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Problems of Civic Education in Latvia

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Abstract

This paper compares CiCe publications on civic education with the Latvian context. The educational content of pedagogical processes in Latvia, discussion and pedagogical observations are employed in this empiric investigation. In the context of the social situation of the inhabitants in Latvia and other European countries, different levels of knowledge and attitudes towards civic consciousness are investigated, and the need to include the subject in the school curriculum is explored. The problems of students include incorporation and alienation in the school process, attitudes towards the school's demands and the student's own rights. We conclude that civic upbringing takes place on the emotional level, and that civic consciousness should be included as a school subject.

Introduction

There are two components in the school educational system in Latvia: learning and upbringing. The subject civic education is not included in the school curriculum. Since Latvia has entered the European Union new and fast social and economical changes in living standards form new attitudes in the evaluation sphere. Unusual social circumstances, like cost of living or high costs for studying, create disrespect against state rules or education. Young teachers are scared away from schools due to the students' attitude towards schools (pupils have their rights but they do not want to fulfil them). Many people go to work and live abroad as the salary there gives them the possibility to maintain the family. The stated the goal of this investigation is to find out the real civic attitude of Latvian teachers, students and pupils towards their own country, their rights and responsibilities in a European context.

Objectives: investigate the actual documents of the Ministry of Education and Science about civic education in the pedagogical process. Find out about the attitude of former students, teachers, and pupils against their state. Look into theoretical sources about contents of education in Europe and outline the suggested contents of civic pedagogical educational processes in Latvia.

Analysis of civic problems

Investigations show that in the School Year 1935/36 Latvia had gained a respectful place in the world with its amount of students. Then, in 10,000 inhabitants 30,4 were university students and it was in 1st place, (in Estonia – 28,8, in Switzerland – 21,1, in France – 20,8, in Finland – 20,4, in Ireland – 16,6). During the post-war years the number of Latvians abroad had reduced from 77% to 52%. Comparing other Baltic countries: in Lithuania – from 80,6% to 79,6 %, and in Estonia – from 88,1% to 61,6%.

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Compulsory secondary education was introduced in 1977 but the prestige of education and the level of knowledge went down as there was no motivation to study. Extensive development of education was practised in Latvia from the 1940s to 1990s. Common regulations, politicisation, authoritative management, disregard of parents' wishes and low morality ruled then (Builis, 1992). Changes in education took place during the period of awakening. The Law of Education of the Republic of Latvia was adopted in 1991 in Munster. Congresses about education were organised by scientists the same year.

Different studying contents were introduced, different relationships formed between teachers and students. Uncritical foreign innovations were used in the learning and upbringing processes as Latvia did not have its own suitable upbringing theory. Upbringing theory by Špona was published in 2001, but it must be admitted that this theory appeared ten years too late. There was no purposeful upbringing of pupils during these ten years. Children human rights defenders declare the priority of pupils' rights, so the opinion that pupils have rights but do not have responsibilities prevails in the society. The latest statistics indicate that 14,000 inhabitants of Latvia have gone to work in Ireland. There are questions to be solved in pedagogics: what must be done so that pupils obtain working skills, respect adults, teachers, parents, study purposefully and hard and improve knowledge through all their life? How to teach them civic attitude? What to do to stop people going away from Latvia?

Analysing different educational systems of different countries, it was found out that, for example, in Belgium they have the subject rights and responsibilities of citizens. It was necessary to understand what the situation is with civic education in Latvia, so investigation of the general law of education was carried out.

Table No.1 depicts information analysis about learning contents in elementary school/class registers of the 7th, 8th, 9th classes – school documentation in school year 2006/2007.

Further contents of Geography, History and Civic studies are looked upon as obtaining information as in these subjects the attitude towards one's own country has been taught.

Class 7. In Class hours the following topics are discussed: inner regulations of school, History of the country – state holidays, historical background, etc.

Geography: terrain of the world, climate, inhabitants of the earth, Africa, Australia, South America (9 lessons each), Oceanland, Antarctic (9 lessons).

History: the following themes are studied – Byzantium, Islamic countries, Islam, the Baltic countries, legionaries. Changes in the lives of Europeans. The contents of **Civic studies** deal with the place of Latvia in Europe, natural birth growth in the world, environment, globalisation, NATO, European Union. Getting a job, writing a CV, forming a company, mental health, overcoming stress, values and priorities, the right decisions.

