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The Humanitarian Basis for the Development of the Cultural Identity of Secondary School Students

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Abstract

This study in Latvia was of teachers from various Latvian schools (202 people from 5 schools, and 264 students aged 13 – 14). The purpose was to determine the theoretical basis for the development of cultural identity, developing an humanitarian model of education, and implementing it in the educational process as a basis for developing cultural identity. The analysis of the results showed that the development of cultural identity facilitates not only the integration of Russian people in the Latvian society, but also the integration of the whole Latvian society into a united community.

Introduction

At the end of the 20th century, man's individuality started to be considered as a value in the philosophy of education in Latvia. Education acquired a new purpose – to ensure that an individual understands and feels his/her own unique nature and finds his/her own life calling by means of self-realisation and self-identity. The existential meaning of modern education acquired high priority and reached the status of goals and values.

There can be observed a new tendency in education, where the focus shifts from knowledge, predominantly of scientific character, to personality, to all the world of culture and turns to the humanitarian paradigm both in theory and in practice. Education has to be culture-centred rather than socio-centred and bring the ideas of new humanism and new rationalism to young generations. Thus, it has to serve the needs of people and the society, even the whole humanity (in the period of globalization), taking into account the challenges which the humanity has to face in the 21st century.

It should be pointed out that the system of education tends to have its own development trends. These are the humanitarian trend, focusing on man as the highest social value, a dialogue, etc. These tendencies, actualized in the educational process, represent the humanitarian bases facilitating the development of the cultural identity of secondary school students.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the humanitarian bases for the development of the cultural identity of secondary school students. Transformations in the cultural paradigm that took place in Eastern Europe in the late 1990s changed the status of ethno-cultural communities traditionally present in the cultural space of Latvia. As a result, cultural identity, one of the key components of social identity, was forced out of the structure of social identity, which could lead to the destruction of student's identity manifesting itself as the feeling of purposelessness, being unprepared for life, conflict of mind (Erikson, 1996: 308-333). It is possible to overcome this crisis by means of four

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behavioural strategies: assimilation (forming a mono-cultural identity with the dominating cultural group and rejecting one's own culture), separation (forming a mono-cultural identity with one's own culture and rejecting the culture of the majority), marginalization (balancing between two cultures, not acquiring to a sufficient degree the norms and values of either), or integration (identifying both with one's own culture and that of the majority) (Berry 1990; Berry et al. 1992).

There is no doubt that in the present historical and cultural situation where a dialogue becomes "a universal comprehensive mode of existence for an individual in culture" (Kagan, 1996: 404), the strategy of integration can be a guarantee for social and ethnic peace in a poly-cultural society like Latvia; this implies the renewal of the balance between a positive ethno-cultural identity and ethno-cultural tolerance. Clearly, integration can be achieved by means of the social perception of cultural distance enabling the representatives of an ethno-cultural minority to form positive local identities (e.g. a Latvian Russian) corresponding to the new ethno-cultural and socio-political reality.

When analysing the pedagogical ways of developing cultural identity we were faced with the problem of determining its status relevant for secondary school students. It was already mentioned that the development of cultural identity takes place in the course of all individual's life. At the same time, it is possible to single out several stages of identity that supersede each other. The most remarkable among them are the diffusive identity or the loss of identity, when an individual loses important reference-points and does not feel any certainty regarding his/her "self", and the acquired identity – when an individual has taken certain decisions concerning himself/herself and his/her life; they know what they want and have a certain system of values and beliefs. In contemporary cross-cultural psychology, the model of two dimensions is considered as the most effective one in measuring ethno-cultural identity; it presupposes two basic types of the positive identity – a mono-cultural and a bi-cultural one (Berry et al. 1992). Consequently, as regards the acquired identity, it can be either a bi-cultural identity or a local cultural identity (e.g. a Latvian Russian).

The humanitarian bases for the formation of acquired cultural identity.

A dialogue in the educational process is regarded as a precondition for the development of an acquired cultural identity. Organizing teaching and learning on the basis of a dialogue can humanize the educational process and bring human dimensions into it. I regard the development of cultural identity as the development of learner's ability to engage into a personal cultural dialogue. The development of student's self-identity as the representative of a certain cultural community takes place in a dialogue with another person. There appear the relationships of a new kind: cooperation in achieving two goals – mutual education and creativity. Pedagogical interaction in the form of a dialogue is connected, first of all, with the transformation of adult's superiority and learner's subordination into equal personal positions of two cooperating individuals.

