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Citizenship education in Latvia

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Introduction

Citizenship is a topical issue in Latvia. Major transformations in the political and socio-cultural situation in the country have led to a change in the status of the representatives of ethnic minorities, and many of these have become non-citizens. Under the Citizenship Law, citizenship was granted to those people whose relatives had lived in Latvia before 1940, and during the 10-year period since independence the situation has not greatly changed. A comparatively small number of people have used their rights to become Latvian citizens by means of the naturalisation procedure. The major reasons for the lack of activity by the remaining population have been their inadequate knowledge of the Latvian language and, above all, their lack of personal motivation. The dominant sentiment is the hurt feelings of those people who were born in the territory of Latvia, but were not granted citizenship after the country regained its independence.

The analysis of this situation and the experience gained from working in schools show that children need positive motivation and understanding of the importance of being citizens in the country where they live. Developing the motivation of ethnic minorities to become citizens is only possible within a framework of cross-cultural dialogue based on their own cultural identity. Cultural identity is the key feature for a citizen in a multicultural society. This article is based on the results of an educational experiment carried out at literature classes for Forms 5 and 6 at ethnic minority schools in Riga, in which Russian is the language of instruction.

In these conditions of diaspora, literature becomes an important source for understanding both native and world culture.

Historical and cultural context of literary texts – the basis for the development of cultural identity

We believe the principal pedagogic task in the ethnic minority schools is the development of students' cultural identity, so that they can integrate into the Latvian multicultural society and become citizens of Latvia. The cultural and educational environment of the school was organised on the following ideas:

- of free development
- of a person as an independent value, not as the means of education
- of adapting a system to a personality, not vice versa
- of developing the person's ability to coordinate his/her own value system with that of the socio-cultural environment.

It was therefore important to demonstrate, with specific examples, the culture of each nation as a specific form of the universality of all humans. This universality is formed in

the complex multi-layered development of humanity. Our approach was to determine an educational structure to compare various cultures. One approach might be to reflect on philosophical world outlook ideas, important for all nations in all periods of development: the study of literary texts, in their historical and cultural context, in literature classes that aimed at developing cultural identity. The historical and cultural context not only enables students to incorporate certain ethno-cultural values from their inner world, but also gives them a specific key for understanding certain cultural codes and an ability to look at a culture from the point of view of people who have developed other values. In this way understanding universal human cultural values from previous centuries helps to develop a cultural identity and the idea of citizenship.

These factors made it possible to develop pedagogically meaningful themes for the literature classes:

- Man and his roots;
- Family – Home – Motherland;
- Man among other people;
- Man – Nature – Power;
- Self –knowledge and self-comprehension in the world;
- Man – God – Supreme Harmony.

These themes allowed us to treat universal human cultural values within the framework of Russian cultural traditions, thus gradually bringing the students closer to an understanding of the versatility of human culture, and of dialogue as the only productive mode of cultural interaction.

The next task was to structure the educational content of literature, so that students could grasp the meaning of culture. Using Bibler's concept, that culture lives in the works of literature and not in talk about it (Bibler, 1993), we dealt with this task through studying major works of literature from different cultures, selected to reflect important forms of perception and understanding of the world. The dialogue form is very characteristic of these literary texts representative of various cultures. While presenting and tackling universal human problems, each brings something specific, enriching the universal content richer through the addition of unique ethnically-coloured facets (Karave, 1997, 416). A work of literature is a cultural universe, a generalised model of the world that accumulates information about the culture of previous centuries.

The development of a cultural dialogue in literature classes

While developing techniques of involving students in cultural dialogue, we worked from the idea that an adequate understanding of cultural phenomena is possible when the phenomena are perceived not merely as historical artefacts but as issues, relevant to each student personally. This means that research methods play a key role in understanding students' personal reaction to a literary text. It is commonly accepted that literature is a means for the cognition of the world, combining both rational and emotional understanding. (Leontiev, 1998) Therefore a system of didactic techniques was developed to enable students to master the following:

- direct emotional perception of a literary text

- analysis of a literary text
- gaining aesthetic experience.

The system of didactic techniques aimed at the direct emotional perception of a literary text enhances students' motivation for closer reading and subsequent analysis in the historical and cultural context. This block comprises several didactic techniques.