Table No.1. Subjects

Class	Subjects
Class 7	Latvian language, Latvian literature, English, German, Maths, Biology, Computer science, Music, Housekeeping, Visual Art, Sports, Geography, History, Social Sciences , Class hours.
Class 8	Latvian language, Latvian literature, English, German, Maths, Biology, Computer science, Physics, Chemistry, Music, Housekeeping, Visual Art, Sports, Geography, History, Social Sciences , Class hours.
Class 9	Latvian language, Latvian literature, English, German, Maths, Biology, Computer science, Physics, Chemistry, Music, Housekeeping for girls/boys, Visual Art, Sports, Geography, History, Civic studies , Class hours.

Class 8. **Class hours:** mutual relationships. Inner regulations of school. Behaviour in different official parties. Duties and rights in family, conflicts, education. The state proclamation day. Health, medicine, bad habits. Labour market, extreme situations, sources of information. **Civic studies:** globalisation, international organisations UN, NATO, EU.

History: Ancient history.

Geography: Europe, Great Britain, Ireland, France, Germany. Tourism in Europe. Asia, India, China, Japan, Eurasia.

Class 9. **Class hours:** country and power, human rights. Festivals in Europe. The Day of Lāčplēsis. The sense of the world. Nowadays society. Sources of information. Ecological situation. **Civic studies:** society, social roles in the family, election, family and laws, possibilities in education, power and democracy, basic rights.

Geography: themes of Latvia.

So, in Classes 7 and 8 during class hours, but in Class 9 – during civic studies, the emotional civic upbringing (started already in the kindergarten period) has been developed on the intellectual level. Unfortunately the knowledge obtained at school deforms due to adults' attitude against the country: in their lexis, businesses, in their disrespectful usage of juridical norms. In fact, this is our heritage from the times of the Soviet Union.

Empirical investigation – interviewing and mediating – was done to find out why such a situation happened. Five respondents were inquired – graduates of Rēzekne State Teachers Institute of 1941-1942.

The first respondent (AK):

The institute was famous for its high culture, intelligence, high morale and friendliness. That was not taught specially but it was understood by itself. Mutual respect, generosity and sympathy existed. Solidarity formed. Teachers cared about students' health. Every morning Catholics, Lutherans and Orthodox did the Morning Prayer and worshipped blessing before the beginning of work. Belief in God was valued.

The second respondent (SL):

The state policy enabled economical development of the country. The standard of living went up and it succeeded in positive attitude towards the state. School students were active and the whole system was directed to patriotic upbringing. National holidays were celebrated. For example, November 18 – towns were decorated, everybody went in the torchlight procession. There was a retreat in the Warriors' Cemetery where military people gathered – leaders and members of Latvian paramilitary organisation. It all was needed and sincere. It influenced mind, feelings and willpower. At home parents did not speak about civic attitude. My brother had finished the 4th class but he was already a patriot. It was clear that the country had to be defended. There were no discussions about rules and norms. The attitude was created by itself.

The third respondent (MB, has lived in exile in Australia and come back to Latvia at the period of awakening):

Civic consciousness was cultivated indirectly. Teachers inspired their pupils in a patriotic way with the help of literature and history. They used the comparative method and thinking was guided so that children loved and thought about their own country first not Europe and the world. Every nation was patriots in their own country, important and relevant to their country. Now it is announced – go, one must be everywhere, the world is open, there is your fatherland where you go. People were travelling earlier if they had money but they did not want to stay there. Computers now are mentioned as a negative phenomenon. Letters are substituted by mobile messages. Language becomes poor and depleted, thinking – shallow as pupils read little or even they do not read at all. They can't gain the essence. But it is literature that enriches language.

Latvian children in exile in Australia grew up apart as parents thought more about culture not politics. There were special meetinghouses, choirs were organised, and there was an active social life. Graduates of the institute helped to consolidate Latvian spirit in Adelaide. The respect towards the fatherland was strengthened, adults were hard working and disciplined, youngsters were brought up in a conservative way which was accepted. Today we can think that it was forced but at that time it was normal. The next generation grew up very Latvian and 'old-fashioned'. Children developed in action: sang, played, read. So the third generation in Australia speak Latvian. Bringing up in the family was very important. For example, parents never criticised teachers in the presence

of their children. The school years was the period when respect for the teacher and his knowledge was created. Now teachers lack a strict position as a new type of teachers have come into schools. The world outlook has swerved. The world, the overtness of the world, permissiveness are the main for the people...

The fourth respondent adds to the previously said: pupils knew the anthems of all the Baltic States and sang them during the state holidays. State holidays and seasonal holidays were celebrated. Teachers led children's organisations such as girl guides, scouts and mazpulki.