Humanization of the educational process takes place as a result of changes in the content of education. Humanitarian culture is the basis for the content of education. Its characteristic features are as follows. Focus on man, value concentration, and a dialogue

determine the humanitarian bases of the educational process. Humanitarian culture is introduced in the educational process through the cultural component in its content. Teacher's and learners' personal experience is of great importance. Personal acquisition of culture is possible in those cases when objective cultural values become subjectively meaningful in the process of learning and transform into stable reference-points in the life of a personality.

Experimental work aimed at the development of the cultural identity of secondary school students.

The experiment was carried out in the Department of Psychology and Pedagogy of Pushkin Lyceum. This was due to the fact that Pushkin Lyceum provides specialised education corresponding to the key ideas of our research. There were determined the following priorities in the experimental construction of the educational process: humanitarian approach and the humanization of educational process. The development of self-awareness and students' focusing on their inner world determined the significance of the moral component in the process of learning. For this reason, the content of education is based on:

- humanitarian issues: values, choosing one's future profession, attitude to self as a unique individuality, attitude to another person as a value;
- organization of research activities, as a result of which there develops interaction between a teacher and students as equal collaborators in the research work;
- specialised education aimed at creating free, practically oriented educational space in order to actualize the potential abilities of each learner and enable him/her to chose the future profession corresponding to his/her abilities and talents, as well as develops awareness of oneself as a respectable personality.

The Lyceum students were given an opportunity to freely choose their area of specialization and test the rightness of their choice in practice, as well as to change their area of specialization after a year of studies.

When developing the programme of the experiment, there were identified three stages. The main directions of the research were implemented in each of the stages. All the stages were interrelated and interdependent representing a uniform educational process; at the same time, attention was focused on specific objectives in each stage of the experiment.

During the first stage of the experiment, issues concerning the principal direction of the research, i.e. humanitarian issues in the content of education and the humanization of relationships were dealt with. The goal of this stage was the development of life values of senior secondary school students, treating culture and another individual as a value. Due to the humanization of the educational process, it acquired the features of spiritual human creativity. Thus, the development of cultural identity is connected with the awareness of values.

The second stage of the experiment was characterised by a wider use of interactive methods and means of humanitarian education in the process of learning: students

acquired the methodology of scientific cognition: transfer of knowledge, analysis, generalization, analogy, argumentation, problem solving, the elaboration of modules, formulating and testing hypotheses, experiment, decision-making, correlation of a model and reality, a role play, etc.

The goal of this stage was the development of the cognitive learning competence, one of the key competencies of cultural identity. It is necessary to develop the ways of cognizing one's own culture and the culture of the Latvian nation.

During the second stage of the experiment:

- There were organized two seminars 'Innovations in the Pedagogic Process' and 'Organization of Research Work' in Pushkin Lyceum;
- Support was provided for the research activities of the Lyceum students;
- Students and teachers participated in a research conference;
- Consultations were provided for the research society of the Lyceum students.

Many research works were devoted to the history of the Latvian and Russian nations, e. g. "Latvian and Russian Contacts in the 19th Century", "Imants Ziedonis' Poetry". This promoted the development of interest in the Latvian and Russian culture. Studying literary works from the historical and cultural perspective results in the creation of a polylogue "a learner – a work of art – a learner - a teacher". It also facilitates the development of mutual relationships between students and a teacher in the process of learning.

The third stage was focused on the organization of the process of learning aimed at the choice of a future profession corresponding to students' possibilities and abilities. The goal of this stage was to ensure students' preparedness for an adequate choice of a profession. In the Pushkin Lyceum, this goal was achieved by means of providing specialized education. The experiment was organized in order to:

- enable the Lyceum students to analyse their chosen area of specialization;
- give them an opportunity to test the rightness of their choice in practice.
- Awareness concerning the prospects of one's future also facilitates the development of cultural identity.

Conclusion

The pedagogic strategy of experimental education aimed at the development of cultural identity during all the three stages of the experiment lead to the enrichment of the process of learning by humanitarian components. This facilitated the development of students' freedom. There were singled out two ways of increasing students' freedom. First, freedom can be regarded as the freedom of choice. The subjects were granted right to choose the means and conditions of their activity when choosing their area of specialization in the educational process. The possibility of choice opened the door for creative self-expression. All this brought students closer to free activity. Still, they could make a choice only from what was offered, thus it could be regarded as a limited choice or lack of freedom, which slowed down the process of self-determination. Second, freedom is an opportunity of self-realization, self-identity. This implies using the humanitarian basis as the precondition for one's own development rather than the freedom of choice offered from outside.

As a result, the educational space is perceived as free, providing extensive opportunities for the development of students' cultural identity. All in all, the experimental organization of the process of learning resulted in the implementation of the humanitarian model in specialized education, which gave a possibility to provide conditions for individually oriented learning and the effective development of students' cultural identity. This was determined by means of qualitative and quantitative research methods.

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