the “Practical Law” program, the youth is taught to consider complicated (controversial) social policy items in all their aspects, outline their own interests and pay attention to the influence of their decisions on the society in the long term. Practical law increases public activity associating the personal responsibility with providing general freedom and a person’s right to choose [4, 7- 8].

We would like to state that in several years from the “Practical Law” implementation in Ukraine, only one its component remained to be active, namely, the one that involved the legal education of schoolchildren.

There were several approaches to the “Practical Law” program implementation in the teaching and upbringing process in the Ukrainian schools, namely: 1) the organization of the events regarding law, state, professional and religious holidays that enables to attract attention to the importance of studying law. Teachers, educators, supervisors of the school clubs invited the lawyers to take part in such educational events as law debates, play courts contests, essays and posters competitions as well as holding meetings with the public representatives aiming to find the solutions for the local problems; 2) a special learning unit or a tutorial course (a compulsory or an optional one) which is similar to the “Practical Law” [2, 8]. It was regarded as the most effective way for the school youth’s legal knowledge acquirement. Certain units were recommended for the use during other classes of different directions; 3) inclusion of the “Practical Law” program in working plans of the teen clubs, school project groups, leisure activities, summer camps for teenagers and young people [4, 8].

Eventually, it was the so-called school part of the “Practical law” program which was transformed into the piloting training course with the same name. This course was introduced as a propaedeutic one for the theoretical course “Law Fundamentals” (the 9<sup>th</sup> grade) which was abovementioned. In the explanatory note of the program, it was indicated that this course is of a propaedeutic nature and did not intend to substitute the compulsory course of “The Law Fundamentals” but it complemented and developed the pupils’ legal awareness. Its major task is to get them interested in law, to provide them the opportunity to develop their essential skills in everyday situations in correspondence with legal requirements, to lay the basis for the legal and social knowledge...» [4, 9].

The main characteristics of the school optional course ‘Practical law’ include the following ones: 1) it provides with the essential practical knowledge about law and its areas, state system and its bodies, legal organizations and professions, legal and peaceful ways of solving problems, basic rights and duties of a citizen which assures a competent citizen; 2) pupils have the opportunity to develop their practical communicative skills, public speech, holding negotiations, making legal documents, finding solutions for complicated situations, personal or social problems; 3) the atmosphere of interactive classes, meeting with the specialists, visiting state and public

institutions create a positive attitude to the legal and the state facilities, to lawyers and the state bodies representatives; 4) the pupils' desire and ability to take part in the civil society life, their active life position are formed.

In the academic program of the "Practical Law", the following objectives are set: making the schoolchildren get acquainted with the legal issues and the law systems, the part that law and lawyers play in the life of society; overcoming the rule skepticism; raising the pupils' interest in law, motivating them for obeying the laws and regulations; promoting the pupils' comprehension of practical law; making foundation for the comprehension of such basic legal principles and values as human rights, democracy, the rule-of-law state, market economy etc. that form the basis of the Constitution, laws, legal system and society in general; developing the basic skills and abilities as critical thinking, reflection, thinking skills, communicative and observational abilities as well as the abilities of holding all types of conversations which include finding solutions for the legal problematic situations [4, 9-10].

It should be also mentioned that the objectives which have been declared by the program, are quite extensional for the school optional course. However, from our point of view, the achievement of the abovementioned aims is assured by the balance between the purpose, the content, the methods with the results of learning the course; interactive methods and ways of teaching; involving specialists, namely, the lawyers, the civil servants, the law enforcement officers as a resource staff. Thus, as an innovative course, "Practical Law" combined a certain set of the content and the methodology: the pupils could get some information about law, law regulations, legal system, their rights and responsibilities by means of educational strategies which assist in the implementation of the cooperative (collectively sharing) teaching, the development of critical thinking and positive interaction between them and the adults.

It can be stated that there is a high probability for the innovative ideas, positive expertise that has been gained in the process of the introduction and the teaching of the "Practical Law" course as well as the lay-outs of the program developers, the authors of the academic and methodological series, teachers and methodologists who have taken

part in this process to become a basis and to promote the appearance of a new school subject of law.

A considerable success in the school law development, the phenomenon which corresponded to the contemporary innovative tendencies of the Ukrainian school education development became an introduction of a new subject “Law. A Practical Guide” for the 9<sup>th</sup> year pupils in the 2009-2010 academic years. Its implementation was specified by the fact that nowadays each person should not only KNOW but also BE ABLE to apply to the legal knowledge in life. In its turn, it requires increasing the practical direction of teaching law, mainly, introducing a special practical course for the senior pupils, the main purpose of which is to convert law into a vital regulator of the pupil’s life and behavior under the condition of the quick socialization.

“In the juvenile age, when a kid “goes out in the world” independently for the first time, he/she faces with the “adult problems” of the world around him/her, which are sometimes very unpleasant, though; it is necessary to provide him (her) with the essential knowledge about law, human rights and freedoms, citizens’ duties, legal regulations which govern public relations ...” [7, 7]. Pupils ought to get to know with the social roles they are playing now or they will have to play in the future (an employee, a consumer, an owner etc.) Schoolchildren also need some information about legal institutions, jobs, about legal and other procedures of solving life problems; they are to know how to behave in court, the police department etc.

We should notify that according to the school program, the subject “Law. A Practical Guide” aims to lay a legal knowledge basis, develop respect to law, positive attitude to state bodies and local self-governing authorities, get students interested in legal studies, to provide them with the skills necessary to act in life situations in accordance with the requirements of the law and legal regulations.