Teachers expressed their own position and attitude against everything, during the lessons they emphasised the significance of language and literature.

Working habits were worked on. Each school had its garden and greenhouse. Class 5 worked there during summers. As a result the school canteen was provided with fruit and vegetables. Economy and respect towards other people's work was taught during lessons. Attitude was created with the help of school uniform. It was a uniform that united all pupils from class 1 to class 6. Teachers were observing the culture of clothes as well as pupils behaviour and standing.

Regulations existed in behaviour and learning. By observing self-discipline and self-regulation attitudes were formed. This created respect for education and learning.

Life nowadays is different. These are hangouts, entertainments and Latvia's language and culture are not important any more.

The fifth respondent (MA):

Positive attitude and respect against the country existed. But there were exaggerations. Ulmanis was far too adored. No understanding of the term – civic consciousness – was there. Children were not separated by nationalities. Some Russian girls were there in class 6 but nobody cared that they were Russians. Russians spoke Latvian. People lived friendly and felt like one family. Mutual contacts still exist. The true internationalism governed then Jews, Gypsies, Russians, and other nationalities. There were no immigrants as all these people were born in Latvia and all were citizens of Latvia. They lived in Latvia without complaints. Small children had common plays, festivities were celebrated together and in a friendly way.

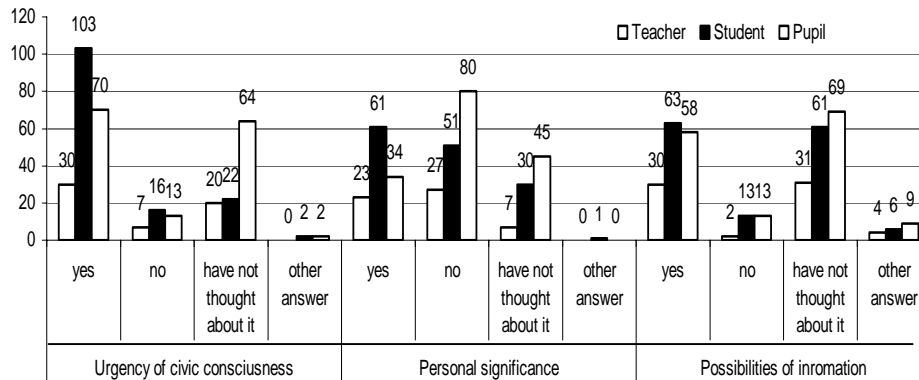
Russians now are shameless and with unjustified demands.

All emerging teachers in Latvian State teacher institutes in the 30s - 40s had the same respectful viewpoint about their country and civic consciousness.

The next 50 years of soviet power changed this attitude.

In order to find out modern attitudes of teachers, students and pupils towards civic consciousness meditating was carried out. 143 pedagogical students, 57 teachers from two schools and 149 pupils of classes 8 and 9 took part in it.

Picture 1 shows teachers, students' and pupils' attitudes towards civic consciousness.

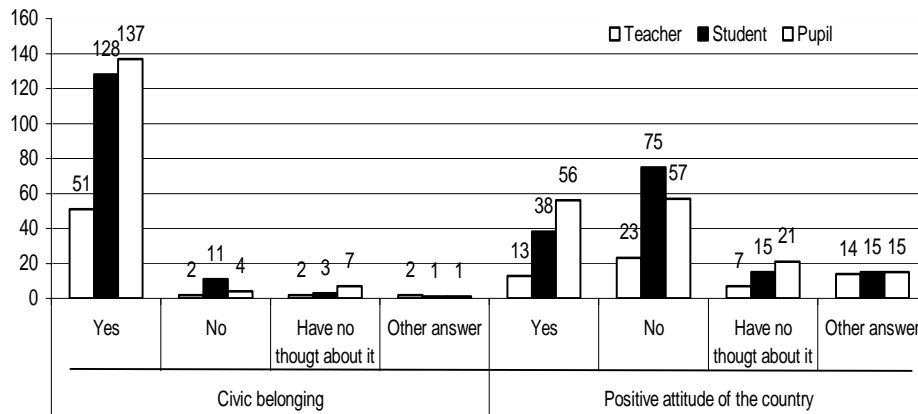


Question 1: 30 teachers, 103 students, 70 pupils – civic consciousness is urgent in Latvia; 7 teachers, 16 students, 13 pupils – it is not urgent; 20 teachers, 22 students, 64 pupils – have not thought about it. Two students consider that civic consciousness is not urgent for other nationalities, but must be talked about it more. Two pupils think that it is partly urgent.