Pre-reading questions and tasks

These draw attention to key aspects of the work. The variety of the learning content presupposes the development of a system of differentiated questions and both standard and individual tasks.

Teachers commenting on the text

This serves the purpose of reference and facilitates the activation of students' perception.

Defining the problem for subsequent analysis of the literary text

While the first two didactic techniques aimed to create motivation for careful attentive reading, the third technique focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the text.

Analysis of a work of literature as a means of acquiring culture

Didactic techniques to help master the analysis of a text can be divided into two groups:

- techniques for identifying a hypothesis, i.e. singling out specific problems from general ones
- techniques for the solution of specific problems.

We have chosen here two approaches for the development of the first group techniques. Firstly, we tried to involve all students in the group idea-generation process. Secondly, we drew the attention of each student to problems that personally interested him/her, taking into account each student's level of development, needs and cultural self-identification particularities.

For the first approach, the students used the group problem-solving technique based on metaphorical thinking, known in pedagogic theory as *synectics* (Clarín, 1999). This technique allowed students to use mental analogies corresponding to their own perception of the problem tackled in the text.

In the second approach, a system of individual tasks for a student to work with the text was devised. Attention was paid to the cultural self-identification of each student, which

could be different according to the schools, e.g. Ukrainian, Byelorussian, etc. For example, when studying the theme 'Nature and Traditions – the Sources of Human Power', the Ukrainian students were given the following tasks:

1. Find the description of nature in the story *The Enchanted Place* by Nikolai Gogol. Underline the words and word combinations that help you to visualise the place described in the story.
2. Find on the map the places described in Gogol's story. Prepare a short presentation about the places where Gogol lived, using the textbook and visual materials.
3. Find in Gogol's story the descriptions of Ukrainian traditions. Compare them with the Russian traditions you know. Find their similarities and differences.

The study of a literary work in its historical and cultural context involves understanding the spiritual world of the period, and having insight into the psychology and behaviour of people living in those historical conditions. Analysing literary texts in their historical and cultural context requires the evaluation of the cultural and historical events in them from three different perspectives: that of a participant; of the author of the text, reflecting her/his own point of view and period; and of a contemporary reader. The task of analysis is to find elements common to all three positions. This will lead to the cultural values of a distant historical period becoming part of the student's own spiritual life. To approach this task, a system of didactic techniques was developed:

Compiling, understanding, and practical usage of the glossary of an epoch

The major objective of this is to learn and practically use words denoting concepts characteristic of a particular historical and cultural period.

Writing a commentary on a literary text

This technique is to explain particular relevant details of a text as an artistic fact of the period, reflecting the traditions of the national or world culture. The commentary explains episodes or details of the text to the student, enriching their knowledge, and also concerns their personal experience connected to the problems treated in the text.

The system of didactic techniques aimed at gaining aesthetic experience

These techniques facilitate the formation of personal cultural meaning, and involve changing the value system of a personality. Experience becomes aesthetically significant for the student when it develops into his/her own form of self-expression and reflection on their experience. These didactic techniques corresponded to the criteria mentioned above:

- creative rendering of a literary text
- developing a film script based on a literary work
- critical and theoretical literary dialogues.

The creative rendering of a literary text proved to be the most relevant technique of the three. It makes the students compare the behaviour of literary characters with their own emotional experience and values. This leads to the enrichment of students' emotional world and the formation of a personally meaningful attitude to the events depicted in the literary work.

During this experiment, it also was found that the writing of a film script facilitated deeper understanding of the literary text, and developed the empathy needed for cultural openness. Other important components of cultural openness are motivation and the need and ability to conduct a cross-cultural dialogue. These qualities comprise the world outlook of a citizen.

Conclusion

Diagnostic tests carried out in the final stage of this educational experiment showed that values such as understanding another culture, willingness to help, and empathy towards other people, enjoyment and beauty, erudition and tolerance began to develop and grow in the students' value systems. Changes in their knowledge and their skills of conducting a dialogue, as well as changes in their system of values, testify to the enrichment of students' personal, social, and cultural experience. All these form the basis for the development of cultural identity. For most students, their own cultural affiliation became a topical issue. The level of their cultural needs increased considerably; there appeared a greater interest in Latvian culture and Latvia in general. This appears to be a successful strategy for bringing up citizens in Latvian schools.

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