One of the main characteristics of the mentioned course which has been inherited by it from the “Practical Law” is containing information which certainly meets requirements and needs of 14-15 year-olds. Therefore, the content aims to introduce pupils to legal regulations and legislative provisions considering the under-aged. The

course is developed on a set of the legal knowledge which is new for the pupils, their social experience and practical actions to solve certain life problems.

We would like to state that teaching the practical course of law to 9<sup>th</sup> year pupils covers the following: mastering the basic, practically significant pieces of knowledge by the pupils; understanding and proper usage of the most important legal conceptions and terms; developing proper actions skills, mastering ways of behavior in various life situations; being able to analyze activities, situations, things from everyday life legally, applying to the legal knowledge to exercise and defend their rights and legitimate interests, formation of the internal motivation and active public position.

In accordance with the school program, the subject “Law. A Practical Guide” aims to provide the conditions for the legal culture formation, legal marks and behavior of the pupils. The abovementioned purpose may be achieved by the fulfillment of the following tasks: get students acquainted with law and its importance in the life of the society, encourage understanding of the most essential legal ideas and terms; assist in fundamental values formation, for instance, rights and freedoms of a citizen and a human, democracy, active public position which form the basis of the democratic and rule-of-law legal state along with the public society in Ukraine; develop the pupils’ skills to use legal knowledge for exercising and defending their rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests, choose the proper behavior in everyday situations, considering the legal regulations for the under-aged; master certain provisions of regulating acts, use critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, reflection, communicative skills, the ability to discuss, find solutions and build skills of legal behavior while dealing with legal tasks; raise their interest in law, encourage them to use and obey the legal regulations [5, 4].

The course content includes the following units:

Unit 1. Laws and rules in your life.

Unit 2. You are a citizen and a human so you have rights.

Unit 3. You and the civil law relationships.

Unit 4. Laws in the life of your family.

Unit 5. Your rights in labor relationships.

Unit 6. Your legal marks in administrative and criminal law.

Unit 7. Your journey into the world of legal careers [7, 10].

Therefore, the course provides the pupils with the practically oriented legal information, get them acquainted with the social and legal situations, which are typical for their age, based on the certain provisions of the Ukrainian legislation. Besides, the course comprises the profession-oriented part which promotes the pupils' choice of the corresponding profile at the senior school.

We want to emphasize on the fact that the link of the subject "Law. A Practical Guide" with the optional course "Practical Law" is obvious in the effectiveness of teaching this subject to the pupils which includes the prevailing of the cooperative studies, contextual simulating, debates, etc. In its turn, it encourages the development of the pupils' communicative skills, their critical thinking, teamwork skills, peer teaching and evaluating each other.

Consequently, the practical course of law may be considered as the pupils' comprehensive expertise gained by means of the interactive studies which lead to the development of the new skills, knowledge and attitudes that are essential to respond rapidly to the legal issues in a modern quick-changing society.

It is of common knowledge that the principles of choosing the content play a vital role for the course/subject in general. Conceptually, the practical course does not require mastering much tutorial material and allows a teacher to spend some time on the pupils' cognitive activity, using different methods and practical exercises, etc.

We should notify that the competence-based approach to teaching Law is implemented by means of interaction to the full extent as the knowledge, the skills, and the attitudes of pupils are formed and acquired in the process of their own activity. Besides, in the process of interaction between a teacher and pupils the latter master "a system of the approbated activities regarding their environment, themselves and the world in general, learn various ways of searching and applying to their knowledge. They are also able to try some new models of behavior and action during the studies."

All in all, after the introduction of the subject "Law. A Practical Guide" for the pupils of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the tutorial plan of the secondary school, teaching law has



become more directed at the formation of the abilities to analyze social and legal regulations which enable them to manifest their place and position, their abilities to use the received legal knowledge in certain situations, develop their critical thinking and communicative skills.

**Summary.** Therefore, taking into consideration the characteristics of the practical law development as a subject at the Ukrainian school, which was provided by us, the following generalized thoughts can be represented: 1) the school subject “Law. A Practical Guide” (for the 9<sup>th</sup> year pupils) is a modern school subject which reflects conception ideas and progressive approaches to school education in Ukraine; 2) it aims at carrying out the main tasks of the youth legal education; 3) the basic ideas of the current practical course of law (the invariable part of the curriculum in a comprehensive school) reflect the main innovative principles, approaches and notions of the optional course for the 8<sup>th</sup> year students, which was popular in Ukrainian schools in 2000-2009, and which correspondently became the modification of the Street Law educational program.

Law education as a component of the civil education must be observed as the most important priority of the civil upbringing and the activity of various institutions. Therefore, the ways, the content, the forms of the law education of the school youth must become a subject of the methodological researches of the specialists and a vector of practice in this area. In this case, the expertise of the “Practical Law” program can become useful in all its variations.

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### **Анотація**

Стаття присвячена характеристиці потенціалу практичного курсу правознавства в правовій освіті школярів. Подано детальний опис освітньої програми «Практичне право» й наголошено на основних її досягненнях. Акцентовано увагу на особливостях змісту й методики курсу за вибором учнів «Практичне право». Охарактеризовано специфіку навчального предмета «Правознавство. Практичний курс» (9 клас) та його роль в правовій освіті учнівської молоді.

**Ключові слова:** правова освіта, практичне право, практичний курс правознавства, інтерактивні методи, Street Law.