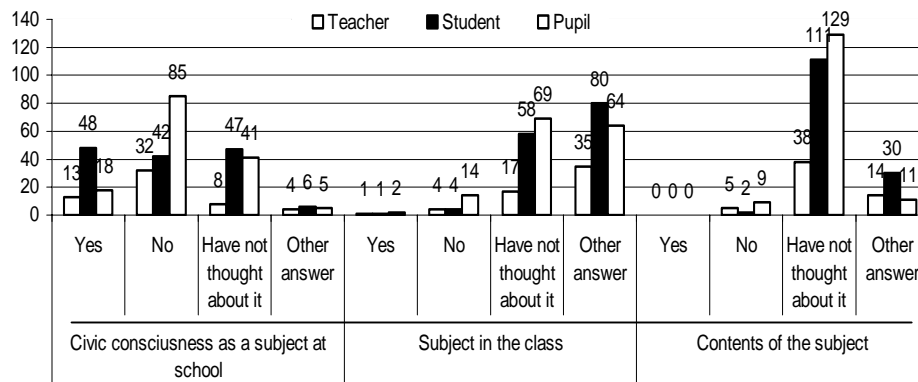
Question 2: 23 teachers, 61 student, 34 pupils – personal significance is important; 27 teachers, 51 student, 80 pupils – not important; 7 teachers, 30 students, 45 pupils – have not thought about it.

Question 3: 30 teachers, 63 students, 58 pupils – information sources are – TV, newspapers, booklets, internet, literature. 2 teachers, 13 students, 13 pupils – consider that there are no sources for obtaining information; 31 teachers, 61 students, 69 pupils – have not thought about it. Four teachers stated that there is little information about civic consciousness. Students admitted that there is little information, it is superficial and unspecified. Nine pupils noted that there is little information. It could be agreed with.

Picture 2 shows teachers, students and pupils attitude to country



Picture 3 shows civic as subject in school, in classes and the content of subject



Question 6: 13 teachers, 48 students, 18 pupils – the subject is needed at school; 32 teachers, 42 students, 85 pupils – not needed as a separate subject; 8 teachers, 47 students, 41 pupil – have not thought about it. 4 teachers consider that it could be a subject of choice or it could be integrated in all subjects. 1 pupil noted that some lessons might be included, but not as a subject, but 4 pupils stated that it is not needed.

Question 7: almost half of the respondents answered that they had not thought in which classes to teach civic consciousness, but the largest part suggested to include it in classes 7 and 8 or in secondary school – classes 10-12. Only 3 respondents admitted that this has to be mainly in families. Advised to teach it in non-Latvian schools.

Question 8: as to the contents of the subject the teachers suggested to include Latvian traditions, history of the country, symbols, rights and duties, solidarity, minorities in Latvia, starting with the word ‘fatherland’. Students considered starting with studying language, only then traditions, etc, to involve pupils in different help and charity

projects. Teaching the pupils to take responsibility, patriotism, study laws. Alarming is the fact that the most part of respondents – 38 teachers, 111 students, 129 pupils – have a negative view point about the contents of this subject as well as about the inclusion of the subject in the subject list.

In appendixes students wrote that civic consciousness will soon become less as the European Union will standardise everybody and everything. Suggestion was made to make the exam of Latvian language for non-citizens more serious than it is now.

Pupils have different opinions: One considers that civic attitude is understood by itself and there is no need to study this additionally; one thinks that it must not be paid so much attention to; one states that family parents should be responsible for children's right attitude against the country. If something like this is not done in the early years of age then in the teenage period it is more difficult to do.

Conclusion

To sum up the analysed material, we can conclude that in the first period of the Republic of Latvia the students of Teacher Institutes have preserved respect towards state, laws, belief, culture, and regulations of behaviour. The tense social and economical situation in the country complicates the development of civic attitude. The analysis of documents shows that themes on civic consciousness are included in the contents of class hours, social and civic studies.

Empirical investigations reveal that teachers as well as pupils do not want an additional subject – civic consciousness.

According to teachers, students and pupils civic attitude could be taught with the help of studying Latvian language and traditions, the history of the country, symbols, citizens' rights and duties, patriotism, and responsibility. The key word for the civic consciousness is the word - Fatherland. Pupils must be involved in help and charity projects.

Discussions are the main form of how to obtain contents.

It is necessary to work out on the state level the contents for the integrated school subject which would update contents of studies, would succeed pupils' balanced attitude against rights and responsibilities and would lead to everybody's own attitude towards the country.

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